Factors influencing Saudi consumers' behaviour towards food online purchasing: Pilot Study

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ABSTRACT
The pilot study aims to investigate the factors which affect the behaviour of online food consumers in Saudi Arabia. After investigating the previous similar studies, the factors of trust, subjective norms, utilitarian and hedonic values were employed as independent variables to study their effect on consumers of online food in Saudi Arabia. A sample size of 50 respondents was employed to answer a self-administrated questionnaire then these responses were analysed by using Smart-PLS software. The results showed that hedonic values and trust have no influence on Saudi consumer behaviour during ordering online food while utilitarian values and subjective norms have significant influence on Saudi consumer behaviour.

Keywords: Online, Food, Platform, Consumer Behaviour, Saudi Arabia.

INTRODUCTION

The online food delivery business is expected to make a revenue of 1.20 trillion USD globally by 2024. With 9.04% predicted compound annual growth rate (CAGR 2024–2029), the market is likely to reach a value of 1.85 trillion USD by 2029. A 20.0% revenue growth is predicted for the delivery of groceries in 2025. Grocery delivery is predicted to reach a market size of US$0.77 trillion by 2024 (Statista, 2024).
In Saudi Arabia alone, there was a 9.9% rise in food ordering between 2019 and 2023. According to Research (2022), 39% of people ordered food for dinner after 6 p.m., and Statista (2023) projects that by 2027, there would be 18.81 million users. By 2024, it is anticipated that Saudi Arabia's online food delivery business will make a revenue of 11.74 billion USD. By 2029, that business is predicted to have a proposed volume of US$15.13 billion, growing at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 5.20%. The grocery delivery business in Saudi Arabia is anticipated to expand as well, with a projected 23.0% revenue growth in 2025. In Saudi Arabia, the grocery delivery business is predicted to make a revenue of 10.19 billion USD by 2024. In terms of revenue generated by the online food delivery business, China is expected to lead the world with US$450.50 billion in 2024. In Saudi Arabia, the business of grocery delivery is projected to make an average revenue per user (ARPU) of 627.00 USD by 2024. By 2029, there are projected to be 19.2 million subscribers in Saudi Arabia's meals delivery business. In the meals delivery business, the user penetration rate is anticipated to reach 43.4% by 2024. The industry for online food delivery in Saudi Arabia has grown quickly because to the rising desire for frictionless and convenient dining options (Statista, 2024).
Online shopping has increased in popularity in Saudi Arabia and most other countries globally after the coronavirus illness 2019 (COVID-19) epidemic in December 2019. As the entire nation was placed under quarantine, the epidemic sparked a decline in economic performance. The country's regular economic activity has suffered as a result of the government's health measures intended to curb the virus's spread. On the other hand, it has prompted consumers to come up with creative ways to buy goods and services. The Saudi government has been working very hard to stop the spread of COVID-19 since the outbreak by enforcing regulations that restrict gathering and suspending communal work conditions. (Salem & Nor 2020). That suspension affected not only businesses but also at government buildings, retail establishments, schools, and colleges all of which are either completely or partially locked down. All metropolitan neighbourhoods now face strict time restrictions, a plethora of gathering types are considered illegal, and violating the public authority's mandate carries a fine. Both Sobaih and Moustafa (2022) and Salem and Nor (2020) claimed that the changes in consumers' behaviours during the implementation of the government measures to contain COVID-19 in Saudi Arabia.

BACKGROUND

The food retailing industry has seen enormous changes in consumer preferences in the wake of the government-imposed confinement measures and the rapid global spread of the coronavirus, or "COVID-19." A supply-demand mismatch in the food industry resulted from the move to online grocery shopping to reduce the danger of infection from stores, which was caused by economic instability(Osailan& Al-Kubaisy, 2022). Like most other nations in the globe, Saudi Arabia has seen a substantial shift in consumer behaviour due to the coronavirus illness 2019 (COVID-19), which has also been a major factor in the rise in commercial online activities (Al Hamli&Sobaih, 2023). Al Hamli and Sobaih state that the following variables influence online shopping in Saudi Arabia: trust, payment methods, ease of use, diversity of products, and psychological aspects. Furthermore, Mohammed, A. A. (2021) found that trust, subjective norms, and hedonic and utilitarian values all positively influence customer purchase intention. Additionally, they demonstrate how, in the Saudi Arabian context, availability has a moderating effect on the link between consumers' behaviour and their purchase intentions. From the previous studies, it could be concluded that the most influencing factors on online Saudi food consumer behaviour are namely trust, subjective norms, hedonic and utilitarian so these factors will be considered and investigated in this study.

Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

Psychology's Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) makes the connection between ideas and deeds. The idea states that three fundamental factors attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control influence a person's behavioural intentions. Behavioural intention is the most proximal predictor of human social conduct, according to TPB. IcekAjzen came up with the concept to increase the theory of reasoned action's (TRA) capacity for prediction. Ajzen's idea was to include perceived behavioural control into TPB. A component for perceived behaviour control was absent from TRA (Satsios&Hadjidakis, 2018). Across a broad spectrum of human areas, TPB was employed to examine the relationships between beliefs, attitudes, behavioural intentions, and behaviours. These fields include, among others, sustainability, sport management, public relations, advertising, and healthcare (Satsios&Hadjidakis, 2018). Perceived behavioural control is the extent to which an individual feels capable of doing a particular behaviour. Perceived behavioural control is the idea that one can perform an action on their own. Put differently, perceived behavioural control is linked to a particular action or objective. Depending on the circumstance and the deed in question, this opinion varies. The idea of planned behaviour holds that people are significantly more likely to plan to engage in specific activities when they have confidence in their ability to do so (Putrina et al., 2020).

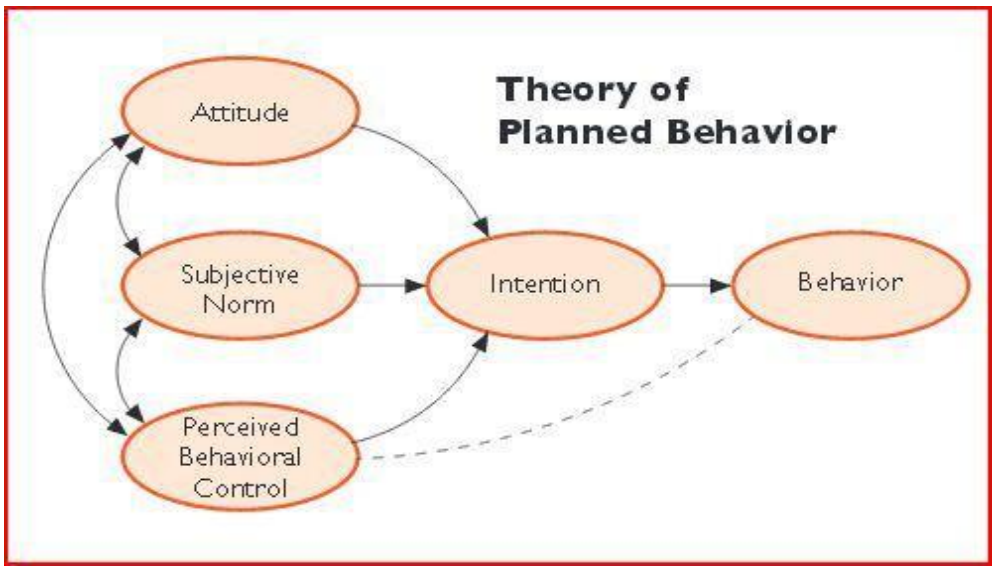

Figure 1: Diagram representation of TPB

Prior studies have demonstrated that an individual's level of confidence in their capacity to complete a task has a major influence on their behaviour. TPB has been widely applied in health-related domains, including encouraging adults to exercise more and helping preadolescents increase their physical activity, which improves their mental health, because self-efficacy helps explain a variety of relationships between beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behaviour (Webb, 2017).

According to Ajzen, Bandura's concept of self-efficacy served as the inspiration for the importance of perceived behavioural control in the theory of planned behaviour (1991). Control beliefs relate to perceived behavioural control in its aggregate, normative views offer a subjective norm, and behavioural beliefs generate an attitude towards the behaviour, either positive or negative. A favourable assessment denotes a conviction in the suggested behavior's ability to reduce the likelihood of unfavourable consequences. Conversely, a negative self-evaluation is associated with the belief that the behaviour will have unfavourable consequences if it is implemented (Tian et al., 2021).

The attitude towards the act, the subjective norm, and the perception of behavioural control all have an impact on the creation of a behavioural intention. It is believed that behavioural intention influences actual behaviour both directly and indirectly through perceived behavioural control (Lam et al., 2022). An individual is generally more likely to strongly want to engage in the action in question when they have a favourable attitude towards it, the attitude is consistent with pertinent standards, and they perceive a high degree of behavioural control (Caso et al., 2021).

Finally, the individuals are expected to carry out their goals when the opportunity occurs if they have sufficient degree of actual control over the conduct. Certain procedures can be taken to increase the odds of behaviour modification using TPB as a theoretical framework (Dang Vu & Nielsen, 2022). The action, target, context, and time should all be specified by the intervention team. For instance, "consume at least one serving of healthy grains during breakfast each day in the coming month," could be a goal. The action is "consuming," the objective" is one serving of whole grains," the context is "at breakfast each day," and the timing is "in the future month"(D'Souza, 2022).

Consequently, TPB theory was adopted to be the theoretical base of this pilot study in order to understanding the effect of perceived hedonic and utilitarian values, trust and subjective norms on online food consumer behaviour in Saudi Arabia.

Definition of key terms

hedonic and utilitarian values: Zeithaml's (1988) "What consumers get for what they give" or "the consumer's overall evaluation of the utility of a product or service provision based on perceptions of what is received for what one gives" are two ways to define a product's utilitarian worth. Functional benefits—lower cost, convenience, and excellent service are what provide value in this instance (Rintamaki et al., 2006). On the other hand, hedonic values include the potential for customers to feel happy and excited (Babin et al., 1994). These principles centre on the enjoyment derived from food's flavour as well as its freshness and quality (Maehle et al., 2015).

Subjective norms: is the second construct oftheory of Planned Behavior. As per Ajzen (1991) subjective norms is considered as social influence on other community members that somehow impacts an individual's behavior; it describes the sensations that people have as a result of particular social pressure (Sun & Wang, 2019).

Trust:According to Moorman et al. (1992), trust can result from a spouse's competence, intention, or integrity. It can also be defined as feelings, beliefs, or expectations of loyalty in a partner. When it comes to consumers' intention to buy food online, trust is a major factor. Trust and desire to buy are influenced by a number of elements, such as perceived risks, features of the website, and vendor traits. Trust in online food suppliers is greatly impacted by hazards related to money, time, and mental health (Munikrishnan et al., 2021). Food suppliers and website administrators should make sure their websites are easy to use, dependable, safe, and easy to navigate in order to increase customer trust (Xiao et al., 2015 and Nguyen et al., 2019).

Objective of Study

This study is designed to investigate the influence of factors, such as, trust, subjective norms, hedonic and utilitarian on the Saudi consumer behaviour who buy food through online platforms. The theory of Planned Behaviour was employed in order to understanding these relationships.

Methodology

Framework

The proposed theoretical framework for this research is presented in (Figure. 2) below, the independent variables are trust, subjective norms, hedonic and utilitarian while the dependent variable in this study is Saudi food online consumer behaviour.

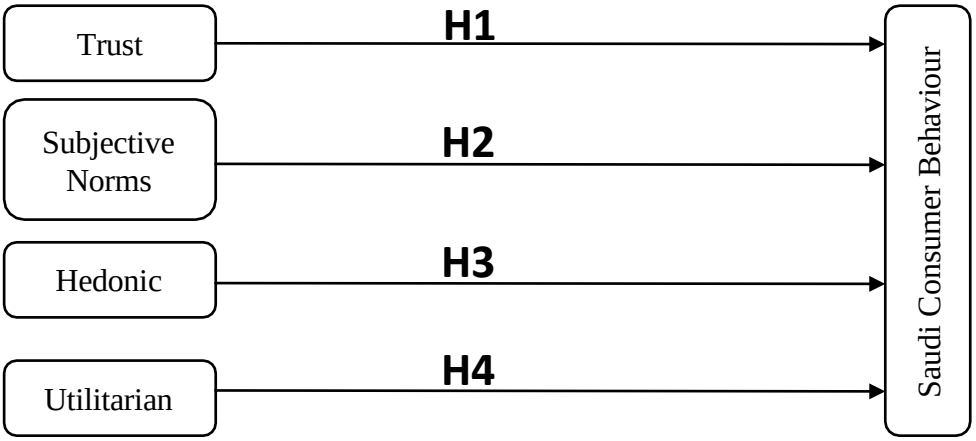

Figure 2: Research Conceptual Framework

Hypotheses Development
H1: Trust positively affect Saudi online food consumer behaviour.
H2: Subjective norms positively affect Saudi online food consumer behaviour.
H3: Hedonic values positively affect Saudi online food consumer behaviour.
H4: Utilitarian values positively affect Saudi online food consumer behaviour.

Population
A population is a group of people who share a common set of characteristics (Banerjee and Chaudhury, 2010). In this research, the target population is a group that consists of food consumers through online platforms in Saudi Arabia. Convenience sampling was employed because of the rarity of statistics on the target group.

Research instrument
The main research tool in this study is a self-administrative questionnaire, which is utilised to look at the relationship between each variable. The questionnaire is one of the most widely used data gathering instruments in the survey method (Saunders et al., 2009). Written answers to a series of questions or assertions are requested from respondents. Questionnaires are a useful tool for collecting data from a big sample before undertaking quantitative analysis because all respondents are compelled to answer the same set of questions (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The scale of Likert 7-Points was employed in order to enhancing the internal consistency, reliability and validity.
The questionnaire items are adopted from Mohammed, A. A. (2021) then adapted to be suitable for this study, the questionnaire items are illustrated below in Table.1.

Table 1: Questionnaire Items

Construct	Item
Trust	I trust the quality of food provided by Saudi online platforms
	I think the online payment methods are safe and secure
	I trust the quality of delivery services provided by Saudi online platforms
Subjective norms	People who are close to me encourage me to buy food through online platforms
	I think Saudi people are more likely to use online platforms to order food in the future
	I think Saudi people believe that the quality of online supplied food is accepted
Hedonic Values	Buying food through online platforms would give me pleasure because of its taste and freshness
	I would feel relaxed using online platforms to order food
	The use of online platforms to order food can affect my wellbeing positively
Utilitarian Values	Buying food through online platforms is more convenient
	Buying food through online platforms is more economical
	Buying food through online platforms saves more time
Consumer Behaviour	I am a regular food buyer through online platforms
	I still buy food through online platforms even though other food stores are on sale

	I still buy food through online platforms even though other food stores are closer to me

Sample size

A sample is a subset of a broader population consisting of people, things, or stuff chosen for assessment (Mugo, 2002). The survey instrument used in this study is a self-administered questionnaire. The participants who live in Saudi Arabia are the main focus of the target population. Gender and ethnicity are not limitations. Participants in this survey were kindly encouraged to participate. Saudi Arabian online food shoppers will receive an email including a URL to the web-based survey site along with a description of the study's objectives.

People who live in Saudi Arabia aged over 18 years were eligible to be included in this study. In this pilot study the sample size of 50 respondents was adopted according to Fink (2017). The purpose of the pilot study is to ensure that the data collected through measurement items are reliable and valid and could be used to answer the research questions (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

Data Collection

The data collection process for this study was achieved by directly collecting from the field. Data was collected from the sample population through online survey which was distributed within Saudi online food consumers as mentioned above, electronically via social media different types of channels, such as, WhatsApp communities' groups, Facebook, Twitter and Snapchat.

Data Analysis

For purpose of data analysis, Smart-PLS version 3.3.3 was employed in this study to analyze and test the hypotheses and the research model. Smart-PLS is a software that adopting the Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) method. SEM is one the most commonly used statistical technique that simultaneously evaluates relationships between different constructs represented by multiple variables (Morin et al., 2020). PLS-SEM technique is proven to be competent in dealing with complicated modelling issues such as non-normal data or highly complex models that commonly existed in studies (Hair et al., 2014). Besides that, the PLS-SEM technique has several advantages in social science research, such as its high efficacy in coping with a complex model, establishing dominant latent variable reliability and informatively assessing specified measurement models (Ghasemy et al., 2020; Sarstedt et al., 2020). Therefore, Smart-PLS software which adopts a PLS-SEM technique is deemed appropriate and chosen for this study.

After running data on Smart-PLS, three items were eliminated because their loadings were below 0.7. So the final constructs are illustrated in Table.2 and Figure 3. We also test the convergent and discriminant validity. We examine the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) in order to assess convergent validity. Table 2 shows that the AVE values were higher above the 0.5 cut-off value for each component (Fornell&Larcker, 1981). We examined each construct's squared root of AVE with its cross-correlation with other components in order to assess discriminating validity. Table 2 illustrates that every diagonal value surpasses the inter-construct correlation, meeting the requirements for proving discriminant validity (Fornell&Larcker, 1981).

Table 2: Cross Loading, Construct Reliability and Validity

Construct	Item	Loading	CR	AVE
Trust	I trust the quality of food provided by Saudi online platforms (T1)	0.899	0.909	0.834
	I trust the quality of delivery services provided by Saudi online platforms (T3)	0.926		
Subjective norms	People who are close to me encourage me to buy food through online platforms (SN1)	0.876	0.844	0.731
	I think Saudi people believe that the quality of online supplied food is accepted (SN3)	0.833		
Hedonic Values	Buying food through online platforms would give me pleasure because of its taste and freshness (H1)	0.891	0.924	0.803
	I would feel relaxed using online platforms to order food (H2)	0.921		
	The use of online platforms to order food can affect my	0.877		

	wellbeing positively (H3)			
Utilitarian Values	Buying food through online platforms is more convenient (U1)	0.711	0.843	0.643
	Buying food through online platforms is more economical (U2)	0.883		
	Buying food through online platforms saves more time (U3)	0.802		
Consumer Behaviour	I still buy food through online platforms even though other food stores are on sale (CB2)	0.937	0.933	0.874
	I still buy food through online platforms even though other food stores are closer to me (CB3)	0.933		

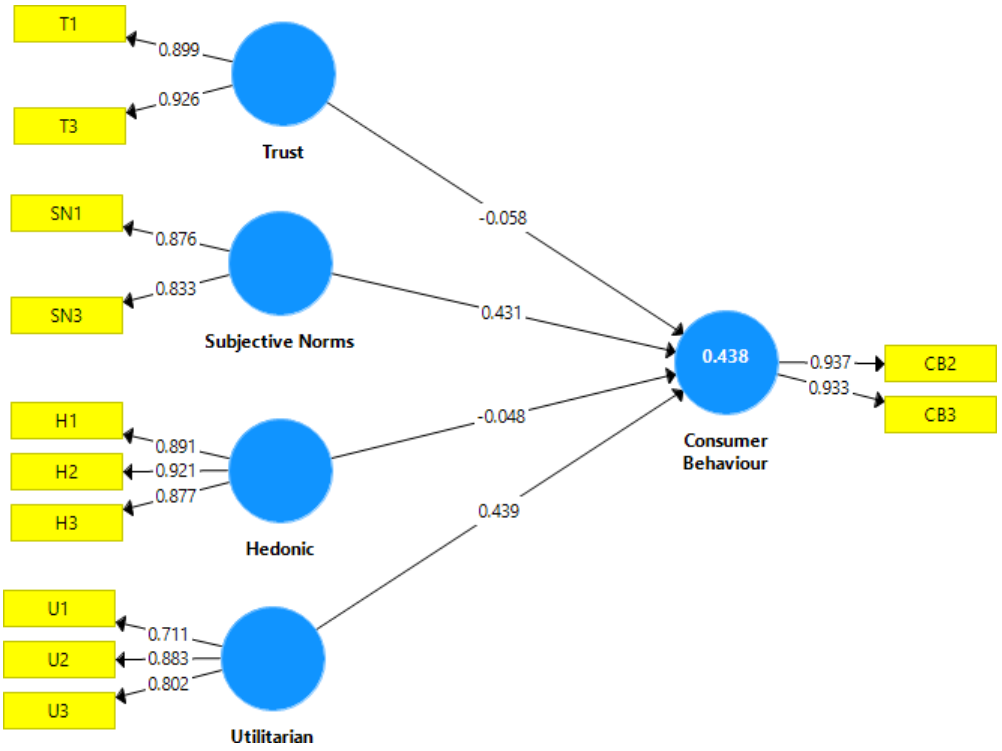

Figure 3: PLS Algorithm Measurement Model

As shown in Table 3, the result of the Fornell-Larcker criterion analysis indicates that the square root of the average variance extracted (numbers in bold) is higher than all the correlations between constructs, which can be decided the Fornell-Larcker criterion is met.

Table 3: Result of Fornell-Larcker Analysis

	Consumer Behaviour	Hedonic	Subjective Norms	Trust	Utilitarian
Consumer Behaviour	**0.935**				
Hedonic	0.477	**0.896**			
Subjective Norms	0.549	0.674	**0.855**		
Trust	0.43	0.579	0.694	**0.913**	
Utilitarian	0.568	0.612	0.436	0.494	**0.802**

Findings

In this study, direct effect of Trust, subjective norms, utilitarian values and hedonic values) as independent variables on online food consumer behaviour. There were four hypotheses proposed to delineate these direct relationships as below.

H1: Trust positively affect Saudi online food consumer behaviour.

H2: Subjective norms positively affect Saudi online food consumer behaviour.
H3: Hedonic values positively affect Saudi online food consumer behaviour.
H4: Utilitarian values positively affect Saudi online food consumer behaviour.
Figure 4 presents these direct relationships and hypotheses as well as their path coefficients in Smart-PLS software.

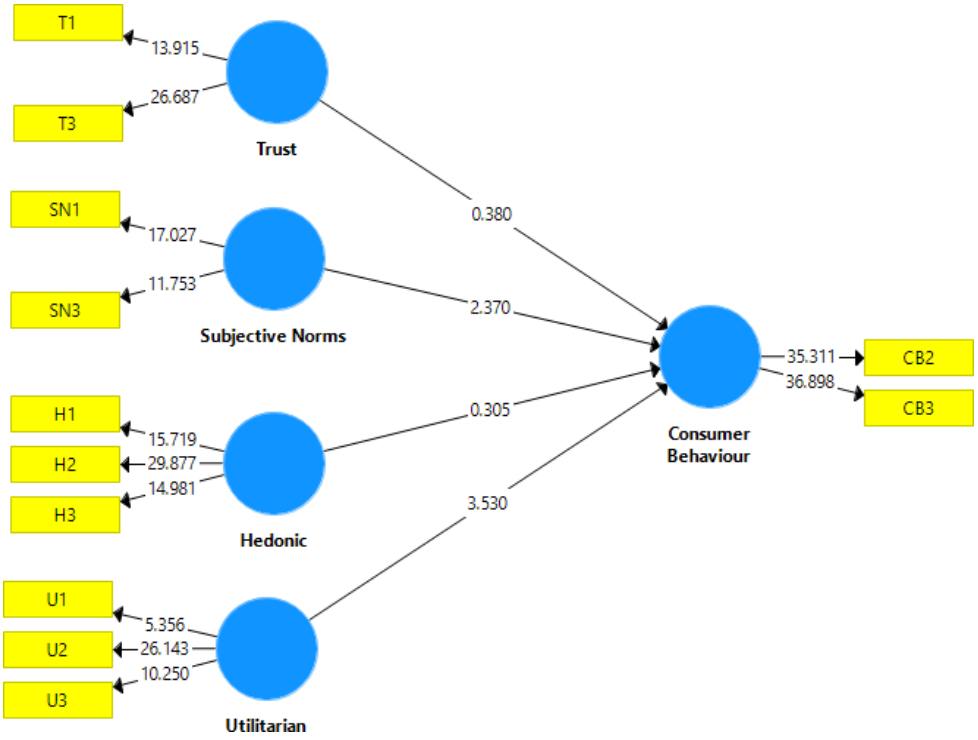

Figure 4: Path Coefficients in Smart-PLS

Table 5: Results of Direct Relationships Analysis

	Path Coefficients (β)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T-value	P-Values	Decision
Hedonic -> Consumer Behaviour	-0.048	-0.041	0.151	0.316	0.752	Not Supported
Subjective Norms -> Consumer Behaviour	0.431	0.429	0.183	2.348	0.019	Supported
Trust -> Consumer Behaviour	-0.058	-0.052	0.14	0.414	0.679	Not Supported
Utilitarian -> Consumer Behaviour	0.439	0.441	0.129	3.398	0.001	Supported

As shown in Figure 4 and Table 5, there were total four direct effects were tested by using two-tailed bootstrapping test, only 2 hypotheses which are (H2 and H4) were supported with reference to the criteria of two-tailed test which is: path coefficients (β) > 0, t-value > 1.65, p-values < 0.05, while H1 and H3 were not supported because path coefficients (β) was less than 0, t-value was less than 1.65 and p-value was greater than 0.05.

DISCUSSION

CONCLUSION

After employing the theory of Planned Behaviour, it was assumed that online food consumer behaviour could be influenced by trust, subjective norms, utilitarian values and hedonic values. These factors were adopted from previous studies which examined similar variables.
A sample size of 50 respondents was employed to investigate the influence of these four factors on the consumer behaviour and the results were that hedonic values and trust don't affect the consumer

behaviour of online food in Saudi Arabia while the subjective norms and utilitarian values have a significant influence on Saudi consumer behaviour.

Implication of Study

Since this is deductive approach-based research, this research integrated the theory of Planned Behaviour to support the theoretical framework of this study. This theory will help in deeply understanding consumer behaviour toward online food platforms in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, this study provides valuable insights into marketing strategies which should be adopted by online food ordering platform in order to gain more traffic and converted customers in a country like Saudi Arabia.

Limitations and Further Research Directions

This study is applied on a wide range of population which may need to limit the population to include only certain range of age, degree of education, level of monthly income or certain region in Saudi Arabia because these factors may play vital roles in changing the study's results which gives more knowledge about the relationship between variables. Also, this study focused only on one types of products which is food while it is essential to examine the effect of the same variables on other type of products which are regularly being sold through online platforms.

Also, this study is considered a pilot study with small sample size which is designed to guide future researcher to employ similar variables and study their effects on consumer behaviour, so the directions of future researches is to adopt this study's framework, try to investigate more variables and widen the sample size to make the results more reliable and representative of the population.

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