



# E-books Purchase Intention During the Covid-19 Pandemic in Southern Region of Malaysia

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## Abstract

This study aims to explore the effects of price, accessibility, and brand image on e-books purchase intention in Southern Region of Malaysia. A total of 237 questionnaires were collected online from e-book users. Partial least square structure equation modeling was employed to evaluate the research model and hypotheses. The results showed that only price had a positive effect on e-books purchase intention, but accessibility and brand image do not have significant effect on e-books purchase intention. This research gives remarkable theoretical contributions by exploring these elements amidst the COVID-19 situation as components of theory of reasoned action, and their effects on e-books purchase intention. This study likewise gives imperative insights to business organizations especially book publisher to consider better price as the business initiative to gain a competitive advantage in the market.

**Keywords:** e-books purchase intention, price, accessibility, brand image, Malaysia

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## Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has affected many global sectors and system, especially the education system which includes the pre-school level to the tertiary education levels (Lorenzo, 2020). In order to prevent the spread of the disease, schools and educational facilities were closed and shifted to remote teaching (Aguilera-Hermida, 2020; Jan, 2020; Oyedotun, 2020). Therefore, technology plays an important role in influencing online outcomes between students and teachers. However, during the early implementation of online learning, educators were facing difficulty in preparing materials due to time-consuming process and challenges in assisting the students to access the learning materials (Selvanathan et al., 2020).

Not only that, the demand for e-books also have arisen especially, as they can't go to bookstores or libraries (New Straits Times, 2020). Despite understanding the vast potential that e-books could offer in leveraging the effectiveness of teaching and learning, many of the teachers having challenges to access the e-books even before the pandemic struck (Luaran et al. 2016). It was reported that teachers perceived the e-books are too costly, inaccessible, and unsuitable to be used for teaching and learning. As this phenomenon was reported before pandemic, a study is warranted to examine the perceived influence of price, accessibility, and brand image on the e-books purchase intention amidst COVID-19 pandemic. As asserted by Ismail et al. (2020), there is a



need for aspecial support both for staff and students to use technology during the pandemic as a support service for online teaching. It is hoped that the findings of this study will be useful to implement initiatives or strategies in the e-books production to make online learning more effective.

### ***Theoretical Underpinnings***

The theoretical foundation of the theory of reasoned action (TRA). The TRA model comprises of four different components which are attitude, subjective norm, behavioural intention, and actual behaviour whereby if people evaluate the suggested behaviour to be of positive attitude and if they think others want them to perform the behaviour (subjective norm), this greatly motivates them and the tendency to perform the behaviour is higher (Hoewe & Sherrick, 2015). The attitude is defined as the total sum of an individual's principal behavioural beliefs with regards to the consequences of the action after assessing and weighing the outcome of the action (Azam & Lubna, 2013). The TRA is one of the most widely used theories that states that an individual's intention determines their behaviour and this intention is a function of their attitude towards the behaviour and subjective norms (Silverman et al., 2016). This theory is useful to assess e-books purchase intention because it gives direction on buying behaviour based on rationality (Hosseini et al., 2015). said. The more favourable the attitude toward e-books' price, accessibility, and brand image, the stronger the person's intention to purchase.

### **Literature Review**

#### ***The influence of price on e-books purchase intention***

Price is an arrangement given by consumers to the sellers in return to getting the product or services being offered (Auf et al., 2018). This is a determinant factor that holds financial value so it is given as an exchange for products and services and therefore, price is not only influence consumer behaviour but also their

loyalty positively as it can save the marketing expenditure by preventing customers from switching to other brands. Majority of the consumers use price to measure the degree of the quality of the brand which is an important factor when come to decision-making of intended product or service (Goh & Ng, 2021). Satisfaction in the price paid is inevitably an essential factor which influences a trade because price is one of the most elastic unit in a buyer seller relationship that varies accordingly with the evolvement of the characteristics of products and services. The association between price and the value of a product or services causes price to become significantly pivotal and it is unavoidable when come to value a product or service by the price set by the companies (Chander & Raza, 2015). The price set by a company influence a customer greatly as the consumer perceive that the degree of performance of a brand and quality of the product or service that are set by a higher price is better in performance compared to those with a lower or cheaper price (Martínez-López et al., 2016). Past studies show that customers perceive and measure the price of a product or service more instead of the quality of the product or service. In contrast to that, there are also customers who are price conscious and sensitive to a high price or price difference and reject the product or services (Norfarah et al., 2018). Consumers' affordability and buying power is the major determinant that should be investigated and evaluated carefully by companies (Holst et al, 2017). This statement was further supported by Martínez-López et al. (2016) through the findings in his research whereby he urged companies to have a deep understanding about the market price of a product or service as a slight increase or reduction in price might influence and change the customer's decision in purchasing which may cause pin losing a loyal customer which may or may not be detrimental to the productivity of the company.

Holst et al. (2017) urged companies to evaluate price threshold that consumers willing to pay and place importance on price factor



seriously before placing pricing strategies as it plays very important role in influencing e-books purchase intention. Sevanandee and Damar-Ladkoo (2018) reported that price can impact e-books purchase intention in purchasing products or services which lead to price elasticity of demand price that creates sensitivity which makes it remain as the pivotal factor in determining the product or service competition position in the marketplace. It is imperative for the companies to understand the strategy of pricing products and services and to know the consumers' buying and paying power so that business transaction is not affected (Sun & Chen, 2016). Aschemann-Witzelet al. (2015) also reported that e-books purchase intention is strongly influenced by price as it plays a very crucial role and therefore high price will hinder consumers' demand for a certain product or service. Study conducted by Sun and Chen (2016) showed that consumers are becoming wiser in gaining knowledge on price of products or services through multiple channels and sources that will affect the price sensitivity and will head for more search and survey if they think that the advantages of searching for information pertaining to price will outweigh the costs of doing so. Consumers of lower income are more prone to do some research to find out more information and to compare prices compared to consumers with a higher pay range. On the other hand, Letchumanan and Sam (2016) reported that pricing strategy is crucial in pricing products and services reasonably as it determines how consumers are going to perceive a brand and to create a brand awareness, they might relate the price with the quality and this is something companies need to be aware of. In another research conducted by Rodrigues (2016), the willingness of consumers in paying a higher price for a product or service when they feel convinced that the product or service offers a better quality and when the performance of these products and services meet their requirements. In another research that was conducted by Auf et al. (2018) on roles of price in e-books purchase intention, the price

information and price cognitions on positive and neutral emotions basically influence positivity and neutral emotions of consumer behavior. The study was conducted in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, where Islam encourages people to have a reasonable price for any product, it is utmost important to have adequate knowledge on price strategy and market price. Finally, Qalati et al. (2019) found that positive relationship between price and e-books purchase intention guarantees customer satisfaction. Hence, we hypothesized that:

*H1: Price positively affects e-book purchase intention.*

### ***The influence of accessibility on e-book purchase intention***

Users are more attentive to accessibility and less sensitive to article importance nowadays (Garcia et al., 2018). However, many publications now are getting harder to be accessed due to the lack of easy accessibility (Starr et al., 2015). When the accessibility is low, online sources are unreachable thus making it the major reason for inaccessibility (Sedghi et al., 2018). The development of the web and internet has become an important factor for accessing important information in various fields over time. A study in Haizhou Gulf, China by Shan et al. (2020) reported that consumers buying behaviour is affected by accessibility on intention to purchasing tickets. When there is accessibility, a reflection of judgment on the physical and mental quality, economic base, professional skills, information channels, and many other opportunities of taking part in the purchasing activity could be seen (Jia & Liu, 2018). Another study by Chiciudean et al. (2019) on purchase intention toward organic products reported that marketers must consider accessibility to the product when they build marketing strategies. This is due to shoppers' decision was basically driven by the accessibility of the products and shops itself (Maat & Konings, 2018). In addition, people also benefit most from online accessibility when purchasing goods and therefore adopt e-shopping. When the



accessibility of the clothing shops increased, the share of people shopping online also went high which also reveals that people with a high accessibility have more in-store shops at their disposal. Due to the advancement of technology, the internet has become source of accessing important information and therefore accessibility is one of the most important factors when come to study e-books purchase intention (Chiciudean et al., 2019; Sedghi et al., 2018). A study conducted in Malaysian restaurant reported that social media has a positive effect on consumers' purchasing behavior (Kumar et al., 2020). This indicated that consumers seek accessible information in various platforms like social media which stimulates the consumers' purchasing behavior. Furthermore, Carvalho et al. (2016) affirmed that accessibility is important dimension of loyal customers and therefore has impact on sustainable purchase intention in a long run. Therefore, we hypothesized that:

*H2. Accessibility positively affects e-book purchase intention.*

### ***The influence of brand image on e-book purchase intention.***

Brand gives the meaning of a name, term, sign, symbol or design of a company's products and services (Letchumanan & Sam, 2016). It is important asset to a company as it plays a major role in giving the company its identity for consumers to be able to distinguish them other various competitors out there (Rodrigues et al., 2015). Both consumers and companies desire differentiation through branding and consider that as important as a form of identification of a product or service offered by different companies. Brand also helps consumers' mind to perceive and associate a product or service and how it is being put together in their minds (Rehman & Ishaq, 2017). Besides finding the brand name on a label, a brand name has the ability to represent many ideas and characteristics associated with the products and services it symbolizes thus, consumers to form

an individualized perception towards the brand name based on the literal meaning of the name is not surprising and how it sounds or have some form of association towards the brand name as influenced by individual experience or company marketing strategies (Alhedhaif et al., 2016). Anjana (2018) further asserted that brand is a representation and identity of a company that plays an important role to uplift the image and reputation of the company among the consumers and it is undeniable that it has the ability to attract new customers and also to retain existing customers of the company. Brand becomes a standard quality when it was firstly created and subsequently when the brand is established, it becomes engraved in the minds of customers and through loyalty (Ahuja, 2015), whereby the impression is hard to be eliminated and therefore brands not only contend in the physical area of a product but most importantly compete for the brand awareness and establishment of loyalty in the customer. The attributes or features of a product highly determine the strength of a brand associated for product settings while for services, how successful a brand is determined through the customers' experience (Rehman & Ishaq, 2017). It is imperative for companies to ensure good consumer experience to maintain or to uplift the brand image as this determines the productivity and performance of a company and brand remains as a symbol or identity associated to a particular product or service and consumer tends to remember and register a brand in their mind that way (Chakraborty & Bhat, 2018).

Brand is associated to status, lifestyle, and social background from a consumer's perspective and therefore, brand is one of the many important factors that influence e-books purchase intention (Letchumanan & Sam, 2016). E-books purchase intention is influenced by brand so it is a pivotal factor for companies to increase its revenue and productivity as brand plays important role to be the focus for consumer loyalty. Brand is essential and a



crucial tool used by organisations to attract consumers to gain competitive advantage and brands which are successful differ from other competitors because they possess high degree of awareness amongst consumers which will eventually turn into loyalty in the long run that benefits the company in increasing their revenues as well. Brand plays a significant role of representation of the marketing strategies and its standard in the marketplace of a company. Consumers do not have to waste time when come to think about purchasing as branding helps consumers in searching for information of a product or service that they are interested to purchase as with branding, consumers are able to obtain the information needed based on the brand name (Letchumanan & Sam, 2016). Brand is a unique identity of a company and should not be patented or replaced to gain competitive advantage to distinguish a company from another with an intention to uplift the company's reputation to another degree. Successful brands are capable to attract new customers and strengthen a company's position in the marketplace apart from being able to retain existing customers. Development and establishment of brands in the marketplace will take time and therefore companies need to consistently upgrade and evolve to meet the demand and requirement from the marketing perspectives in order to cater its customer's expectations of the brand image and eventually, brand names which withstand for the longest time in the market will have the potential to influence consumers' purchasing decision significantly (Rodrigues et al., 2015). It takes abundance of effort and time for a brand image to be built and established before it gains trust through customer's experience of the product or service and the company will have to be aware of any negative feedback or review as it will tarnish its reputation. Besides helping the product or service to be known by customers, branding is equally crucial because it provides information to consumers about the product or service through brand name that able to generate a positive brand image for newly

launched products or service (Chakraborty & Bhat, 2018). Gázquez-Abad and Martínez-López (2016) reported that brand image plays a very important role in influencing brand loyalty and to improve the performance of a brand which help in gaining competitive advantage against other competitors. Anjana (2018) further explained that consumers can identify a product, decide and determine its quality which eventually reduces their risks of wrong purchase as they are able to gain experience other than increasing their satisfaction level through brand image. According to Ahuja (2015), companies always use branding as an effective marketing tool to promote their product or service and should be aware that if managed wisely, the results are rewarding and conversely if managed wrongly, the outcome can be detrimental. Hence, we hypothesized that:

*H3. Brand image positively affects e-book purchase intention*

## **Methods**

### **Population and Sample**

The sample frame selected to conduct this study included e-book consumers in Southern Region of Malaysia that covers Johor, Melaka, and Negerisembilan states. In order to determine the minimum sample size required, we employed the G\*Power (Faul et al., 2009). With the effect size of 0.15, alpha of 0.05, and a power of 0.95, the minimum sample size needed was only 119. A total of 237 sample was gathered in this study, therefore our sample is considered sufficient in terms of statistical power. The participants were recruit via social network platform such as Facebook and WhatsApp using snowball sampling method. This procedure takes samples that are either connected to or alluded by earlier participants (Taherdoost, 2016). In this research, snowball sampling was chosen because this technique helped gain representation from different levels, backgrounds, genders and age groups, and

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covered a wide geographical region (Asiamah et al., 2017).

Table 1 presents the summary of the demographic profile of the 237 respondents. In the gender category, the majority of respondents were females with 62%, followed by males with 38%. In the age categories, the majority of respondents were aged 25 and

below (42.2%), followed by 20 and above (32.5%), while in the minority were the 26 to 30 years of age group (25.3%). In terms of education level, the majority of respondents held a Certificate (41.8%), followed by respondents who had completed Postgraduate Degree (35.9%), and respondents who had completed Undergraduate Degree (22.4%).

**Table 1**  
*Demographic Profile of Respondents*

		Frequency	%
Gender	Male	90	38.0
	Female	147	62.0
Age	Below 25 years	100	42.2
	26-30	60	25.3
	30 years and above	77	32.5
Education Level	Certificate	99	41.8
	Undergraduate Degree	53	22.4
	Postgraduate Degree	85	35.9

**Measures**

**E-book purchase intention.** This construct comprises 5 items (e.g., “do you think that e-books purchase has increased during the pandemic?”) which were adapted from Chahal and Kamil (2017) using the 5-Point Likert Scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The Cronbach alpha coefficient was .86.

**Price.** This construct comprises 4 items (e.g., “the cost of e-books is higher than printed books”) adapted from Phan and Mai (2016) using the 5-Point Likert Scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The Cronbach alpha coefficient was .81.

**Accessibility.** This construct comprises 4 items (e.g. “e-books can be accessed anytime from anywhere without hassle”) adapted from Liebler and Cunningham (2019) using the 5-Point Likert Scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The Cronbach alpha coefficient was .87.

**Brand Image.** This construct comprises 4 items (e.g. “the e-books that are available

now have got good quality”) adapted from Rehman and Ishaq (2017) using the 5-Point Likert Scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The Cronbach alpha coefficient was .92.

**Results**

Data was analysed using the partial least squares – structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). The PLS-SEM involves two approaches which are measurement model assessment and structural model assessment (Ghasemy et al., 2020).

**Assessment of Measurement Model**

This section indicates the criteria necessary to confirm the reliability and convergent validity of the measurement model. The assessment involves determining the value of composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach’s alpha (CA), which should be greater than 0.70; whereas, average variance extracted (AVE) should be greater than 0.5 (Hair et al., 2019). Table 2 shows the value of CRs, CA, and AVE for each variables were above the threshold



values, meaning the convergent validity of the measurement instruments was established.

**Table 2**  
*Results of measurement model assessment*

Latent Variable	Items	Loading	AVE	CR	CA
E-book purchase intention	EPI1	0.811	0.647	0.901	0.863
	EPI2	0.764			
	EPI3	0.798			
	EPI4	0.850			
	EPI5	0.795			
Price	PRC1	0.664	0.642	0.876	0.811
	PRC2	0.847			
	PRC3	0.827			
	PRC4	0.851			
Accessibility	ACC1	0.785	0.708	0.906	0.872
	ACC2	0.825			
	ACC3	0.895			
	ACC4	0.858			
Brand Image	BRI1	0.785	0.799	0.941	0.872
	BRI2	0.823			
	BRI3	0.895			
	BRI4	0.919			
		0.934			

Note. AVE=Average Variance Extracted. CR=Composite Reliability, CA=Cronbach Alpha

The discriminant validity of measurement model was assessed using the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio (Rasoolimanesh & Ali, 2018). Discriminant validity is achieved when the value of HTMT is

less than 0.90 (Ali et al., 2018). Table 3 shows the value of HTMT for all constructs is lower than 0.90, thus discriminant validity of all measurement instruments was established.

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**Table 3**  
*Discriminant validity using HTMT ratio*

	Accessibility	Brand Image	E-book purchase intention	Price
Accessibility				
Brand Image	0.772			
E-book purchase intention	0.124	0.19		
Price	0.344	0.507	0.609	

**Assessment of Structural Model**

In order to test the structural model, we use the bootstrap re-sampling method with 5000 re-samples to assess the path coefficients. The values of 0.271 for the R<sup>2</sup> of e-book purchase intention is considered sufficient in

behavioural studies (Hair et al., 2021), suggesting that 27.1% of the variance for employee retention can be described by price, accessibility, and brand image. The results show positive significant effect of price on e-book purchase intention ( $\beta = 0.532$ ,  $t = 8.310$ ,  $p <$



0.01). But there was no effect of accessibility and brand image on e-book purchase intention.

Therefore, only H1 is supported, and H2 and H3 were not supported.

**Table 4**  
*Results of hypothesis testing*

Hypothesis	Relationship	Coefficient	t-value	Supported
H1	Price → E-book purchase intention	0.532	8.310	Yes
H2	Accessibility → E-book purchase intention	0.049	0.485	No
H3	Brand Image → E-book purchase intention	-0.004	0.045	No

**Discussion**

This study has used the theory of reasoned action to determine whether price, accessibility, and brand image affect e-book purchase intention among consumer in Southern Region in Malaysia. The results show that only price predicted purchase intention of e-book. This research has proven that price has significant effect on e-books purchase intention. These are consistent with the research of Qalati et al. (2019) and Sevanandee and Damar-Ladkoo (2018). Therefore, in order to understand the behavior of e-book consumers, marketers have to develop effective strategies or initiatives to promote a better price and improve their ability to innovate goods. Organizations especially publishers can adopt and implement the price factor which would eventually bring in many benefits to their respective companies.

Future researchers could include different sectors such as service sector; large enterprises; multi-national organizations or other different types of organization to have a better understanding on the types of behavioral influences that best fits these sorts of organizations. This would be beneficial for the marketers as they can gain a better understanding from this sort of research and would guide them throughout the process of shifting their perspective on behavioral culture, adopting and implementing the best suitable factor that fits the business. Ultimately, there are ways to consider the influence of certain types of factor. This is worth considering other types of factors in future research to further

investigate the impact of other factors on consumer purchase intention. Lastly, if time is allowed, future researchers are encouraged to perform a combination of both qualitative and quantitative approaches since qualitative does not provide deep focus on the issues of the research whereas qualitative includes the issues of generalization to the scope and time-consuming. The mixed approach of qualitative and quantitative analysis offers a clearer view of the problem by compensating for the shortcomings of both quantitative and qualitative research approaches (Brannen, 2005). Hence, if the future researchers have a long timeline to conduct and complete the research, it is then recommended to them to use a mixed qualitative and quantitative method.

**Conclusion**

The findings from this study is imperative because it offers valuable insights to predict factors associated with e-book purchase intention in Southern Region of Malaysia. In light of this, our study has revealed price is the main factor that has significant influence towards the e-books purchase intention during the covid-19 pandemic.

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