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INVESTIGATING THE IMPACT OF AFFORDANCE VALUE AND TRUST ON THE USAGE OF FOOD DELIVERY APPLICATIONS: A CONCEPTUAL STUDY

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Abstract:

Food delivery applications (FDAs) have been increasingly popular in recent years. Customers from developed and emerging countries are increasingly using these applications for quick and easy delivery of food to their homes. Furthermore, FDAs have provided restaurants with new chances to increase revenue without needing to increase sitting space. As a result, there has been a notable shift in the food sector, with an increasing number of customers relying on FDAs for their meal needs. Although FDAs are becoming more prominent, it is essential to understand the elements that affect their usage. This study utilises an extended Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) as an underpinning reasoning. The affordance value and trust in the application platform are also examined to bridge the hypothetical relationship for future research direction. This study aims to provide insights to future researchers in the food delivery research area regarding the potential factors influencing the usage of meal delivery apps. This study offers significant information for FDA service providers seeking to expand market share by knowing how to impact consumer usage.

Keywords:

TAM Theory, Food Delivery Applications, Perceived Ease Of Use, Perceived Usefulness, Affordance Value, Trust In Application Platform, Actual Usage

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Introduction

Research Background

E-commerce has quickly evolved within the last twenty years, migrating towards mobile platforms (Ezeamuzie et al., 2022). An online food delivery platform has been functioning for over 25 years and is a rapidly increasing sector (Shankar et al., 2022). The food delivery market has witnessed a noteworthy transition in recent years due to the rise of online platforms that have revolutionized how customers fulfil their culinary wants (Li et al., 2020). The growing popularity of FDAs has proven to be a big success in the food sector, streamlining the ordering process from local restaurants through an effective platform for pooling resources. This technology enhances customer convenience and creates new chances for businesses and employment. The quick development and popularity of these FDAs have been vital in fostering the general adoption of food delivery services in Malaysia (Wen et al., 2022).

Due to convenience, food delivery applications are gaining popularity, especially among younger generations. Online food delivery has been a popular choice for them (Yulius et al., 2022). The younger generation, called as *"Digital Natives"* has grown up with technology and is quite proficient at using digital tools (Rue, 2018). They are used to smooth online experiences and anticipate comfort to be a crucial part of their interactions, especially in the context of food consumption (Poon & Tung, 2022). Therefore, it is hardly unexpected that online FDAs have become popular with younger people. Moreover, the market volume of FDAs has expanded, resulting in increasing rivalry among service providers (Lee et al., 2023). Understanding the characteristics of customers is vital for developing a more efficient marketing strategy to enhance market share (Lee et al., 2023).

According to Statista, in 2023, a significant percentage of Malaysia's population is projected to use smartphones, surpassing the already high usage rate in 2020. The increasing popularity of social media sites has led to more businesses utilising them to establish and nurture strong customer relationships (Nagi & Mohammed, 2021). Businesses strive to encourage customers to generate positive comments and enthusiastic electronic word-of-mouth on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Belanche et al. (2020a) emphasise the importance of food delivery services in current urban lifestyles for their convenience. Food delivery apps have grown in popularity in recent years due to their convenience and widespread use of smartphones (Wen et al., 2022). Roh and Park (2019) investigate the impact of mobile devices on the meal delivery market, focusing on the success of well-known apps such as FoodPanda, Deliver Eat, and Grab Food. These apps have successfully connected clients to various neighboring restaurant options. Customers may easily view menus, place orders, and make payments via dedicated applications and websites on their own devices. Furthermore, Lee et al. (2019) discovered that a strong need for convenient and effective solutions is driving the growth of the food delivery sector.

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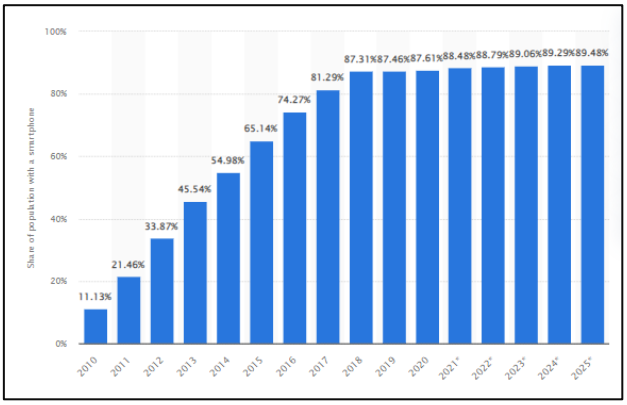

Figure 1: The Population in Malaysia Used a Smartphone In 2020

Source: Statista, 2023

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) has long been a cornerstone in understanding technology adoption and its value through the lens of customer perceptions. Central to this framework are factors such as utility, ease of use, and actual utilization, as highlighted by seminal works including Davis (1989), Teo (2010), and Kang and Namkung (2019). TAM posits that the perceived usefulness of a technology significantly influences its real-world usage, a notion supported by empirical evidence, such as the findings of Jung et al. (2021). By emphasizing the importance of user perspectives, TAM provides a robust and practical foundation for delving into consumer behaviour surrounding technology adoption. Its applicability extends across various contexts, making it a versatile tool for exploring the intricacies of how individuals interact with and embrace technological innovations. Through TAM's lens, researchers and industry stakeholders gain valuable insights into the drivers and barriers shaping the adoption and utilization of technologies like Food Delivery Applications (FDAs), elucidating pathways for enhancing user engagement and satisfaction.

Problem Statement

Food delivery apps have experienced a surge in popularity due to shifts in consumer behaviour accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly among younger demographics and food enthusiasts (Rivera, 2019; Itani & Hollebeek, 2021; Marinkovic & Lazarevic, 2021). This transition to digital lifestyles has prompted the emergence of FDAs in response to increased demand for off-premises orders in the restaurant industry (Zhao & Bachao, 2020; Bae & Chang, 2021; Shim et al., 2021; Marcellus, 2020; Kumar & Shah, 2021; Naeem, 2021; Roggeveen & Sethuraman, 2020). The convenience of home food delivery has further fueled the popularity of FDAs (Naeem, 2021; Roggeveen & Sethuraman, 2020).

Despite this shift, there's a lack of research on the FDAs' usage and purchasing behaviours, presenting a gap in understanding (Chan et al., 2017; Collier et al., 2017; Oliveira et al., 2016; Park & Shin, 2017). Furthermore, there's limited research on the factors influencing customers' adoption of technology-based services in food delivery applications, particularly regarding actual usage (Ogut & Onur Tas, 2012; Lee et al., 2023; Pitchay et al., 2021; Chakraborty, 2022; Ray et al., 2019b). While various factors affecting the utilisation of food delivery services have been explored, maintaining consumer satisfaction remains a challenge, with convenience playing a crucial role (Rabaa'i, 2022; Arora et al., 2022; Puriwat & Tripopsakul, 2021; Niu & Zhang, 2023; Kusk & Nouwens, 2022). Factors such as competition, affordance value, user-friendly expectations, and trust in application platforms influence individuals' choices to use food delivery applications (Xu, 2017; Xu & Huang, 2019; Tandon et al., 2021).

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By investigating existing literature regarding the FDA's influence on acceptance and usage, this study aims to shed light on their effectiveness and significance in the Malaysian food delivery service industry (Tan & Ooi, 2018; Palau-Saumell et al., 2019). Thus, this study explores the potential influence factor of customer use of FDAs application through literature analysis and develops a conceptual model for future study. This study aims to address a critical gap in previous research by evaluating potential factors that influence FDA usage among users. Furthermore, understanding the factors that influence the use of FDAs is critical, given the growing importance of these apps to the future survival of many restaurants and food businesses. The study used the TAM theory as the principal theoretical framework. This study provides vital insights to food industry stakeholders and adds to the current knowledge of technology adoption in the food business and literature of the field.

Literature Review

Food Delivery Applications (FDAs)

FDAs, as described by Dirsehan and Cankat (2021), are mobile applications that utilise the user's location to provide real-time access to relevant information and services. FDAs allow customers to purchase food online and have it delivered to their doorsteps, as noted by Li et al. (2020). Ray et al. (2019) identified two distinct categories of FDAs: those operated by individual restaurant franchises like KFC, Domino's, and Pizza Hut, and those operated by food delivery aggregators such as Food Panda and Grab Food, which serve as third-party intermediaries connecting customers to various nearby dining options.

Research by Chotigo and Kadono (2021) and Kumar and Shah (2021) suggest that the surge in FDA popularity began post-COVID-19. This shift was driven by heightened health concerns among customers, prioritising non-contact dining options. With indoor dining restrictions in place during the pandemic, many customers turned to FDAs, leading to long queues at restaurants. Lock (2020) projects a user base of 53.9 million for the year 2023, indicating a likely annual increase in user numbers. Consequently, FDAs have become indispensable for the growth of the food delivery sector (Inthong et al., 2022b).

FDAs in Malaysia

Through online food delivery services, customers can virtually connect with restaurants and culinary businesses (Az-zahra et al., 2021). The systems for conducting online food orders in Malaysia have transitioned to a new phase, propelled by the utilisation of contactless food delivery technologies during the COVID-19 pandemic, effectively curbing the spread of the virus. Concurrently, the expansion of food delivery services in Malaysia has paralleled the rise of such technologies, with these applications experiencing a notable surge in popularity, particularly during the pandemic. Factors influencing customers' continued usage of these applications include performance expectancy, social influence, perceived usefulness, and perceived ease of use (Antara et al., 2022; Lahap et al., 2023). Additionally, convenience and time-saving emerge as pivotal determinants for sustained usage (Yapp & Kataraian, 2022). Trust in the application platform, affordance value, ease of use, convenience, and perceived value are other crucial factors (Amron et al., 2022).

Furthermore, data indicates that the Food Panda Malaysia application was downloaded nearly ten million times from the Google Play Store (Rosli, 2018). In recent years, the majority of people have turned to FDAs due to the fast pace of life and the opportunity to explore a wider variety of meals through these applications (Pitchay et al., 2022). This trend is driven by the

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accessibility of diverse food options facilitated by the applications. During the Movement Control Order (MCO) period, businesses involving online platforms and delivery services witnessed significant demand surges (Omar, 2021). On a broader societal scale, the emergence of the food delivery system has not only provided convenience to customers by delivering food to their doorsteps but has also served as a lifeline for those who have lost income or employment due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Suhartanto et al., 2019).

Technology Acceptance Model

TAM is widely acknowledged for its perceived ease of use and usefulness. Numerous empirical studies have shown that TAM can explain up to 40% of the variance in behavioural intention and actual usage (Bala and Venkatesh, 2008). It is a primary model for predicting individuals' acceptance of technology (Lee et al., 2003) and has been cited in over 170 publications related to user acceptance of systems (Lee et al., 2003; Marangunic and Granic, 2015). However, the original TAM's limited explanatory power regarding users' attitudes and behavioural intentions toward new technology adoption is attributed to its exclusion of demographic, economic, and external factors (Venkatesh and Davis, 2000).

Scholars have extensively applied TAM across various business sectors, including education (Teo, 2010), transportation (Chen et al., 2007; Min et al., 2019), medical services (Kamal et al., 2020), tourism (Tom Dieck and Jung, 2018), hotels (Kim et al., 2008), online travel agencies (Assaker, 2020), and accommodation sharing (Jung et al., 2021). For instance, Kang and Namkung (2019) examined the effectiveness of TAM in an online-to-offline service system. Several studies have also employed TAM as a theoretical framework to investigate customer behavior (Lee et al., 2017, 2019; Zhao and Bachao, 2020). Moreover, TAM has been utilised in several studies to explore how individuals use and behave within applications, demonstrating its suitability as a theoretical framework for understanding users' app adoption decisions.

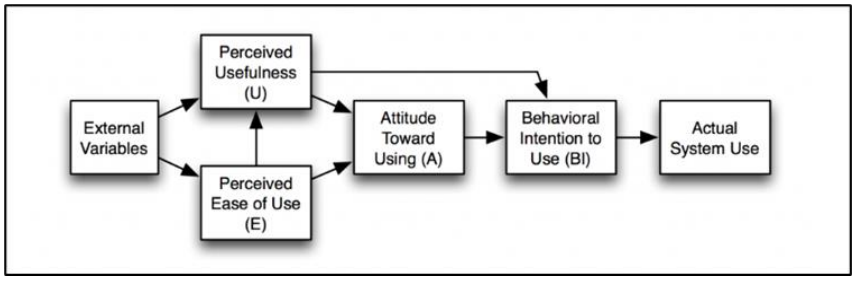

Figure 2: The Theory of Technology Acceptance Model

Source: Davis et al. (1989)

Actual usage

The customer-buying decision process refers to the cognitive process undertaken by individuals to make choices regarding purchasing products or services in exchange for a price within the marketplace. This process encompasses the stages preceding, during, and subsequent to the actual purchase transaction (Lumen, 2019). The impact of various factors on mobile services can be observed, including but not limited to mobile network information, application features, service quality perception, and customers' intention to use mobile services (Tong et al., 2020).

Conversely, some customers only utilise FDAs a few times every month. For example, the customer might use FDAs to get his lunch once or twice a month for less than HK$100, which is equivalent to RM60 in Malaysian ringgit. Given that the Hong Kong government has recently

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taken significant moves to relax social distancing restrictions, they claimed that they would choose to eat out at restaurants rather than pay for food delivery (Leung et al., 2023). According to the research conducted by Javed and Wu (2020), a positive correlation has been observed between customers' satisfaction with the utilisation of FDAs and the degree of trust they place in such organisations. The results of a study conducted by Shao et al. (2019) suggest that customer retention is positively correlated with the level of trust they place in a particular product or service. The research conducted by Wang et al. (2021) demonstrates that customer retention and increasing the tendency to continue utilising FDAs are solely achievable via the establishment of customer confidence and the enhancement of customer satisfaction.

Perceived Ease Of Use

Perceived ease of use stands as a cornerstone in individuals' perceptions of technology, reflecting their belief that utilising a technological system will demand minimal effort (Castillo & Bigne, 2021, p. 879). Recent research by Jun et al. (2022) delves into the relationship between trust and perceived ease of use within the realm of Food Delivery Applications (FDAs), aligning with Pavlou's assertion that trust significantly influences perceptions of ease of use (2003). Kang and Namkung (2019) further explored this dynamic, investigating how customers' behavioural intentions correlate with their actual usage of FDAs, revealing that perceived usefulness and ease of use wield significant influence over real-world usage, emphasising the pivotal role of convenient accessibility facilitated by such applications.

Chakraborty's study (2022) underscores the paramount importance of ease of use for FDA users, attributing it to the versatility these platforms offer across diverse contexts. Echoing this sentiment, Ray et al. (2019) identified factors like ease of use and the platform's functionality in listing and searching for restaurants as pivotal determinants shaping customers' actual usage of FDAs. Similarly, Hansen et al. (2018) highlight the critical role of perceived ease of use in driving the acceptance of FDAs among potential users.

However, Castillo and Bigne's findings (2021) introduce a nuanced perspective, suggesting that while perceived ease of use may generally impact perceived usefulness, this influence might not consistently manifest statistically. Nonetheless, in today's tech-immersed landscape characterised by rapid advancements, mobile applications and emerging technologies have seamlessly integrated into customers' daily routines, thereby diminishing perceived technological barriers (Castillo & Bigne, 2021).

The comprehensive array of arguments presented collectively points towards potentially significant relationships between perceived ease of use and the usage of FDAs, thereby compelling the imperative for deeper exploration by future research endeavours. Consequently, the formulation of the following hypothesis is proposed for future research undertakings:

Hypothesis 1*: Perceived ease of use significantly influences the usage behaviour of FDAs among consumers.*

Perceived Usefulness

According to Venkatesh and Davis (2000) and Masrom (2007), usefulness refers to the extent to which individuals derive utility from technology to achieve their objectives. For instance, in describing their online food ordering experiences, customers often highlight factors like quick delivery, simple payment processes, and excellent customer service, all of which contribute to positive experiences and encourage future use of meal delivery platforms (Leung et al., 2023).

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Hong et al. (2021) found perceived usefulness to be the most influential factor in increasing actual usage among customers, indicating that customers are more inclined to adopt FDAs if they perceive them as useful. Legris et al. (2003) and Ha and Stoel (2009) emphasise that the usefulness of technology is evaluated based on its ability to enhance individual productivity. When customers believe that new technology will improve their productivity, perceived usefulness arises (Hong et al., 2021).

Past research has consistently shown that perceived usefulness positively influences the actual usage of FDAs. Roh and Park (2019) identified perceived usefulness as the strongest factor affecting actual usage, particularly when customers perceive the application as both useful and easy to use. According to Song et al. (2021), customers tend to assume that an application is easy to navigate and will deliver promised benefits based on detailed marketing communications regarding its features and benefits. The arguments presented collectively indicate the potential presence of significant connections between perceived usefulness and the utilisation of FDAs, thereby necessitating a thorough exploration by future research efforts. As a result, the proposal of the following hypothesis is suggested for upcoming research endeavours:

Hypothesis 2*: Perceived usefulness substantially influences consumer usage of FDAs.*

Affordance Value

Research conducted by Food on Demand (2019) reveals that customer reviews frequently spotlight shortcomings in food delivery app services, such as limited menu options and delays in delivery schedules. These findings underscore the critical importance of FDAs furnishing comprehensive information regarding delivery times and offering a wider array of menu choices to align with customer expectations.

Further insights from Wells et al. (2011) delve into the influence of customers' perceptions of affordance value concerning FDAs. Their study indicates that platform quality directly impacts customers' perceptions of product quality, particularly when there exists a higher degree of information asymmetry. Wang et al. (2021b) expand on this notion, discussing how platform quality factors shape user loyalty and actual usage. Additionally, Choe et al. (2021) highlight the significant impact of user interface on customer satisfaction and engagement.

Moreover, Leung et al. (2023) observe a prevalent attraction among customers towards discounts and coupons offered by food-ordering and payment platforms, exemplifying an aspect of the affordance value associated with these platforms. Customers are inclined to seek out meal options at competitive prices to mitigate expenses, often leveraging free delivery charge coupons, especially for orders from restaurants located farther away, where delivery costs tend to be higher (Leung et al., 2023). Previous studies (McCloskey, 2006; Gafni and Nissim, 2014; Bezovski, 2016) suggest that customers exhibit a greater propensity to adopt new technology when they perceive the costs to be outweighed by the anticipated benefits. The arguments indicate the potential presence of a significant relationship between affordance value and the utilisation of FDAs, thereby necessitating a thorough exploration by future research efforts. Thus, the proposal of the following hypothesis is suggested:

Hypothesis 3*: Affordance value substantially influences consumer usage of FDAs.*

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Trust In The Application Platform

Within the realm of FDAs, customers face constraints due to the limited information provided on the platforms, hindering their ability to accurately assess food quality before making a purchase (Dong et al., 2021). To improve customer utilisation of online platforms, the presence of a comprehensive and intuitive interface is essential (Wang et al., 2021). Yoo and Donthu (2015), as cited in Wang et al. (2021), provided evidence that customers are exclusively drawn to high-quality FDAs, emphasising the potential for platforms of superior quality to enhance practical utilisation and establish customer confidence.

Moreover, safety and trust are essential elements influencing the food delivery industry and customer purchase choices. Prior studies have highlighted the significance of trust in technology-related behaviours (Gefen, Karahanna, & Straub, 2003; Lai et al., 2013; Nguyen et al., 2019; Vatanasombut et al., 2008, as cited in Hong et al., 2023b). Nguyen et al. (2019) found a positive correlation between customers' trust in a food delivery application and their intention to use the website. Inconsistent service delivery can be attributed to a lack of trust in the platform's safety, with trust being closely linked to service convenience rather than effectiveness (Hong et al., 2023). Therefore, operators and vendors must make significant efforts to build trust in brand-customer relationships naturally. Providing credible information about food products, sanitary conditions, storage, and delivery systems on food application platforms can help establish trust (Zhuang et al., 2021).

Previous studies by Cho et al. (2019), Hong et al. (2021), Jun et al. (2021), Muangmee et al. (2021), and Zhao & Bacao (2020) have shown that customers are more inclined to use FDAs when they expect the service's accuracy. Additionally, research on FDAs have emphasised the significance of customers' perceptions of platform reliability in influencing their preference for platform usage (Cho et al., 2019; Hong et al., 2021; Jun et al., 2021; Muangmee et al., 2021; Zhao & Bacao, 2020). There is a positive association between trust and customer satisfaction in online transactions, as found by Chen and Chou (2012) and Javed and Wu (2020), indicating that customers are more willing to engage in online transactions or purchases due to increased trust. The arguments suggest that there may be a significant relationship between trust in the application platform and the use of FDAs, highlighting the need for further investigation in future research endeavours. Consequently, the proposal of the following hypothesis is recommended:

Hypothesis 4*: Trust in the application platform substantially influences consumer usage of FDAs.*

Propose Research Framework

The proposed conceptual framework offers a structured approach for investigating the complex relationships between perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, affordance value, trust in application platforms, and the actual usage of FDAs, drawing from arguments and literature studies. This framework guides future research endeavours to understand the intricate dynamics of consumer behaviour in relation to FDAs.

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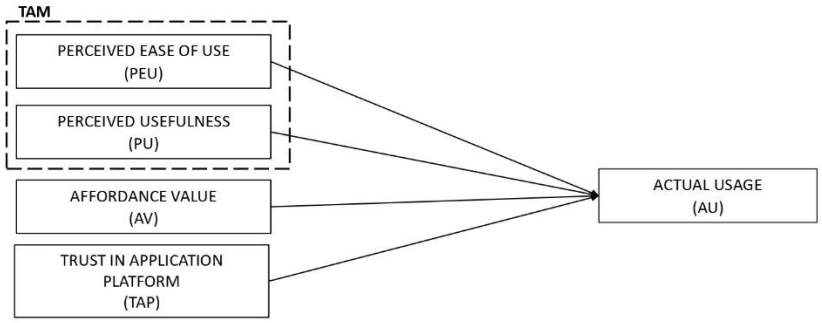

Figure 3: Propose Research Framework

Propose Methodology

Based on the wealth of information and arguments presented in the introduction and literature review sections, it is evident that there is ample room for future applied research endeavours that hold significant potential for exploration and investigation. These proposed research ventures promise to offer valuable insights and contribute meaningfully to the existing body of knowledge. The applied research is suggested to be conducted through a quantitive approach with a cross-sectional study setting. A quantitative approach allows for the systematic collection and analysis of numerical data, enabling researchers to quantify and measure the extent of relationships between variables. Through the use of surveys or questionnaires administered to a large and diverse sample of FDA users, researchers can gather comprehensive data on individual perceptions, behaviours, and usage patterns. A standardised questionnaire through a 5-Likert point scale is recommended, utilising an online data collection approach to align with the digitalised nature of the study area. Quantitative methods, such as questionnaires, are highly effective for efficiently and cost-effectively gathering large volumes of data. This data can then be analysed to identify patterns, explore causal relationships, and apply findings to a larger population (Bhandari, 2021).

Additionally, a cross-sectional study design offers a snapshot of data collected at a single point, providing insights into the current state of affairs regarding consumer behaviour and perceptions of FDAs. This approach is particularly useful for identifying correlations between variables and assessing their concurrent relationships. The future study population is suggested to encompass the Klang Valley area in Malaysia, considering the market development of FDAs in the area. Other geographical locations with comparable levels of FDA development and customer density are also recommended for inclusion in the study.

Sampling is essential for accurate data collection and delineating the study population. It entails the selection of a subset from a larger population to draw inferences about that population. This research will use a non-probability sampling design, specifically the purposive sampling method. This approach is appropriate because there is no available sampling frame for the target population. The study will focus on individuals who have previously used food delivery applications in Klang Valley for the past six months. For future studies focusing on the actual usage variable, the study population should ideally consist of customers who have experience using FDAs. Additionally, the research will employ a self-administered questionnaire survey with a 5-point Likert scale: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree.

Future analysis is recommended to utilise Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) for an advanced, reliable, valid, and robust data analysis approach. SEM allows for the simultaneous

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examination of complex relationships among multiple variables, providing a comprehensive understanding of the underlying structures influencing the phenomenon under study.

In determining the minimum sample size for SEM analysis, the 10-times rule is suggested as a guideline to ensure sufficient statistical power. According to this rule, for each survey item included in the analysis, a minimum of 10 respondents is required (Hair et al., 2017). Prior to hypothesis testing, the collected data must undergo thorough preprocessing. This includes decoding, cleaning, and preparing the data to ensure its accuracy and integrity. Additionally, the measurement model's reliability, discriminant validity, and convergent validity should be assessed to ascertain the robustness of the data before hypothesis testing is conducted.

By adhering to these methodological guidelines, future research can enhance the rigour and credibility of their analyses, yielding more accurate and reliable findings that contribute to advancing knowledge in the field.

Conclusion

The rise in demand for service convenience has propelled technology to streamline numerous industries, including the food sector. Among these advancements, food delivery applications play a significant role in influencing consumer behaviour and actual usage. The independent variables that may impact consumer usage include perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, affordance value, and trust in the application platform. Meanwhile, the dependent variable primarily focuses on consumer actual usage. As consumer behaviours evolve, there is an increasing tendency to adopt the latest technologies, such as food delivery applications, provided they meet essential criteria. However, despite their current significance, both the industry and food delivery applications still have room for further development, given their substantial contribution to the future of the food services industry.

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