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IMPACTS OF MEDIA ON CUSTOMERS' DECISION TO CHOOSE FOOD AND BEVERAGE SERVICES POST THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

In the context of the prolonged covid-19 pandemic, the enforced social distancing in many places has changed residents' consumption habits. Especially in the food and beverage (F&B) service industry, customers are also gradually changing their habits from buying and eating in-store to ordering online. The paper aims to identify and measure the impact of media on customers' decisions to choose food and beverage service. Research data was collected through Likert-5 questionnaires that were sent via social networks such as Facebook, Zalo, and Messenger. After that, the dataset was processed by the methods of scale analysis, exploratory factor analysis, correlation analysis, binary logistic regression analysis, and ANOVA analysis as well. The results show that communications factors including Communications Content and Messages, Communications Forms, Channels, and Customer's Interaction have an impact on customer's decision to choose food and beverage service. In addition, there is no statistical significance of different service choice decisions among customers of different genders, ages, and careers. The study also provides some managerial implications for food and beverage services to improve business efficiency.

Keyword: *communications impact, F&B service, decision to choose, covid-19*

1. Introduction

As a market research report of iPOS.vn and VRAC in collaboration (2023), F&B is one of the industries with potential and positive growth rates among important economic sectors with a good growth rate. In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, people are forced to social distance, and limit the gathering of people, so the service industry faces many difficulties in doing business. In particular, the food service (F&B) industry is not allowed to sell directly due to infection restrictions and avoidance of concentration, so it has to change its sales method or face unemployment and bankruptcy. As a survey in August 2020 by Vietnam Report, more than 50% of businesses had to close, downsize, reduce business area, or lay off employees due to the impact of COVID-19. Those showed that the operating methods of businesses were not flexible and did not respond in time to the change of the environment, especially with the risks and disasters.

However, the Covid-19 pandemic has also opened up new business opportunities in the food business for logistics services such as Grab, Gojek, Baemin, Shopee, etc. Many businesses have quickly applied online sales and built websites, fanpages, as well as applications for customers to conveniently access and order. Customers can experience and enjoy their favorite dishes at home. This convenience greatly affects the service habits of diners during the epidemic season and risks prolonging the epidemic season when the hot season arrives. Even the food and drinks that were originally from high-class restaurants, they can now

sit at home and still enjoy; or snacks that were previously only sold in person, are now also sold online. Since then, people's consumption trends and eating habits have also changed to adapt to new circumstances (Adsota, cited by Chau Minh, 2020).

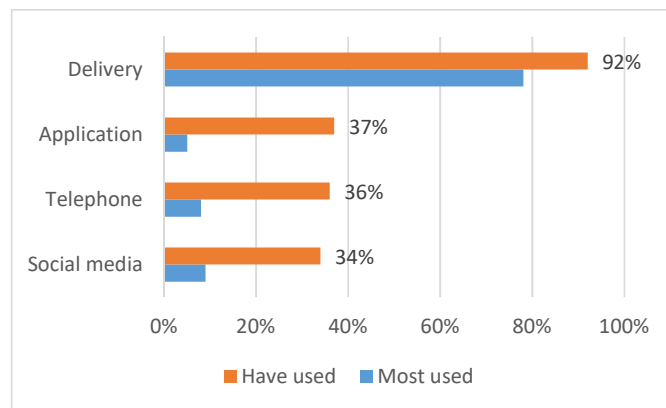


Figure 1. Popular ways of ordering food and drinks delivery by users (Adsota, 2020)

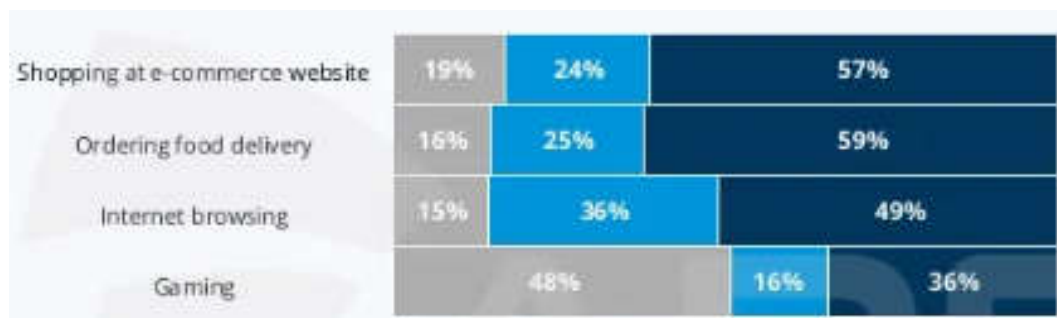


Figure 2. Vietnamese consumer change their daily habits during the Covid-19 outbreak (Adsota, 2020)

Transformation to an online business method was immediately supported, interested, and welcomed by most people. In Vietnam, the internet in general, and social networking platforms, in particular, are developing strongly. Under the market research done by We are Social in January 2023, Vietnam has 77.93 million internet users and 70 million social media users, equating to 79.1% and 71% of the total population (Anh Tuyet, 2023). The most used social media platforms are Facebook (91.6%), Zalo (90.1%), TikTok (77.5%), Facebook Messenger (77%), and Instagram (55.4%) (Anh Tuyet, 2023). The above data reveals that social media increasingly greatly influence the life of the whole society and become an indispensable part of daily life as well as in the work and study of many people. The types of social media were followed in the purposes the most such as keeping in touch with friends and family (54.7%), reading new stories (49.2%), seeing what's being talked about (34.7%), finding products to purchase (32.9) %, watching live streams (32.9%) (Anh Tuyet, 2023). Most of people rely on the media and social networks to find out and choose what they want to satisfy their needs.

Thanks to the change in thinking and business model, despite two difficult years of the Covid-19 pandemic, in 2022, the F&B market has regained its growth, even surpassing the pre-Covid-19. The number of services as well as revenue in 2022 will both grow more than in 2021 (*see Figure 3,4*). (Anh Tuyet, 2023).



Figure 3. The amount of F&B service in Vietnam (Source: Anh Tuyet, 2023)

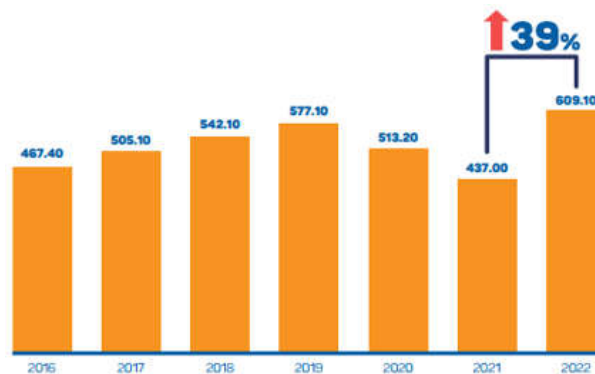


Figure 4. The revenue of F&B service in Vietnam (Source: Anh Tuyet, 2023)

On that growth momentum, the revenue of the F&B industry in Vietnam in 2023 is expected to grow by 18%, reaching more than 720,300 billion VND despite many difficulties causing people to tighten their wallets and many business owners are suspending the new opening plan to wait for the time (Anh Tuyet, 2023). However, revenue from F&B services nationwide in 2022 has a strong differentiation, reflected in 95% of sales coming from single food services such as restaurants and bars. Meanwhile, only 5% of the market share was recorded from revenue from food service chains with at least 10 branded stores (Anh Tuyet, 2023). Therefore, in order to increase business efficiency in the F&B industry, and inherit business experiences during the covid-19 pandemic, businesses F&B may step up their social media activities and strengthen their online business.

2. Methodology

2.1. Theories of Communication

Communication is a process of transferring, receiving, and exchanging information in order to establish relationships among individuals or organizations. The main communication components consist of Sender or Source, Message, Channel, Receiver, and Effect (Lasswell, cited by Zachary S. Sapienza). At the same time, communication requires structural conditions such as independence of channels, access to channels, and diversity of content. The richer the source of information, the more specific, precise, and uncomplicated message, and the better communication efficiency is achieved (Jones et al., 1988-1989).

Media Richness Model (Daft & Lengel, 1986) and organizational information processing theory (Galbraith, 1977; Tushman & Nadler, 1978) argue that whether communication message is transmitted and processed well depends on the diversity of media of organizations and individuals. The four criteria that determine the multi-media include the speed of response, the variety of media channels used, the individuality of the source, and the richness of the language used. And communication researchers implicate that a high communication effect is more likely to match media richness (Daft, Lengel, & Trevino, 1987; Lengel & Daft, 1988). Communication channels include interpersonal communication, mass media, and social media. The theory of Structural Symbolic Interactionism (Stryker & Statham, 1985) asserts that interpersonal interactions are the basis for communication. Interpersonal communication gives customers an objective view of products, services as well as the brand image through the way employees communicate with customers (Nguyen Van Dung, Do Thi Thu Hang, 2018). The quality of interpersonal communication is evaluated under two dimensions that are related to reliability and empathy. How employees convey the characteristics of products and services, as well as their honesty, openness, and listening to customers, all have an impact on customer trust. Social media is a manner that relies on the pervasive power and strong interaction speed of popular social platforms such as Facebook, Youtube, Instagram, Blog, Forum, TikTok,... to convey the advertising marketing message of an organization or business. Mass media such as TV, audio, leaflet, banner, billboard, CD, DVD, etc. are used in combination with social media to reach more fully and continuously with the public and customers. An important component of international mass communication is advertising, linked to the globalization of many product markets and reflecting the international character of many products.

The communication theory Magic Bullet (Lasswell, 1927, cited by Thibault, 2016) assumes that the receivers are passive and the message is a bullet fired from the "media gun" into their "head", by which the receivers immediately were direct influenced. It means the media can control the mind and affect the behavior of audiences he more and more information transmitted by the media will make the receivers pay more attention, and explore more, thereby creating public opinion with the sender's purpose is to change awareness, and move towards adjusting the audience's behavior and attitude in accordance with the development needs of the individuals, community, and society (Foote & Hart 1953; Patricia & Brandon, 2013; Tran Thi Bich Duyen, 2015; Le Minh Chi, Le Tan Nghiem, 2018).

2.2. Decision-making model and theories of consumer behavior

In the field of individual behavior research, such theories of consumer behavior are applied in behavior research and business as well, such as the Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1975), Planned Behavior theory (Ajzen, 1991), Behavioral Control theory (Ajzen, 2002) as well as theories of consumer's or buyer's behavior (Kotler, 2001). They assume that if the consumer act according to their intentions, they will achieve the desired results. Moreover, the behavioral intention of customers is formed from the perception, subjective standards of the individual. Accordingly, customers' beliefs and attitudes towards products and businesses along with their perception of their own needs for that product will form their intention to choose products. At the same time, customers' beliefs that the product will meet and satisfy their needs, requirements, and standards will promote the intention to make customers choose the product. In addition, the demographic characteristics of each individual such as gender, age, income, education level, occupation, place of residence, etc. will form an individual's moral and living standards. All of that lead to the consumer's decision (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Kotler, 2017). Therefore, demographic characteristics are said to have an influence on the intention to choose and consume the product of customers. And a result of that process is consumers' decisions, which means that consumers' decision reflects their reactions after

experiencing the communication process, so decisions also reflect the communication effectiveness of business organizations and individuals (Lavuri, 2018).

Based on the above theories and models, the research framework with 6 hypotheses is proposed as follows:

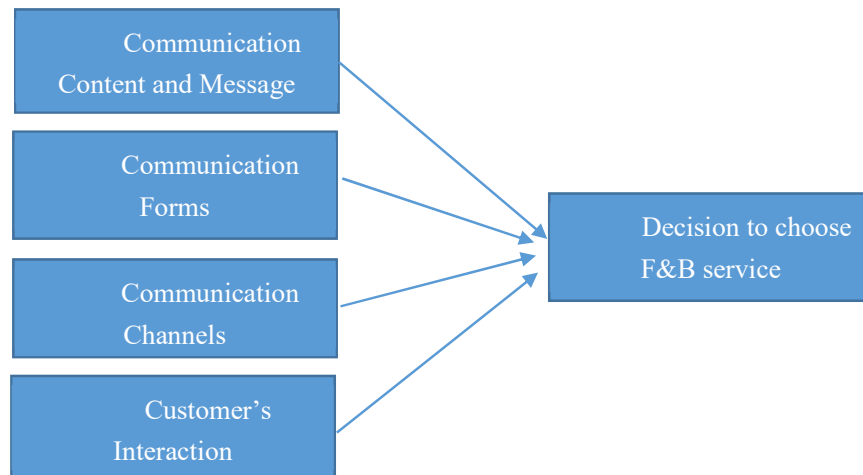


Figure 3. Research framework

H1. There is a statistic significant that Communication Content and Messages positively impact on Decision to choose F&B service.

H2. There is a statistic significant that Communication Forms positively impact on Decision to choose F&B service.

H3. There is a statistic significant that Communication Channels positively impact on Decision to choose F&B service.

H4. There is a statistic significant that Communication Interaction positively impacts on Decision to choose F&B service.

3. Methodology

❖ Sample size

According to Cochran (1977), since the population cannot be determined, the sample size is calculated according to the formula

$$n = Z^2 \times \frac{p \times (1-p)}{e^2}$$

In statistics, the most common error is 5%, thus, the minimum sample size for this research is 384. Moreover, in Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) the sample size should not be less than 100 samples, but the ratio of observations to the measure variable is 5:1 and preferably 10:1 (Hair et al., 2010). Thus, for this research with 20 observed variables used in the study, the minimum sample size needed to analyze the exploratory factors is $20 \times 5 = 100$ samples. In addition, for the best regression analysis, the minimum sample size must satisfy the formula: $n \geq 8m + 50$, where m is the number of independent variables of the model (Tabachnick & Fedell, 2007). Thus, in this research, the minimum sample size needed to analyze the regression with 4 independent variables is 82.

A convenient sampling method was used, because the survey subjects are Vietnamese people, regardless of gender, age, qualifications, occupation, etc. in order to save time and costs, but may still represent the population.

❖ Collect data

The questionnaire includes 2 parts. The first part involves 20 items that refer to the characteristics of communication such as communication content, forms of communication, communication channel, and customer's interaction. The scales of these 20 items are designed under the Likert-5 scale. And the second part has only one item about the customer's decision to choose service F&B that is designed by logical Yes/No question. A convenient sampling method was used, because the survey subjects are Vietnamese people, regardless of gender, age, qualifications, occupation, etc. in order to save time and costs, but may still represent the population. Thus, the questionnaire was sent online via Facebook, Messenger, Zalo, and by direct survey as well, from 04/2022 to 7/2022. After conducting data entry and data cleaning, the dataset of 408 valid samples was processed by SPSS-25.

4. Results

4.1. The Scale Reliability Analysis

The results of Scale Reliability analysis show that all scales have a high Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, at the same time, all observed variables have a total correlation coefficient greater than 0.6. So all of the scales and the observations were accepted and may be used for subsequent EFA analysis.

Table 1. Brief of The Scale Reliability Analysis

Factor	Cronbach-Alpha	Corrected Item-Total Correlation
Content and Messages	0.797	0.535 – 0.638
Forms	0.826	0.574 – 0.717
Channels	0.849	0.582 – 0.708
Interaction	0.770	0.468 – 0.622

(Source: Author)

4.2 The Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

The results of KMO and Bartlett's test proved that the independent variable factor analysis method is appropriate for the dataset due to the coefficient KMO being 0.755 and the significance level being 0.000. The result of Total Variance Explained shows that 20 items are grouped into 4 factors as suggested, with a Total Initial Eigenvalue of 2,477 and all of factor loading in Rotated Component Matrix were all greater than 0.60. At the same time, the result of the Varimax Rotation Method implies that the 20 items explained 59.293% of the variation of the observed variable via cumulative Sums of Squared Loadings. All that evidence suggests that the components drawn from the EFA are significant.

4.3 Binary Logistic Regression Analysis

Binary Logistic Regression is a popular model in research used to estimate the probability that an event will occur. The Chi-square test is used to evaluate the hypothesis of the appropriateness of the regression model. At the same time, the -2 Log likelihood index represents the fit of the overall model, and the smaller the index, the better. The result of Binary Logistic Regression will output two blocks, in which Block 0 is the model result without adding any independent variables, and Block 1 is the final regression

model result. If the -2 Log likelihood index in Block 1 is smaller than in Block 0, we can conclude that the regression model is suitable.

With this dataset, the Chi-square test result proved that the regression model is suitable with the dataset shown through the value of Sig. is 0.000. The value of -2LL in Block 0 is 318.922, higher than 232.455 in Block 1. Moreover, the Nagelkerke R Square value equal to 0.552 is greater than 0.5. Thus, we can conclude that the regression model has a good fit.

Table 2. Model Summary

Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	232.455 ^a	.191	.352

a. Estimation terminated at iteration number 7 because parameter estimates changed by less than .001.

(Source: Author)

The advantage of the binary logistic regression model is its predictability by measuring probabilities. Specifically, in 54 cases of actual observation of not choosing the service, 13 cases to decide not to choose are predicted, and the correct prediction rate is 24.1%. At the same time, in 354 observed cases of choosing the service, 347 cases are predicted to decide to choose, the correct prediction rate is 98.0%. Thus, the average correct prediction rate for the whole model is 88.2%.

Wald test results show that all 4 independent variables have the value of Sig. less than 0.05, so all of them are statistically significant to the model. Their coefficient B values all have positive signs, therefore, when the independent variables increase, it will increase the probability of the decision to choose F&B services.

The value of Exp(B) of all independent variables indicates their positive impact on the decision to choose F&B services. Specifically, if Content and Messages increase by 1, the Decision to choose will increase by 4.324 times; if Channels increase by 1, the Decision will increase by 3.629 times; if Customers' Interactions increase by 1, the Decision will increase by 3.181 times; and if Forms increase by 1, Decision will increase 2,313 times.

From the regression coefficients in Table 3, the Binary Logistic regression equation was represented as follows:

$$\text{Decision} = 4.324\text{Forms} + 3.629\text{Channels} + 3.181\text{Interaction} + 2.313\text{Content}$$

Table 3. Variables in the Equation

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Content	.839	.338	6.146	1	.013	2.313
Form	1.464	.249	34.597	1	.000	4.324
Media	1.289	.342	14.222	1	.000	3.629
Interaction	1.157	.248	21.824	1	.000	3.181
Constant	-15.734	2.439	41.604	1	.000	.000

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: Content, Form, Media, Interaction.

(Source: Author)

4.4 Anova Analysis

According to the results of the analysis of variance by Independent Sample T-Test and ANOVA, there is no difference in the decision to choose F&B services between customers of different gender, ages, educational level, and occupation.

5. Discussions and Implications for Managers

The results of the study show that the communication form has the strongest impact on the decision to choose F&B services, and the level of respondent's approval is high average ($\text{Exp}(B)=4.324$; $\text{Mean}=4.13$). This shows that restaurants, businesses, and individuals doing business in F&B services have focused on using a variety of communication forms. They have used various forms for advertising such as images, videos, clips, or customer comments and shares. Customers enjoy the carefully invested images and videos and the quality of content and images, these products help them easily identify the brand, easily attract attention and help them remember longer. This emotion makes them have the desire to experience and try to enjoy the food and drink of the restaurant. In addition, short videos and clips under a minute easily create a sense of curiosity and make it easy for them to follow and watch the entire ad. Otherwise, advertising articles are not appreciated by customers due to a lack of visual and emotional content. Therefore, F&B businesses and individuals may have strategies and plans to improve this factor so that communication messages are transmitted more effectively and attract more customers' attention.

Besides that, the communication channel is also a factor that has a high impact and is also rated at a good level by customers ($\text{Exp}(B)=3.629$; $\text{Mean}=3.81$). Currently, the communication channels that businesses and individuals often use are leaflets, banners, band-rolls, outside signs, etc. Although these communication channels are highly appreciated by customers, however, in the context of the stressful Covid-19 epidemic, people must comply with social distancing regulations, and restaurants and eateries do not sell online. And as a consequence, these communication channels are no longer used primarily. In addition, with the development of technology, the social media on various social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, Instagram,... are favored by businesses and individuals providing F&B services and customers because of their advantages. Therefore, F&B businesses and individuals should strongly change their communication channels along with the adoption of social networks to match new communication trends.

Simultaneously, communication content and messages also have an impact on the intention to choose F&B services and are highly appreciated by customers ($\text{Exp}(B)=2.313$; $\text{Mean}=3.79$). Customers prefer the way of conveying media content through profound media stories rather than just introducing food and services. By telling stories, and acting in stories, the characters incarnate more vividly, through which the media message creates stronger emotions. In addition, humorous and witty content with impressive character creation also creates a stronger impression, and longer-lasting emotions and is easily transmitted by word of mouth by creating trends.

Effective communication depends a lot on customer interaction, such as the number of likes, comments, shares, or user-generated content. In the field of F&B, services with high customer engagement along with high sentiment scores, audience scale, and positive comments, will drive higher customer decision-making. On the contrary, if any F&B service receives negative reviews, the probability that customers decide to choose will be low. According to the respondents, currently, customers do not pay much attention to interacting with media articles ($\text{Mean}=3.71$). Some customers really feel like or dislike a certain F&B service after experiencing it, then they are interested in commenting or creating new content related to that F&B service. A lot of people only feel confident if the service has a lot of interactive

communication and content with complete and clear contact information. As for the media articles with many views but few interactions, they are not appreciated by customers. Even businesses and individuals doing business in F&B services have KOL public figures as their representatives, but few comments or good ratings from customers are not appreciated. Therefore, businesses and individuals dealing in F&B services need to pay much attention to the truthfulness, objectivity, and timeliness of communication, and at the same time enhance interaction with customers, creating many functions for customers' convenience. Convenience in interaction enhances customers' trust in the communication activities of their services, thereby improving the customer's ability to make choice decisions.

5. Conclusion

The objective of the study is to determine the effect of communications on the decision to choose F&B service customers in Ho Chi Minh City. The research results show that communications have a positive influence on the decision of customers to choose according to the level of decreasing impact as follows: Communication Form, Communication Channels, Communications Interactions, and Content and Messages. At the same time, the study also proved that demographic characteristics such as gender, age, occupation, education, and income, have no statistical significance to affect the decision to choose service F&B.

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