

THOUGHTS OF CRITICAL THINKERS SERIES

# THE IMPACTS OF SOCIAL DISTANCING

ON COMMUNITIES,  
ECONOMY AND INDUSTRIES



Editors

Rozilawati Mahadi  
Latisha Asmaak Shafie  
Sharmini Abdullah  
Abdul Mutalib Embong

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# LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

**Rozilawati Mahadi** is a senior lecturer at Universiti Malaysia Perlis (UniMAP). Her research interests include meta-cognition, self-regulated learning, self-directedness, heutagogy, psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics.

**Latisha Asmaak Shafie** is a senior lecturer at Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Cawangan Perlis. She plays many professional identities apart from being an educator and a researcher. Her research areas are digital discourse, identities, social media studies, autoethnography and informal learning. She is the writer of her dreams.

**Sharmini Abdullah** is a PhD is a senior lecturer at Universiti Malaysia Perlis. Her research areas include English and Malay Metaphors in Translation, Technical Translation, Linguistics, ESP and Communication Skills.

**Abdul Mutalib Embong Eusoff** was a broadcast journalist by profession before venturing into the world of academia. Now, he serves as an academician at Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT). He has published articles on cultures and temperatures of former British colonies and his main research area is a Malay discourse, which he formalised in his PhD on this subject. He is also active in doing research, publishes books and journal papers. Besides, he is devoting himself for charity, focusing on the poor and orphans. At present, he is developing the English language curriculum for the Orang Asli children and Tahfiz schools.

**Aisyah Dollah @ Abdullah** is lecturing Islamic oriented subjects at University Malaysia Terengganu (UMT) since 2016. Earlier, she was an educator for Tahfiz related courses and a tutor at Faculty Quran and Hadith, University Malaya. She was also an assistant researcher at Faculty Quran and Hadith, University Malaysia in 2008. She has received few grants in the areas of education, counselor, society engagement and training.



**Ameer Farhan Mohd Arzaman** is a PhD student at the Faculty of Business, Economics and Social Development, Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT), Malaysia. He received a Master of Science (Aquaculture) from Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT) and a Bachelor of Business Administration (Management & Entrepreneurship) from Universiti Kuala Lumpur (UniKL). His areas of study include economics and general well-being, community development, environmental resources and sustainability.

**Capt. Fausta Ari Barata, M.M** is currently an assistant professor at the University of 17 August 1945, Surabaya, Indonesia. He received his PhD degree in Economic and Business Management from the same university in 2019. He has a vast experience in the field of marketing, operations management and consultancy.

**Mahirah Kamaludin** is an Associate Professor, Head of Economics at the Faculty of Business, Economics and Social Development and an associate fellow at the Institute of Oceanography and Environment (INOS), Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT). In 2013, she obtained a PhD in Natural Resources Development and Policy from Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Serdang, Malaysia. Her research interests include economic valuation, non-market valuation, hypothetical market, environmental and natural resources economics, sustainability and conservation of endangered species.

**Fazmawati Zakaria** is a senior lecturer at the Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Cawangan Perlis. She obtained her Master and Bachelor in TESL from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM). Her interests are in motivation, error correction and communication.

**Huzairah A. Hamid** obtained bachelor's in education (TESL) (Hons.) from Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Selangor in 2010 and Master of Linguistics from University of Malaya (UM), Kuala Lumpur, in 2014. She had served in the Malaysian Examinations Council as MUET Examiner from 2017 until 2020 and as CEFRR Examiner in 2020. She

is currently a lecturer at the Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Cawangan Perlis. Her areas of interest include Systemic Functional Linguistics, Critical Discourse Analysis and English Language Teaching.

**Khalipah Mastura Khalid** is an English lecturer at Kedah Engineering Matriculation College. She has obtained her Bachelor of Education in TESL and her master's degree in TESOL. Her research work is related to upgrading writing skills and ability of Matriculation students in Malaysia. She has presented her research papers and innovation projects in various conferences and innovation competitions, at national and international levels since 2009-2021. She holds the title of Excellent Lecturer for English since 2010.

**Majdah Chulan** is currently a senior lecturer at Academy of Language Studies at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Cawangan Perlis. She has more than 15 years of teaching experience. She has published few chapters in book and other publications. She has written journal articles, short stories and articles in Dewan Bahasa magazines. Her areas of expertise are in second language learning (SLL), applied linguistics and creative writing.

**Nur Athirah Zaki** is a fresh graduate from International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), specializing in Arabic Language and Literature. She loves writing and at present working on her first poetry book. She also enjoys the nature which she pens on in her write ups.

**Nurain Ali** is a fresh graduate from International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). She majors in Arabic Language and Literature. She is currently doing free-lance with NGO engaging in the voluntarily work especially dealing with education for the poor.

**Razlina Razali** has a doctorate in education from The University of Auckland. After earning her PhD in 2020, she joined Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Cawangan Perlis as a senior lecturer of English in the Academy of Language Studies. Razlina's research interest include teaching

and learning in higher education, feedback, research supervision and qualitative case studies. As a young academic, Razlina is always interested to expand her horizons in academia.

**Siti Anatasya Saari** is a Master of Science student at the Faculty of Fisheries and Food Science, Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT). She graduated with a Master of Tropical Fisheries and Bachelor of Science in Applied Science (Fisheries) from Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT). Her areas of studies recover for environmental changes towards fisheries development, including climate change on the primary food chain, ecological changes on planktonic and bivalve's species, and life table parameters.

**Surina Nayan** is currently a senior lecturer at Academy of language Studies at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Cawangan Perlis. She is actively engaged in writing books, journals and other publications. Her google scholar citations are 652 and h-Index 13. Her interests are in vocabulary, grammar, workplace in English, teaching and learning English.

**Mohd Khirulnizam Musa** is an English Instructor at National Youth and Skills Institution (Institut Kemahiran Belia Negara Kemasik) with six (6) years of teaching experience. Previously, he was a secondary school teacher in Gerik, Perak. At present, he is pursuing his PhD in Applied Linguistics (Language Teaching and Learning) at Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT).

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# PREFACE

The book was initially a product of an intellectual discussion among three academicians during the first Malaysian Control Order (MCO) that was enforced in April 2020 where physical academic classes and meetings was put to a halt for face-to-face (f2f) contexts and was forced to shift online. Coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) is undeniably a revolutionary force that has change our education system. In the beginning, the purpose of writing this book was for educational purposes. However, it cannot be denied that the impacts of a pandemic can be experienced by many communities around the world. During the MCO, we talked about the need for a written account of social distancing that we could use in the future for learning and analyzing. Therefore, seeing this publication come to fruition is a great honor, as it allows us to read the perspectives and analyses of these international communities.

Why does social distancing matter to us? It is because we are human beings with a strong need to be connected by humans in order to fulfil our emotional and physical needs. This book will provide our readers with an overall perspective of social distancing. Each chapter portrays personal and professional insights on the matter. It describes specific impact of social distancing towards specific communities, economy and industry. Each chapter will also include authentic experiences faced by affected parties. The chapter will include practical suggestions that will help with decreasing or eliminating the challenges.

In addition, readers will learn what social distancing is and how it affects their lives. By identifying these areas, they will be able to make necessary changes in their lives. They can apply the techniques and suggestions given to overcome the challenges they've faced due to social

distancing. This book provides a unique framework on social distancing and the impacts on communities, economy and industries. All the terms used are simple and easy to understand. This book also includes real experiences and provides unique and practical suggestions to our readers to thrive during social distancing.

## **Editors**

**Rozilawati Mahadi**  
**Latisha Asmaak Shafie**  
**Sharmini Abdullah**  
**Abdul Mutalib Embong**

# INTRODUCTION

The book was initially a product of an intellectual discussion among three academicians during the first Malaysian Control Order (MCO) that was enforced in April 2020 where physical academic classes and meetings was put to a halt for face-to-face (f2f) contexts and was forced to shift online. Readers of this book will gain an understanding of what social distancing is and how it has impacted their daily lives. By doing so, they can determine how to make changes to their lives. Meanwhile, techniques and suggestions are provided for our readers to overcome the challenges they've faced due to social distancing. This book provides a unique framework on social distancing and the impacts towards communities, economy and industries. All the terms used in this book are simple and easy to understand. Furthermore, our readers will be exposed to real experiences, unique and practical suggestions that can be used to thrive during social distancing as written in each of the following chapters:

In **Chapter 1**, we discuss how social distancing without traditional f2f learning and teaching practices affects the norms of learning communities around the world. Covid-19 pandemic has impacted learning communities around the world in unprecedented ways. Traditional offline learning communities, which employed pre-pandemic norms have struggled to sustain ongoing learning and teaching in virtual contexts during and post-pandemic era. To meet the present needs of learners and educators, effective traditional teaching and learning practices were shifted to online teaching and learning. In the process, disruptive changes occurred from traditional, offline teaching and learning practices. In this chapter, we discuss the scenarios, challenges, and strategies encountered by offline traditional learning communities and online learning communities. The chapter also discusses is the role of learning communities in coping with global crises.



In **Chapter 2**, the authors elaborate on how the Covid-19 outbreak poses serious concerns to the education system. The chapter highlights some of the difficulties that most educators and learners have to endure during the pandemic, among which are lack of social support system from home, unavailability of peer support, limited teaching and learning resources, problems with Internet connectivity, and poor digital skills. It also reveals the damaging effects of social distancing on educators and learners such as increased mental health problems, increased social isolation, loss of sense of identity and personality, individualism, and indulgence in negative style behaviours. Lastly, the authors present possible recommendations for policymakers, stakeholders, researchers, education institutions, educators and communities on improving teaching and learning strategies across rural areas during the social distancing crisis.

As discussed in Chapter 2, **Chapter 3** continues to discuss the unpredictable impacts of COVID-19 on the social, economic, and fishing industries of each country. In addition to providing food and work to millions of people, the fisheries sector helps preserve the culture and identity of numerous coastal communities. Movement Control Order (MCO) in Malaysia have greatly affected the livelihoods of fishing communities across Malaysia. With this being said, present study was conducted to analyse the impact of physical distancing towards small-scale fisheries community from their socio-economic perspectives.

Meanwhile, in **Chapter 4**, the author discussed the impact of social distancing towards transportation industry, which has raised multiplier effects such as a decrease in the number of passengers, an increase in operational costs due to health protocols, and the possibility of changing the transportation business' functions. There are also a number of recommendations for potential opportunities in the transportation business, starting from making substitute products, bringing up-supporting products that can replace the main product and creating unmanned transportation modes such as Tesla. Not forgetting utilization of drones in various shipping matters. In addition, transportation

business players must recalculate product prices or service costs because in principle, the community still has a great need for transportation modes and as another opportunity by changing market numbers.

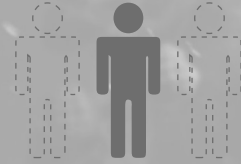
**Chapter 5** highlights the impact of social distancing measures towards Small and Medium Enterprise Business (SME), particularly in Malaysia. Furthermore, since we are living in the IR 4.0 era during this pandemic, there is a need for entrepreneurs to start moving towards digitalization and thinking of innovative solutions in all aspects of their entrepreneurial endeavours to ensure that their businesses are still relevant during this outbreak. Apparently, technology has turned out to be a great saviour for the business world. It gives great opportunities to most entrepreneurs to run their business online rather than offline, since social distancing has becoming a new norm in Malaysian society. In other words, the emerging of virtual entrepreneurship among Malaysians, where there are less human contact and social distancing could be maintained. This chapter also includes real experiences faced by Malaysians who have ventured into online businesses that offer contactless deliveries.

**Chapter 6** addresses the impact of Covid-19 towards consumer's online purchasing behavior. The study relies on the feedback received via questionnaire. The chapter starts off with a thorough discussion of the socio-demographic factors that comes with purchasing food via apps. It also takes into consideration identifying the methods by which these behavioural changes can influence the digital transformation of food purchasing. The pivotal finding is that most consumers were sceptical about leaving their home to purchase food and prefer to buy their foods via online application. The reasons for these are discussed. Nevertheless, some consumers used their time at home to explore on different types of foods that's available in the online market.

**Chapter 7** presents the result of a case study on students' relationship with themselves, their peers, family members, instructors, or teacher within educational institution; due to the pandemic Covid-19. This chapter reflects the issues highlighted in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 of this book. The main findings of this chapter implied that the relationship

between the learning communities namely, educators, learners, peers and parents was positively and negatively affected. In this study, due to the practice of social distancing, students have positive relationship with their family members and them-self. However, in terms of their social relationship with their peers, instructors or teachers grew weaker. Obviously, social distancing during the pandemic has reshaped the landscape of social interaction of the students with the people around them.

Finally, in **Chapter 8**, the authors explored perceived lifestyle changes after the outbreak of Covid-19 among the people in Kuala Berang, Terengganu and how they cope with the new norm in their life. A thematic content analysis approach was used to analyse the respondents' association with pandemic spreading and lifestyle behaviours as well as changes in their lifestyle due to the pandemic. Lifestyle behaviours include the respondents understanding on Covid-19 and their coping strategies with economy, children's education, medical expenses, religious values, entertainment and physiological needs. The finding reveals that the geographical area of Kuala Berang which is quite isolated from other places makes it safe from the virus. The number of visitors is also small, so it is a lot easier to keep the virus at bay. Apart from that, these people have a certain way of living which does not require them to expose themselves to the disease. Certain aspects of Kuala Berang's response to Covid-19 may not be replicable in other places. Yet, its experience dealing with pandemic can encourage others to take significant steps to reduce the spread of the virus.



# SOCIAL DISTANCING IMPACT ON LEARNING COMMUNITIES

*Latisha Asmaak Shafie, Razlina Razali and Khalipah Mastura Khalid*

The Covid-19 pandemic is an ongoing pandemic that was detected in December 2019 and was declared as a pandemic in March 2020. Unfortunately, Covid-19 does not only affect the health systems alone, our economy, social and emotional well-being are dangerously affected as well. Since the outbreak of Covid-19, social distancing was enforced and is seen as one of the most effective preventive tools to curtail the pandemic by maintaining a physical distance of at least two (2) meters between people in indoor or outdoor setting. Social distancing too requires people to select safe activities and to limit physical contact activities with people that does not live under the same roof.

Hence, not only does social distancing promotes social isolation, but it restricts human socialization, which affect their learning engagement. Learning occurs when learners construct new knowledge as they conduct their social interactions with other learners. Social distancing forces our traditional method of learning by dividing and segregating our communities. In other words, a traditional face-to-face (f2f) learning requires ample space, such as a classroom or lecture hall. However, during the pandemic, physical classroom and lecture halls are obsolete. Our students are forced to adapt to new learning method or new norms such as the use of online platforms.

Or else, they will not be able to survive if they do not accommodate with the changes made due to the pandemic. Those learning communities with digital inequalities will suffer as digital spaces have become essential. Poor families will not be able to accommodate with digital learning and economic crises imposed by Covid-19 (Van Lancker & Parolin, 2020). There are so many changes as new norms are embraced and accepted. However, there is not much known about the changes occurs towards learning communities, and how they need to adapt to these changes. Along with the challenges they must face to sustain and maintain their progress. Therefore, the chapter will highlight on traditional and online learning communities, the impacts of social distancing towards learning communities, insights learnt during social distancing and emerging norms of learning communities.

## LEARNING COMMUNITIES

A learning community is a group of members from various levels who work continuously together for a common purpose (Johnson, 1999). They enhance engaged learning among members through social interactions. Learning communities are varied. They can be among school students, university students, and even professional members. They are formed through face-to-face interactions, virtual encounters or the combination of both contexts. A learning community is defined as the following characteristics: a) sharing the access, b) having relationships with the members, c) sharing the shared vision and, d) embracing the functions prescribed by the community (West & Williams, 2018). In this section, three types of learning communities are discussed; First and foremost is Professional Learning Communities (PLC), then there's the Community of Practice (CoP) and finally, Professional Learning Network (PLN).

Firstly, Professional Learning Communities (PLC) consists of a group of educators who work together to promote their professional developments in improving the quality of teaching and learning in structured ways (Blitz, 2013). Professional Learning Communities enhance learners' academic achievements due to their teachers' collaborative efforts (Avalos, 2011; Owen, 2015). With that being said,

learning institutions become learning communities when their mission and visions are shared by their staff, students, parents and the community (Hassan, Ahmad & Boon, 2018). PLC consists of five dimensions. They are Shared Vision and Mission, Leadership Sharing and Supportive Leadership, Collective Learning and Learning Application, Personal Practice Sharing and Organization Support (Hord, 1997). PLC consist of professional educators who collaborate to ensure a learning culture for their learners (Hipp & Huffm, 2010).

However, according to the work of Vescio, Ross & Adams (2008), PLC is difficult to maintain for a certain period of time. Sims and Penny (2014) indicate rigidity, less impact on teaching skills, time constraint and arguable students' academic achievements are the problems faced when implementing PLC. Secondly, Community of Practice (CoP) refers to a group of people who have regular interactions, develop relationships, have a sense of belonging and develop a commitment to learning (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002). Classrooms can be considered as communities of practice as the members share the same practice and interest to solve problems and improve their learning through their interactions (Kapucu, 2012). Thirdly, a personal or Professional Learning Network (PLN) refers to an informal network that a learner has to learn from others for professional or personal growth. It is personalized and cost-effective. It often stems from social contact one utilizes at the workplace.

## **LEARNING COMMUNITIES AT EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS**

Educational institutions are also referred to as learning organisations. The members of said organisations will share and contribute their knowledge. Without continuous learning, organisations will suffer and unable to thrive. According to Senge (1990), a learning organisation must share a vision, mental models, team learning, personal mastery and system thinking. With thriving educational institutions, they are rich in learning communities with members of varying learning needs.

## Learning Communities at Higher Education Institutions

Learning communities are formed at higher education institutions when students and practitioners work together within and outside disciplines (Giesen, 2015). For instance, contemporary learning communities include Residential Learning Communities (RLCs) which combine sharing living arrangements with educational opportunities. This have proven successful in completing undergraduate programmes. Eidum, Lomicka, Chiang, Endick and Stratton (2020) studied on Residential Learning Communities (RLCs) as a learning community as a High Impact Educational Practice studied 3,000 undergraduates at four campuses. The study reveals that, the faculty's involvement in students' academic and social learning show positive learning outcomes.

Residential Learning Communities (RLCs) enable the students to reflect and self-assess their ongoing learning experiences by integrating learning spaces that enable them to learn across the contexts where the students will be able to learn from both; co-curriculum and curriculum (Gebauer, Wade, Muller, Kramer, Leary & Sopper, 2020). Meanwhile, Sriram, Haynes, Weintraub, Cheatle, Marquart and Murray (2020) reveal that RLCs work as learning communities when students are invested in the community by participating in co-curricular activities that require them to be engaged socially, emotionally and intellectually. An essential part of building a successful learning community is setting aside cultural differences between schools and universities. As well as the willingness to overcome these differences (Carpenter & Matters, 2003). Students with Living-Learning Communities (LLCs) will forged a strong connection with the faculty staff as they have better peer and staff support relationships, improved collaborative skills that enhanced their academic and social achievements (Arensdorf & Naylor-Tincknell, 2016).

Learning occurs through engaging and reflective collaborative classroom activities for postgraduate students (Kacuru, 2012). When students are forced to work in groups, they will develop a closer relationship with each other. The bond forged is a form of their investment in the

community. Thus, the finding suggests that students learn effectively through social interactions. The facilitators were instructive in the success of this learning. Collaborative learning ensures different kinds of minds work together and the assignments must be practical and mirror real-life challenges. It can be concluded that learning communities at higher education institutions thrive on collaborative learning that occurs in social contexts.

### **Learning Communities at Schools**

Learning communities are best defined as ‘ongoing groups who met regularly to increase their own learning and that of their students’ (Lieberman & Miller, 2008, p.2). A professional learning community consists of a group of professionals sharing some fundamental core beliefs and values, common goals and purposes, constantly gaining new knowledge through interaction with one another and aiming to improve practices. This is a cycle where learning is normally embedded into daily work. We can see teachers working hard to gain new knowledge, try it out in practice and from the experience, more experience is gained to be shared.

They do this in interaction with each other, by working collaboratively which can foster collaboration or hinder it; cultural factors, which are people’s beliefs and values; and leadership style, which greatly affects both the culture within the school and the structure. All these factors or characteristics are embedded in one another and are interdependent. The idea of improving schools by developing professional learning communities is currently very popular. This term is used to describe every imaginable combination of people from all walks of lives with an interest in education; a school committee, a high school department, an entire school district, a state department of education, a national professional organization and so on.

The professional learning community model now has reached a critical juncture, one well known to those who have witnessed the fate of other well-intentioned school reform efforts. In this all-too-familiar



cycle, initial enthusiasm gives fundamental concepts driving the initiative, followed by inevitable implementation problems, the desired results, abandonment of the reform and the launch of a new search for the next promising initiative. As Covid-19 continues to move among us, societies across the world are attempting to keep up with the new challenges the pandemic brings. Non-pharmaceutical interventions such as social distancing are important and effective tools for preventing virus spread. Social distancing is a means of slowing down the spread of contagious disease.

It involves restricting the gathering of large groups of people, the closing of public spaces, and the cancelling of large-scale events. By curbing the pace of the disease, social distancing buys societies the time to prepare and stops health systems from becoming overwhelmed. Right now, many of us are experiencing the reality of social distancing. Most infrastructure such as shops, restaurants, cinemas, galleries, offices and schools are closed. Festivals and sports events are cancelled. Professionals are working remotely, students are learning online and social interaction now mostly takes place via apps.

### **Online Learning Communities**

The rapid advancements of information technology and communication have brought various changes to every aspect of our lives, including our education. Nowadays, education can be accessed through various online platforms without being restricted by space or time. Not only that, this development has enabled a wide range of opportunities for educators and students alike to engage virtually, which creates a sense of community. The term community can be defined as a group of people that share common elements such as membership, influence, fulfilment of needs, and emotional connection (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Online learning communities however are different to that of physical communities. Specific to the educational context, an online community can be conceptualised as groups of people, for instance, students and educators that share the same interest. They work together to achieve teaching and learning goals through virtual learning spaces (Arasaratnam-Smith & Northcote, 2017).

An online community however does not exist in vacuum – it has to be built especially considering the fact that its main stakeholders – students are physically apart from their educators and peers and may experience isolation. Technology, social, and task have been identified as important elements to an online community (Abdelmalak, 2015; Carabajal, Lapointe, & Gunawardena, 2003). Technology is central to online communities as it provides the platform or space for communities to gather, interact and engage in dialogue. In addition, technology plays an important role for maintaining online communities and enabling them to accomplish goals (Carabajal *et al.*, 2003). With reference to the social element, trust, understanding and care need to be present in online communities as well so that members of the online communities do not feel apprehensive to engage in dialogue with one another. This is to say that although it's happening in the virtual world, online platforms should help communities develop a sense of belongingness (Arasaratnam-Smith & Northcote, 2017). Lastly, task refers to the contents, materials and resources used within online communities (Abdelmalak, 2015).

The Covid-19 pandemic has expanded online learning communities and making them more important than before. The closure of schools and higher learning institutions has led to an exodus of online learning communities. Before the pandemic, educators and students in schools and higher learning institutions had the flexibility to incorporate hybrid learning – a combination of learning through online tools with face-to-face classes. However, nowadays, it is not unusual anymore that students and educators engage in fully online learning. Implicit to the discussion above is a call for educational practitioners and providers to consider the Fully Online Learning Community (FOLC) model proposed by van Oostveen *et al.* (2017) as a guide to develop and sustain learning communities during this pandemic.

As posited by Lock (2007), 'the relationships, the intimacy, the negotiations, and the engagement of participants all influence the evolution of a community' (p. 130). Therefore, building on the works of van Oostveen *et al.* (2017), we suggest that the following implications be considered by online learning communities if they are to maintain their dynamics and achieve sustainable teaching and learning:

- i. Using synchronous video conferencing. This approach will enable members of the communities to experience the 'human touch' that is inherent to physical, face-to-face communication such as the use of different intonation, facial expression and body language. These aspects are crucial when it comes to developing a sense of trust within members of the online learning communities.
- ii. Treating online communities as a space that promotes negotiations of information and responsibilities amongst its members, thus diluting power distances between members. To that end, both students and educators must work in tandem in selecting resources for learning, preferred digital devices and learning environments, and assessments processes.
- iii. Constructing assessments that suits the 21<sup>st</sup> century context and depart from traditional assessments. In other words, assessments are carried out in an ongoing manner and allowing students to utilise skills such as critical thinking, reflection, creativity and collaboration.
- iv. Utilising various online platforms to carry out teaching and learning activities as well as dialogues around learning.
- v. Promoting students' autonomy in the feedback process by providing them opportunities to self-evaluate their understanding, work-in-progress and also their peers.
- vi. Promoting dialogues about learning among members of online learning communities.

## FORMAL LEARNING SPACES

In the past, formal learning spaces have been equated to traditional learning which takes place within the four walls of classrooms. Typically, it involves desks and chairs arranged in a systematic manner, facing a board and the teacher's desk. Not only that, formal learning spaces are teacher-centred whereby learning involves the transfer of knowledge, often from a prescribed set of syllabi from teachers to students (Bautista & Borgers, 2013). However, the advent of technology has altered some aspects of formal learning spaces. Examples of incorporating information and communication technology in formal spaces are the use of projectors, computers or laptops to display teaching videos and slides. This is also known as smart classrooms. The introduction of smart classrooms is to dilute the authoritative role of teachers as well as the unidirectional transfer of knowledge from teacher to students.

Notwithstanding the inclusion of technology in the classroom, there is a concern that teaching and learning are still very much teacher-centred, especially when one has a narrow view of smart classrooms i.e. seeing such classrooms as a traditional classroom that is heavily equipped with technology (Bautista & Borgers, 2013; McPhee, 2009). Consequently, Bautista and Borgers (2013) have suggested the following principles to harness the function of smart classrooms:

- i. Flexibility of physical arrangements in the classroom that fit the need of particular lessons or learning activities.
- ii. Adaptable to the types and needs of students and educators.
- iii. Comfortable for learning activities to be carried out.
- iv. Availability of various information resources in both physical and digital formats
- v. The provision of tools for network connectivity.
- vi. Space personalisation for educators and students i.e. learning spaces do not follow traditional arrangements.
- vii. Organisation of resources for easy retrieval and use.
- viii. Openness in teaching and learning i.e., the realisation that teaching and learning can take place outside the formal, traditional classrooms.

- ix. Prioritises safety and security of users both in both physical and online spaces.

To sum up, traditional learning spaces can be transformed into spaces that promote students' active role in learning. The onus does not lie on information and communication technology tools, rather on educators in employing these tools to make classrooms 'smart'.

## NON-FORMAL LEARNING SPACES

These non-formal learning spaces are spaces that are outside the walls of traditional classrooms. One example of non-formal learning spaces are information commons. An information common is defined as a space that 'provides reinforcement for the social aspects of learning, offers abundant technology and digital content, and provides students with a physical setting that is often available 24-7 (Lippincott, 2010, p. 27). Non-formal learning spaces promotes democracy in learning. It gives students the liberty to choose how to utilize these spaces for their learning. Students have the choice whether to use technological devices or books in the learning spaces. In addition, students have been found to prefer studying in non-formal learning spaces due to the opportunity it provides them to study with peers in an atmosphere that detaches them from formal learning spaces (Hunter & Cox, 2014). Although students are technically present within the physical space of their institutions, learning in non-formal learning spaces are purely voluntary (Bilandzic, 2013). Students use these non-formal learning spaces outside their participation in formal learning spaces.

Despite that, it is important to note that formal and non-formal learning spaces are interrelated. Students use non-formal learning spaces for learning discussions and work on tasks assigned to them in the formal learning spaces (Chattier, 2006). Among the features that make non-formal learning spaces appeal to students are the freedom for them to choose either to study alone or in groups, the availability of strong internet connection and charging ports, well-lit spaces with natural light, and accessibility to food and drinks (McPhee, 2009). What can be concluded from this is that non-formal learning spaces promotes students'

collaborative learning in a space that is still bounded by the systems of their respective institutions. At the heart of these non-formal learning spaces is the accessibility to strong internet connection, especially Wi-Fi to suit the modern needs of students who are always on the go.

## INFORMAL LEARNING SPACES

Informal learning spaces can be conceptualized as learning that takes place outside formal and non-formal learning spaces (Bilandzic, 2013). Information and communication technology plays a central role in informal learning spaces. As students nowadays have accessibility to mobile devices and portable internet networks, informal learning can take place almost anywhere provided students have these tools at hand. Additionally, informal learning spaces do not require educators or curriculum, and students can choose to engage in self-directed or incidental learning, as well as social learning (Kontovourki *et al.*, (2017). Undeniably, students especially Millennials and Generation Z nowadays are more digitally literate and active users of online social media platforms. These sites have become informal learning sites for many learning communities.

Interestingly, sometimes students do not realise that they are in fact learning due to the casualty within these spaces. The rise of social media for instance, *YouTube*, *Instagram*, *Facebook* and *TikTok* have provided avenues for users to be constructors of knowledge and experts without being bounded by institutional standards and curriculum (Meyers, Erickson, & Small, 2013). Informal learning spaces are becoming increasingly popular since the Covid-19 pandemic. For example, in Malaysia, social media users utilise social media to raise awareness about the pandemic and the importance of social distancing. Some even shared their experiences of battling the virus. That said, in informal learning spaces, sharing has become an acceptable norm within digital communities. Educators should take advantage of these informal learning spaces to engage students with learning especially that at present learning happens outside the physical spaces of institutions. Teacher can create discussions about various topics through forums and *Facebook* groups.

Another suggestion is for them to create learning games, for example, through Kahoot to provide students the opportunities to learn in a playful yet competitive environment. The sharing of short videos of lessons through *Facebook*, *You Tube* and *TikTok* may also appeal to students as they do not feel bounded by formal learning spaces. At the same time, students can take part in the learning process by sharing their thoughts in the comment sections.

## **SOCIAL DISTANCING IMPACTS ON LEARNING COMMUNITIES**

The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has impacted learning communities significantly. Almost in the blink of the eye, schools and educational institutions all over the world are forced to close in order to comply with the social distancing standard operating procedures stipulated by their respective governments and local authority. Social distancing refers to the practice of staying home and avoiding physical contact with others to break the chain of Covid-19. In line with this, communities are encouraged to interact and communicate with each other through electronic means such as video conferencing and telephone conversations.

As a result, this has caused forced migration from physical, traditional learning communities to the virtual world. This situation, referred to as Emergency Remote Learning (ERT) aims to provide a 'temporary, reliable access to instruction and support during a crisis' (Reynolds & Chu, 2020, p. 233). Although the initial plan was to shift teaching and learning to online platforms temporarily, the pandemic, which at the time this chapter is written in the second quarter of 2021, is not showing any signs of slowing down. Although Brook and Oliver (2003) posited that, an individual's decision to whether or not pursue online community lies on his/her will, in these unprecedented times, traditional learning communities have little to no choice but to adopt ERT for the sake of surviving the teaching and learning process. One of the earliest responses made by schools and universities towards social distancing regulations was to suspend face-to-face classes in formal learning spaces and to move classes online.

Apart from that, other academic-related activities such as seminars, meetings and workshops were either postponed or conducted online. This new norm has become part-and-parcel of the lives of learning communities since the pandemic attacked the world in 2020. One of the impacts of social distancing is the redefinition of learning spaces. In a short window of time, educators and students had to continue learning through online platforms. Home spaces such as the dining area, living rooms and bedrooms become makeshift learning spaces. Not only that, information and technological devices such as smartphones, laptops, computers, printers and internet connection become critical aspects in these new learning spaces. Without these, one's learning process may be hampered as social distancing has made it almost impossible for learning communities to return to formal learning spaces.

In 2020, the story of an 18 years old Malaysian university student who took her exams on a treetop became viral both locally and internationally. The student who lived in a remote part of Sabah had to resort to such measures due to the limited broadband coverage in her area. This shows that in order to thrive, individuals sometimes need to go extra lengths to ensure that they are not being left behind by their learning communities. Traditional learning communities are also affected by social distancing since they are managed by traditional face-to-face discussions and meetings. These communities tend to perform their best when they work together, since they share the same physical space. They are social people and people-friendly as their work is best produced when they are not physically apart. They are used to plan events and studying together.

When social distancing is imposed, these traditional learning communities are badly impacted. The members have difficulties managing their work or projects as they are unable to consult or discuss with their members. The inability to work physically together hinder their learning progress. Apart from that, the members might feel the lack of separation between personal and professional spheres. Hence, stresses them and discourage them from learning or mastering a project. Working from home comes with family responsibilities which contributes to inefficient



work progress as these members might need to fulfil their parental responsibilities. The inability to plan, monitor and implement effective work or study progress prevents these traditional learning communities to continue with their traditional learning methods during social distancing periods. Most often, the members do not have proper work stations at home. They do however, have proper equipment at their offices.

Learning communities who share communal spaces or co-working space are also impacted from social distancing. They cannot share the cost of a functional office with capable work colleagues apart from the social impacts of social distancing. Communal spaces or co-working spaces allow their members to pay affordable fee of functioning and comfortable spaces that come with like-minded members. These members provide emotional and social support of being functional members of a society. These members too do not have proper work stations at home. Members need human touch as feelings of being isolated and depressed due to less social contacts. Mental health of members becomes an important topic of discussion during social distancing. Although members of learning communities interact through electronic devices and online platforms, these can never replace physical interactions as per the pre-pandemic years. The lack of physical interaction such as touch, limited body language, and group gatherings have impacted members emotionally. Some members feel that they are unable to perform their best during social distancing.

Despite that, members still try their best to maintain personal relationships through social media. *WhatsApp* and *Telegram* groups have become increasing popular among members. Not only they are used to share information revolving work matters, members also use them to maintain camaraderie during these testing times. Apart from that, social distancing has opened avenues for learning communities to interact and engage with one another without leaving their homes. Social distancing does not stop institutions to halt educational conferences. On a brighter side, a lot of institutions offer free conferences since there's no need for them for hire venues and arrange for accommodations and caterings for

presenters and participants. With the click to a link, members can be in any part of the world and benefit from knowledge sharing through virtual conferences.

In addition, as a result of social distancing, members especially educators get the chance to explore a wide range of virtual resources to enhance teaching and learning. Unlike traditional learning spaces that commonly utilize chalk and talk, members incorporate informal resources such as *You Tube* videos as supporting resources for learning. To conclude, social distancing has impacted learning communities both in positive and negative ways. Learning communities have proved their agility and persistence in these testing times by adapting to changes in a short period of time. These are the values that make learning communities thrive in these unprecedented times. It is hoped that members learn from this pandemic can give birth to best practices for online teaching and learning, regardless what the future may bring us.

## **INSIGHTS FROM LEARNING COMMUNITIES DURING SOCIAL DISTANCING**

Turning to technologies was the first reaction taken by school, since they have to close due to Covid-19. Everyone has to adopt with digital technologies in order to enable the transfer of curriculum-based studies to virtual spaces and homes. What we are doing right at this moment is trying very hard to minimize disruption to teaching and learning. The priority is to mobilize distance learning solutions. The Covid-19 pandemic prompted a rapid shift in distance education. Using social media as a means for supporting active learning has provide one pathway of means to reduce some of the distance, or feelings of disconnection, that students experience during distance education (Smith and Taveras, 2005). Modern learning communities that have proper work stations at home are the least impacted by social distancing. They substitute physical meetings with virtual meetings. They do not have difficulties in managing their time and completing their projects as they are not affected by social distancing. Most of them thrive during social distancing as

they are able to complete their work faster as they do not have to attend face-to-face meetings and many bureaucratic procedures are eliminated. When they need their members' presence, they choose to conduct video conferencing to discuss the matters.

Under social distancing, students are not prevented from their normal social interaction and routines. They are only forced to adapt to new circumstances, in a wide variety of conditions, with minimal social, emotional, or psychological support. Extracurricular and other social activities are also disrupted. For learners whose exams have been cancelled or postponed, a decisive milestone in their lives has disappeared.

In these circumstances, in which social distancing is a temporary preventative measure, the idea of 'school' as a learning community may help reframe the problem. The 'problem' becomes how to sustain - in the short to medium term - the relationships, peer-to-peer learning, intellectual engagement, services, and sense of belonging. Solutions may require more continuity than change, to ensure that the school as a learning community remains healthy and caring, inclusive and active, using appropriate technologies, including community radio, television, telephone and postal services.

As members of learning communities, students have built mutually enriching relationships, and have learnt skills and values such as learning to learn, empathy and solidarity that will stand the test of time. Roles may change, but students, teachers, parents and others with strong networks and social capital can together figure out how to sustain thriving learning communities-and learning processes - in a crisis. In such contexts, there may be less risk of disengagement and drop-out when schools reopen. However, where there is already a large social and cultural distance between 'school' and 'home', formal learning communities may be weaker and have less resilience. In these situations, increased efforts will be needed to maintain communication and to sustain relationships, especially with disadvantaged groups.

## **TRENDS OF LEARNING COMMUNITIES DUE TO SOCIAL DISTANCING**

The growing trends of traditional learning communities indicate that they are being adaptive to the pandemic and post-pandemic demands. The pandemic forces learning communities to be creative, realistic and resilient. They are aware that learning needs to be continued in new contexts. It has further accelerated the digital skills of even the most reluctant educators and learners. Initially, they were forced to train on online presentations and virtual meetings. The pandemic has managed to successfully enforce physical separation, yet the world has become smaller as communication among communities is unlimited. Learning communities substitutes social distancing with online closeness because humans crave social interactions. Learning communities discover there are other cheaper viable alternative to learning and communicating with others by replacing their face-to-face meetings with virtual meetings. Social distancing has also created a new norm of mobility. Learning communities with enhanced digital skills are more receptive to innovative ideas.

For instance, the migration of global workforce in local contexts with mobility without being mobile and staying put. Being able to collaborate remotely produces opportunities that were realised before Covid-19. However, the digital divide is being exacerbated in benefiting the communities with resources while leaving behind the ones who are resource-poor. In uneven distribution, rich resource communities thrive while poor communities are left behind. The pandemic also leaves social inequalities due to the loss of jobs and economic impacts.

## STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY LEARNING COMMUNITIES

There are several strategies that can be employed by members of learning communities:

- i. Learning communities can encourage their members to set proper work stations at home and provide portable work stations that will enable the members to work at the office, home or anywhere during uncertain times.
- ii. Community leaders should train members to work with flexible work schedules that give freedom and space to work in given space or remotely with proper guidelines so the members know exactly how they work successfully.
- iii. Learning communities need to enhance the digital skills of the members so they can manage virtual meetings and collaborations by mastering online video platform by giving them regular technological training and adequate practices.
- iv. Responsible learning communities should give support to their members for mental and physical health. The lack of 'f2f' meetings and human contact create social isolation which causes depression.
- v. Each community is responsible to implement proper Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for face-to-face meetings during scheduled face-to-face appointments and meetings.
- vi. Each community can choose an online project management tool that can be accessed by team members so the projects can be run smoothly.
- vii. Each learning community should be ready to share resources and expertise with other learning communities
- viii. An effective learning community should be prepared with its strategic planning during emergencies.

## CONCLUSION

As learning communities move to online forms of teaching and learning in times of this pandemic session, distancing learners from classmates, teachers and public life, our education web services and social media offer benefits for active learning, community building and civic participation that can help reduce some of the distance we feel. Although these benefits pose new challenges that must be navigated, they also offer a pathway to overcoming the aforementioned technology integration barriers. Integrating social media as well as fully utilizing the education web services provided as we have suggested, may help educators purposely disrupt teacher-centred, transmission-oriented pedagogy in favour of learner-centred, co-constructive practices. Learners can experience the sense of ownership and connection to remote schooling and educators have more occasions to facilitate the learning process.

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# THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL DISTANCING ON EDUCATORS AND LEARNERS IN RURAL SETTING

*Fazmawati Zakaria, Latisha Asmaak Shafie and Surina Nayan*

The Covid-19 outbreak poses serious concerns to global education system. Efforts to contain the virus has prompted unscheduled closure of education institutions worldwide. This action has impacted all individuals and communities especially those who live in rural areas. With the widespread implementation of social distancing and self-isolation policies, educators and learners are prevented to conduct face-to-face (f2f) Teaching and Learning (T&L). This has led to an almost immediate switch to online education by these institutions to maintain T&L activities during lock down. However, online education was hindered by the lack of support system from home, unavailability of peers' support, limited T&L resources, inaccessibility network issues, lack of digital devices and poor digital skills.

These challenges or obstacles have brought negative effects to educators and learners, for example increase in mental health problems, social isolation, loss sense of identity and personality, individualism, and indulgence in negative style behaviours. Researchers, universities, educational institutions, communities, businesses and policymakers must collaborate and find adequate answers to the challenges emerging from

this worldwide experience. They proposed several actions to address these challenges. Among them are the need to improve curricula, enhance educators and learners' digital skills, to build connectedness among communities, to provide adequate and equal access to resources and support, introduce social inclusive approach to online T&L which promotes quality in the distribution of education service.

## DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

### **Social Distancing**

Social distancing has become part of our daily living because of the novel global Covid-19 pandemic. It is defined as maintaining a safe distance from other people and reducing interaction between individuals in order to minimize the spread of the virus. It also implies avoiding crowded places and not having group meetings to forestall mass infection of the virus.

### **Online Learning**

Online learning and teaching are referred to web-based training, e-learning, distributed learning, Internet-based learning, web-based instruction, cyber learning, virtual learning, or net-based learning (Urduan & Weggen, 2000). Online learning is a subset of distance education and embraces a wide set of technology applications and learning processes including, computer-based learning, web-based learning, virtual classrooms, and digital collaborations (Urduan & Weggen, 2000). It encompasses delivery of course content via all electronic media, including the Internet, intranets, extranets, satellite broadcasts, audio/video tapes, interactive TVs, and CD-ROMs. Online learning include online contexts along with a full range of computer-based learning platforms and delivery methods, genres, formats and media such as multimedia, educational programming, simulations, games and the use of new media on fixed and mobile platforms across all discipline areas. Dabbagh and Nanna Ritland (2005) examined the differences between traditional and online

learning environments and argued that traditional learning environments are (a) bound by location and presence of instructor and student, (b) presented in real time, (c) controlled by an instructor and (d) are linear in teaching methods. Using evolving information and communication technologies, asynchronous communication and real-time information, online teaching and learning environments are unbound and dynamic. Online learning environments include diverse range of pedagogical practices and are often characterized by active learning student-centred pedagogical techniques (Baker, 2003; Browne, 2005).

### **Rural Settings**

This paper defines rural as the composition of human settlements which have agricultural production as the main economic activity, or a place isolated from urban settings. Rural settings are remote places or areas found in the countryside, in forests and mountains. Typically, rural people lack access to socio-economic amenities, such as quality education, good health services, transport, marketing facilities and even electricity (Avila, & Gasperini, 2005). Generally, rural settings mostly lack the social and economic viability needed to sustain technological improvement (Cristobal-Fransi, Montegut-Salla, Ferrer-Rosell, & Daries, 2020). According to World Bank (2018), 33% of the South African population is classified as rural. The government finds it more difficult to provide quality education services in rural settings and various factors has weakened the quality of teaching and learning in South Africa's rural settings (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019).

## **THE DIFFICULTIES OR CHALLENGES FACED BY EDUCATORS AND LEARNERS HAVE TO ENDURE DURING SOCIAL DISTANCING**

Covid-19 and the implementation of online learning as an alternative to replace traditional schooling has magnified the challenges faced by rural educators and learners. They are deprived of useful information, Information Technology (IT) skills, inadequate access to electricity,

network connectivity and expertise which are important elements of successful online teaching and learning. They have to experience a transformation which brings major changes to their lives. Educators and learners have to adapt to the new methodologies, pedagogical and learning approaches, new infrastructure and platforms specifically designed for online teaching. The Covid-19 crisis has also created an inequality gap between educators and learners in rural and urban settings. The former has to endure difficulties in online teaching and learning due to the existing limitations related to social, pedagogical and technological challenges, which will be discussed in the following sections.

## **SOCIAL CHALLENGES**

### **Lack Of Social Support System From Home**

Online teaching and learning during Covid-19 crisis present problems to teachers, learners and parents. During such an emergency, the support from all related parties is crucial. Teacher and parents will be working remotely and at the same time, learners will be expected to study online. This poses a serious problem relating to the availability of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) devices for all member of the family, especially considering the availability and the types of devices and platforms used for online learning. Not all families in remote areas are privileged and fortunate.

In the case of Italy, even though it is one of the countries with the highest rate of mobile phone ownership in the world, but in southern Italy, 42% of families do not own a personal computer, laptop or landline with an Internet connection compared to 33% families that do (World Bank, 2018). Some might opt for using mobile phone but it is not easy to use a mobile phone for online learning and even the most advanced smartphones do not allow adequate interaction for a long time. Such problem is encountered by many educators, learners and families who live in rural settings. Thus, it is evident that it is not easy for everyone in rural settings to gain access to digital content. If learners do not have the

opportunity to access the network on a regular basis, they risk of being left behind and inevitably leading to the alienation of some learners. Besides that, the situation was made worse by the government responding to Covid-19, that is by shutting down what is perceived as non-essential services which has affected many rural families whose members earn their livelihood selling vegetables or doing casual labour for wages. The lockdown has caused many people to lose their income, which could have helped them to set up a conducive online learning environment for their children. Furthermore, lack of suitable home learning environment to study is another issue that learners have to endure. The lock-down due to Covid-19 which was imposed by the government on the public has caused difficulty for educators and learners. Learners from less-advantaged families are forced to work in a small space shared with other family members and parents. When everyone is studying and working at home, the problem lies in the lack of physical space will rise where each person will struggle with learning or doing his or her work.

Moreover, the quality of housing is also not conducive for learning to take place. There are more families in rural areas who are living in households that are classified as being below the poverty line and in need of major repairs (Pietro *et al.*, 2018). The logistics of online teaching and learning have to be carefully considered to ensure the success of online learning. Indeed, not all families in rural areas can afford to provide conducive learning environment for their children. Moreover, online learning for children and younger learners is quite a challenge since they frequently require parents' presence to assist and monitor their learning process. This will make it impossible for their parents to balance their work activities while supporting their children during their online learning experience. Not only that, some parents have to play both roles; the parents – look after the family and work to support the family and the teachers.

Unfortunately, in reality, most rural parents may not have the necessary educational level, language competence and digital skills. Hence, they are unable to provide adequate literacy to support the children' online learning at home. Vigdor *et al.* (2014) report that,



online learning is found to improve learners' academic achievement in households if parents and siblings can serve as more effective instructors with online resources and assist with the technical challenges of online learning. Attanasio *et al.* (2020) provide evidence of widening disparity in socio-emotional skills among youth of different socio-economic status. They found that learners who have more educated parents are likely to get more emotional support than those who have less educated parents.

### **Unavailability of Peer Support**

The effect of social distancing has caused a lack in human interactivity between educators and their learners, and learners with their peers. Compared to traditional and face-to-face interactions, online learning, will not be able to facilitate interaction, improve collaboration and social relationships among learners, as well as and between the learners and their educators the lack of 'human' factors. Hau Yan Ho (2020) reveals that youth are in the process of learning to be social beings, aside from their parents and siblings, their peers will provide the most of the input they need. Most youths were against the idea of social distancing, and they preferred to mingle as they studied. They felt that they thrived better in a lively atmosphere with their peers from different backgrounds, experiences and intellectual levels than in their personal spaces (Learmonth, 2018).

The shift from physical to online learning and the social distancing due to the lockdown have negatively affected their transition to establish essential bonding and intimacy with their peers and loved ones. Social distancing has caused a decline in education scenario in rural settings. Learners from low socio-economic status or less advantaged background, experience more significant learning loss and suffer from adverse psycho-social impact than their counterparts from higher socio-economic status or more advantaged background or in urban settings.

## **PEDAGOGICAL CHALLENGES**

### **Limited Teaching and Learning (T&L) Resources**

Researchers confirm that the predominant measure against the spread of Covid-19 is ensuring social distancing, self-isolation, and prohibiting people from gathering in large numbers (Krinshnakumar & Rana, 2020). These prescriptions represent a problem to rural learners who are taught using traditional classroom setting, where educators are visible to learners, and they monitor learning at close range. Thus, when online learning was introduced to replace the traditional approach, many educators and learners are confused as to how they should go about teaching and learning using the new approach. Furthermore, besides having no guidelines on how to implement online teaching and learning, there are also the lack of knowledge on Information Technology (IT) and IT devices and lack of training on conducting online teaching and learning approach. This actually leads to the fear that online education during the time of COVID-19 will serve a few privileged learners and educators who are connected to resources compared to deprived communities who live in rural settings. The shift made from classroom teaching to online has compelled rural educators to rethink about their T&L practices as well as their resources. In order to motivate learners to learn, they need to plan, choose or design their teaching practices and resources well.

It is necessary for them to create suitable content and use appropriate mode to deliver the content successfully to the learners so that both educators and learners are able to interact, clarify doubts and discuss problems effectively. Unfortunately, most educators are not well-prepared and ill-equipped with IT knowledge. The result of having little notice about the lock-down and shifting of T&L to online and having no knowledge on how to use educational technology have caused educators and learners to feel isolated and depressed. To create teaching materials in the form of interactive multimedia – images, animations and educational games use to engage and maintain learners' motivation in learning, is almost impossible for rural educators. Their lack of digital and technological skills, problems with internet connectivity and lack

of internet devices hinder their creativity – an important element in online learning, in order to retain learners' attention, and encourage learners' participation. The Covid-19 pandemic has given a boost to the open education resources approach, which enables the collection of large amounts of free T&L educational materials available to be downloaded. Surely, this can ease the burden of educators of having to create. However, to access these multiple channels and certified resources made by different institutions requires educators' training on how to access these contents.

## TECHNOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

### **Problems with Internet Connectivity and Lack of Technological Devices**

Technological challenges are mainly related to the unreliability or the lack of Internet connections when thousands of people are simultaneously connected as well as the lack of technological devices. This problem may increase inequalities through uneven access of technology needed by educators and learners. Indeed, not all of them who live in rural settings have access to the necessary technologies to gain benefit of online education, for instance, a fast internet connection and a high-tech computer. This scenario is made even worse when many of the villages in rural settings do not have proper electricity.

For those disadvantaged families who are from lower to middle-class families with many children, online learning will not be successful unless they are able to provide to each child with high internet networks and sufficient technological gadgets to take part in their children's digital online education course. Similarly, educators also claimed that since their learners have none to limited internet networks, it makes it difficult to teach them because they are unable to get access to online learning materials provided by them (Dube, 2020). Another challenge experienced by rural learners is the lack of devices to connect for online learning. These devices include cell phone, computers, laptops and smart phone that are compatible with low-tech teaching applications.

Most rural parents cannot afford to provide the necessary equipment for their children's online learning, so, as an option those children are forced to go to town to borrow phones, computers and other gadgets to complete tasks given to them from their relatives. As a result, educators discovered that during online sessions most of these unfortunate learners are not online simply because they do not have appropriate devices to support their online learning (Dube, 2020). Besides that, most parents from rural settings claimed that internet data is too expensive and beyond the reach of many rural communities to facilitate online learning. The situation is worsened when some of them lost their jobs due to the lockdown, which prevents them from conducting their business from selling vegetables, which seems to be the main source of income of many rural communities (Mbatha, 2020).

### **Poor Digital Skills**

In spite of online T&L seems to be one of the best platforms to teach and learn during Covid-19 period, the innovation is disrupted by educator's and learners' lack of digital skills. In addition to the issues relating to lack of internet gadgets and connectivity, educators and learners in rural settings are also unable to use online learning software and applications, which makes online T&L difficult and almost impossible. The educators' poor digital skills, which is associated to their lack of training on using computer will make it difficult for them to help their learners.

World Bank (2020) stated that, very few educators who work in rural areas have received training in online instructional approaches and tools. The success of online teaching and learning and the effectiveness of curriculum implementation, is related to the competencies of the users with the system. Thus, to ensure its' success, they must be able to assist learners to engage in online learning effectively and efficiently. If the training of educators has been compromised, it will translate to failure in T&L process and incompetency in curriculum execution (Schwartz, 2006). It is clear that, the challenges of lack of social support from home, unavailability of peer support, limited T&L resources, problems with internet connectivity, lack of technological devices and poor digital skills are serious impediments to online T&L in rural communities.

## THE DAMAGING EFFECTS OF SOCIAL DISTANCING ON EDUCATOR AND LEARNERS

Covid 19 pandemic has caused huge effects towards many businesses and other economic and non-economic activities. In addition, educators and learners who are at the rural settings faced these problems as well since these places do not have good internet coverage. Many educators, learners and parents have expressed their grievances regarding T&L activities that are badly affected by the pandemic. T&L are done on-line and these create more problems for those who live in the rural settings. Access to the internet and also the availability of access are the biggest problems faced by the learners. The Education Ministry has conducted research that involved 670,000 parents and 900,000 students. Findings show that, only 6% of the respondents have a personal computer, 5.76% own a tablet, 9% have a laptop while 46% of them own a smartphone. For those who live in the rural settings on the other hand, they suffered from unstable or non-existent internet connection (Rajaendram, 2020). When T&L are done on-line, teachers do not meet face to face with their students. When this happens, social distancing takes place. Social distancing is also known as 'physical distancing' and it means that we maintain a distance between ourselves and other people that does not share living space or home (CDC, 2020). We are advised to keep a safe space of about one meter from other people who are not from our household (both in indoor and outdoor spaces). Social distancing brings negative effects to all, including educators and learners at rural areas.

One of the issues is it increases mental health problems. Learners tend to face problems when they are not fully equipped with the proper devices and given help for them to participate in online classes. Many learners who are from rural areas are from the B40 household. Their parents are struggling to ensure that their children have food on their plate during this pandemic. At the same time, they struggle to ensure that their children receive proper education, even though their income is badly affected. Besides, weak or no internet coverage also poses problems to them. When they do not have proper equipment for their study, they will feel stressful and this will affect their learning. They have to opt for other methods like asking their teachers to send printed materials

to them and this takes time as the teachers need to spend time with printing materials and sending or posting the materials to certain students' location.

When they experience weak internet coverage, they take time to download the information shared by their teachers. This is a waste of time and many learners are struggling to receive the shared information. Some tend to give up when the system does not really support their learning. They feel that they are being abandoned and left out (as compared to their counterparts with good internet coverage) without getting enough help to overcome the problem that they have to endure. Some educators also face difficulties as they are not aware or lack exposure to some of the software or programs needed for their online classes. Senior educators who are complacent with the old method of teaching using the whiteboard and printed books need time to adapt to the new norm. Some even considering to retire early because of these unfortunate experiences. To them, it's a hassle. Not only having to share their materials with their learners online, having to learn some technology for online learning can even be exhausting to some. Some educators are also concerned with parents' preparedness in terms of distance online learning and their unavailability to attend to their children's need during lessons.

Educators also experience confusion and stress as they themselves are not sure of their duties and how to maintain connections with students through online learning (Apperribai *et al.*, 2020). Social isolation is another effect of Covid-19 to these educators and learners. Reduced social interactions will lead to reduced social isolation. A study by Elmer, Mephram & Stadtfeld, (2020) reveals that, these learners who are at a high risk of social isolation usually live by themselves, have less contact with their close family members, receive less social support and have weaker integration in the social network of students. These factors could potentially affect their mental health very negatively. These learners and educators who used to have a face-to-face interaction with others during normal classes and group discussions will find it hard at first to adapt to the new norm. They experience social isolations since face-to-face T&L is prohibited.

In addition, outdoor activities are also not allowed during this period. This, further triggers their stress level as some of them exercise and enjoy outdoor activities. Another impact of social distancing is loss sense of identity. Educators and learners with less resources and help for T&L will struggle to adapt to how they perceive themselves. They might feel that they do not belong and this will become harder for them to get engaged with others and commit to a new identity like "... a student in their late teens before the pandemic may have identified as a person whose future is bound up with going to university and pursuing their ambitions for a career, as well as seeing themselves as someone with their own resources courtesy of a part-time job at a big retail store." (Bowles, 2020).

However, when the pandemic struck, the reverse exists where these learners are unsure of what their future will be. Similarly, educators are also confused on their identities as sometimes they just share others' videos with their students as they themselves are struggling to learn on how to impart knowledge to their students on-line. They themselves need to learn and adapt to their new selves in adapting to the new norm and virtual learning. When online learning takes place, educators and learners tend to work independently. There is no face-to-face interaction with their colleagues or classmates in school. Online learning can cause isolation that leads to individualism. Since there is limited communication among them, personal connection will not exist. In addition, one negative behaviour during online learning is cheating during exam. This is unavoidable as teachers have lack of control over online learning. Grijalva *et al.*, (2006) as cited in Raines *et al.*, (2011) claim that, "... teachers and institution of higher education perceived that the frequency of cheating would be higher in online courses because students and faculty do not interact directly."

There are several recommendations that can be implemented to reduce the impact of social distancing on educators and learners in rural setting. The first recommendation is to reform curricula that are suitable for new T&L norms. The pandemic forces educators to adopt with the most suitable pedagogy for their learners to encourage engaged learning

(Zhao & Watterston, 2021). Educators need to use an extensive range of teaching practices such as adapting to online teaching, blended learning and hybrid learning which require new T&L skills. Educators need to reduce group work which requires close contact and teacher-centred approaches. Instead, they need to adopt peerology and heautegogy as their teaching approaches. During the pandemic, school and university administrations have to analyse whether current curricula support current teaching practices, learning goals, assessments, teaching and learning strategies and learners' difficulties in rural settings as the communities in these areas are strongly impacted by the pandemic. Educators, learners and learning institutions should collect data regarding these matters for reforming the curricula. They should also suit the curricula for pandemic and post-pandemic era.

The second recommendation is to enhance the digital and mobile skills of educators and learners in rural settings. The pandemic forces learners and educators to stay connected and continued their education using digital platforms. This enforcement encourages learners and educators to enhance their digital skills. Communities can support this effort by sharing the burden. Communities can enhance their members' digital skills by conducting and hosting online social events. They can conduct these events in the comfort of their home. When community leaders train their community members to upgrade their digital skills, they can enhance the skills of the youngsters. Charitable persons can share their Wi-Fi connection during lessons and they can crowd-funding digital bills to assist the less fortunate learners. Self-efficacy will decrease stress among educators and learners as they have the skills and knowledge to succeed in online learning (Al-Kumaim, Alhazmi, Mohammed, Gazem, Shabbir & Fazea, 2021).

The third recommendation is to build social connectedness among educators and learners. Social distancing has erected physical and psychological barriers among educators and learners. Social connections should be promoted among learners and educators to decrease social isolation and loss of identity and personality. For instance, educators can only see their learners via camera and computer screen. They cannot form



close bonds with their learners. At times, they cannot even recognise their learners if they happen to encounter one another in real life. Similarly, learners cannot meet their peers face-to-face. Hence, less emotional attachment is formed. This lack of human connection leads to social isolation which may lead to depression and mental health problems. Therefore, educators are encouraged to connect with their learners because learners should maintain connected to the classes. Educators can make social activities as their ice-breaking activities to encourage students to get acquainted with their classmates and their instructors. In addition, educators can design their class activities that encourage learners to care and know one another by asking them to work in groups. When they work in groups, they need to converse with their group members to complete the task. Hence, they will forge social connections which will make them less lonely and detached. Class activities should be conducted in online contexts to discourage physical contact yet to encourage online social interactions. In rural areas with poor internet connection, they can use traditional snail mail, or the schools as their post office and use a telephone to call their friends. Malaysian female learners have been proven to understand the importance of e-learning platforms to their online learning success (Shahzad, Hassan, Aremu, Hussain & Nawaz, 2020).

The fourth recommendation is that the government and communities should provide internet access or alternative learning centres to accommodate learning for educators and learners in rural settings. Covid-19 has proved to Malaysians that learners in rural settings are at a disadvantage when they are forced to learn via online classes. Learners are forced to climb hills and learn at uncomfortable places just to have access to the internet. If the internet centres are made available at each rural site, no one will be left behind. The authorities will prepare access to these infrastructures and provide internet for subject matter experts, technological experts and counsellors for personal issues. The fifth recommendation is to provide resources and support for educators and learners. The government and schools should provide technological and educational assistance to our educators and learners. Educators should be assisted by experts with training. Teaching them to learn during emergency situations.

In addition, they should also be trained to enhance their technological skills. Schools and district educational offices should identify educators that requires these assistance by sending technological staff to assist them. These educators should be given technological gadgets for their lessons if they do not have access to these tools. Furthermore, subject matters experts should help them with the preparation of the lessons. These steps are necessary because research found that educators are stressed due to the longer time spent on marking and evaluating students' work on the internet (Sia & Adamu, 2020). Meanwhile, the *Ministry of Education* should prioritise marginalised rural learners by giving sufficient funding to rural schools so they can have adequate funding to accommodate their physical and online learning materials. The sixth recommendation is to introduce a socially inclusive approach to ensure all the parties are not neglected. Learning institutions should ensure that, social distancing which is enforced by the government will not force poor students to abandon their studies.

Therefore, learning institutions in rural areas should be prioritised to ensure these marginalised communities' learning needs are assisted. For instance, the *Ministry of Education* should give adequate funding to rural schools to encourage their student to learn. If there is no internet connection, traditional print materials should be supplied to them with the funding of the Ministry. The efforts of educators or community members who should be celebrated and acknowledged by public acknowledgement and certificates. Moreover, learning institutions should ensure that their educators include every individual in their lessons and they are able to join the lessons. Even during the pandemic, all the learners need to be considered for class participation. If the learners cannot afford to join a class session due to lack of internet access, the educator needs to ensure there is an alternative plan i.e., learning the same lesson but with different mode of delivery.

Besides that, communities should be encouraged to participate in the learning process because learners are community members too. Learners in rural areas too should be taught updated learning contents with exposure to digital skills and relevant skills for Industry 4.0 (Gul

& Khilji, 2021). The seventh recommendation is sharing of resources among learning institutions that benefit educators and learners in rural settings. Having online classes solves a shortage of educators at learning institutions in rural settings because their learners can be taught by other educators in urban areas. In addition, administrators can ensure that rural educators and learners can get access to quality education and training by attending classes and training sessions conducted by other local or international learning institutions. Global learning too can be implemented by exposing rural educators and learners to international collaborators who enhance their global experiences.

## CONCLUSION

The Covid-19 pandemic has driven the fastest change to global industries including education across the globe, necessitated by social distancing measures preventing face-to-face teaching and learning. This has led to an almost immediate shift to online T&L by education institutions. This paper sought to reveal the impact of social distancing with the introduction of online T&L on educators and learners in rural setting. Evidence from numerous research indicate that they endure difficulties which include lack of social support system from home, unavailability of peer support, limited T&L resources, problems with internet connectivity, lack of technological devices and poor digital skills. These challenges have affected our educators' and learners' socially, mentally and psychologically. They suffer mental health problems, social isolation, loss sense of identity and personality, individualism and participate in negative style behaviour.

To overcome these problems among rural educators and learners; policymaker, stakeholders, education institutions and communities have proposed several recommendations such as to improve curricula, enhance educators and learner's digital skills, build connectedness among communities, provide adequate and equal access to resources and support and implement social inclusive. In short, this paper does not only outline the difficulties and challenges relating to online learning encountered by rural educator and learners during the Covid-19, which frustrate

them to teach and learn, but also, provide practical solutions to related parties to undertake in order to ensure the success of online T&L in rural setting.

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# THE IMPACTS OF PHYSICAL DISTANCING ON SMALL-SCALE FISHERIES: SOCIO-ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVES

*Ameer Farhan Mohd Arzaman, Siti Anatasya Saari and Mahirah Kamaludin*

Since the Movement Control Order (MCO) was implemented by the government on March 18, 2020 which aims to end the chain of Covid-19 pandemic in Malaysia, it has greatly affected various sectors of the country's economy, including small-scale fisheries sector. Most countries opt for physical distancing measures or more stringent lockdowns to slow virus spread and 'flatten the curve' of hospitalizations and deaths (Bennett *et al.*, 2020). The physical distancing implemented during the MCO have also caused difficulties for fishermen, fishmongers and medium and small-scale enterprises. They had to reduce the number of their workers while limiting their working hours.

Small-scale fisheries are crucial for food security, nutrition and livelihoods, especially in developing coastal countries. Okyere *et al.*, (2020) noted that, the small-scale fisheries sector globally is estimated to support 32 million jobs. More than half of catches in developing countries are generated by small-scale fisheries sector, that is 90 to 95% of small-scale landings used for local community consumption. Moreover, as the primary source of livelihoods in coastal areas, the fisheries sector, directly and indirectly, employs local people, ensuring



their continued survival and socio-economic well-being. The impact of physical distancing does not focused on the national economy only, but it also affects the social and economic aspects of the local community. Society experiences changes in their daily lifestyle compared to their previous life, such as employment, income and expenditure, education, health, religious activities and social relations.

On the economic front, the physical distancing is edging closer to an economic collapse. According to Lim (2020), the economy heading downwards with intensifying negative impacts on employment, incomes and livelihoods, disrupting supply chains and upending businesses, and exacerbating inequalities, poverty and hardships, particularly for the most vulnerable. The influential economic impact of market disruptions has affected the ability of small-scale fishermen to make a living through the 'twin disasters' of declining demand and falling prices (Bennett *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, this leads to two research objectives for this study. The first objective is to investigate how physical distancing affects small-scale fisheries sector; and the second objective is to identify on how local communities that are involved in fishing activities will improve the socio-economic during Covid-19 pandemic situation.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In 2019, the world was rocked by the discovery of a deadly virus called Covid-19. Covid-19 stands for Coronavirus Disease, which was found in 2019. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) (2020), Coronavirus Disease is a kind of infectious virus and may cause death. Covid-19 can be infected in a person by transmission through air. For example, when a person who has Covid-19 sneeze or coughs in public, they release a droplet of infected fluid and this fluid will attach to nearby object and surfaces. In return, the person that's in contact with the infected object through will mostly get infected, also, the spread of this disease is most similar to a flu. Most infected people will experience fever, cough and shortness of breath (Nobel, 2020).

In some cases, older patients with lower immunity system will surely have a high chance of being infected (Guo, 2020) and higher chances of death (WHO, 2020). Until 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2021, a total of 146.3 million cases have been reported worldwide, with up to three (3) million people died due to Covid-19. There are reported cases made by the Ministry of Health in Malaysia. Up until 24<sup>th</sup> April 2021 with 390,252 cases. 1,426 are total death. The increased number of cases due to economic, social, and religious activities among communities and widespread without disclosure and according to appropriate Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). As a result, the Movement Control Order (MCO) was enforced by the Prime Minister on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2020 to curb the spread of this epidemic. The MCO requires society to stay at home and maintain physical distancing. Physical distancing, which are also called social distancing, is a government way to keep a person safe by maintain a certain space or distance between one person (Chu, 2020). To practice this, the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) requires a person to stay 1 meter between another. These SOPs were conducted in all public areas, including restaurants, shopping complex, hospitals and even small outlets and stores.

The importance of physical distancing with preventing the spread of COVID-19, help to reduce contact with potential patients, contaminated object and surface while encouraging and sustaining virtual community connection within themselves (Galea, 2020). However, in response to the physical distancing effects, many sectors include economics and social aspects. Martin *et al.*, (2020) stated that physical distancing occurred a massive shock to the economic interruptions and social impacts where more than 60% of activities had to shut down and these causes to unemployment. Income, daily expenditure, education are affected. Not forgetting our health and social relations. In Malaysia, fisheries activities are one of the main and important sectors that play a significant role in our economy (FAO, 2010). According to the Department of Statistic Malaysia (2021), the supply record for fisheries-based is RM18.8 billion in 2015 and began to rise within years.

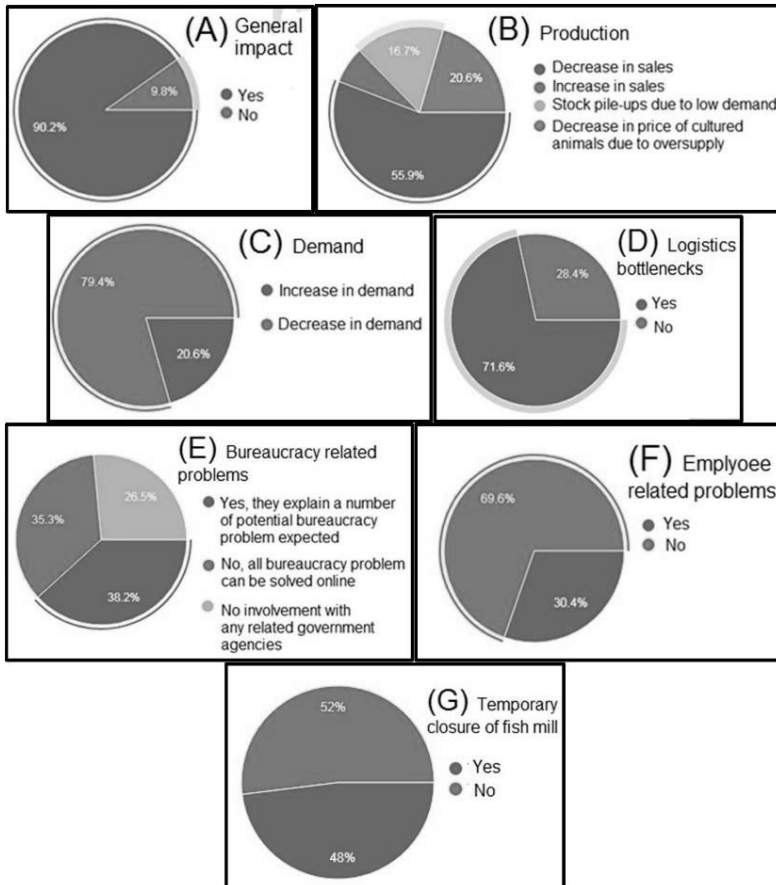
The total supply of domestic production by 77.3% and imports at 20.6% and this valuation include margins trade and transportation, tax with less subsidy on a product by 17.9%. By 2018, the fisheries sub-sector endures in contributing to the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and one of the sources of employment, food demand-supply, and foreign exchange in the rural population in the country. Malaysia was among the highest consumptions of fish per person each year, with 56.5 kilograms per year on average (Ahmad, 2016). This shows that fish constitutes about 70-80% of protein intake in Malaysia. Besides, the rate of market demand for seafood sources expected to increase within years. Most of the fisheries captured generated by small-scale fishermen (FAO, 2012). Small-scale fishers generate traditionally fishing activities to seek their income using small capital and energy besides short trips and artisanal boats.

Apart from that, the effects of MCO and physical distancing enforced by the government to curb the spread of Covid-19 have hampered the economic generation of small-scale fishers as they were unable to carry out fishing activities (Jomitol, 2020). According to the Department of Statistic Malaysia (2020), up to 33% of small-scale fishermen lost their income due to the impact of Covid-19 on individual and economics and 79.1% experiencing a reduction of daily income. In the meantime, socio-economic is a field relating to social and economic factors (Ashford, 2004). The factor contributes to socio-economic are income, education, social community and also employment. These factors can significantly affect how people live and what they do for a living. Looking forward to fisheries perspective, socio-economic play roles in maintaining a source of income for fishermen, especially small-scale fishermen.

According to the FAO (2010), overcrowding in the coastal region, common sources of income, the fishermen's low social, professional, and economic status, lack in job options, and lack of environmental consciousness contribute to socio-economic constraints. The migratory aspect of the area's residents and the deforestation of the islands and main lands are reflected in their loss of land. Apart from physical distancing, MCO has charged our fisherman with time constraints. They are unable

to go fishing, hence unable to generate income for living. This imprint goes to the market disruptions where the down gradation of small-scale fishermen makes a living through the ‘twin disasters’ of declining demand and falling prices. According to *The State of Fisheries and Aquaculture (SoFiA)* (2020), Covid-19 has proven to be one of the most difficult obstacles faced as a team since FAO’s inception. The pandemic’s severe socio-economic repercussions would make our fight against hunger and injustice much more difficult since fisheries and aquaculture were among the most affected industries by the pandemic. As noted by Ma *et al.*, (2021), the implications of MCO on Malaysia’s fisheries sectors has reduce national and global demand in buying power.

Thus, this leads to 12% of household income and employment of small-scale fishermen. Moreover, Minahal *et al.*, (2020) mentioned by closing a single dominant market has exposed the decreasing susceptibility of small-scale fisheries to global market shocks, as many of these fisheries depend heavily on international buyers while having domestic markets. Figure 3.1 shows the result from a study by Azra *et al.*, (2021) on the impact of MCO towards the production and declining demand in the fisheries sub-sector.



**Figure 3.1.** The impact of MCO on the production and declining demand in the fisheries sub-sector (Azra *et al.*, 2021).

Hence, the importance of socio-economic studies on fisheries sub-sector is a backdrop to a more in-depth study, which later provide an overall impression of the structure, practices, and living conditions of small-scale fishing societies and households. Besides that, able to recognize reasons that explain discrepancies in living standards within small-scale fishing households and other socio-economic classes in order to arrive at policy consequences, devise and propose successful policies

for assistance and growth. Not forgetting to identify the effects and impact of physical distancing from the implemented MCO on their livelihood, their source of income and how they adapt to this situation in recovering their living situation.

## **METHODOLOGY**

A substantial number of participants are fishermen that live in a coastal community, necessitating a qualitative research approach that enables researchers to ascertain participants' experiences, opinions, and types of knowledge through their own words. This will ensure that the data collected for this study contains a greater amount of data and can be used to explain the processes underlying the impact of physical distancing on small-scale fisheries from a socio-economic perspective. The qualitative method was chosen because a thorough understanding of the impact of physical distancing on the socio-economic status of small-scale fisheries in the Covid-19 pandemic situation is required. Additionally, this method will examine the various financial resources available during the pandemic and their effect on income, livelihoods and the fisheries sector on Malaysia's east coast.

This situation indicates that, qualitative research is an appropriate method for eliciting a deeper understanding of research issues from participants by probing their knowledge, experience, and opinions about the socio-economic impact of physical distancing on small-scale fisheries in the context of the study. The scope of this study is the coastal areas on the East Coast, Malaysia, which are Terengganu, Kelantan and Pahang. The study was conducted on the East Coast because these states have large coastal areas with a greater range of fisheries activities potential to obtain appropriate data. A total of eight (8) participants were selected for in-depth interviews working as fishermen and fishmongers in these three (3) states. Locations were selected based on several factors, which are coastal areas, distance, suitability of place to interact and barriers to movement and face-to-face encounters due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The participants were selected from among coastal communities living and

engaged in small-scale and socio-economic fishing activities. Participants were also selected from potential coastal states to answer the questions. Snowball retrieval methods and facilities were also applied in this study.

Several participants were recommended by friends or those with knowledge or experience with the socio-economic of small-scale fisheries as candidate participants in this study. Using a snowball approach will ensure that knowledge is gathered from important people close to the issues being studied. Face-to-face and semi-structured interviews were used to collect data because they enabled researchers to use both open and close-ended questions, communicate closely with participants, and observe non-verbal responses from participants so that the context of their responses could be thoroughly investigated. Open-ended questions were deemed necessary for this study in order to adequately explore and collect data on socio-economic perspectives based on participants' experiences and opinions. The questions were developed following a review of literature. Each interview lasted approximately twenty to forty minutes.

The interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder and then transcribed into a Microsoft Word document. Additionally, notes taken during the interviews are included in the document to summarise each interview. Following that, thematic analysis was used to identify themes that aligned with the objectives of the study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The demographic characteristics of the participants are shown in Table 3.1. The age group of 50-59 years represented the largest proportion of participants (62.5%). This community group demonstrates a greater level of involvement in the fisheries sector than other age groups. The majority of participants (62.5%) earned between RM1000.00 and RM2000.00 from catching and selling seafood. In terms of ethnicity, 100 percent are Malays who are involved in the fisheries sector. Additionally, the majority of participants (50%) had completed secondary school. Most

participants (75%) were fishermen in terms of employment, while the remaining 25% were fishmongers. Participants' locations were in Terengganu (37.5%), Kelantan (37.5%) and Pahang (25%).

**Table 3.1** Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

CHARACTERISTICS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	6	75
Female	2	25
<b>Age</b>		
40-49	1	12.5
50-59	5	62.5
60 & above	2	25
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Married	6	75
Divorce/Widow/Widower	2	25
<b>Income</b>		
RM1000 & below	1	12.5
RM1001 - RM2000	5	62.5
RM2001 - RM3000	2	25
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
Malay	8	100
<b>Education</b>		
Primary school	3	37.5
Secondary school	4	50
Certificate/diploma	1	12.5
<b>Employment</b>		
Fishermen	6	75
Fishmonger	2	25
<b>Location</b>		
Terengganu	3	37.5
Kelantan	3	37.5
Pahang	2	25



Based on Table 3.2, physical distancing has affected small-scale fisheries on the east coast, Malaysia. A total of 87.5% of the participants stated that the resources of marine products have been dwindling, and this situation makes the resources obtained insufficient. *Department of Fisheries* (2014) mentioned that declining fish stocks are a major factor in reducing fishermen's sources of income. Besides, 75.5% of the workforce in the fisheries sector had to be reduced, and they were forced to implement a rotation system. Physical distancing has restricted the workforce's arrival and foreign workers (Aziz, 2020). This will reduce the source of the workforce and, in return, reduce the fish catch revenue.

Additionally, 62.5% were impacted by fluctuating inflation rates due to scarce resources, such as rising prices of goods. Jomitol (2020) also reported small-scale fishers in Sabah, Malaysia also lost their main income due to denied fishing activities during MCO and faced with rising fish market price. Thus, 37.5% were involved in inland fisheries, implying an increase in the consumption rate in the inland fisheries sector. As noted by some participants:

*"The physical distancing has resulted in a lack of seafood resources for fishermen and coastal communities, as well as losses for the small-scale fisheries sector." (P2 Fishermen, P7 Fishmonger)*

*"Previously, my friends and I always do fishing activities together, but now, due to physical distancing, I can only do this activity alone and the workforce has to be reduced." (P1, Fishermen)*

*"We are also shocked by the price of goods and the inflation rate during this pandemic situation. There have been significant price increases, and some resources have had to be reduced in cost, as many people do not have a fixed income." (P8, Fishmonger)*

*"Some fishermen engage in the land-based small-scale fishery. I am also involved in inland fisheries, and I notice that this sector of the industry has grown." (P5, Fishermen)*

**Table 3.2** Physical Distancing on Small-scale Fisheries

DESCRIPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
The source of seafood obtained is dwindling	7	87.5
The total workforce had to be reduced	6	75
Inflationary changes due to limited resources	5	62.5
The inland fisheries sector is growing	3	37.5

Table 3.3 demonstrates physical distancing has also had an impact on social life. All participants (100%) were affected by their quality of life. All participants reported that, their quality of life had decreased, and their lives had changed, for example, they were no longer able to meet in large groups and had reduced social activities outside their home. Also, they stated that there was no more freedom, they had to be careful and adopt to new norms.

Additionally, several participants (50%) had experienced mental health issues due to the inability to practice the cultural traditions and a lack of income. Galea (2020) mentioned that, in the context of Covid-19 outbreaks, had caused increasing anxiety and depression due to loss of job and income. While some faced loneliness due to reduced social activities. Supported by Giallonardo *et al.*, (2020), physical distancing is detrimental consequences on the mental and physical health of the general population worldwide. As stated by some participants:

*“My quality of life, as well as that of my family, has changed, for example I can no longer do social activities outside the home and need to be more careful. We had to live with new norms as recommended by the government such as keeping physical distancing and wearing face masks.”*  
(P6, Fishermen)

*“Now, I feel no longer free to get out there because of a covid-19 infection and have to distance myself from other people.” (P8, Fishmonger)*

*“Some of us suffer from mental health issues due to being confined at home and unable to engage in outdoor activities such as fishing, as well as a lack of income.” (P2, Fishermen)*

**Table 3.3** Physical Distancing on Social life

DESCRIPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Quality of life is decreased	8	100
Loss of freedom	8	100
Mental health issues	4	50

Table 3.4 presents the impact on participants’ income due to physical distancing . All participants mentioned on how their income had decreased significantly and that they were forced to seek alternative sources of income. Therefore, 62.5% have established new businesses, such as taking wages to build houses or mowing the lawn in order to increase their income. Moreover, 25% have completely lost their income and have no other source of income. This result was supported by the Department of Statistic Malaysia (2020). It was reported that, 52.6% of small-scale fishers have difficulties seeking their income, and 33% lose their job during MCO.

Most coastal fishermen still have to rely on middlemen because not all fishermen’s associations play a role in buying and marketing their catch. Apart from that, physical distancing has forbidden middlemen’s presence, which will affect the source of the fishermen’s income itself. This statement was supported by *Friends of Environment* (FOE-Malaysia) (2020), the catch of fishermen, especially coastal fishermen, cannot be sold when the middlemen stop buying the catch because they do not want to take risks due to the volatile market and the fishermen’s catch did not reach the market. Eventually, the landing of the catch was reduced

when the fishermen stopped at sea because they could not sell their catch. As a result, the coastal fishing community’s income and livelihood were impacted, as they were unable to sell their catch and were forced to stop going to the sea in order to avoid further losses. As described by some participants:

*“Our income has been significantly reduced as a result of this physical distancing, which has also had a significant impact on our family’s economic rate.” (P4 Fishermen, P7 Fishmonger)*

*“Several of us have established additional small businesses to support our income, such as taking wages to build houses and mow the lawn. Indirectly, it can provide job opportunities to others as well.” (P1, P2 Fishermen)*

*“Several of us have completely lost our source of income as a result of physical distancing during this pandemic season, as the number of workers had to be reduced” (P8, Fishmonger)*

**Table 3.4** Physical Distancing on Income

DESCRIPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Fishermen’s total income is decreasing	8	100
Build-up a new business	5	62.5
Total lost income	2	25

## CONCLUSION

Movement Control Order (MCO) was implemented in order to curb Covid-19. The main factors of physical distancing are preventing the spread of this epidemic, actively. However, there are some side effects involving the economy as well as social life in Malaysia. This includes small-scale fishermen economic and social living. The MCO revealed the flaws that existed in the supply chain of the industry. It had generated in

a loss of income for coastal fishing communities. The effect of physical distancing can be measured on their source of income as well as their mental health. As a result, fishermen lost their main source of income, since Covid-19/social distancing affects the country's food supply chain. As 52.6% of fishermen income are affected, and as many as 33% of our fishermen have lost their source of income since they're prohibited to return to the sea and also sell their fish to middlemen.

Therefore, the government and the authorities need to implement some incentives so that this situation can be controlled and demand for the fish market can be met normally without inflating prices and declining resources. Among the initiatives that can be done is to offer some benefits and allowances from the government for small-scale fishermen affected by physical distancing and those who use middlemen as their source of income. Besides, measures that can be implemented are providing flexibility to small-scale fishermen. Allow them to fish. Not forgetting, the middlemen as well, since they will take the produce for sale. The next step is to monitor the level of mental health of our small-scale fishermen, periodically. Health authorities should be sensitive to this and need to create a unit for those affected to express their feelings and therapy.

Apart from that, in order to implement and disseminate effective treatments for the general public and other at-risk populations, a better picture of the effects that this new stressor can have on mental health and well-being is needed. Moreover, it is vital to include the role of *Lembaga Kemajuan Ikan Malaysia* (LKIM) to assure that all fishing associations were participated in the buying and marketing of fishermen's catch. Though, in these hard times, it is understandable that the 'Caring for People' package attempts to offer something for all" in order to create a 'feel good' atmosphere among people. The Prime Minister must announce who would benefit from the package, from fishermen to farmers to market traders to e-hailing drivers, civil servants and many more. The stimulus package amounted to RM 64.4 million for farmers and fishermen associations that are able to produce food between three and

six months to secure food security during these difficult time. This study uses a qualitative approach to explore the impact of physical distancing on small-scale fisheries as well as socio-economic perspectives.

Though, future studies can be expanded to include quantitative data and include a greater number of respondents. Additionally, because this study concentrated on Malaysia's East Coast, the findings may not represent the entire Malaysian population. Thus, future research should focus on other coastal areas in Malaysia, as the impact of physical distancing on fisheries scale and socio-economic may vary from that observed in this study.

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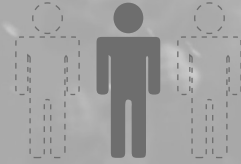
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# SOCIAL DISTANCING OPPORTUNITIES ON TRANSPORTATION

*Capt. Fausta Ari Barata, M.M*

In 2019, the world was shocked by a virus that attacks the respiratory system, causes acute pneumonia and may result in death. The virus was identified as Covid-19 (*Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2/SARS-CoV-2*). Since the virus was discovered in Wuhan province Hubei, China on November 17th, 2019, till now, no country is free from Covid-19. (Lee, A. 2020). According to the work of Rohim and Annessa (2020), Covid-19 indicated directly take a stage to prevention and standby for medical power. Hence, in order to minimize the number of cases, every country develop their own strategy and preventive policy. This includes social distancing policy followed with Work from Home (WFH) policy.

The end of pandemic affected by virus Covid-19 creates new habitual or as we know as 'new normal' which there is a changed behavior to consist normal activity. However, we implemented health protocol to prevent transmission of Covid-19. (Lilis Suryani, dkk, 2020). An example of new normal our society are forced to adapt with is 'social distancing'. According to the *World Health Organization (WHO)* social distance refers to the act of maintaining a certain amount six (6) feet of physical distance from another person. However, social distancing is not the same with isolation. Many people tend to confuse between these two

concepts. According to the work of Sylvira, Azwar and Abdurrohman (2021), these two concepts are often misunderstood by many. Social distancing can in outdoor, going to a mall, or doing activity in outdoor. However, misconception of social distancing is to minimize contact with other people and stay away hustled. (Sylvira A. Azwar & Yusuf Abdurrohman; 2021).

The virus can be transferred to other people through air. Covid-19 transmits when people breathe in air contaminated by droplets and small airborne particles containing the virus. According to the *Corona Disease Centre*, they believed that this virus will spread easily in the community. The result of the research from *BioMed Central Public Health* in 2010 concluded that, social distancing is very effective to reduce the number of cases within the work place. (Rahma; 2020). Covid-19 has forced the society to adapt to the new norm, for example adapting to social distancing. Little did we know, this new norm, along with other practices bring impact towards numerous business sector, including our transportation. Even though transportation sector is still in business, health protocol has tightened. For instance, passengers must wash their hands, use hand sanitizers, face masks must be worn, temperature must be checked and practice physical distancing. Health protocol should not be ignored and should not be considered new, unfortunately for some, it is.

Each individual must ensure they partake in social distancing to decrease the spread of the virus. Therefore, marketing and operational strategy has changed. There is a number of differences made before and after the pandemic, especially toward transportation sector as shown in the table below:

**Table 4.1** Difference before and after the pandemic

NO	ACTIVITIES	PRA-COVID19	ERA-COVID19
1.	Fulfilling need	With private or public transportation movement	Without movement, online shopping delivery service
2.	Work	Work From Office (WFO)	Work From Home (WFH)
3.	Education/ Learning	Study From School (SFS)	Study From Home (SFH) or home-schooling
4.	Selecting transportation	Selecting transportation Suitable with human need	Tend to avoid travel with Public transportation
5.	Social interaction	The physical meeting, through presenting meeting, seminar, conference.	The virtual meeting, through zoom meeting application, webinar, video conference.
6.	Entertaining and recreation	Offline entertainment, film in bioscope	Online entertaining, film streaming online
7.	Spiritual/ Workshop	Offline workshop, Dakwah, Pengajian, Tabligh Akbar,	Virtual worship, learning online, religious activities via Youtube
8.	Performance parameter (service quality) public transportation	Safety factors, reliability, flexibility, convenience speed and effect.	Health factor (main), seventy, reliability, Flexibility, convenience, speed, and effect

Change or movement behavior pra-covid19 activities to Covid-19 era, direct impact on decreasing movement or social mobility. This existing condition gives opportunities and challenges for the development system of land, sea, and air transportation which can adapt with a change of social mobility. Based on the explanation above, the purpose of this

article is to know the impact of social distancing for society, how is their technique stages businessman on getting through pandemic Covid-19 eras and to know the kind of opportunity create in pandemic Covid-19 era, especially business transportation.

## DISCUSSION

### The Impact of Social Distancing

The policy of social distancing is given a certain high impact on society. To respond to the development of Covid-19, Indonesia President Joko Widodo makes a policy on March 16<sup>th</sup> 2020, many firms or institutions start to apply to work from home as an act of social distancing for employees. This action uses to press and decreasing the spread of the Covid-19 virus through human interaction. Much research is related to the effectiveness of social distancing action that does to respond to Covid-19 development. This research proves the social distancing policy action from the center of government, province, and institution presents the level of effectivity 75% for work from home. How many respondent duties that influent pandemic Covid-19 presents that strong influence is 24% and overpowering is 46%, residual categorize a few and moderate influence. With social distancing policy, the dominant work from home is 48%, work from home but not exclusive is 27%, daily activity, as usual is 24%, and minority have planning work from home. This social distancing policy makes majority did not official travel to out of town 84% and just minority is still official travel to out of town. Dominant society did not an activity like meeting, 37%, partially reduce 23%, seldom 35% and minority is still usual. Related daily activity, dominant society is still usually activity 34%, decreasing volume activity 29%, did not activity 21%, did a little activities 11%, minority fill busy. (I Gusti B.R Utama; 2020). The lecturer from *Universitas Dhyana Pura Bali* concludes that, social distancing action is effective in decreasing the spread and infection of Covid-19 through human interaction. The research result present in the Table 4.2:

**Table 4.2** The result of the spread and infection of Covid-19 through human interaction

NO	EFFECTIVITY	PRESENTATION
1.	The effectivity of policy for employees to work from home	75%
2.	The effectivity of policy for employees did official travel to out of town	84%
3.	The effectivity of policy can develop literation and read news from newspaper/ magazine/ Internet or TV	68%
4.	The effectivity to decreasing employees meeting	85%
5.	The effectivity of missing potential to get direct opportunity interaction with a consumer	95%
6.	The effectivity of missing potential to get direct opportunity interaction with a consumer	5%

Source: *Rai Utama: 2020*

### **The Technique Stages Businessman to Get Through Pandemic Covid-19 Era**

The conditions above change all things, especially the economic rotation process. *Managing Partner Grant Thornton Indonesia*, Johanna Gani said that, the key to sustainability is to be optimistic and adaptable to changes. The businessman can arrange the structure of the plan for the pandemic era or after the crisis, it will able to back speed movement on trajectory development. (Andi Hana; 2020). These five stages done by a businessman to get through crisis are:

i) Cast Management

Management cast flow is the main key for a firm to get through high challenges in the pandemic Covid-19 era. The firm must take stages to save stitch cast as primary action for many problems, such as extending creditor payment, negotiating for deferral of lease payments and credit in the bank.

ii) Anticipate Plan

Anticipate plan is an emergency response effort to know the crucial sector of a firm and ensure the strategy will take to business sustainability. Ensure the employees are in a crucial position to work with high flexibility.

iii) Manage Stakeholders

A good estimation of cash flow will put the firm in a stronger position while discussing with stakeholders. The firm suggested pro-active and taking initiatives to make relationships actively among tax authorities, lenders and the main suppliers to get available financial support.

iv) Give Special Attention to Employees

A company needs an understanding of employees profile to decided option and labor solution in a firm. In several situations, the firm will encounter a difficult position in employee maintainance in sustaining its business.

v) Create Special Team

A special team is a team that manages crises. The team conducts discussions and communicates decisions. In addition, the team anticipates forthcoming issues that will be faced by the firm wisely and professionally. During the pandemic, the government must prepare risk management to minimize the problem and disadvantage in all sectors and did risk management includes:

vi) Mapping Supply Chain

A mapping supply chain is related to business process and organization service about probability impact and resulting disturbance delay in delivery logistic, and delay manufacturing process effect of global pandemic Covid-19 virus.

vii) Risk Evaluation, Supervision and Control

Each situation change in a business environment is a certain effect on the risk level faced by the firm. Therefore, the firm must evaluate, assess and controlling risk periodically in other that disturb the business performance. Risk evaluation periodically on suitable assumes, data source and procedure used. Interval decided adjusted with firm effort development and external condition influent with a firm condition. A firm must decide on continuous controlling risk. System and procedural controlling include high-risk exposure, risk tolerance, internal limit obedience, and stress testing result or consistency of implementation policy and procedure decided. The resulting control is present in the periodical report that reports to management to risk mitigation and action needed.

viii) Arrangement Risk Control

The arrangement risk control system is aligned with policy and procedural decisions. The risk control process must align with risk exposure or risk level taken and risk tolerance. Controlling can be done with risk mitigation methods, such as hedge and additional capital to absorb disadvantaged potential.

ix) Designing on Safety Procedure

Safety design and procedure must do by a logistic firm in pandemic Covid-19 eras include: a) building communication system and procedure with a supplier to anticipate the problem faced by firm or organization effect on pandemic Covid-19 virus; b) Identifying the potential of other



suppliers to assurance operational business process and service, if there is a problem on business process; c) presenting limitation faced by a firm to consumer and presenting the stages of risk management which will do on business process.

x) Crisis Management

A crisis is a condition faced by each firm. Crisis can be in various forms during the pandemic Covid-19. A crisis is the potential to threaten a business's future, therefore needs proper handling to sustainability a business. To solve the crisis, the firm must do crisis management. Crisis management is preparing processes and managing emergencies or uncertainty that can influence stakeholders, employees, customers and company income.

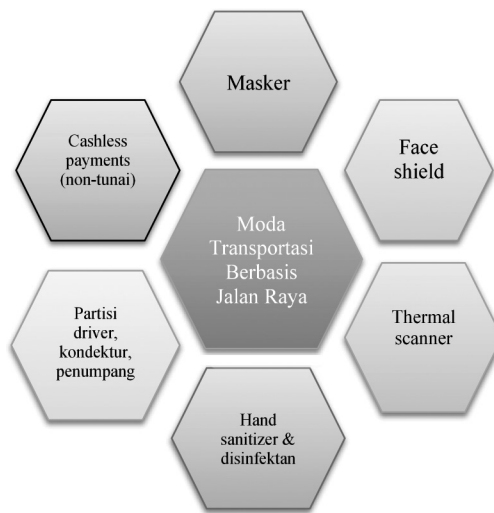
xi) Monitoring and Tracking

Monitoring each policy in the centre of government or regional government in the effort to solve the Covid-19 virus enables the firm to adapt to anticipative stages of stages of business process effectively and speedily. For instance, this monitoring enables public transportation operators to decrease request and tariff income because of the social distancing policy to reduce infection risk in transportation. Social distancing needs requesting management effective to care for the transportation occupancy rate below the threshold decided before special or temporary. Daniel Horcher *et al.* study (2021) said that, there are five potential approaches to social distancing in public transportation: a) Flow control with queuing up, b) The price depends on room and time, c) Capacity reservation with advice booking, d) Slot auction and e) Travel permit scheme on sale.

### **Social Distancing Opportunities on Transportation**

The government must improve the societal perceptions about social distancing to maintain normal economic activities in business transportation. For example, social distancing demands vacant seats to separate passengers. The purpose is to avoid the possibility of infection

droplets while coughing or sneezing. It can be avoided using partitions between driver, conductor, and passengers, so passenger capacity will be normal. Thus, there is no need to increase transportation tariff. In land transportation, role and protocol enforced must run maximally by businessman transportation. It will encourage society members to use the public transportation system, grow social belief and no afraid with Covid-19 virus. Figure 4.1 explains the types of needs of passengers that should be fulfilled.



**Figure 4.1.** Passengers' Needs

Source: Laboratorium Transportasi dan Geoteknik Teknik Infrastruktur Sipil - Fakultas Vokasi Institut Teknologi Sepuluh Nopember

Land transportation such as motorcycles or cars must make passengers comfortable to encourage them to use land transportation in doing their activities, routine and their business as usual. Moreover, the online business transportation should be become the applicator responsibility, in other that the drivers consistently run their duties. The applicators must train their drivers to be confident and competent in running their duties, considering available facilities such as:

- i. Buy fuel get 50% cashback.
- ii. Holiday 'instalments payment' credit bank.
- iii. Get 'Bantuan Langsung Tunai' (BLT).
- iv. Consider the transportation for main need ('Sembako').
- v. Get Covid-19 test and taking down shipping cost.

In a business context, there an interesting term is '*Whenever There Is Danger, there is Opportunity*'. 'Social distancing' creates 'physical distancing', it has a high influence on business transportation in the world and raises 'multiplier effect' with apply 'physical distancing' following:

- i. Decreasing the number of passenger or 'Okupansi'.
- ii. Decreasing operator income.
- iii. Increasing operational cost affect health protocol.
- iv. Decreasing revenue center and regional government, so limited subsidy for public transportation, effect relocation for handling Covid-19.
- v. Enabling passenger migration to private transportation to avoid public transportation.
- vi. Enabling business transportation potential change function.

In this case, the government through *Otoritas Jasa Keuangan (OJK)*, apply policy about relaxes microcredit business. Debit UMKM will get leeway credit payment and decreasing bank interest. With this policy, a businessman can focus on other payments to develop their businesses. Besides, a businessman directly affected by the pandemic Covid-19. Transportation entrepreneurs must be able to create innovative sustainable strategies to thrive in this area. There are all things can do by businessman transportation, such as:

**a) Make Substitution Product**

**i) Supporting Product**

An business transportation effort is creating *a supporting product* that changes the main product. It is done when online drivers form affiliations with other businessmen to distribute things as symbiosis mutualism in the pandemic. For instance, an entrepreneur created a tour and travel service at Pamekasan, Madura to decrease turnover after the impact of pandemic Covid-19. He modified his bus as a cafe with a full facility like music and AC and named his cafe as Coffee on The Bus Kadung Sa'ateh. All the passengers can drink sensational coffee on a mobile cafe bus while travelling around the city. These ideas become business opportunities for the surrounding communities.

**ii) Unmanned Mode of Transportation**

The pandemic promotes an unmanned mode of transportation as a future business opportunity. Nowadays, the technology development of unmanned mode of transportation is popular. Tesla is a producer of famous electric cars in the world. Elon Musk; the founder of TESLA, said that self-driving cars is better than human drivers. It is an opportunity for businesses.

**iii) Drone User**

Since the pandemic Covid-19, there is an increased production of drones as they are in monitoring and transportation to limit human interactions. Limited human activities will decrease virus infections. For example, Terra Drone Corporation helps people work easily in a pandemic era. Drone can be used as a technical solution to transport medical samples and dangerous material. It is a business opportunity as a business alternative in business transportation. (Yair Wiseman; 2021)

**b) Recount Product and Service Cost**

There are many business transportations with a lot of burdens that will increase operational cost Social distancing policy will decrease human transport and reduce income. Businessman transportation must

recount serve cost received. The high social need for transportation made businessmen provide the right price that is not burdensome to society.

### c) Market Reach Change

There are two positive meanings are: First, market reach change to press operational cost, to avoid the high disadvantage. Second: if markets reach wide, it will get more profit, a firm must seriously consider the market, distribution technique and operational cost.

## CONCLUSION

*The Social Distancing* policy gives a high impact on society. With social distancing policy, there are many people who work from home exclusively. Others work like usual. However, there are many people losing their work. The conditions above, change all things, especially economic rotation process, but businesses must be conducted with optimism and adaptation with the condition. There are five manners done by a businessman to get through crisis are a) Cash management; b) Make anticipate plan; c). Involve stakeholders in management; d) Give special attention to the employee; e) Create a special team.

Pandemic Covid-19 is a global disaster that cannot be avoided by all people, the virus's existence has changed the world speedily. All sectors affected pandemics such as health, economic, education and social, etc. However, we must think '*Whenever There Is Danger, There is Opportunity*'. There is no exception for transportation businesses. Although there are many obstacle such as many have gone out of business, decreasing the number of a passenger, decreasing operator income and increasing operational cost cause health protocol, they must be optimistic. There are many opportunities in several ways includes a) Make supporting product, unnamed transportation mode, using drone maximally; b) Recount product and service cost; c) Market reach change.

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## SMEs: DIGITALIZATION IN COVID-19

*Majdah Chulan, Surina Nayan and Huzaifah A. Hamid*

The world is affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and many activities are affected by it; from education to businesses. Students have online classes at home and many businesses are done virtually. Business is booming every single day and because of this pandemic, business owners are struggling to survive. Among the government's effort to safeguard public health and economy are implementing the Movement Control Order (MCO), lockdown, confinement and social-distancing, (Craven *et al.*, 2020). The implementation of MCO has affected numerous businesses sector, since they are not allowed operate without having to follow strict Standard Operation Procedure (SOP) in order to control the spread of the virus.

During this pandemic, business operators, especially Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are struggling with traditional methods of doing business. Such as having a place or space to display and sell their products or promote their services. With pandemic, they do not have that freedom and head out to a specific place or office to run their business since most of the time they need to work from their home and sometimes alone. Their whereabouts is not important as long as they are connected to the internet (Bean-Mellinger, 2018). They can use either their handphones, laptops or personal computers to sell and promote their products or even offer their services. Small and medium enterprises SMEs are classified into three categories, namely micro, small, and



medium. They are defined by industry, sales turnover, and the number of employees. The following table depicts the definitions of SMEs in Malaysia.

**Table 5.1** Definition of small and medium enterprises in Malaysia

SIZE	MANUFACTURING	SERVICES AND OTHER SECTORS
Medium	Sales turnover between RM 15 and RM 50 mil Between 75 to 200 employees	Sales turnover between RM 3 mil and RM 20 mil Between 30 to 75 employees
Small	Sales turnover between RM300,000 and RM 15 mil Between 5 to 75 employees	Sales turnover between RM 300,000 and RM 3 mil Between 5 to 30 employees
Micro	Sales turnover between RM300,000 or less Less than 5 employees	Sales turnover below RM300,000 Less than 5 employees

Source: SME Corporation Malaysia (2020)

In terms of economic activities of SMEs in Malaysia, the service sector comprises 63.5%, from manufacturing, 19.8% from agriculture, 9.7% from construction, while mining and quarrying contribute 5.6% and 0.5%, respectively (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2019). Hashim and Abdullah (2000) define SMEs in Malaysia as follow:

- i. it is actively managed by its owners (owner-managed and family business).
- ii. it is highly personalized.
- iii. it is largely local in its area of operation.
- iv. it is largely dependent on internal sources of capital to finance its growth.

In 2018, 99% are SMEs of the total 920,624 business establishments (Tong & Gong, 2020). Therefore, when these businesses are affected by this pandemic, many people are affected as they have become part of the SMEs family. They depend on these businesses for their income. According to Radam *et al.*, as cited in Muhammad Wasaim & Muhammad Khaliq (2014) claim that in Malaysia, SMEs are considered as the country's economy backbone because they are the major contributors to our country's economy (Zalina, *et al.*, 2016). SMEs in Malaysia is badly affected when the country experiences recession as the unemployment rate is increasing like other countries. According to Nor Asiah, Khairunesa & Azmi (2020), 13% of business owners have already started doing business virtually before the execution of the MCO and 76% of the respondents had to close their business during MCO. The number of businesses that went digital is still small compared to the total number of businesses that doesn't.

Furthermore, only 12% of businesses take the first step into digitalization during the MCO while the remaining 64%, have yet to follow (Soh as cited in McIntyre (2020). Since we are living in the Industrial Revolution 4.0 (IR 4.0) era, there is a need for all SMEs to move towards digital transformation as to retain their position. According to Datuk Nur Halim Yunus, *Malaysian Technology Corporation (MTDC)*, the SMEs must head towards IR 4.0 even though they are not equipped with sophisticated technology (Wan Chik, 2019). However, it is vital that they have a clear vision on how to raise and stabilize their business during this pandemic era. Though Covid-19 has hit Malaysia, they must understand and respond to IR 4.0 technologies in order to retain and survive.

## **DIGITALIZATION AND VIRTUALIZATION OF SMEs**

Digitalization and virtualization go hand-in-hand in businesses. Investing in digitalization helps manufacturers to gain a competitive advantage, ensure flexible supply chains, move supply chains to new geographies, and become resilient to future crises (Global Virtualization Software Industry,

2020). Cloud platforms facilitate businesses as they are responsible for data continuity and storage, thus, enable businesses to be accessed anywhere. As for virtualization (the creation of computing resources that comprise of software than hardware), it is an innovative technology that enables companies to save a lot of money and helps them to operate efficiently. In many cases, it involves a single machine that can perform multiple roles (OC-IT, 2018).

## **DIGITALIZATION, VIRTUAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND SMEs**

Virtual entrepreneurship are famous and has been the choice for many SMEs owners, especially during the MCO period. In order to survive especially during this pandemic, SMEs need to go digital as digitalization is increasingly useful in order to improve the SMEs efficiency and competitiveness. However, not many SMEs are willing to go digital. The following are some of the reasons:

- i. Many SMEs do not have the right people and are not aware of the processes and technology that they can adopt in marketing.
- ii. Marketing is not really measured by most SMEs, so they are not sure what is considered effective and what is not.
- iii. Traditional marketing techniques are still used by many businesses as they do not really observe the effects of new media practices.
- iv. They have regular customers who already know their existence and they do not see the need to go digital.
- v. They are reluctant to invest in technology because of the uncertainties that lie ahead.
- vi. They view digitalization is complex, costly and unnecessary.

To be virtual, businesses need to be digitalized. Any businesses that conduct their business via the internet is called a virtual business/ entrepreneurship (Ward, 2020). They do not need to have some kinds of physical entity, for instance an office or a warehouse where customers can visit. Any virtual business depends on its digital capabilities to scale

back its physical existence. The following are some benefits of virtual entrepreneurship:

- i. They reduce the need and number of employees and retail workspaces. This saves costs (rental, utility bills, insurance premium and more).
- ii. They are flexible, less rigid and are able to react faster to changes in the market place.
- iii. They create better environment and feeling as employees are able to anywhere, for instance, in the comfort of their own home so that they have a balanced-lifestyle.
- iv. Employment can be offered to rural employees or employees that live in areas that have high unemployment rate.
- v. No commute time involves so less stress among staff as there is no traffic jam.
- vi. Productivity increases and employees are more focused as they do not need to travel/commute to the office/business premise.
- vii. Able to access to worldwide talent since business are done virtually via the internet.
- viii. Expansion can be done easily because space is not the limiting factor.
- ix. They are able to fulfil instant services. Business needs are catered via a single click
- x. They are easy to set up and shut down.
- xi. They are more environmentally sensitive as paper is less used and fewer people commute to offices so less emission of carbon dioxide to the environment.

## **THE IMPACTS OF SOCIAL DISTANCING TO BUSINESSES AND SMEs IN PARTICULAR**

Social distancing refers to the prohibition of crowd gathering at the non-essential businesses. It also limits social gatherings to ten (10) people or less, it orders people to stay at home and they need to maintain a one-metre distance from each other. Social distancing definitely affects personal and business activities. Businesses that depend heavily on the face-to

face communication are vulnerable since social distancing is practiced during this pandemic. Consumers and business practices are disrupted and this affects the whole productivity and income of businesses. Nearly all countries lost their businesses. As in the United States, Fairlie (2020) claims that, due to Covid-19, the number of active business owners in manufacturing, restaurants, hotels, transportation and personal/laundry services all have decreased dramatically. In addition, among the highest disrupted sectors during MCO are travel-related industries, aviation and tourism. In contrast, groceries, healthcare, pharmaceutical and agricultural companies which are under the staple goods producers, are less vulnerable ( Segal & Gerstel, 2020). Worldwide SMEs businesses are badly affected by the implementation of social distancing and MCO in terms of the overall cash problems, closure of business operations workers' retrenchment (Smith-Bingham & Hariharan, 2020). Therefore, in order to survive SMEs, they must go virtually.

## **THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON SMEs**

The Covid-19 pandemic still brings impacts to the lives of many people, including their lifestyles and careers. Many that are forced to adapt to the new norm are becoming mundane. Businesses ranging from retail to service providers are forced to redesign their models from the conventional face-to-face method to a contactless transaction. Failure to do so has caused many businesses to seize their operation temporarily or even permanently.

This situation undoubtedly is more worrisome for the SMEs who had to struggle even before the pandemic hits the nation. Despite receiving tremendous support from the government in terms of capital, namely tax deferrals and subsidies among others, it is crucial for the SMEs to acknowledge the fact that the pandemic will stay longer than they initially hoped for and that depending on the government's assistance alone is insufficient in the long run. Thus, a much more effective measure is needed, and the solution lies in the transformation of business from in-person to one that is more digitalized to ensure future survival. The beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic and the enforcement of the

Movement Control Order (MCO) in Malaysia had explicitly resulted in an exceptional slump in the economic activity.

However, it is pertinent to understand that the situation is more intricate than it seems. Despite the 70% massive drop in SMEs businesses, the ones operated digitally proved to thrive. For instance, purchasing of non-food essential via online has by 53% while an increase of 144% and 61% are online grocery shopping and online food delivery, respectively (Vodus, n.d.). On the first day of the MCO alone, food delivery platforms such as GrabFood and Foodpanda witnessed a 30% increase in orders (Free Malaysia Today, 2020). The vast differences of revenues between offline and online economic activities serves as evidence that a more digitalized approach is necessary for the SMEs to survive and succeed during the pandemic era.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF DIGITALIZATION FOR SMEs

Amidst the chaos that ensues following the Movement Control Order (MCO) implemented by the Malaysian government to control the spread of Covid-19, one sector proves to impacted much, if not the most – the business sector. The once flourished sector that attributes much to the birth of young millionaires as well as establishment of moguls now seems to be at a lost. These entrepreneurs were faced with tremendous challenges in various aspects, namely financial, marketing and labour force, among others.

**Table 5.2** Digitalization stage of SMEs and large corporations

DIGITALIZATION STAGE	ENGAGEMENT LEVEL (%)	
	SMES	LARGE CORPORATIONS
Basic Digitalization	77	23
Active Digitalization	20	80
Advanced Digitalization	25	75

Sources: YCP Solidiance's research and analysis, as cited in Consultancy.asia

Despite the predictions that this sector will be in deep turmoil, large corporations surprisingly managed to maintain their businesses, albeit many losses here and there (see Table 5.2). The high existing revenues coupled with advanced digitalization skills were enough to keep them within the market. Unfortunately, the SMEs had it worse. Not only were they void of capitals, their knowledge on how to sustain their businesses was limited, as they were not exposed much on how to reach the global market digitally. This situation forces them to go beyond their capabilities and learn the strategies and skills from the large corporations, and one of the skills was none other than the Information Technology (IT) Skills.

## CUSTOMERS ENGAGEMENT

When it comes to digitalization, one important aspect of it that greatly appealed to SMEs would be the amount of positive engagement it offers to the small businesses. Majority of consumers are now digital savvy, making them the most targeted clients. Therefore, going digital would open up pathways that connect the seller to these consumers. In fact, what most people failed to acknowledge is that the most valuable advantage of digitalization essentially surpasses the fancy website design and profile, but more on the data collection it manages. It is often challenging for small businesses to understand the customers' needs and interests, but digitalization bridges the gap by enabling the businesses to gauge the efficacy of their marketing plan through the data collected. Through digitalization, businesses can specifically target their customers by narrowing the options based on age, location and preferences in a much faster and more convenient way, compared to handing out flyers and conducting face-to-face surveys (Singtel, 2019). Digitalization also helps SMEs in terms of cost efficiency, whereby online marketing only requires modest budgets compared to the traditional marketing that involves printing, such as newspapers and magazines.

## TRANSFORMATION OF PRODUCT AND SERVICES

Another important aspect of customer engagement is in terms of transformation of product and services via customers' direct and indirect feedback. By going digital, businesses can improve their products based on the algorithms detected. Once the customers' needs have been identified through the algorithms, the marketing team can easily alter their products to suit the customers' preferences and immediately cater the changing customers' expectations. With algorithm, various business sectors able to enjoy this privilege, for instance, the use of *Instagram* and *Facebook* and as a result, similar products can be advertised on both applications upon logging in.

## PROCESS OPTIMIZATION

Optimizing the processes involved in running a business is perhaps one of the top priorities of any businesses. By reducing the amount of time allocated to manage the workflow of their businesses, corporations could direct their focus on marketing and product quality, among others. However, increasing the efficiency of their businesses proves to be difficult for SMEs considering their budget limitation. This is how digitalization comes into practice. Through digitalization, data can be easily accessible and key applications can be efficiently consolidated. Prior to Covid-19, large corporations did not have any problems with optimizing their businesses as they have the capital to purchase essential hardware and recruit skilful teams. Unfortunately, this was not the case for SMEs.

The amount of time and energy spent on managing the processes involved had to be increased probably up to threefold. With the emergence of cloud services in the past couple of years, these processes can be managed more effectively. Sadly, most SMEs opted out of this system, either in fear of transformation or they were simply not exposed to the benefits it could offer. Instead, they preferred the traditional method of purchasing infrastructures that somehow ended up not being used (How It Works Daily, 2019). Currently however, vast number of SMEs have



now begun venturing into online opportunity. Thus, digitalization can be regarded as one of the silver linings of the pandemic. More and more businesses are now more open to digitizing their business to ensure their sustainability. There are myriads of online services that could optimize business processes, and one of them is the cloud services.

Cloud computing involves using the power of the Internet to outsource processes you might usually perform on a personal computer – anything from handling simple storage to complex development and processing – to a massive and more powerful network of interconnected machines remotely (How It Works Daily, 2019). Cloud computing allows businesses to run essential programs and applications through the Internet, saving them time, space, energy and most importantly, money. The cloud is also extremely flexible. For heavy tasks, businesses may have instant access to scaled-up computing power. Once the task is finished, they simply release it back to the cloud. Some examples of cloud applications include Facebook, Twitter and Gmail. These are all powerful applications that allow the customers to interact and engage using the same information simultaneously.

## **THE FUTURE OF DIGITALIZATION FOR SMEs**

While it is evident that digitalization can pave the way for the SMEs to survive during the pandemic, the reduced cashflow experienced by these businesses stands in the way of their digital transformation. In a report made by Business Today (2020), it was found that despite the initiatives introduced by the government, only 25% of Malaysian organizations accelerated their digital transformation plans due to the Covid-19 pandemic, while 60% slowed down. In order to ensure smooth transition towards digitalization, it is crucial for the government to take effective measures that could benefit all parties.

## **Improving Technical Competencies**

Acquiring the skills in managing a digitalized business should be one of the many concerns of the government in ensuring the survival of SMEs. Not only do these businesses lack the skills to automate their operations, but they are unaware of the myriads of benefits that digitalization can offer (SME Corp Malaysia & Huawei Technologies, 2020). Providing adequate free training of the employees will essentially boost their technical competencies and encourage digitalization within and between SMEs.

## **Providing High Quality Infrastructure**

Support from both the government and the private sector should pave the way to expedite the digitalization process of the SMEs. In the field of e-Commerce, it is crucial to understand that digitalization is only possible when there is connectivity. For an online business to thrive, the Internet coverage should be expanded so that even the remote areas can be reached. Currently, the government allocates RM7.4 billion to increase broadband services in 2021 and 2022, as stated in the *Budget 2021* (Ahmad Fairuz Othman & Teoh, 2020).

## **Expanding Incentives**

In promoting SMEs digitalization, various incentives have been introduced by the government, such as the *SME Business Digitalisation Grant* run by MDEC. This incentive however is only limited to 100,000 SMEs (Tong & Gong, 2020). Expanding programmes such as this will provide SMEs with the capital needed to kickstart or sustain their businesses. Nevertheless, apart from expanding incentives, a more challenging task may be in the form of spreading awareness to the SMEs on the availability of these programmes, as reports found that 60% of SMEs who cited funding as a barrier to digitalization were in fact unaware of their financing options (SME Corp Malaysia & Huawei Technologies, 2020). Alerting them on the availability of these incentives could boost the digitalization rates.

## Online Business: Real Experiences During Covid19

This pandemic has created a profound shock worldwide where most Malaysians, particularly the housewives, business people, self-employees and even graduates are venturing into online businesses to assist with their own income as well as their families. Even the government has urged those who have problems in seeking jobs during this pandemic to involve in online businesses by learning about digital tools as to equip themselves with technological knowledge. This notion is also presented to full-time housewives that have lost their jobs during this Covid 19. According to Datuk Seri Rina Mohd Harun, *Women, Family and Community Development Minister*, in addition to their positions as housewives, women may contribute to the economy by running online businesses (Asila, 2021). Luckily, there are quite number of online business that Malaysians can do at home, despite the hit of Covid-19. It is cost-effective and easier if they are interested to set up these online businesses:

- i. Providing Tiffin service
- ii. Selling home-made foods
- iii. Cooking class
- iv. Baking cakes (wedding, birthdays)
- v. Making raya cookies biscuits and brownies
- vi. Making homemade pickles and jams
- vii. Making natural and organic cosmetics
- viii. Selling clothes, scarves, handbags and bags
- ix. Packing vegetables, seafood, meat, dried products and groceries

### *Doing Tiffin Service*

Generally, Malaysians love to gather over food with families or friends, eating at roadside stalls, restaurants or even at mamak stalls. However, since the Movement Control Order (MCO) was enacted to halt the spread of the coronavirus, the entire food and beverage industry has come to a halt, forever altering its environment. Due to this situation,

as a result, many Foods and Beverages (F&B) businesses have begun to sell home delivery to Malaysians who are staying at home. Food delivery service using the 'tiffin' approach was introduced.

Back then, using these tiffin-carriers or tiered bowls known as *mangkuk sia* or *mangkuk tingkat* was quite famous among the locals. Originally, these 'tiffins' also known as 'dabbas' were used among the Indians who used to keep their food in stainless steel containers. This approach has greatly influenced Malaysians. Looking at this opportunity, the team at the *Yayasan Keusahawanan Sosial* (YKS) has decided to start off the first food delivery service known as *MangkukTingkat.com*.

According to Khairul Anuar Abdul Rahman, the managing director of *MangkukTingkat.com*, customers can simply select their plan meal on our website and place their order. Once they have made the necessary online payment, their meals will be delivered to their doorstep by respective agents (Zieman, 2010). Meanwhile, Datuk Redzuawan Ismail or better known as Chef Wan has also ventured into this tiffin service. He operates *De. Wan 1958*, a restaurant that serves diversified Malaysian cuisine and his food brings unforgettable memories of what Malaysia stand for. He also ventures into online tiffin delivery for his customers during this MCO. He introduces few interesting tiffin sets which cater for special *Hari Raya*, *Chinese New Year* and *Christmas* editions. His tiffin were loved by his customers and they were sold like hot cakes. This could be one of the best delivery services in Malaysia because tiffins are capable for delivering hot, homecooked meals on time, every time.

### ***Selling Home-Made Foods***

Housewife, Kamsiah Ahmad from Sik, Kedah has decided to operate her own Korean food online delivery business. Her interest in Korean food began three (3) years ago. It all started when she watched the Korean variety show, *Running Man* which features interesting places and authentic food around the country. Furthermore, most of her time, she spent watching Korean drama and movies which in turned made her fall in love with Korean cuisines. Sha, her nickname, who is 44 years

old has been cooking at home with the assistance of her daughter from early in the morning. She is passionate about learning how to cook authentic Korean food such as *tteokbokki*. *Tteokbokki* is a well-known *Korean Street Food*. It's spicy, slightly sweet, and has chewy rice cakes, kimchi, a Korean pickled vegetables dish and grilled *gochujang chicken* which she has modified into Malaysian version.

Surprisingly, she never attended any cooking class and she claimed that these dishes were very easy to prepare. "I am so excited that I can finally have my own food delivery business to support my husband and four children," she said after receiving sugar, flour, and a few cooking items from Pak Khalid, the head of housing residents at her house in Taman Seraya, Kedah. Apart from that, Western food such as *spaghetti carbonara*, *spaghetti bolognese* and *lasagne* is also included in her menu as well. Her daughter would help her to promote the menus online using social media platforms like *Facebook* and *Instagram*. She herself will manage the food delivery to the customers.

### ***Online Drop Shipping Business***

Aina, a college student has taken the opportunity to start her own business online because she spends fewer hours in class and more time at home. She has been doing an online drop shipping business. Aina sells women's socks, scarves and *batik sarongs*. She discovered, by doing her own business is a good way to stay busy and supplement her income. Aina said that "whenever people ask me how did you start? I just tell them, "Just start!" "When I first started, I definitely did not have any money". "The whole thing happened by chance when I successfully helped my sister to sell her preloved handbag on *Facebook*". "I felt so content. The reason why she pursue with drop shipping business is because she does not have to keep any stocks with her, hence, making it the best business with the smallest capital. Certainly, this business is not the most lucrative one but she personally feels that it may be the most convenient way to fulfill her customers' orders.

### ***Online Cooking and Baking Classes***

Since the pandemic, Rani, a freelance baker has conducted online cooking classes for private individuals and groups. She used to have about 10 people joining her cooking classes every Sunday morning at her home but since the pandemic, she needs to abide with the SOP enforced by the government. However, she finds that there are several benefits when she starts her cooking online, using live recording in *Facebook*:

- i. No mask is needed since she cooks within the safety and comfort of her home.
- ii. No social distancing since there is nobody around her.
- iii. She's able to expand her cooking repertoire by creating a few more dishes which is useful during the pandemic.
- iv. She's able to provide personal guidance & full attention because she will be cooking alone.

Being a home baker, she needs to create and develop her own recipes. Among her customers' favourites are brownies, layered chiffon cakes, cream puffs, sticky cinnamon buns and *pandan* cakes and chocolate cakes. The sales have been increasing each day. Unfortunately, when Movement Control Order (MCO) started in 2020, her sales dropped. She had to deal with huge cancellation of brownies and wedding cakes. With this pandemic, she realized that she had to learn and adapt with new norms in order to keep her orders steady every month.

## **CONCLUSION**

When Covid 19 pandemic hit Malaysia in March 2020, the government immediately plan and execute Movement Control Order (MCO) to control the spreading of the virus, which has directly impact many aspects of our daily life. Indirectly, it forces us to rethink about how we live, play, and conduct business. This situation does greatly affect those involve in business, particularly Small-and Medium Enterprises (SMEs).

Since we are living in IR 4.0 during this Covid-19, SMEs players are advised to grab opportunities from the government's initiatives to assist them with their business via online.

In other words, they are not alone in this journey. The implementation of social distancing among Malaysian has resulted a massive drop in the business sectors, especially SMEs. Due to this reason, SMEs are urged to go for digitalization to sustain their business in this pandemic situation. They are forced to re-evaluate and restructure their business approach, as some of them may or may not be going forward with the digitalization. Noor Azmi Mat Said, Chief Executive Officer for SME Corp Malaysia asserts, that to remain relevant, entrepreneurs must push their businesses digitally since the number of e-commerce users are growing (Adilla, 2020). Besides that, social distancing policy also encouraged some individuals to run their online business as to minimize their contact with customers. Among them are providing tiffin service, selling home-made foods, online drop shipping business, as well as cooking and baking classes. Shifting to online businesses during the pandemic will definitely help them to abide with social distancing as enforced by the government in order to break the spreading of coronavirus.

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# FOOD ONLINE AND CONSUMER SENTIMENT IN TIMES OF EMERGENCY: INFOVEILLANCE STUDY

*Nur Athirah Zaki, Nurain Ali, Abdul Mutalib Embong Eusoff and Aisyah Dollah@Abdullah*

Due to the outbreak of Covid-19, Malaysia's situation has changed dramatically and has become more critical towards the end of 2019. Both government and the people became alarmed with the sudden change in situation. In response to the current situation, everyone began to plan their reforms and research. As we all know, Covid-19 is an outbreak of virus that is transmitted through breathing and direct contact between humans. Since the virus does not present any specific symptoms, making it difficult to track its victims. This virus began to take root in China and has spread to many people in the region of the world, including Malaysia. During the outbreak, the virus has made its way into Malaysia. Since then, the number of victims has increased over time. *The World Health Organization (WHO)* and the health ministry are working together to find a vaccine that can fight off the virus.

Till then, the government is taking measures to improve the situation through several reforms, including a tighter system to eliminate any risks for every sector in Malaysia, including the business sector. In this regard, the country's economic growth has slowed down. It seems to have shaken up all types of businesses including the e-commerce business on

a massive scale (Mohammad Waliul *et al.*, 2020). In order to reduce the number of cases, the government then introduced the Movement Control Order (MCO), a strict Standard Operational Procedure (SOP) to curtail the chance of citizens contracting the disease. In light of the MCO, incentives have been given to citizens to ensure economic growth takes place as usual despite the critical situation. Since Covid-19 pandemic has a significant impact on the people as a whole, as well as on the country itself, in terms of physical, mental health and economics.

Additionally, the virus also affects trading and education sector as well. As we know, buying and selling is an important process for Malaysians because it has a huge impact on the economic development of the country. However, with the emergence of this epidemic, the country has faced some obstacles with everyday activities in order to avoid the transmission of this epidemic. Not to mention, the government has tightened the law on doing business and so on. Every person who invests in this business agency must comply with the SOP guidelines that have been set by the government. Also, many countries are following the advice from the *World Health Organization (WHO)* regarding the introduction of physical distancing measures as one of the ways in which transmission of the disease can be reduced. (WHO Covid-19, 2020).

In this regard, each company began to formulate new plans such as creating an online service system in order to stabilize their economic management. As we know, this system has long been established in Malaysia and it has facilitated the business of buying and selling among citizens in Malaysia. However, this system seems to be more actively used by citizens since the spread of Covid-19. The users have enhanced their activities through online applications concerned with shopping in Malaysia (Mohammad Waliul *et al.*, 2020).

## ONLINE SERVICES

All forms of information and services provided over the Internet are considered online services. An example of online service is e-commerce system. E-commerce is a service provided by companies commonly used for selling or buying goods as well as a service or individuals in order to deal with them over the Internet. Since the development of the Internet in 1960, e-commerce has grown with technology advancements year by year. E-commerce system including online services is widely provided by traders in small companies, large companies as well as individuals. In addition, an e-commerce system was categorized into several categories, namely Business-to-Business (B2B), Consumer-to-Consumer (C2C), Business-to-Consumer (B2C), Consumer-to-Business (C2B) and mobile commerce (m-commerce).

In fact, this service can be used by everyone for online purchasing and selling activities, anytime and anywhere. The online service has made it easier for people to communicate with sellers by using technology provided without having to meet them face-to-face. Yet, customers' needs are still met. According to Suhartono (2019), "*the availability of e-commerce platforms as a shopping medium enables customers to shop conveniently, compare products and prices effectively, and arrange the delivery of the product immediately.*" A study highlights on the precondition for conducting business in an environment that uses this e-commerce technology is the ownership of appropriate Information Technology (IT) equipment and telecommunication infrastructure that allows you to access the Internet. In e-commerce environments, the time of the delivery service plays a crucial role in satisfying and retaining customers. (Azizul, Jamaluddin, 2019).

Unfortunately, some citizens are still unaware of the benefits e-commerce brings, because, most still prefer traditional system, which is a direct face-to-face business between sellers and buyers. However, sellers that market their goods to the public via e-commerce system will further expand their market opportunities. (Dwi Suhartono, 2019) also emphasize that "*the availability of online delivery service technology enables*

*the industry, which is in a saturated market, to improve order accuracy, increase productivity, and enhance customer relationship.” (Dwi Suhartono, 2019).*

There are many advantages to online services. For instance, customers are able to make their purchase online without having to travel to shops or markets. In addition, customers are presented with the options to purchase their items from our country or abroad. There are a number of contributing factors that pushes a consumer to make that online purchase. They are cost, security, trust, social influence and usefulness.

## ONLINE SERVICES DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Online services are becoming more and more popular amongst consumers. Not to mention, statistics on the use of e-commerce methods has skyrocketed since the outbreak of the Covid-19 epidemic. According to the work of Waliul (2020), “*The usage of online retail applications and e-commerce mobile apps experienced a significant rise in inactive and new users*”. Since the government announced MCO, every person has taken precautionary steps to avoid any risk of exposing oneself and others to Covid-19 in their daily activities, this includes shopping. Hence, with that being said, there has been an increase in consumers’ use of e-commerce. The SOP guidelines were designed by the government to prevent citizens from spreading the viruses in their everyday activities. Following this reform, online services were introduced by business sector. Since then, these services began to thrive and has helped consumers to buy goods without having to leave the safety of their own home.

There are a few e-commerce systems that are well-known among Malaysian, such as *Lazada, mudah.my, Shoppe, Zalora, Carousell* and many others. The E-commerce system have also introduced delivery systems via online, for instance *PosLaju, Pos Express, JnT, Ninja Van* and many more. Apart from that, online grocery store websites are made available to Malaysians, including *Mygrocer, Mydin Mart and Tesco*. These online stores have made it easier for citizens to purchase household items during

the MCO. The online services platforms have helped consumers with their needs and interest throughout the MCO. Moreover, consumers are able to choose the best product from several markets through online purchasing because (Dwi Suhartono, 2019) concluded that, “*the perceived value importance in online business is because customers can easily compare products, features and prices.*” (Dwi Suhartono, 2019).

These platforms were not only designated for consumers alone, sellers will gain benefits as well. For instance, those who wish to start their small online businesses may use these online platforms to improve their financial status. In this regard, some guidelines consumers and sellers must follow business transaction process, following the new norms without compromising the quality of business while protecting the consumers from the risk of infection. This includes maintaining social movement or social distancing between the consumer and the sellers during the delivery process.

Citizens are also advised to make online payments in order to avoid any contact with the sellers during delivery of their goods. In addition, citizens should take precautionary measures when purchasing goods online from companies abroad in order to avoid any contact with Covid-19.

### **Online Food Services**

Online food services provided by e-commerce systems are platforms that provide a variety types of food for customers to purchase online. These foods are purchased through applications on mobile phones, laptops or many other devices. Hence, customers do not require to physically go to restaurants or markets. These services are well-known among Malaysians since Covid-19 pandemic. Zhao and Bacao (2020) clarified that, “*Food Delivery Apps (FDAs) is an emerging online-to-offline mobile technology and have been widely adopted by catering businesses and customers.*” Moreover, Yuyang Zhao (2020) mentioned that, these apps are in demand. The competitive dynamic of the food delivery apps market are growing worldwide, especially since the pandemic. According to Azizul and Ahmad (2019), “*mobile applications have gathered this chance to adjust*



*to restaurant and food delivery services, as an alternative to increase income and for customers to receive products and services.”*

Malaysians are able to purchase their food during MCO without having to risk their health by leaving their homes in the midst of Covid-19 pandemic. Among the food companies that provide food delivery via online are *Boost, food panda, grab food, KFC delivery, pizza hut delivery and McDonald's*. Even restaurants that provide local cuisine option for online system for food delivery. *“Although food is the primary component of online food delivery services, the process of consuming food begins when customers search for and order food from the firm's website or application.”* (Dwi Suhartono, 2019). Moreover, since MCO not only registered companies but also individuals have begun selling their goods through this service.

The merchant's online food delivery service can be accessed through an online food delivery application, but the user must have internet access to use that application to complete their order. The payment method provided by the company is a direct payment system as well as online payment. This payment method has made it easier for customers according to their situation at that time. Moreover, these online food services are registered and trusted by the consumers since their personal information is kept safely in the application. Consumers can also communicate with the riders of food delivery through the application used. These services also provide significant benefits to consumers, as the application provided for them is well-used, faster and easier to understand. Buyers or consumers can also select the items or foods and make comparisons of the menu with other restaurants before making a purchase. Azizul also stated that, *“online food ordering and food delivery apps satisfy the needs of busy individuals living in the cities that place their orders online and receive the service within a few minutes.”* According to Azizul and Jamaluddin (2019), Gagah and Agung emphasize that, e-satisfaction is defined as the satisfaction of consumers coming from online transaction experience in a market place. While Anderson also stated that, the influence of e-satisfaction and e-loyalty is moderated by convenience motivation, purchase size and inertia at the level of individual consumers (Gagah Triyuniar, Agung Nugroho, 2018).

## Online Food Services during Covid-19 Pandemic

Since the MCO was implemented and the law began to tighten, online food services is becoming a more useful option for purchasing food. *“During Covid-19 pandemic, the food retail sector faced the greatest challenges in maintaining optimal hygiene standard, protecting staff from the risk of infection, maintaining physical distance when dealing with large numbers of customers.”* (WHO Covid-19, 2020). In spite of having to take precautionary measures to reduce the risk of Covid-19 infection, the virus still affects the supply and demand of the catering industry. It has changed the consumption habits of residents and forced a sudden change towards the services offered by catering industry, from traditional in-store service to online-to-offline service. This change was necessary for survival during pandemic season. (Yuyang, Fernando, 2020).

Therefore, people have option for online food delivery services to fulfil their needs and interests. However, some guidelines must be followed by consumers and riders throughout the buying and selling process. The government’s guidelines are intended to prevent the risk of Covid-19 outbreaks to the general public. *“Maintaining physical distancing in retail food premises is critical to reduce the risk of transmission of the disease “* (WHO Covid-19, 2020). In addition to the guidelines, food delivery riders must undergo a health screening process at a clinic before they are allowed to start working during MCO. Most food delivery companies, like *grab food* and *food panda* bear the cost of the screening tests. *“Drivers need to be aware of physical distancing when picking up deliveries and passing deliveries to customers. Moreover, they must also maintain a high degree of personal cleanliness and wear clean protective clothing.”* (WHO Covid-19, 2020). Most food delivery riders are equipped with face masks, gloves and hand sanitizer, provided by their employers. Moreover, the riders are required to follow the guidelines by using a contactless method of delivery. Besides, personal shoppers must complying with the SOP guidelines as well, in order to avoid any risk of infection with their customers.

### *Consumer Pattern + Consumerism Behaviour in Online Food Services*

Providing goods and services to consumers is one of the ways in which economists maintain a stable economy of a country satisfying the wants and needs of consumers, manufacturers and organizations must plan, organize, direct and control their resources, which includes goods and services. As a result, they will learn about consumer behaviour in terms of target groups, current needs, factors that encourage consumers to buy and many other things. Ignoring the fact that, the consumer has become 'the master of the market' and ignoring the study of his needs, behaviour and motives will often lead to the wrong decisions, which might lead to the collapse of an organization (Dr. Khaled, 2008).

Consumption, consumer and consumer behaviour play important roles in succeeding and stabilizing the economy of each organization as well as the country itself. Consumptions can be defined as the process of purchasing and using a product, while the consumer itself could be defined as 'we', the decision maker, who purchases the goods or services that are provided by the manufacturers or big companies. As for consumer behaviour, it is the psychological part of the individual which makes a difference in purchasing any goods, services and anything else. (Dr. Kailash, 2010).

Consumer behaviour is influenced by several factors or forces, including psychological, social, cultural, economic and personal factors. (Dr. Ramya N., Dr. S.A. Mohamed Ali, 2016). This study on consumer behaviour formally investigates individual qualities such as demographics, personality and behavioural variables (such as usage rates, usage occasion, loyalty, brand advocacy and driving factors, barriers to use), in an attempt to understand people's needs and wants. Influences of groups members are also investigated such as family, friends and reference groups, to society in general, including critical situations when the Covid-19 pandemic has spread in Malaysia since the end of 2019.

## METHODOLOGY

This paper is quantitative in nature. It involves an online survey using a set of questionnaires on 'the use of food online and consumer sentiment in time of emergence' infoveillance study. A set of questionnaires was distributed through Google form to the respondents residing in Malaysia. Some workers and students in Malaysia took part in the study. The survey took place from 1<sup>st</sup> November 2020 to 30<sup>th</sup> December 2020. The main content will compile feedback from the concerned respondents about consumer behaviour, their opinions, beliefs, factors, obstacles in using online food delivery as a service, especially during Covid-19 pandemic outbreak across the country.

A total of 911 respondents responded to the survey within the time frame. The data was later analysed using Statistical Package For The Social Sciences (SPSS). 911 respondents were involved in food purchasing provided their responses.

## FINDINGS

The questionnaire was completed by 911 people with 181 males and 730 females between the ages of 15 and 55. While the majority of the respondents are between the ages of 15 to 24 years old (886 respondents), 14 respondents are between the age of 25-34 years old and seven (7) of them ranged between 35-44 years. The data also recorded one respondent that lies between the age of 45 to 54 years, while three (3) respondents are 55 years old and above.

The questionnaire was disseminated to four main areas. They are cities, towns, villages and rural areas. Amongst all four, most respondents were from the city, with a total of 421 respondents. Followed by the village, with a total of 213 respondents. Whereas, rural areas and towns come in third and fourth, respectively. Each with 155 and 122 respondents. There was also a wide range of educational backgrounds represented in the respondents to this survey; degree holders made up the highest number

of samples with 887, while only nine (9) high school students responded to the questionnaire. Four (4) respondents were master students and only two (2) were certified students.

In terms of occupation, 868 of the respondents were students while 18 respondents worked in the private sector, six (6) are civil servants, nine (9) respondents were self-employed, seven (7) were unemployed and three (3) respondents had retired. In terms of current income, the majority of the samples (824 respondents) did not have an income while 48 respondents had an income that's below RM1,000. In addition, 28 of the samples earned from RM1,000 to RM3,000 annually. Five (5) and six (6) respondent earned between RM3,001 to RM5,000 and RM3,001 to RM5,000, respectively.

In terms of frequency, 756 of the samples used *Online Food Delivery Applications* occasionally, 73 samples use the application at least once a week. 34 respondents used the application twice a week and 42 respondents used the application three to five times in a week. This study also shows that, the samples who frequently used the application more than five (5) times a week were only two (2) people while four (4) people used this *Online Food Delivery Application* every day in their daily life.

### Pattern of Consumerism

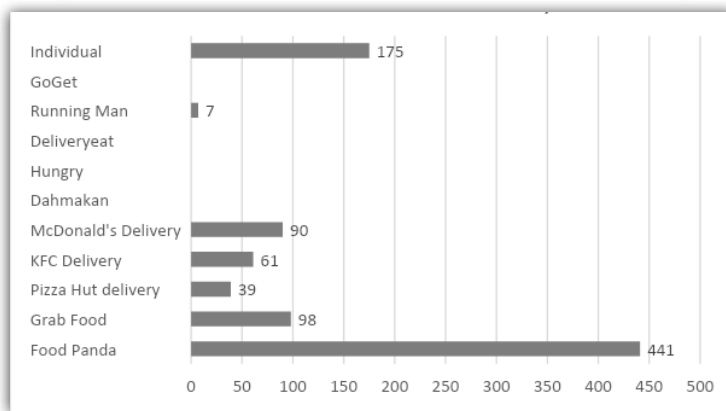
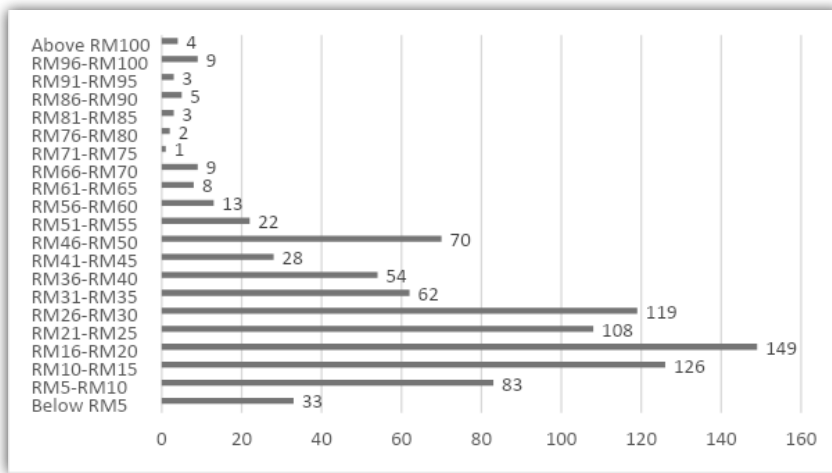


Figure 6.1. Preferable Online Food Application.

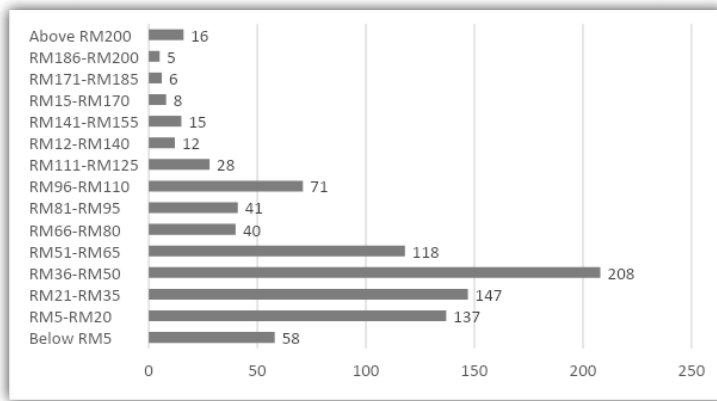
Figure 6.1 presents the result for the most preferable online food application used among Malaysians during the pandemic. The top three apps that were frequently used amongst Malaysians are *Food Panda*, followed by individual or middleman and finally, *Grab Food*, with 441, 175 and 98 respondents, respectively. In addition, a total of 90 samples preferred to use the *McDonald's Delivery App* as a way to purchase food online.



**Figure 6.2.** The Average Money Spent on Each Purchase.

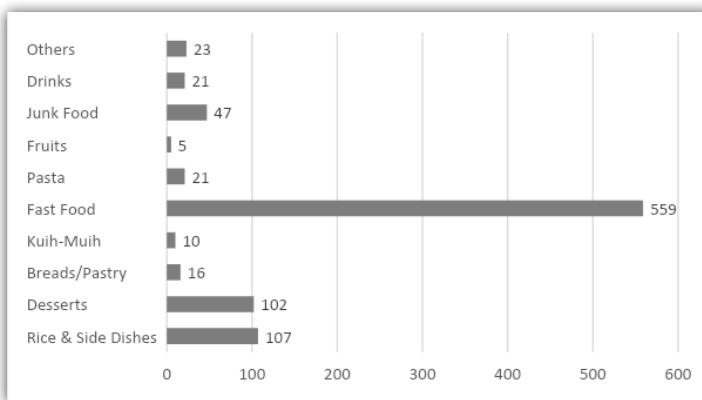
Figure 6.2 presents the results for average money spent on each purchase. Referring to the figure, the top three average amount spent on a single receipt were RM16-RM20, RM10-RM15 and RM26-RM30 with 149, 126 and 119 respondents, respectively. While 108 people spent an average of RM21- RM25 on a single purchase by. In conclusion, most of our respondents spent an average RM10-RM30 on food for single purchase. Figure 6.3 presents the average amount spent by respondents on purchasing food online within a month. Most respondents (208) spent within an average of RM36-RM50 for monthly purchases of food online. Followed by 147 samples that spent RM21-RM35 as their average monthly expenditure on purchasing online food.

**THOUGHTS OF CRITICAL THINKERS' SERIES**  
**The Impacts of Social Distancing on Communities, Economy and Industries**



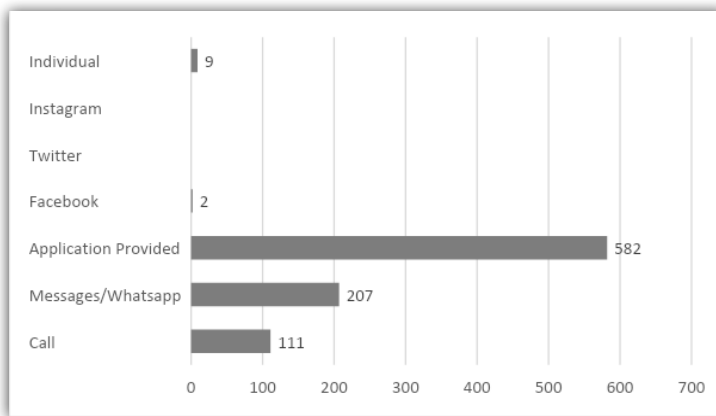
**Figure 6.3.** The Average Monthly Money Spent on Purchasing Food Online.

Figure 6.4 presents the findings on the types of food purchased amongst Malaysians. The majority of the sample (a total of 559 people) preferred fast food, while 107 preferred desserts and a variety of rice and side dishes.



**Figure 6.4.** Types of Food Purchased.

Figure 6.5 presents the result on methods used among Malaysians. According to the research, the most commonly used medium of communication with online food delivery was the online food delivery application itself, such as *Food Panda Application*, *grab food* and so on; 582 samples preferred using these apps, followed by *WhatsApp* (207 respondents) and phone calls (111 respondents).

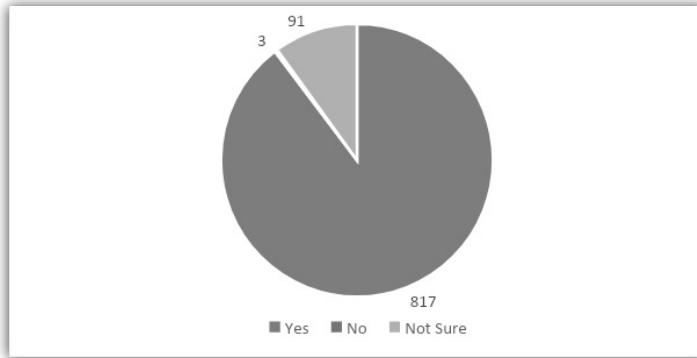


**Figure 6.5.** Methods Used among samples.

### Quality of Online Food Service

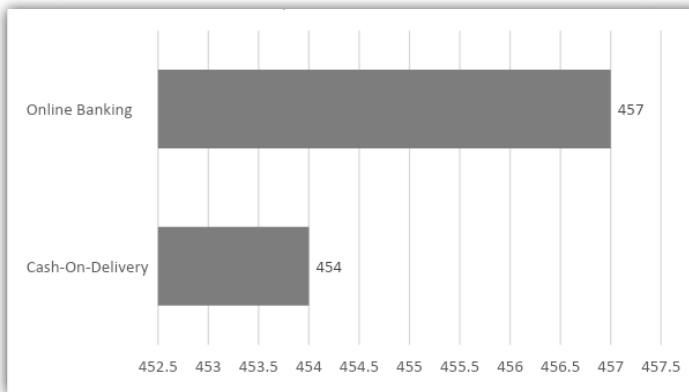
Figure 6.6 presents the findings on the quality of online food delivery service. 89.68% agreed that the application provided by *Online Food Delivery* companies was customer friendly and easy to use, while 9.99% answered uncertain and 0.33% of the sample denied the statement.





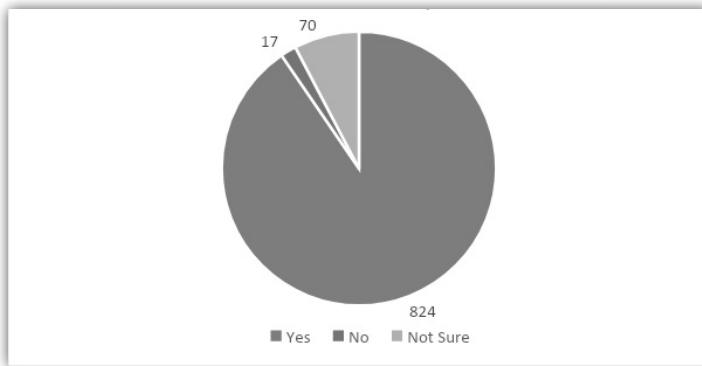
**Figure 6.6.** The Effectiveness of Online Food Delivery Application.

The figure 6.7 shows that, the most frequent form of payment method used by the sample was *Online Banking* with 50.16%, while 49.86% prefers *COD*. This demonstrated that the sample commonly used the method of payment between *COD* and online banking based on their situation, with the majority still preferred online banking as their method of payment.



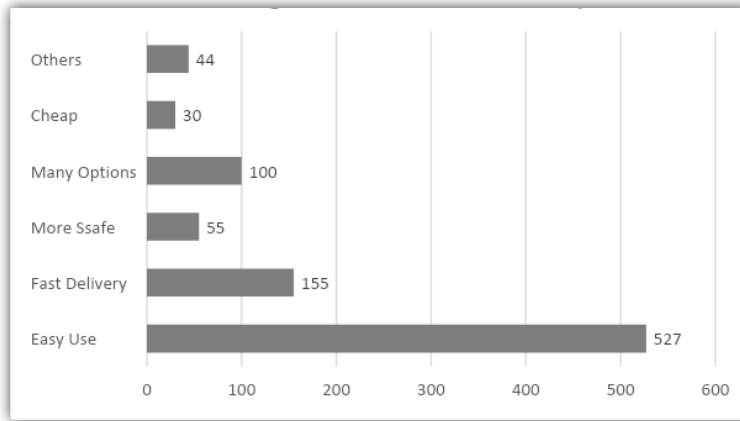
**Figure 6.7.** The Payment Methods used in Online Food Delivery Apps.

Figure 6.8 illustrates the finding on the effectiveness on using the application for food delivery amongst Malaysian. The statement on the effectiveness of the *Online Food Delivery Application* that was provided to facilitate customer affairs when dealing with food deliverers was well received by 90.45% of the samples, while only 7.68% were unsure of the statement and 1.87% denied the effectiveness of the application provided.



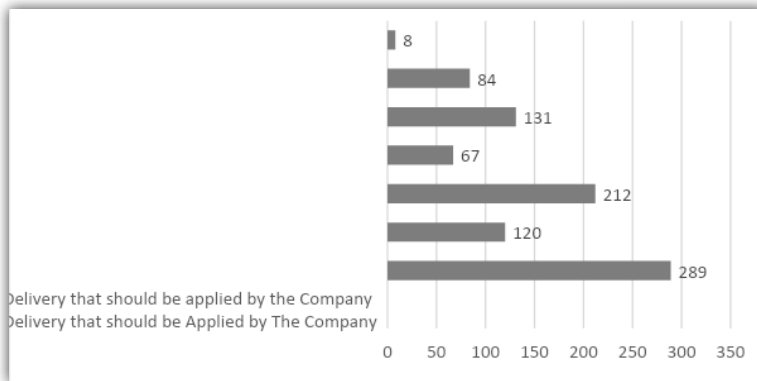
**Figure 6.8.** Application Effectiveness in Communicating with Food Delivery.

Figure 6.9 presents the finding on the advantages of online food delivery. 57.87% (527 respondents) agreed that it was easy to purchase food online because they only require the Internet connection to place their order. Despite this, 17.01% believed the benefits of using this service are due to fast delivery, while 10.98% preferred online food delivery for its variety of options.



**Figure 6.9.** The Advantages of Online Food Delivery.

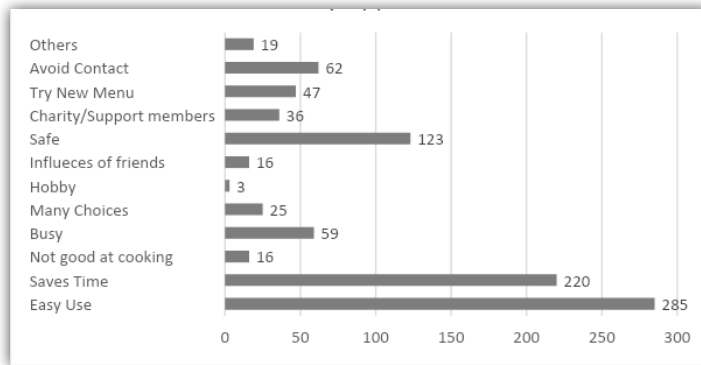
Figure 6.10 shows the main features of *Online Food Delivery* that respondents thought should be applied by the company. With 31.72% said that, their best services for consumers were really needed in this kind of service. From that, 23.28 % also agreed that big companies should offer a great menu in their services so that consumers would be encouraged to use it. Aside from that, the samples chose the features of low cost and friendliness as the most important features that the company should implement.



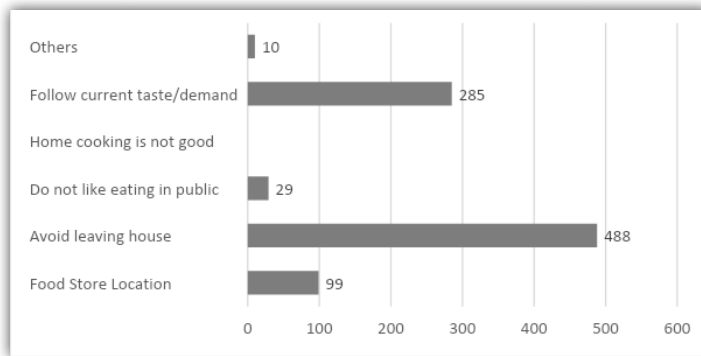
**Figure 6.10.** The Main Features of *Online Food Delivery* that should be applied by the company.

### Factors Food Purchased Online

Figure 6.11 presents the findings on the main factors of purchasing food via *online food delivery apps* amongst Malaysians. 285 respondents agreed that it was easy to use the app for ordering food. While 220 respondents believed that ordering online saved time rather than having to go out and finding the restaurant that they wanted to eat at, which was time consuming.

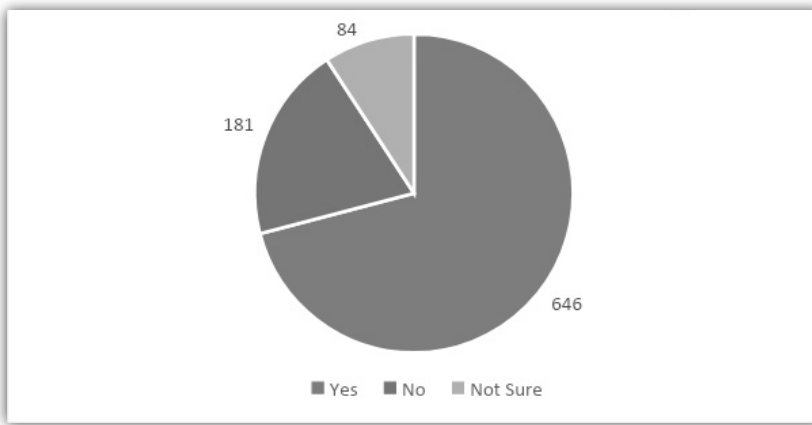


**Figure 6.11.** The Main Factors of Buying Through Online Food Delivery Application.



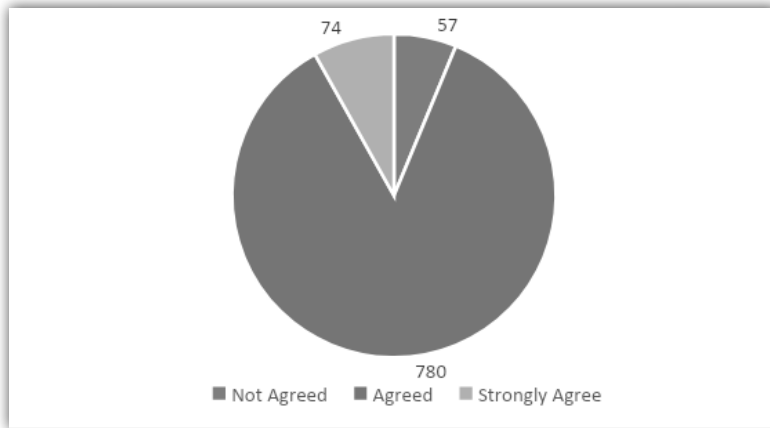
**Figure 6.12.** Other Factors that encourage the purchase through Online Food Delivery.

Referring to Figure 6.12, 488 samples believed that the need to avoid leaving the house was another factor that encouraged them to purchase through an *Online Food Delivery*, particularly during pandemic. Apart from that, Malaysians usually purchased their foods due to trend or demand. Hence, it would be easier for them to choose the menu through an *Online Food Delivery Application*.



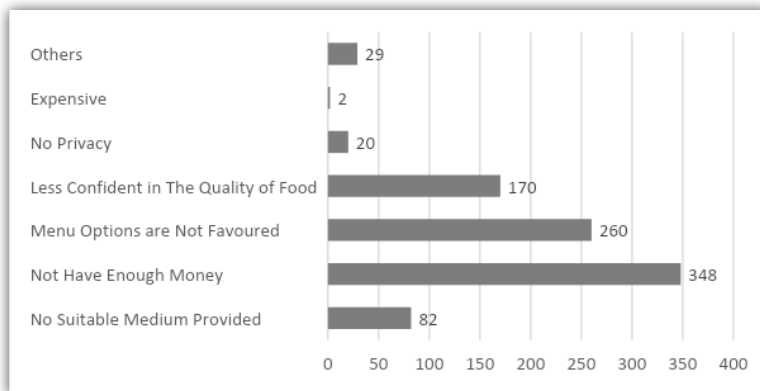
**Figure 6.13.** Is This an Epidemic Covid-19 was One of the Reasons of using the Online Food Delivery.

The pie chart shown in Figure 6.13 presents the findings on reasons of using online food delivery during epidemic. 646 samples (70.91%) agreed with the statement that Epidemic Covid-19 was one of the reasons for using *Online Food Delivery*. While 181 respondents with a percentage close to 20%, denied this statement because it was their usual method of purchasing food and the situation that happened today did not have a big impact on them.



**Figure 6.14.** Purchased Food through Online Food Delivery Easier and Preferable.

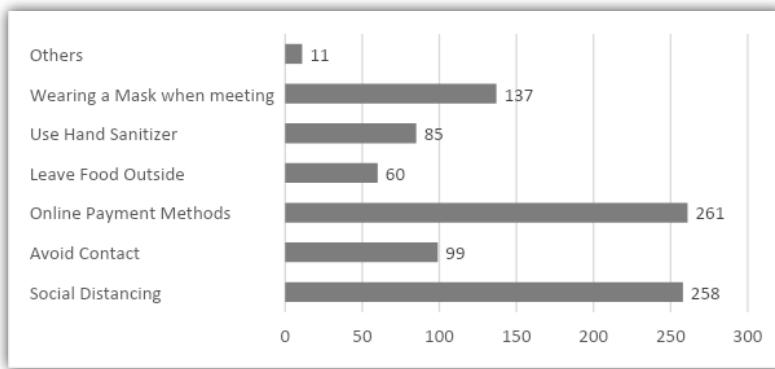
Figure 6.14 shows that more than half of the samples (74 respondents) strongly agreed on the statement that *Online Food Delivery* was preferably by Malaysians since it was easier and mostly preferred, while only 57 respondents denied this statement.



**Figure 6.15.** Others Factors that Can Prevent You to Continue Purchased with Online Food Delivery.

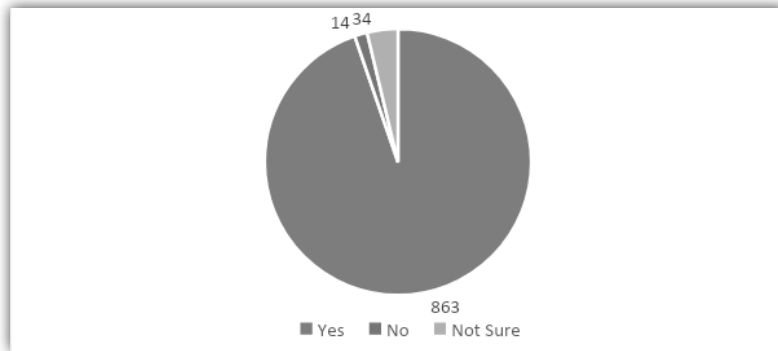
Figure 6.15 presents the findings on other factors that prevented Malaysians from continuing their purchase with online food delivery. 348 respondents responded that money issue was their contributing factor with online purchasing. Followed by 260 respondents' stating that unfavourable menu options was the reason they discontinue with the purchase. 170 respondents had less confidence with the quality of food.

### The Relationship Between Covid-19 and Food Purchased Online



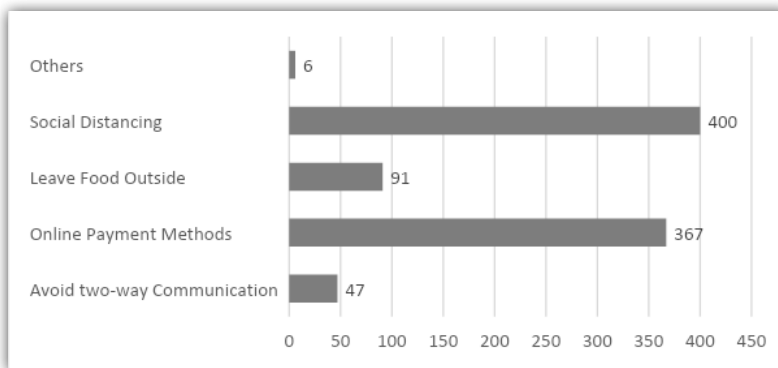
**Figure 6.16.** The Main Step to Avoid Any Risk since the Emergence of Covid-19 Outbreak during the Use of Online Food Delivery Method.

Figure 6.16 shows that 261 respondents (28.65%) applied *Online Payment methods* when using *Online Food Delivery* as their main step of payment to prevent risk from happening, while 258 respondents (28.32%) opted for social distancing as their main step. Followed by wearing masks and avoid contact with 137 and 99 respondents, respectively. In this chart, the majority of the samples stated that they followed the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) that are set by the Government when they were physically dealing with the sellers. Only 1.54% have not followed the guidelines properly and 3.73% are not sure about it.



**Figure 6.17.** Do You Follow Standard Operating Procedures Set by the Government when Dealing with Sellers Physically.

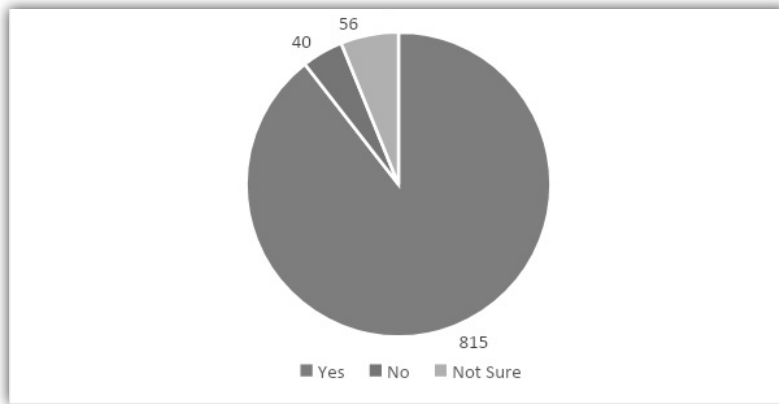
Figure 6.18 shows 400 respondents opted for Social Distancing as their specific guidelines when in contact with the food deliverers since the Emergence of the Covid-19 Outbreak, while 367 of them preferred to use *Online Payment Methods* as their specific guidelines when in-contact with food drivers.



**Figure 6.18.** Specific Guidelines when In Contact with Food Deliverers since the Emergence of the Covid-19 Outbreak.

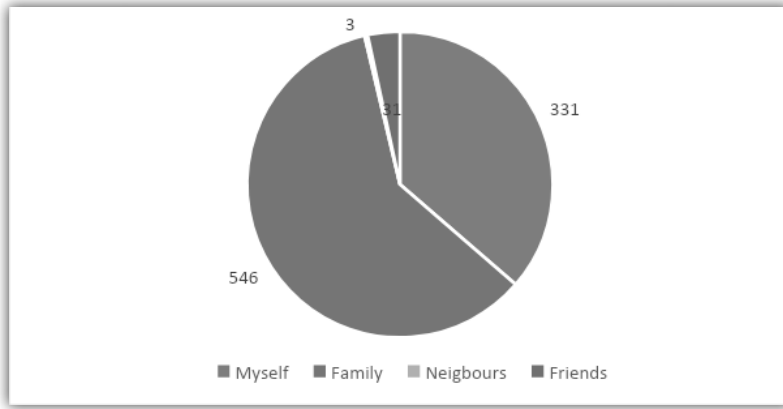


In this chart (6.19), the majority agreed that *Online Payment Method* could also avoid any risk from happening between customers and sellers when their foods are delivered to them. In contrast, 14 of them denied this statement, whereas 34 of them were unsure about it.



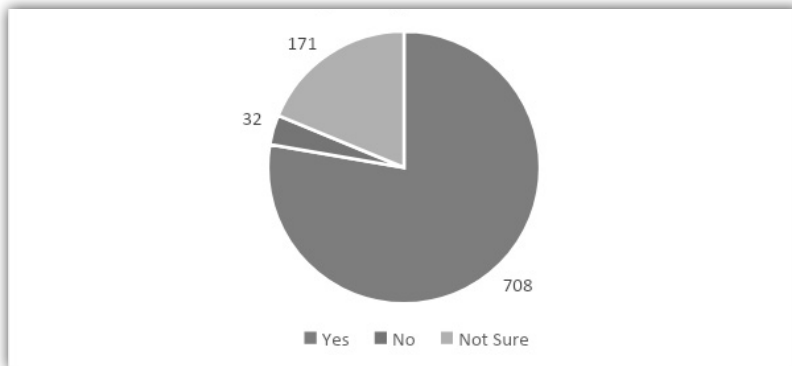
**Figure 6.19.** Do You Agree if Online Payment Method can also Avoid Any Risk Occur.

6.20 shows 546 samples with a percentage of 59.93% purchased their food using this service for their family and 331 of them usually bought their food through this service for themselves. While 31 respondents purchased their food for their friends and 3 of them usually bought it for their neighbours.



**Figure 6.20.** Targeted Group when Buying Using Online Food Delivery.

Referring to Figure 6.21, the majority of the samples agreed to maintain their use of Online Food Delivery method even if the epidemic had come to pass. While 171 were unsure, and 32 of them would discontinue to use this method when Covid-19 has come to its end.



**Figure 6.21.** Will you continue to use the Online Food Delivery method if this Covid-19 Epidemic can be completely overcome.

## DISCUSSIONS

This section discusses the pattern of consumerism when using the Online Food Delivery services as their method of purchasing food. Most of them prefer to use Food Panda, since it is a commonly-opt service used by the citizens in Malaysia. In this case, 149 of the samples spent an average of RM16-RM20 for online food purchase, whereas the majority of them spent an average of RM36-RM50 per month, accounting for 22.83% of the total. In addition, 61.36% these samples often bought fast food when using *Online Food Delivery* where they usually used the application itself as a medium of communication with Online Food Delivery such as *Food Panda Application*, *Grab Food Application* and many more.

The majority of the samples agreed that the application provided by *Online Food Delivery* is customer friendly and easy to use. In addition, Malaysians frequently used both forms of payment methods which are *Cash-on-Delivery* (COD) as well as *Online Banking Payment*. In terms of effectiveness of communication with this service, as it was provided to facilitate customer affairs when dealing with food deliverers, it has been well received by 90.45% of the samples.

With that, most of the samples (527 respondents) suggested *Online Food Delivery Services* were easy to use that company should look into the best services for customers in order to attract potential customers along with existing ones to their services. In terms of the factors of purchasing food, 285 respondents stated that the main factor for purchasing food online was the ease of use. While 488 respondents believed that they needed to purchase their food online to avoid leaving their houses, especially during the Covid-19 Outbreak which can harm people. 70.91% agreed that Epidemic Covid-19 was one of the reasons for using *Online Food Delivery* and they also thought that these services were easier and preferable for them.

In contrast, 348 of the samples stated that one of the factors that could be a barrier for them to continue their purchase with *Online Food Delivery* was that they did not have enough money to do so. This was

followed by 260 of the samples who stated that the menu options are not to their taste while 170 samples believed they have less confidence in the quality of food in this service. Therefore, the number of people purchasing food via online services has steadily risen by the end of 2019 since the pandemic. So, these figures depict the relationship between Covid-19 and Food Purchased Online, as both are linked in several ways. In order to prevent any risk from happening, 261 samples (28.65%) used *Online Payment Methods* while using *Online Food Delivery* as a main step, while 258 samples (28.32 percent) believed social distancing is their main step to curve the outbreak.

The majority of them also stated that, they have followed the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) that were set by the Government when dealing with the sellers physically with 400 of practices Social Distancing as their specific guidelines when in contact with the food deliverers. However, more than half of the samples also agreed on the statement that the *Online Payment Method* would prevent the risk of transferring the virus with since there was less contact involved. Thus, the majority of the samples agreed to continue using the *Online Food Delivery* method even if the Covid-19 is completely eradicated because these services can satisfy their needs the most.

## SUGGESTIONS

Based on the research conducted, online services have played an important role in the country's economic recovery. Even though it is a struggle to recover the economy and revenues as before, the struggle is temporary and we hope it will not last long. Therefore, it is recommended for future researchers to conduct a more in-depth study or analysis on Malaysia's trading activities in factor in Covid-19 pandemic. Future researchers should look at all types of enterprises, including small or large businesses, in order to aid the country and the people who depend on income from this industry.

## CONCLUSION

Covid-19 has emerged as a threat to the community, as the disease has exacerbated the country's situation. Both the economy and the health of the country are suffering. However, since the outbreak, a positive outcome did fall through, that is the impact it has towards online food services. Since the service provide consumers with online payment option, many has opted for online food delivery services. In addition the food purchased will be delivered directly to the buyer's home, and buyer is still able to comply with the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) at ease. As a result, it appears that online food services will continue to play an important role during the epidemic in Malaysia, since it's widely used by Malaysians, till today.

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# 'PLEASE LET ME FREE': A CASE STUDY OF STUDENTS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP DURING PANDEMIC COVID-19

*Mohd Khirulnizam Musa, Kais A. Kadhim and Muhamad Khairul Zakaria*

*The World Health Organization (WHO)* has declared coronavirus, also referred to as Covid-19, to be an epidemic on 11 February 2020. It is a respiratory disease that affects the health of the entire organism. The first case of Covid-19 was identified for the first time in China on December 2019. WHO named the novel coronavirus a '*Pandemic Epidemic*' on March 2020, which means that 'the current virus is circulating quickly through countries across the globe'. The novel coronavirus and containment strategies such as social distancing have posed a threat to the interpersonal and group relationships. Since the dawn of humanity, these social links, experiences and partnerships have been central to our lives. So, if there is no such link, it may certainly lead to stressful state of isolation, fear, depression, behavioural illness, health risks and many other problems will impact the lives of people and society as a whole. In Malaysia, social distancing has been imposed since March 2020 as a remedy to curb its widespread. Somehow, this action brings an impact to the human relationship. This section brings about the effect of social distancing towards students' relationship in a particular educational institution; relationship among peers, family, instructors or teachers as well as own self.



## LITERATURE REVIEW

Social relationships are applied to ties between family members, friends, neighbours, co-workers and other partners. Good factors such as helping people in terms of emotion and negative aspects such as tension and stress affect the nature of social ties. Factors linked to adverse health effects, including inflammatory biomarkers, compromised immune function and even death, have been described as having low-quality social ties participation and a low amount of mutual ties (Kiecolt-Glaser *et al.*, 2002). Social relationships have been thoroughly studied. Therefore, researchers are convinced that social ties may significantly affect the well-being of a person (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). According to the data collected in a recent epidemiology and virology study, that was published by the *Centre for Disease Control and Prevention*, coronavirus (Covid-19) is primarily transmitted by direct respiratory exposure to symptomatic or even asymptomatic patient droppings triggering a wide variety of health and radiological effects, or by interaction with infected items and surfaces (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020b; Shabrawishi *et al.*, 2020). WHO has reported that, patients can get more sick at the time of the onset of symptoms than at subsequent stages of illness (Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020a).

Malaysia, along with other countries have adopted a curfew on 17 March 2020, in order to limit or even eradicate interaction with people in public spaces. The curfew was planned to combat the spread of coronavirus. Except in an emergency, civilians or other unwanted individuals had to stay out of the streets and not to leave. Moreover, public meeting sites were also closed. While social distancing practice still remained as the only option to curb the spread of virus, places that promoted social gatherings such as schools, social events, sports clubs and gathering sites are shut down until further notice. Even though this practice defended individuals from COVID-19, it also invited tension and loneliness within the population, and may be a key and unforeseen effect of such orders (Piquero *et al.*, 2020).

WHO recently announced that, social disconnection is a serious challenge for fitness. The world is battling against the Covid-19 pandemic. Surprisingly, many research focused on social distancing (Courtet *et al.*, 2020). People now face the threat of social alienation in multiple ways and therefore the purpose of this study is to explore the impact of social distancing towards students' social relationship in educational institution and how it affect their relationship in certain ways.

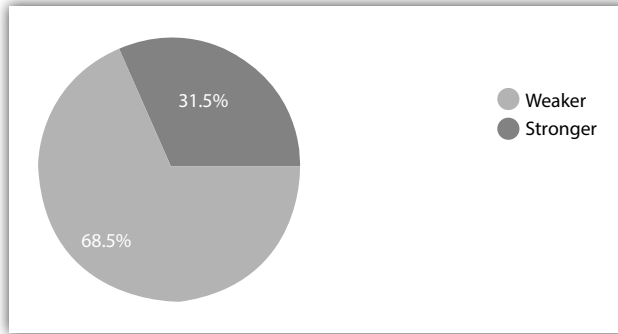
## METHODOLOGY

This study involves an online survey where a set of questionnaire regarding the relationship of students with certain individuals was distributed to respondents. The respondents were students from educational institution, situated in East Coast. The survey took place from 1<sup>st</sup> Sept 2020 to 10<sup>th</sup> Sept 2020. The main purpose of the survey was to collect feedbacks from the concerned students about their relationship during pandemic Covid-19 period. The data gathered were analyzed descriptively based on its frequency.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

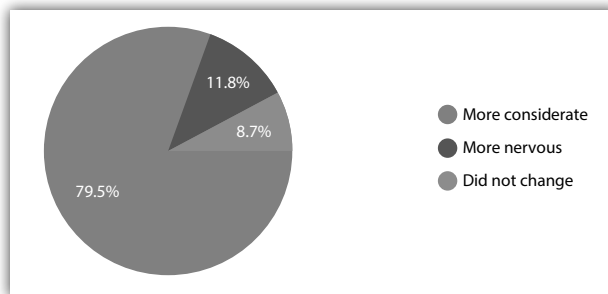
### Relationship with Peers

During the Covid-19 pandemic, personal relationship between individual with other people were affected. This was what happened to the students of an educational institution from East Coast Malaysia. The figures below summarized the relationship of students with their peers. Due to the quarantine period, their relationship with their peers were weaker in terms of social relationship as they had to refrain themselves from interacting socially to prevent the possible spread of infection. As shown in Figure 7.1, 68.5% students (n=87) agreed that, their relationships with their peers were becoming weaker due to this precaution practice. Even if they stayed in the same buildings, they suffered from alienation from their peers (Al-Tammemi, 2020; Brooks *et al.*, 2020; Naser *et al.*, 2020). That was what they went through during the quarantine period.



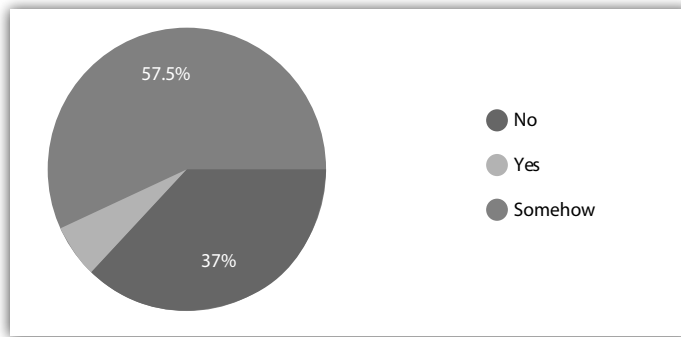
**Figure 7.1.** Relationship among peers during the pandemic.

Figure 7.2 illustrate the findings on peer reactions while socializing. 79.5% students (n=101) said that their friends had become more considerate in doing so. Majority of the students were more considerate because they are being more cautious around their peers, since the virus could be infected anywhere and anytime. Social distancing proved that the relationship of students among their peers had changed. Their peers had to be more attentive to prevent from being potential spreader of the virus. In a way, it was a great effort but somehow it distorted the real social relationship (Singh, 2020). It is always natural to interact with each other as a sign of communication and contributing to social life (Brooks *et al.*, 2020). However, with the emergence of the virus, people had to be extra careful and always practised social distancing.



**Figure 7.2.** Peers reaction while socializing.

Findings on students connection with their peers after the spread of Corona virus is illustrated in Figure 7.3. 57.5 % students (n=73) said they were somehow connected to their peers. In this sense, they were more connected through social platform such as WhatsApp, Instagram and other social media platforms. The enforcement of the curfew had turned social interaction into digital interaction. Physical interaction did not occur at all as to avoid the spread of the virus (Courtet *et al.*, 2020). To sum up, the relationship of students with their peers can be said as getting weaker from the perspective of social interaction. Nonetheless, the connection was still there as they could always communicate with each other virtually.

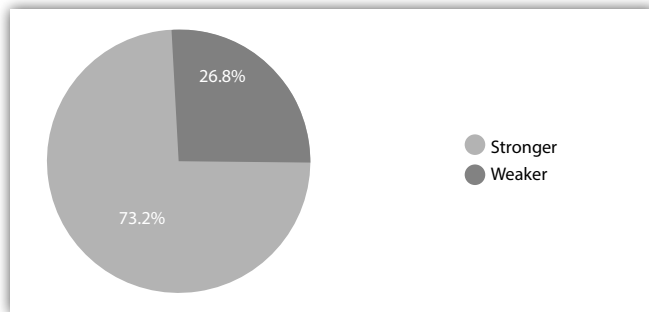


**Figure 7.3.** Students' connection among peers.

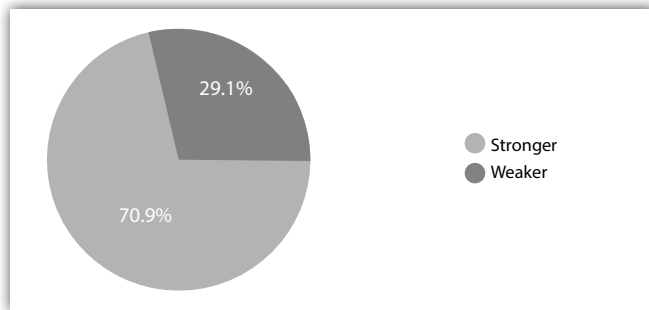
### Relationship with Family Members

Since the cultural status of Malaysia relies on a deep loyalty to a collective community such as the family, social isolation could have a negative effect on individuals. Malaysians love festival. The country have quite a few ethnicities, hence, quite a few public holidays. However, in the absence of vaccines, social distancing practice are clashed with the human desire to communicate with each other (Bavel *et al.*, 2020; Naser *et al.*, 2020). The figures below display the relationship of students with their family members. Figure 7.4 and 7.5 show the relationships of students with their parents and siblings. 73.2% students (n=93) and 70.9% (n=90)

agreed that their relationship with their parents and siblings have become stronger respectively. Lockdown have definitely brought family members together. With the cancellation of usual events, that is, going out to the malls, getting a snack, having a picnic or celebrating birthdays, the students and their family have nowhere else to go except their home. This was to accept however, that the ties between the members of the family was getting better (Naser *et al.*, 2020).



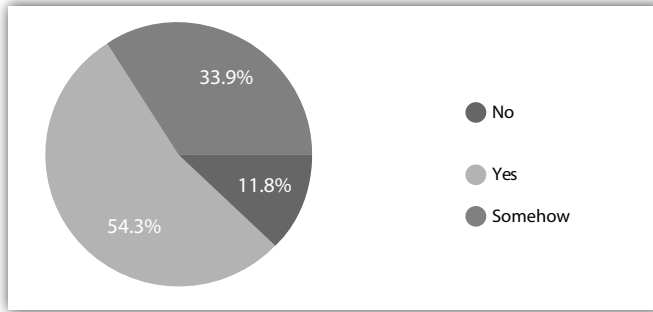
**Figure 7.4.** Students' relationship with parents.



**Figure 7.5.** Students' relationships with siblings.

As much as students were well connected with their peers, they were also in a good connection with their family members. It is portrayed in Figure 7.6 whereby 54.3% students (n=69) stated that, they became more connected with their family members during the period of quarantine. However, for the relationship with family members they were connected physically in a good way. Since they were already in lockdown period, the chance to get infected was lower unless some of them were having

the symptoms. Hence, this is where the connection happened as most of the family members spent their time almost together. Therefore, it can be concluded that, the relationship of students with their family members was positively affected despite the enforcement of social distancing policy.



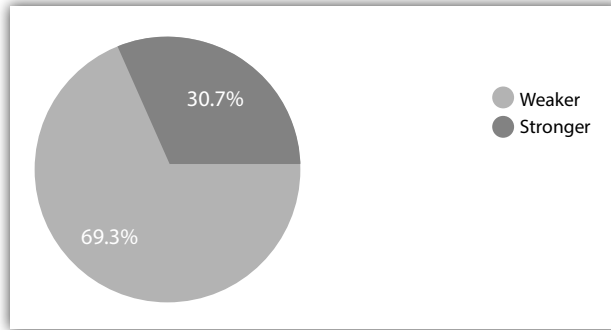
**Figure 7.6.** Students' connection with family members.

### **Relationship with Instructors/Teachers**

On another note, social distancing did also bring about some negative impacts towards the relationship of students with their instructors or teachers. Having to study in a skill-based institution, it is highly-known that the students will have to accomplish their courses with hands-on activities. Those activities have to be done through face-to-face interaction. The curfew period had been an agonizing period for those who were practising skills, be it from the instructors or even the students. It is notably understandable that the relationship of students with their instructors or teachers have become weaker.

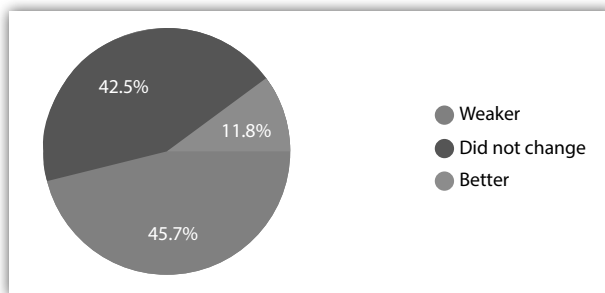
It can be defined clearly in Figure 7.7 where 69.3 students (n=88) chose to agree with the statement. As mentioned earlier in this part, students have to reach certain level of fulfilment in hands-on classes. Social distancing had badly impacted the process whereby the students were prohibited to attend the classes. Most of the educational institutional were facing the same problem. However, it can be done online as opposed

to the students who have to do the lesson practically. There was nothing much can be done since all the equipment's are in the institute and they have to wait for confirmation from the authorities.



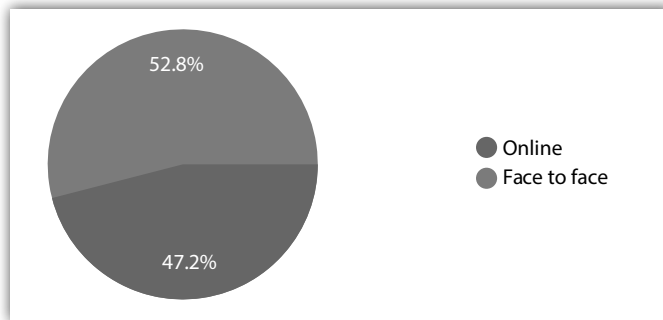
**Figure 7.7.** Students' relationships with instructors/teachers.

Again, a slight negative impact can be seen in terms of social relationship as displayed in Figure 7.8. The percentage of weaker and did not change (relationship) was not much different. However, this social distancing had highlighted that the relationship between students and the instructors grew weaker during this pandemic period. In this new normal, students have to embrace the change in all possible areas. For that reason, online teaching and learning seems to be one of the alternatives to get students to stay safe and healthy amidst the pandemic (Agarwal & Kaushik, 2020). Then, let's look into students' preference of teaching and learning method. This will make us ponder on how they actually want to have physical classes more than anything.



**Figure 7.8.** Social relationship with instructors/teachers.

Obviously, students chose face-to-face teaching and learning searching. More than half of the students (52.8%, n=67). The rest of the students chose to go with online method as it is an effective to curb the infection on the virus. However, deep down they really wanted to have physical classes because the nature of the courses they took. Skill-based courses need to undergo few phases of hands-on activities, then only they would be able to master the skills needed according to their area of interest. This phenomenon somehow pinched the issue of motivation for students learning (Muslimin & Harintama, 2020). Social distancing is still the major factor for not being able to serve the purpose of face-to-face classes. All in all, it can be concluded that the relationship of students with their instructors/teachers was affected negatively. Social distancing and the curfew policy bring down their relationships to a draw back side even for education purpose.



**Figure 7.9.** Students' preference of teaching and learning method.

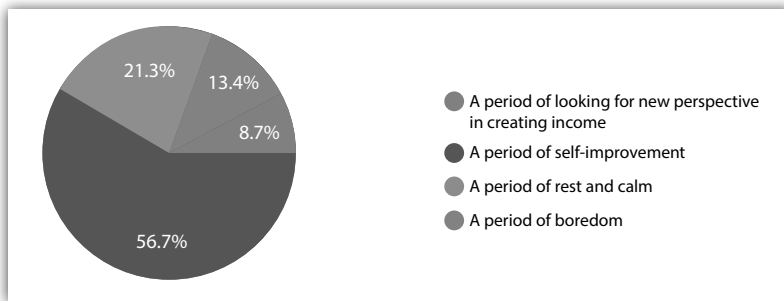
### **Relationship with Own Self**

Last but not least is the relationship of the students with their own self. For this part, there are a few elements were looked into namely; opinion on quarantine period, developed hobby and also feeling during quarantine period. From Figure 7.10 it can be seen that 56.7% (n=72) said that they thought the social distancing period is a period of self-improvement. The rest of the students took this period a period of rest and calm, a period of boredom and also a period of looking for new perspective in



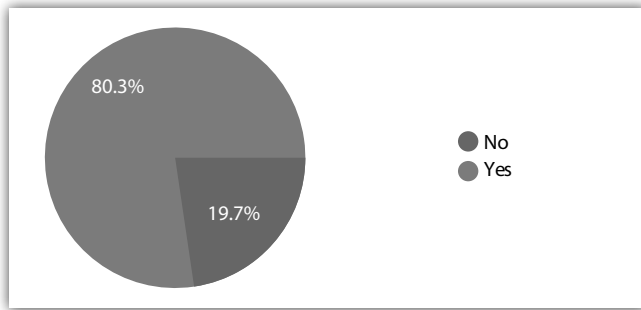
creating income. The uncertainty of this pervasive scenario adds to the situation where people do not know how long this pandemic will last and whether physical distancing will become new normal (Claridge, 2020).

In this case, students of this educational institution saw this quarantine period as a point for self-improvement in which they used the time available to make themselves better and improve the quality of their life. Previous study found that, boredom during the period of social distancing need to be addressed. A total of 13.4% (n=17) students said that, they were bored as the social and physical contact had reduced and caused a tangible effect of boredom (Brooks *et al.*, 2020). Since classes could be done online, some of the students took an initiative to create income. Online platform was used positively by the students to obtain some pocket money.

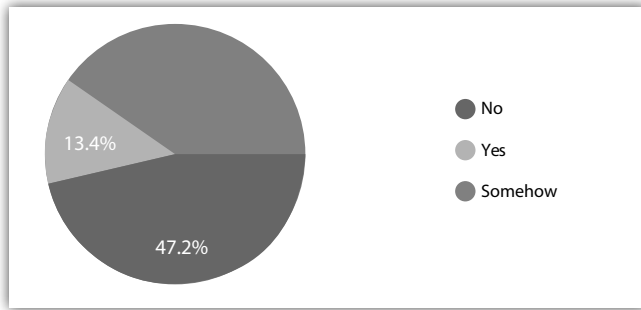


**Figure 7.10.** Opinions on quarantine period.

Findings on students' connection between their hobbies and feelings is illustrated in Figure 7.11 and 7.12. The majority of students (80.3%) developed new hobbies during lock down while 13.4% student experienced with anxiety and depression. The quarantine period was spent on their new hobby hence, reduced negative emotion or feeling. In essence, the relationship students have with themselves results in a positive outcome.



**Figure 7.11.** Developed hobby during quarantine period.



**Figure 7.12.** Feeling during quarantine period.

## CONCLUSION

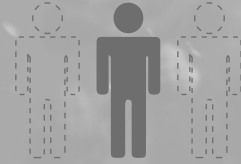
The Covid-19 pandemic is negatively affecting social relationship among students especially with their peers, instructors or teachers. Social distancing is the main reason for that scenario to have happened and could potentially lead to unstable emotion. However, on another note, with social distancing, students portray better relationships with their family members and themselves.

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# WE ARE FREE FROM COVID-19 EPIDEMIC: THE SECRETS OF THE PEOPLE OF KUALA BERANG, MALAYSIA IN FACING THE PANDEMIC

*Nurain Ali, Nur Athirah Zaki, Abdul Mutalib Embong Eusoff and Aisyah Dollah@Abdullah*

On 11<sup>th</sup> of March 2020, the *World Health Organization (WHO)* declares *Coronavirus Disease 2019* as a global pandemic. The Covid-19 pandemic has had a devastating global impact on the health of the population. The spread of the Covid-19 pandemic began in Wuhan, Hubei Province in China on December 2019. The impacts of the virus have affected many sectors, globally. For instance, the economy, education, health, social habits and many more. This pandemic has entirely change our global system. The virus reached Malaysia in late January 2020, when travellers from China arrived in Johor via Singapore on 25<sup>th</sup> of January 2020. The number of cases were low at first. Reported cases are form imported cases until it began to spread in March 2020. The largest cluster for the local clusters was linked to a *Tablighi Jamat* religious gathering held in Sri Petaling, Kuala Lumpur.

This cluster affected the neighboring countries as well. Since then, the presence of the coronavirus disease was reported in every state and federal territory in Malaysia. The government of Malaysia made a quick move by announcing Movement Control Order (MCO) in Malaysia on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2020. MCO is one of the alternatives used to minimize social contacts of the citizens and to control the spread of Covid-19 in Malaysia. During the MCO, the citizens are not allowed to have any social gathering and the country borders are also closed. The citizens work from their home and the students studied through online platform. No one is allowed to leave their houses except the head of the house. And that is only to buy the necessities at the nearest city. Moreover, polices and army are popping up everywhere to control the movement of the citizens and to make sure the citizens are obeying to the rules and Standard of Operating Procedure (SOP). MCO was implemented from 18 March until the end of April. Then, the order of Conditional Movement Control Order (CMCO) is implemented, followed by the Recovery Movement Control Order (RMCO) until 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020. Until now, Malaysia is still fighting to diminish Covid-19 in Malaysia.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The Coronavirus has spread globally and has reached almost every country. Moreover, thousands of deaths are reported daily. However, there are countries that have been free from the Covid-19 for a while such as New Zealand, Taiwan, Australia and Iceland. (Max Roser, 2020). As of January 20, 2021, the total numbers of global cases are 98,862,056. The virus disease has giving great impact to the countries in the sectors of global especially. There are more than 200 countries that are still struggling to fight this contagious disease and the United States of America contributes the largest numbers to the numbers of Covid-19 cases in the world. New Zealand is one of the countries that free from Covid-19, it is because New Zealand was the country that made a quick action to close the border, quick lockdown, trace and test the infected contacts, ask their people to stay in their circle and their government make a clear announcement on the order. (Mark Henrickson, 2020).

The number of confirmed cases in New Zealand as on 23<sup>rd</sup> of December 2020 are 1772 cases and there are no cases in the community. The cases of Covid-19 in New Zealand are under control because their fast action on controlling the spread of the virus. Starting on the 19<sup>th</sup> March, New Zealand closed its border to all non-permanent residents and non-citizens. New Zealand's Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern announced that, those arriving in New Zealand starting on March 15 must be self-isolated for 14 days excluding people from the Pacific Islands. New Zealand's government implemented elimination strategy to control the virus.

Elimination strategy is one of the strategies that implemented by the countries such as Mainland China and Taiwan including New Zealand to control the Covid-19 pandemic. The elimination strategy requires highly effective border controls, contact tracing, quarantine measures, high levels of testing and surveillance and an initial period of intense physical distancing such as lockdown (Michael G Baker, 2020). Then, there's Australia. Australia was also known as the earliest country that managed to control the spread of the Covid-19. First confirmed case in Australia was detected on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2020 and the number of cases increased then levelled out around 20<sup>th</sup> March 2020 with about 350 cases per day. The numbers of cases reduced beginning of April 2020. The decreasing of the numbers of Covid-19 cases is influenced by the quick action from Australia's government to close the border to all non-residents on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2020 and the state governments closed non-essentials services plus the social distancing rules also were imposed on 21 March 2020 (Liudmila, 2020).

These actions reduced the number of Covid-19 cases in Australia. According to Baker (2020), New Zealand and Australia were able to curb the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic because of their quick action. Country borders are closed and surveillance is tightened. In the elimination strategy, border management including the quarantine are the action taken to create and sustained elimination of the coronavirus in the communities (Michael G Baker, 2020). On the other hand, raising awareness about social distancing and wearing masks will help break the chain of Covid-19. As advised by the *World Health Organization*, physical



distancing is an action to distance from each other at least 1m and avoid from spending time in crowded places to limit the spread of Covid-19. The action needs to be taken by the government and the communities itself to prevent the spread of Covid-19 cases in their country.

However, in the Kuala Berang, which is one of the districts in Hulu Terengganu, no confirmed cases were reported until 23 November 2020. Although, there are many contributing factors that lead this cases. However, this fast-moving global pandemic has caught many nations unprepared and has exposed numerous flaws in the global health, public health, and economic and social welfare infrastructures, even though this scenario was predicted by health experts decades ago (Garrett, 1994, 2001). Even though lockdowns are proven to curb the spread of Covid-19 cases, it has not stopped the virus from affecting the economy and unemployment rate in US (Jason J *et al.*, 2020). Coronavirus pandemic impacts are really big in societies. The virus affects many aspects of our life such as economy, education, food habits, mental stability and religious implications.

## METHODOLOGY

The study is done in a qualitative manner. Non-standardized interviews that does not involve a specific template were used in the present study. Moreover, from past research, there are a variety of well-know non-standardized interviews. These include semi-structured interview, unstructured (in-depth) interview, as well as group interview (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009: p.320). Before interviews are conducted, a checklist for interviews, a list of common themes/questions to be discussed during the interview, must be prearranged in semi-structured interviews. Nevertheless, certain questions can be excluded or included based on the situation during the interview. Hence, there is a flexibility for the researchers to ask related questions and/or discuss relevant topics that are not incorporated in the checklist earlier.

The questionnaire was deemed as fit to illustrate and investigate the general trends, for example, the characteristics and behavioural change of people in Kuala Berang, which is one of the critical quantitative details required for this research. A face-to-face interview was conducted on October 2020 with only nine respondents from the place. A thematic content analysis approach was used to analyse the respondents' association with pandemic spreading and lifestyle behaviours, as well as perceived lifestyle changes upon the pandemic. Lifestyle behaviours include the respondents' understanding on Covid-19 and their coping strategies with economy, children's education, medical expenses, religious values, entertainment and physiological needs. The study was conducted from 23rd October 2020 until 23rd November 2020 in Kampung Lerek, Kuala Berang, Terengganu. This study took us almost two (2) months to collect the data and study the findings. The total of the respondents for this study is nine villagers from different ages and work sectors. The respondents stayed in one of the villages in Kuala Berang and that village is still free from Covid-19 during the time of this study.

## **DETAILS OF THE RESPONDENTS**

### **Respondent 1 (R1)**

A female, 66 years old. She sells vegetables from the villagers at the weekly market in town. Some of the villagers depends on her to sell their vegetables at the market. During the MCO, she was not able to sell the vegetables since the market are closed.

### **Respondent 2 (R2)**

A male, 59 years old. He is a palm oil fruit picker. He owns palm oil plantation and sometimes he also picks palm oil fruit for other villagers. He has a child that is still in secondary school.

### **Respondent 3 (R3)**

A male, 51 years old. He is a construction worker with estimated salary of RM1200 per month. He has three (3) children that are still studying in university and high school. During the social distancing or MCO period, he was not allowed to have any project to build house.

### **Respondent 4 (R4)**

A female, 46 years old. She has a contract job as a cooperative assistant at one of the high schools. She is taking care her nephew, who is a student at a primary school. She received her salary as usual even though she could not attend work. She made extra money by selling ice cream and bread at the cooperative shop. The extra money is able to cover her daily expenses.

### **Respondent 5 (R5)**

A female, 45 years old with three (3) children that goes to secondary school and primary school. She is a gardener and own a stall. During the pandemic, her income is really affected due the social distancing. She is also facing hardships with online learning because she is not an expert with the technology. She does not know how to use *WhatsApp*.

### **Respondent 6 (R6)**

A female, 46 years old. She is a housewife. She has seven (7) children. Five (5) of her children are still in primary and secondary school. She assists her children with online study.

### **Respondent 7 (R7)**

A female, 28 years old, owns a small grocery store, she is married and lives with her parents and siblings in one house. She opened her grocery store during MCO and the sales were just like normal. She found that it was really hard to make sure the buyers were obeying the SOP, since the buyers were the villagers.

### **Respondent 8 (R8)**

A male, bachelor, 25 years old that lives with his parents and have a contract job. During the social distancing and MCO, he did not hire to do any job from his boss. He needed to rely on his parents for support during the social distancing. There were some routines that he needed to avoid during the social distancing. His house does not have a good internet connection, so he cannot do online business either.

### **Respondent 9 (R9)**

A male, married, 22 years old. He owns a coconut juice stall but during MCO , he had to close his stall and search for another job to support his living. He has a part time job at Geology that need to enter the forest. He will receive his payment once he completes his job. The closure of the stall also affected the staff who were working with him. His income also became unstable.

### **Summary from Each Respondent**

#### *Respondent 1*

R1 views coronavirus disease as a contagious disease that can easily be transferred to another being. She was grateful to Allah, because none of her family members, including herself was infected with the virus. Apart from that, she was also grateful because her village was located in a remote area. R1 admitted that, during the Movement Control Order she rarely went to the stall or the market. During the pandemic, R1 admitted that, even her income from the vegetables' sales at the market are cut because the market was closed. However, she survived because the living costs in her village were affordable with her current income. And she was able to provide food for herself along with her family. Before the pandemic, she usually performed her daily prayers at the mosque. She is grateful still, since she is a committee member of the mosque, she may still pray at the mosque. R1 hoped that this pandemic will end soon, so she could return to her normal life.

### *Respondent 2*

R2 said that Covid-19 is a dangerous disease. It cannot be seen and may lead to death. R2 chose to go the nearest mini market next to his village to buy the necessities rather than the city to minimize his movement and chance of getting infected by the coronavirus disease. R2 also admitted that during the Movement Control Order, his income was really affected because he could not leave his home to work. The same goes with his wife, she could not open her *Nasi Lemak's* stall which was the main income for his household. He borrowed money from his children to survive. Although his income was affected, his family were well-fed with the donation provided by the government and non-government body. During the spread of the Covid-19, R2 still needed to make his monthly check up at the Tengawang health clinic which is the nearest health clinic. He found that he still could go to the health clinic as usual.

### *Respondent 3*

R3 thinks this Coronavirus disease that can bring to death. He also said that wearing a mask and sanitizing hands with sanitizers are hard at first but after a few weeks it became a normal habit whenever they left the house. During the Movement Control Order, he would only go to the store went to the store not during the peak hours and not choose a hectic store. Due to the pandemic, he could do his job during the MCO, so he need to use his savings and salary from his palm oil farm. He admitted that his expenses during MCO was lower than normal since his children are at home. His money was only spent on food since they could not leave the house. R2 said that his children was struggling online classes at his house since there was no good internet connection. He was sad and curious as to why the government forbade them from performing the *Jumaah* prayer and Tarawih prayer at mosque since it was *Ramadan*. He spent most of his time with farming and watching television with his family. He was still grateful to Allah, even though his income was affected, he still managed to provide food for his family. He hopes that this virus will stop for good and leave this world.

#### *Respondent 4*

According to R4, Covid-19 is similar to 'Taun' which easily infect humans. Moreover, she denied that, it was difficult to follow the Standard of Operating Procedure (SOP) whenever she leaves the house. Unfortunately, due to the Movement Control Order (MCO), she was prohibited to enter school grounds because it was closed. Her monthly salary was lesser than one thousand ringgit, normally she would made some on the side by selling bread at the cooperative store. During the pandemic, she used her salary and savings to buy the necessities. She also found it was difficult to support her family. She was grateful though to receive donations from government agency and Non-Government Organization (NGO). R4 said it is really hard for her nephew having the education and learning session during the pandemic due to the time division between play and study plus she asked her older nephew to teach her nephew doing his homework. She also said that it was hard to control the children in village since they still could play with their friends and fill their times with playing. The access for her mother's medication went well because she was still allowed to restock her mother's medicine by going to the nearest city and making her purchase. She hope that this pandemic will end very soon so her nephew will able to learn properly.

#### *Respondent 5*

According to R5, coronavirus can lead to death and is very contagious. We cannot take this disease lightly because there are many old folks that is at risk in the village if they are infected by the virus. Moreover, she was easily adapting with the new norms, that was wearing the face mask and using the hand sanitizer. Unfortunately, her family's income decreased by almost 50% since the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, since she was permitted to open her stall between 8 am to 6 pm, she was sad to see that her customer was not able to stay further and order drinks. She also suffered some losses from her vegetable business. Since the market was closed, she was not able to sell her veggies. Despite her struggles, she was still able to provide food for her family because she received some donations. She felt a bit sad when the villagers were prohibited

from praying together, but she had come to terms with it. During the Movement Control Order, she spent most of her time gardening with her family. She noticed that, it was difficult to study online via her mother's phone. Apart from making calls and sending text messages, she also found that, it is hard to understand the teachers' instructions from the message.

*Respondent 6*

R6 believed that coronavirus is an unseen disease and may lead to death. Being a housewife, she rarely leaves her home. Instead, she would ask her husband to run her errands. For instance, buying groceries. According to R6, during MCO, she didn't notice any changes in her life. She was still able to do her normal routine, even though her kids are at home with her, since school was closed. Thankfully, her husband's income was not affected since her husband still works as usual. However, R4 admit it was a challenge to assist her kids with school work since they were conducted online. Seeing that she was not a technological savvy person has it challenges as well. She was less convinced with the effectiveness of online learning since the progress of the children's learning could not be measured as usual such as examination and tests. Her activities during and MCO was the same prior to MCO, which was gardening and house chores. Her The food supply for her family during the pandemic were not really affected because they still ate with the same amount as before. She hopes that Covid-19 is gone, so that her children returns to school and receive proper education.

*Respondent 7*

R7 is convinced that coronavirus is contagious, easy to spread and can even lead to death. She also thinks that it is easy to adapt with new norms because it is an order from government so as a citizen, we need to obey. She went to the store only when it was needed and picked a leisure store or mini market. She made some sales from her store during pandemic, since her store it the nearest. She admitted that it was quite hard to buy the stocks for her mini grocery store during the pandemic

due to the lack of the stocks at the bigger market in the city. She also has her religious matters as usual as before MCO. She found during the pandemic, she hardly to find an entertainment as before MCO, but she tried to adapt with the situation and used the social media as a platform to find the entertainment with her family. She also said that television is also one of the electronic devices that filled most of her time. During the lockdown, she did feel a bit pressure because the limitation on movement to the city. She hopes that Covid-19 will go and we can live normally.

### *Respondent 8*

R8 thinks that, Covid-19 is a disease that hardly to be gone due to the type of the virus that are easily infect to the humans. He said that, it was not hard to wear mask and used the hand sanitizer because it was just a simple act to be adapted even though at first it might be quite challenging. He was not working during MCO because private sectors were closed. His income was severely affected, he received none since he was not able to work. R8 also wanted to try online business but the online connection at his house was terrible. He is grateful to his parents though, because they are still able to provide food for his meal since he is staying with his parents. During the pandemic, he really missed praying *Jumaah* prayer at the mosque together with his friends. He filled his time with his family. He also found that mobile games was his main source of entertainment during lockdown. He felt a bit pressured because he cannot hang out with his friends as usual to play online games. R8 hopes that, coronavirus will end soon for him to have a job and having an income.

### *Respondent 9*

According to R9, this virus can bring death if no cure is found. He also thinks that it was easy to adapt with new norms such as wearing mask and using hand sanitizers. He was really effected with the Movement Control Order because he needed to close his coconut drinks stalls which is her income for living. R9 found a part time job to find the income for living, he worked at Geology that needs him to enter the forest and



the payment made only if he enters the forest. R9 admits that he misses praying *Jumaah* prayer together during lockdown. He entertained himself by doing some activities with his wife and family during the MCO. He noticed that, he managed to provide for his family even though his main source of income was affected. Hence, he was eternally grateful. He also hoped that COVID-19 will go in the meantime so he can open his stall again.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study portrays the respondents' behaviours towards their lifestyle including the respondents understanding of Covid-19 along with their coping strategies with economy, children's education, medical expenses, religious values, entertainment and physiological needs.

### Theme 1: Understanding Covid-19

The understanding on the information that related with the Covid-19 are measured to know their knowledge and opinion on Covid-19. Since they lived in a remote area, the respondents were not exposed to the virus, hence, their understanding of the virus was measured according to their lifestyle. According to all respondents, coronavirus is a contagious disease that can lead to death.

*"Covid-19 is the disease that can lead to death" (R1).*

"Based on my understanding, Covid-19 is a disease that's really easy to transmitted from human to other human" (R3).

*"Covid-19 is an unseen disease that is transmitted very easily and can lead to death, plus there is no cure for this disease." (R5 and R2).*

Overall, all of the respondents have a firm grasp on Covid-19. Everyone is aware that the virus is contagious and dangerous disease in this millennium. Prior to that, the respondents were very careful, took

social distancing seriously, use face mask and sanitize their hands every day. R2 and R4 for example, tried not leave their premise as much, they avoid social functions because they are fully aware the crowd might lead to the spread of the virus. They were too that travelling to epidemic area of Covid-19 contact, or eating wild animal is dissuaded. R1, R2 and R4 agreed that those who had history of travel from epidemic area in recent 14 days, body temperature monitor and self-surveillance for 14 days should be performed which is in line with (C Huang *et al.*, 2020).

## **Theme 2: Economy**

The villagers income took quite a hit due to the pandemic. Many of them has lost their jobs and incomes. The ways of coping the economy problem or their economy state would determine how they react on the spread of the Covid-19 disease. Economy can be affected by many factors which lead to the changes of life habits and eating routines. The study was conducted in a remote village that has a low cost of living. Most of the respondent's economy is affected during the pandemic, except for R6 and R7.

*“My income from selling the vegetables at the market are not there, so I just manage to sell some desserts at the stalls, but in the small amount due to the smaller number of the customers” (R1).*

“Normally, our income was made from selling Nasi Lemak and picking palm oil, so when the government ordered us to close the stall, we lost our entire income, but Alhamdulillah, my children did lend us some money for basic necessities ” (R2).

“Even though I cannot open my stall, which is where I made my income, I managed to secure other job and made a living during pandemic.” (R9).

These feedbacks alone shows that, the pandemic affects the villager's economy. Hence, they are forced to find new solutions to cover the cost of their living. As for R6 and R7, they are lucky because their incomes were not affected because they still had their jobs during pandemic.

*“My income was not affected because of my store. I made some sales due to my customers. The villagers are more comfortable to buy their groceries at the nearest store rather than the city.” (R7).*

The respondents are also responded that they still could have the meals as usual even in the economic crisis.

*“I still can have my meals like before the MCO because we still can have the access of the food and there are some donations in terms of the basic needs, so we make use of it” (R4).*

The negative effects have ranged from a severe contraction of economy section across the strata of the people in Kuala Berang. Socio-economic activities came to a halt, such as the closing of boarders, and travel industries crippled which led to trade fairs were cancelled. R3 stated that, some of the teenagers who worked in town were unemployed as tourist locations they worked were deserted. With massive job loss and excessive income inequality, poverty is likely to increase for the first time since 1998 (Mahler *et al.*, 2020). If the curfew on certain activities is prolonged, more people would lose their job and income, even in a safe place like Kuala Berang. Undoubtedly, Covid-19 first and foremost, constitutes a ferocious pandemic and a human tragedy that swept across the globe, resulting in a colossal economic loss (IMF, 2020). It has created a substantial negative impact on the global economy, for which governments, firms and individuals scramble for adjustments (Fernandes, 2020; Pinner *et al.*, 2020; Sarkis *et al.*, 2020; Sohrabi *et al.*, 2020; Van Bavel *et al.*, 2020).

### **Theme 3: Education**

The spread of Covid-19 has led to the closure of schools, universities and tuitions. During the Movement Control Order, the Malaysia government ordered for all education institutions to execute their Teaching and Learning (T&L) activities via online. However, most villagers, struggle with online learning. The factors that affect online learning are the

Internet connection, students' time, availability of the gadget and the availability of the parents to assist the children with online learning. The respondents think that online learning is quite challenging.

*“With online learning, my children have access to her studies. Even though face-to-face are prohibited, she is still able to learn. However, I feel sorry for my daughter. She study alone in her room for long hours. She had to close her doors to make sure that her nephews are not disturbing her while she was online with her teachers” (R2).*

*“I have two daughters. Both are still studying. My daughter continues her studies in university while my son is in his secondary years. Both are forced to study online like the rest. My daughter is quite disciplined compared to my son. My son still need to be monitored by his sister, otherwise, he will play games at all time. I found it is also quiet challenging from the economy aspect since they need to use money to purchase internet data because there is no Wi-Fi our home. Moreover, my kids have to head to their grandmothers for online classes because they receive better internet coverage. ” (R3).*

*“My children hardly sit down to study, they prefer to play with their friends instead. I can only assist with my daughter's homework because she is standard two. It was rather easy compared to her brother and sisters. Plus, the number of devices used to communicate with teachers are not enough for each of my children. The same device was used to play online games and watch YouTube.” (R6).*

There are, however, challenges for the respondents as they stay quite far from town. Some parents (R2, R5) without reliable internet access and/or technology struggle to participate with digital learning for their children. They need to bring the kids to town for better internet access. Since they are not competent with IT, the online learning is a bit hard.

*“My kids have been burdened with the task of adapting to online learning environment seemingly overnight. As well, I have been forced to take on the role of IT technician and teacher, to assist my kids and their online classes”. (R4).*

Sadly, to say, the lack of student-to-teacher interaction has also led students to feel less passionate about the integrity of their work. This leaves students to turn in half-complete assignments. All simply because education has become less important due to Covid-19.

#### **Theme 4: Religious Values**

Religious activities were also affected during the spread of the Covid-19. It can be seen by the closure of mosque and *musalla*. Social gatherings were prohibited, which did affect the villagers. They need to try new platform to make sure they still can practice their religious as normal. The respondents were quick to respond when we interviewed them regarding religious practice during MCO. Most admit that they miss praying together, especially on Friday. From the study, the male respondents are more affected than woman respondent on the closure of the mosque.

*“I’m lucky because I was an organization member. I’m still allowed to go to the mosque as usual, plus our village are free from the virus so we still can pray together at the mosque with SOP of course.” (R1).*

*“I felt sad because I was not able to perform my daily prayers and Friday prayers at the mosque.” (R2 and R3).*

Plus, during Ramadan season, the mosque is not opened and the government have ordered everyone to stay at home. It was not festive compared to previous Ramadhan. Congregational worship and religious programmes are not allowed to be held in mosques or *musalla* alike during the pandemic which has led to the decrease in number of religious congregational in the world. (Sayed A. Quadri, 2020). Jumaah prayer is performed once a week in mosques. However, due to pandemic, the villagers are not allowed to do so, hence, somehow it has affect their mental and feeling. They (R2, R8) missed listen to the sermon together. Even though they (R3 & R4) are not allowed to attend mosques for their usual daily prayers, they are still able to pray together with their families, which somehow makes them grew closer, to their creator and their family members.

## Theme 5: Medication

Medication is vital and must be looked at, due to the Movement Control Order, villagers movement are limited. The access to the medicine is important especially for those who need their regular monthly check up and medical treatment. From the study, there are two respondents that needs regular medication from health clinics. It was not difficult to attend to these regular check-ups since they already have the appointment and the medicine transcript.

*“I admit, it was no hassle for me to visit the health clinic do my monthly check up because I already have the appointment card and I have the transport to go to the health clinic.” (R2).*

*“The medicine for my mother can be bought at the pharmacy, so I just need to go to the pharmacy and buy the medicine.” (R4).*

The respondents met were aware that Covid-19 shows various unspecific symptoms, ranging from mild to severe. A report from Huang *et al.* mentioned that, fever (98%) is the most frequent manifestation that is reported by patients, followed by cough (76%), myalgia or fatigue (44%), sputum production (28%) and headache (8%) (C. Huang *et al.*, 2020). As the respondents were far away from town, they took traditional medicine if there were signs of symptoms. Since the immune system plays an essential role in protecting oneself from Covid-19, infection, an herbal medicine, which has an immunomodulatory effect, could have potential as a preventive measure and even therapeutic agent for patients with Covid-19 infection (R7, R8).

There has been a recent trend of consuming herbal medicine, as an alternative approach to protecting oneself from the deadly virus. The herbal medicine contain some sort of antimicrobial or antiviral such as echinacea, quinine and curcumin. These herbal compounds are said to have the capacity to modulate the immune response and, therefore, believed to have beneficial effects on preventing or treating Covid-19 (R4, R5, R6). R2 took curcumin for hypertension instead of consuming

modern medicine. In addition, R5 suggested that, the use of curcumin does not treat antihypertensive alone, it also lowers blood pressure. Some studies shows that, curcumin with turmeric could decrease blood pressure with an angiotensin-converting enzyme inhibitor (P.C. Lekshmi *et al.*, 2014; X.F. Leong,2018; A.J. Akinyemi *et al.*, 2015). All agreed that, as they are far away from hospital, they must look after their health so that they are kept fit.

Based on the previous explanation, we conclude that, these herbal medicines might have the capabilities and might be useful as treatments to fight Covid-19 even there is no clinical studies on them. Somehow, it gives a clear picture that, the herbs can make the people fit which is a good set up to avoid the virus

## **Theme 6: Entertainment**

Since people were locked up in their homes, they needed to find ways to fill their time. Otherwise, they will likely end up restless and pressured having to stay at the same place for quite sometimes. Entertainment can be found by doing the activities with family and finding out a new hobby. Respondents aged between 30-60 years old found that being locked up in the house are not really stressing. Unfortunately, it does not go the same way for respondents aged between 20-30 years old. They were stressed and bored.

*“I do not find that order to stay at home is one of the stressing situations because I still can do many things such as gardening, cooking and having activities with my family” (R3).*

*“In my opinion, there are many other activities I can explore during MCO, even though I can't do my usual activities anymore. However, I can experience new ones with my families. ” (R6).*

*“In my opinion, it is quite boring. Having to stay at home with nothing to do. Most of the time, I would scroll the social media, watch Netflix and play games. I miss hanging out with my friends.” (R8).*

For a bachelor like R8, streaming habits have changed drastically since the beginning of the pandemic. As lockdowns swept across the nation, they subscribed paid Television so that they had more choices to watch at home. The younger respondents (R7, R8 and R9) would rather be in their room to play and watch movies using their smartphone to avoid the noise and disturbance from their siblings.

*“Sometimes, I would like some time alone watching my favourite shows without being disturbed by my siblings or nephew/nieces.” R2.*

With various channels made available to the nations, most people found themselves flicking through TV channels. As a result, *DIY* videos have become increasingly popular on both platforms (R9) and the *Qur’anic Tafseer* on *TV Alhijrah* become their go-to channel (R4). R6, is a mother to her kids. Seeing that she had nowhere to go, she had more time to try out new recipes in her kitchen.

According to R3 and R6, family members are spending more time with each other over board games, puzzles and physical activity (R5 and R9). Among the respondents, R3 reported his daughter was using online resources or apps to support her positive healthy habits. The coronavirus pandemic is changing the way people celebrate major events and holidays. Most tend to celebrate within their circle and nearest family during the pandemic only.

## **Theme 7: Psychological Needs**

Due to the pandemic, everyone struggles with various challenges that came with social distancing. Such as maintaining one’s health and mental state. As proposed by the *Self-Determination Theory*, basic psychological needs are essential nutrients of well-being. This section will discuss the role of basic psychological needs in well-being during the pandemic. Satisfaction of the basic psychological needs might be difficult to maintain mostly due to the preventive measures involving social distancing and complete quarantine, which seems to have a very important role in well-being (Brooks SK *et al.*, 2020). Compelling people to stay at home



and not leaving them many choices to make on their own likely caused lower satisfaction of the autonomy and its frustration (Calvo RA *et al.*, 2020). Further remarks are given as the following:

*“I feel that my choices express who I really am, in times of Covid-19 pandemic, my role as a head of the family is listened and respected by others. I think my relationship with my family members is stronger as well as I have more time for them” (R3).*

*“I feel I am capable, as a teenager, during lockdown, I get to access the internet and retrieve info with just a click of a button. My parents would seek for my advice for purchasing anything online and attend religious classes via online. I’m so proud to share this knowledge with them and I feel that I did something useful to them” (R8).*

*“Even though I am prohibited to leave my home, I am still able to communicate with the via internet.” (R7).*

*“I feel that people do care about me, even though my children are not with me, physically, they do video call, and I really appreciated this little action” (R1).*

*“I feel forced to do many things I wouldn’t choose and I need to do it for survive” (R9).*

*“In most ways my life is close to my ideal” (R6).*

*“Sometimes it’s tiring and I cry a lot, but I keep my mind open and try to seek Allah for strength” (R4).*

*“I’m ponder, why we need to face these difficulties and hardships” (R5).*

*“I feel that this pandemic is calling us to return to nature by gardening and farming” (R2).*

All respondents showed positive and negative affects with their life satisfaction during the pandemic. They tend to rely on both their positive and negative experiences and emotions to sooth with the pandemic. The results are in line with some previous research which indicated that both positive and negative effects are important in evaluating the satisfaction with life (Kuppens P *et al.*, 2020).

## LIMITATIONS

There are some limitations in this research findings as the interviews are done in one of the villages in the Kuala Berang. It because during the study, the spread of Covid-19 is at high level so there are some limitations in the movement of the interviewee. The interviews done in that village because the village are free from Covid-19 plus there are risks and the interviewee might be fined if having the interview at others villages since the interviewee do not know the spread of Covid-19 in others villages. On the other hand, the study also involved non-highly educated persons. The respondents' opinions and answers are on the surface and not very detail since they not really study about the Covid-19 scientifically. The results from the interview might change if the respondents has formal education. To conclude, the study narrows its sampling by categorizing the respondents according their ages and working sectors. This ensures that, it receives the perspectives and responses from different level of ages.

## CONCLUSION

We must stand together to fend off this deadly virus and make sure that Malaysia is Covid-free. So much efforts were made from both government and citizens, alike. For instance, the government try their best to control the borders, monitor Covid-19 patients and order the lockdown if needed. As citizens, we need to obey the government orders, follow the standard operating procedures, wear mask and apply social distancing. From the study, we found out that, impacts of the pandemic Covid-19 are colossal towards the countries and the citizens. The research

analysed the impacts of Covid-19 in Kuala Berang. The respondents are fully aware of Covid-19 even though they live in remote area. They are also aware about the 'new norm' implemented by the governments such as wearing mask and social distancing. The research also found that, a few families are affected due to the lockdown and the pandemic, but it is shown that there are no changes in their usual habits.

On the other hand, education wise, respondents admit that they struggle with online learning. In addition, they are sad and upset when they are not permitted to attend any religious congregation. The respondents found that the lockdown does not affect their mental as much, since there are no any necessary for having mental assistance. The research found that, the respondents lifestyles, economy, eating habits and mental are not affected as much by Covid-19 since their costs of living are not expensive. They managed to put food on the table for their families. Most of them don't need to pay rent for their home. They're still able to communicate, as usual with their neighbours. Unfortunately, they struggle with online learning because of poor internet connection, lack in knowledge, availability of the gadget and lack of moral support from their teachers.

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