

# **THE MEDIATION EFFECT OF ONLINE SHOPPING HABITS ON PERSONALITY TRAITS AND INTENTION TO RECOMMEND; THE COVID-19 EFFECT**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has transformed conventional buying to online shopping habits. Despite the importance of customers' future behaviour, insufficient studies have highlighted the role of online shopping habits on the intention to recommend. The study investigated how the Big Five Personality Traits (BFPT) influence online shopping habits, the relationship between habit and intention to recommend, and the habit as a mediator by applying the convenience sampling method. A total of 347 usable data were collected online and analysed using structural equation modelling with the Smart Partial Least Squares (Smart PLS) software. The study found that agreeableness, conscientiousness, extraversion, and neuroticism positively affect online shopping habits, but not openness. Furthermore, online shopping habits positively impact the intention to recommend and mediate the relationship between the BFPT and the intention to recommend. The study also provides valuable information for conventional stores and online platform managers to develop marketing strategies to retain and attract new customers. Moreover, the study discussed the limitations and future research recommendations.

**Keywords:** Big Five Personality Traits; Online Shopping Habit; Intention to recommend; Covid-19.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Online shopping has become a norm for people worldwide with Shopee, Lazada, Amazon, and other online shopping platforms offering various online products and slowly eradicating physical stores. Besides, the online advancement of products that provide efficient support services for online transactions contributes to online shopping. Online shopping offers the convenience of usage, whereby users can conduct businesses wherever provided there is an internet connection, and the goods are available online. Moreover, online shopping extends to numerous products available through online shopping. The introduction of mobile payment systems that are traceable, cashless, borderless, and without time limitations have created new versatility that encourages new users to shop online (Kaur et al., 2020).

COVID-19 is highly infectious and transmitted through multiple channels, through direct and indirect contaminated objects or surfaces, close contact with an infected person, or mouth or nose secretions. Thus, numerous countries have introduced a movement control order to prevent the virus from spreading, limiting people from travelling outside to shop for necessities. Additionally, country leaders have started to promote the new norm such as working from home, staying at home, and going out only when necessary. Besides, there is a significant increase in online shoppers, whereby Akbar and Tracogna (2018) revealed that traditional buying habits have changed towards online platforms. In March 2020, Amazon announced hiring 100,000 full-time and part-time staff worldwide to support the astounding demand during COVID-19 (Selyukh, 2020). In May 2020, Ninja Van (a Singapore-based logistic services) invested USD 279 million to increase operation and meet the extraordinary demand for delivery services due to massive electronic commerce (e-commerce) activities. Malaysia has approximately 25.84 million active Internet users (80 per cent of the population) and the population has extremely high rates of mobile phone penetration (San, 2021) supporting the report produced by Bank Negara Malaysia, which online retail sales recorded the growth close to 200% during this pandemic (Idris, 2021).

Despite the efforts by the government and private sectors to combat the pandemic, Malaysia faces the third wave of COVID-19 in May 2021 due to consumers' reluctance to change habits such as preferring physical activities instead of purchasing online. Consequently, the government is forced to execute another movement control order (MCO) to flatten the COVID-19 curve, which justifies the importance of understanding how BFPT influences habit changes from conventional buying to online buying activities.

A new norm forms new behaviour that becomes a habit when consistently performed. According to Mergelsberg et al. (2020), habits are a mental representation of an action that fuels a behavioural response to a cue in the environment and is closely related to daily behaviours. In the study context, when online shopping is continuously performed, it becomes a habit. Although COVID-19 has transformed conventional buying into online shopping habits, the shift has been left out by most studies.

Multiple factors influence consumers' habits, namely psychological factors such as personality traits, which play a big role in understanding consumers' purchasing behaviour (Olsen et al., 2016). Personality traits have been investigated in numerous studies such as impulsive buying (Olsen et al., 2016), online group buying (Hossain & Rahman, 2019), online shopping (Huang & Yang,