

## THE EMERGENCE OF ONLINE HALAL FOOD DELIVERY SERVICES IN BRUNEI DARUSSALAM AMIDST COVID-19

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### Abstract

The COVID-19 outbreak was detected in Wuhan, China before spreading throughout the world. Lockdowns, movement restrictions, social distancing, suspension of public gatherings at a certain number, and other measures have been implemented by governments and world leaders to lessen the loss of life and health. Despite being necessary, these measures have caused a massive economic crisis that has wreaked havoc on businesses and industries, including the halal industry. Due to restrictions, restaurants, for instance, are not permitted to offer dine-in service. Spite of the difficulties, the COVID-19 outbreak has prompted numerous restaurants to seek alternate solutions and develop innovative in-house Online Food Delivery (OFD) services, while others have established third-party OFD service providers and individuals have become runners. The purpose of this study is to look into the emergence of OFD services in delivering halal food across Brunei Darussalam during COVID-19 outbreak. The researchers refer to relevant publications in this area to discuss the online halal food delivery during COVID-19. As a result, for some businesses, COVID-19 is a hidden blessing because it enables them to innovate their operations.

**Key Words :** Brunei Darussalam, COVID-19, Halal Food, Innovation, Online Food Delivery

### INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 outbreak began in Wuhan, China before spreading around the world (**Akter & Disha, 2021**) as a serious worldwide pandemic (**World Health Organization, 2020**) prompting governments to impose strict lockdown measures in order to prevent the virus's spread (**Pal, et al, 2021**). These lockdowns have impacted negatively on many types of company activity around the world, as well as causing significant changes in how businesses operate (**Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020**) particularly restaurants.

There have been tight limitations on dining out, resulting in eateries bleeding cash (**Pal, et al, 2021**). According to Pal, et al, (2021), adopting an O2O (online to offline) network for ordering and delivering meals is the only way for eateries to survive during the COVID-19 period. Restaurants were able to function under the take-away or delivery sales due to stay-at-home orders during the COVID-19 outbreak, according to **Gossling, et al., (2020)**. Therefore, several restaurants are changing their business modus operandi by implementing rapid innovation in order to deal with the COVID-19 outbreak's changes and problems, as well as meet the needs of this unanticipated scenario (**Gavilan, et al, 2021**). More restaurants are developing or improving their Online Food Delivery (OFD) offerings (**Gavilan, et al., 2021**), which is one of the many sorts of innovation (**Damanpour, 1996**).

Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, a smart tool for contactless delivery is becoming increasingly important because OFD is designed to deliver meals to a customer's front door without human interaction. Despite COVID-19's detrimental impact on the restaurant business, it has shifted consumers' dining tastes away from traditional in-store operations and toward out-of-home OFD services. Even in China, due to COVID-19 outbreak, 78 percent of responding traditional catering enterprises had switched their business to OFD third-party applications such as instance Ele.me, Meituan Waimai, and Baidu Waimai (**iiMedia Research Inc., 2020**).

## ONLINE FOOD DELIVERY SERVICES

OFD services, a developing online-to-offline digital technology, combine online ordering and offline delivery services to provide a link up caterers and customers (Perumal, et al., 2021). In other words, ordering halal food from a nearby restaurant or food cooperative throughout a website or app is referred to as OFD (Xu & Huang, 2019). Simply put, OFD companies offer a service that allows customers to place orders over the Internet (Akter & Disha, 2021).

According to Ray and Bala, (2021), there are two different sorts of OFD services: first, restaurants itself that provides delivery services such as KFC or PizzaHut, and second, third-party intermediary platforms such as Foodpanda, Grab Food, SmartBite and DeliverEat which are commonly used in Malaysia (Perumal, et al., 2021). The restaurants themselves, for instance, PizzaHut, KFC and BurgerKing, which have their own website with basic ordering functions for pick-up or delivery by current employees (Ramos, 2021). Meanwhile, OFD third-party intermediary platforms offer online halal meal ordering sites that feature the menus of a variety of partner restaurants but may not provide delivery services from those restaurants (Ramos, 2021). People purchase halal meals from an OFD by using an app or a website, and the food is delivered to a designated location by a delivery man.

The first types of OFD services are prevalent amongst halal fast foods in Brunei Darussalam, for instance, KFC, Burger King, McDonalds, Jollibee, Sugarbun and Pizza Hut. However, many individuals were doubtful that the third-party OFD service provider's app-based food delivery would operate in Brunei because people prefer to eat in or cook at home rather than order deliveries (Thanis Lim, 2015b). For instance, the third-party OFD, Foodpanda, began their operations in Brunei Darussalam in July 2014, with the goal of bringing together halal restaurants across the country and making it easy for consumers to request halal food delivery, even from restaurants that do not have their own delivery services (Thanis Lim, 2015b). In a nutshell, Foodpanda will manage customer ordering, collection and delivery.

There was no competition for Foodpanda in Brunei Darussalam at the time. Through its website and mobile phone app, Foodpanda assisted over 88 halal restaurants in the capital city in delivering food to customers' homes (Inspire Magazine, Jan-Feb 2017). They work with a variety of companies, including Burger King, Excipade and Prego Mauri, as well as smaller businesses like Chatter Box Kopitiam and Nyonya Restaurant. The cuisine available on their website are delectably diverse, and includes Arabic, Chinese, Indian, Japanese, Italian, Malay and so on (Inspire Magazine, Jan-Feb 2017). Sadly, despite their success, Foodpanda's operations in Brunei Darussalam were shut down in 2018.

Freshco Delivery Center was founded in 2017, with the claim on their Facebook page that they are Brunei's first and only restaurant food delivery service where customer may order from multiple halal restaurants at once (Freshco Delivery Centre Brunei, 2017). Freshco's halal restaurant group has developed to include a varied selection of eateries under one roof (Thanis Lim, 2015a). Freshco delivery service is unique which allows customers to combine food from multiple halal restaurants into one delivery. In other words, they will deliver the combination of halal food from different restaurants under Freshco group.

As a result, more OFD service providers are needed in Brunei to respond to and resolve the COVID-19 outbreak. Several Brunei's OFD providers, including GoMamam, Ta-Pow! and Heydomo, have created a contactless delivery system that allows halal food to be served to customers without direct contact (Perumal, et al., 2021).

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study employed both qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative data was acquired through a literature analysis of pertinent documents, journals, books, newspapers and other related resources in order to gain a better understanding of the emergence of OFD services in Brunei

Darussalam. However, to date, there has been little research done on OFD services (**Annaraud & Berezina, 2020**) even in Brunei Darussalam. Therefore, this paper seeks to analyze the emergence of OFD amidst COVID-19 outbreak in Brunei Darussalam and the consumers’ willingness to order through OFD. This study also looks at OFD third-party platforms that provide delivery services to the partners restaurants. In addition, contributing to the limited body of knowledge about the utilization of OFD services in Brunei Darussalam.

Meanwhile, a cross-sectional web-based survey was used to collect data on the intentions of OFD services for quantitative data. The anonymous survey was distributed via WhatsApp. Participants were sent an invitation link through WhatsApp to participate in the study, which directed them to the Google Forms survey. Participants in the study were recruited using a simplified snowball sampling technique, in which respondents were compelled to share the link with as many of their WhatsApp contacts as possible. A total of 290 people responded to the survey, which was conducted between February 5, 2022 to February 12, 2022.

After downloading the data from the Google server, the data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The data analysis was descriptive in nature, with the purpose of describing the variables of the study. The results were presented in frequency tables. SPSS frequency tables are chosen because they allow to organize and summarize survey data in a straightforward tabular format.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The emergence of OFD services in Brunei Darussalam amidst COVID-19 was identified based on the literature analysis and data collection, which addresses (1) the restrictions of dine-in in restaurants, (2) the emergence of OFD services, and (3) the intention of use online food delivery services. The following sections go over the findings.

### *The Restrictions of Dine-In at the Restaurants*

On March 9, 2020, Brunei Darussalam, a country with a population of 459 400 people, recorded its first imported case (**Choo, et al., 2021; Wong, et al., 2020**). As a result, the Government, led by the Ministry of Health (MoH), took a number of steps to control the spread of COVID-19 virus (**Choo, et al., 2021**) in Brunei Darussalam. For instance, as COVID-19 cases increased, dining in at all food establishments in Brunei Darussalam was restricted beginning March 19, 2020, but takeout and food deliveries were permitted (**Wong A. , 2020b**). Table 1 shows the measures taken and de-escalation plan implemented on restaurants, cafes and food courts in Brunei Darussalam.

Table1 Measures and De-escalation Plan Implementation on Restaurants, Cafes

COVID-19	Level De-Escalation Plan	Effective Date	Measures Taken
First Wave	Level 0 (Closure)	19.03.2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dining in at all food premises in Brunei are restricted.</li> <li>• Only takeout and food deliveries allowed.</li> </ul>
	Level 1	16.05.2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dine-in allowed.</li> <li>• Eateries are allowed to fill up to 30% of seating capacity</li> </ul>
	Level 2	15.06.2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dine-in allowed.</li> <li>• Eateries are allowed to fill up to 60% of seating capacity</li> </ul>
	Level 3	06.07.2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dine-in allowed.</li> <li>• Eateries are allowed to fill up to 80% of seating capacity</li> </ul>
	Level 4 (Pre-Normal)	27.07.2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dine-in allowed with 100% of seating capacity</li> </ul>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No buffets</li> </ul>
	New COVID-19 Normal	17.08.2020	Buffet are allowed, with waiter/waitress serve.
	Level 5	8.03.2021	Dine-in and buffet allowed.
Second Wave		07.08.2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dining in at all food premises in Brune are restricted.</li> <li>• Only takeout and food deliveries allowed.</li> </ul>
	Ops Pulih	4.10.2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dining in at all food premises in Brune are restricted.</li> <li>• Only takeout and food deliveries allowed.</li> </ul>
Endemic	Transition Phase	15.12.2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dine-in allowed with 75% of seating capacity</li> </ul>

Source: Ministry of Health (<https://www.moh.gov.bn/SitePages/De-escalation%20Plan%20Implementation.aspx>) and Press Releases.

People were obliged to stay at home and maintain social distance when the lockdowns were imposed forbidding public gatherings, while restaurants were compelled to cease both their dining and takeout services (Aktek & Disha, 2021). This firm move, as well as its prompt implementation, were critical in halting the virus's spread (Hayat, 2021).

### *The Emergence of Online Food Delivery Services*

Consumers' perceptions of COVID-19 have changed how they enjoy restaurants (Zwanka & Buff, 2020), since they are more worried about health and hygiene (Gavilan, et al, 2021). Consumers must obtain food and beverages in these unprecedented circumstances, which is marked by a fast-expanding need, (Ramos, 2021). Furthermore, the OFD service is utilized to redirect consumption to more secure and controlled areas, such as the home.

Consumers adapted to the new normal scenario over time and began to rely more on online purchasing (Aktek & Disha, 2021). Consumers eventually began to use OFD services after placing their trust in the halal food delivery companies' and the restaurants health and safety precautions. According to Ahmad Nizar & Zainal Abidin, (2021) the emergence of OFD services immediately gained traction among consumers, particularly in Southeast Asia.

In Brunei Darussalam, some halal restaurants use independent contractors, such as GoMamam, Ta-Pow! and heyDomo, a food delivery strategy that is both efficient and low-cost (Li, et al., 2020). GoMamam, Ta-Pow! and HeyDomo, for example, have emerged and begun contactless delivery, in which the deliveryman leaves the meal at the customers' door and payment is completed electronically. Brunei Darussalam's third-party OFD services provider are depicted in Figure 1.



Figure 1: Third-party OFD services provider in Brunei Darussalam

Therefore, the OFD business has emerged as an appropriate way of reaching customers and give them better higher-quality services throughout these times (Alalwan, 2020), as it plays a critical part in the business's sustainability. According to Gavilan, et al (2021), most restaurants are driving innovation to offer experiential OFD options because it provides restaurants eith alternative revenue, retains customers, and continues to improve customer experience by providing new delivery channels, as well as streamlining the customer orders for both the consumer and the restaurant (Chavan, et al, 2015) in times of social distancing.

According to the National Restaurant Association (2019), restaurants have been compelled to raise, diversify, or embrace additional revenue streams such as food delivery apps (FDAs), entrenching a clearly growing trend. The third party FDAs identified as a prominent factor among both consumers and restaurants under this regard, with restaurants competent of able to attend to consumers' needs with ease and direct ordering.

OFD platforms are increasing choice and convenience by allowing them to order from a variety of restaurants with a single click of their smartphone (Hirschberg, et al., 2016). Consumers can enjoy a meal at home with the same high-quality food they would find in a fine restaurant thanks to OFD services, (Hirschberg, et al., 2016).

Individuals or freelancers become domestic runner in Brunei Darussalam, in addition to third-party OFD service providers. Essentially, this domestic runner would then pick-up the customer's order at assigned restaurants and deliver it to consumer's front door. Despite this unwelcome situation, the COVID-19 outbreak has opened up new opportunities – a mixed blessing for those in delivery services. Whether it is groceries, foods, or parcel pick-ups, these runners can handle it. Numerous business owners were persuaded to change their approach in order to survive, while other individuals, particularly domestic runners, took advantage of the opportunity of becoming local runners in order to earn a living (Farhana, 2021).

Furthermore, in protecting the interest and the well-being of the business sector, domestic runners and especially the general public during the COVID-19 situation, these domestic runners should indeed register through the website of Ministry of Transport and Infocommunications (MITC) at [www.mtic.gov.bn/pendaftaran](http://www.mtic.gov.bn/pendaftaran) (MITC, 2021). Domestic runners must follow the instructions and guidelines issued by the MoH and other governmental bodies. The following are some of the guidelines with which registered domestic runners must comply:-

- i. To waer face masks,
- ii. Limit the amount of face-to-face contact during delievries or practice contactless delivery,
- iii. Practice social distancing,
- iv. Regularly wash their hands or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer,
- v. Undergo a COVID-19 Polymerase Chain Reaction (RT-PCR SARS-CoV-2) swab test at least once a week to ensure they are negative for COVID-19, and
- vi. Complete their COVID-19 vaccinations before carrying out delivery services. (MITC, 2021).

### ***The Intention of Use Online Food Delivery Services***

In terms of group characteristics, 72.4 percent of respondents were between the ages of 18 and 29, and 87.9 percent were females, according to Table 2. With 89.7 percent, respondents confirmed having bought food online during COVID-19 lockdowns, and GoMamam was the most popular third-party OFD services. During the COVID-19 outbreak, GoMamam's daily order volume increased to 200, earning it popularity amongs customers and segmented delivery rates (Wong A. , 2020a).

Table2 Sociodemographic characteristics of participants

Variable	Characteristics	Frequency	Percent
Age	18-29	210	72.4
	30-39	50	17.2
	40-49	10	3.4
	50-59	20	6.9
Gender	Female	255	87.9
	Male	35	12.1
District	Brunei-Muara	265	91.4
	Belait	10	3.4
	Tutong	10	3.4
	Temburong	5	1.7
Have you orderd food online any point during the COVID-19?	Yes	260	89.7
	No	30	10.3
Which method do you prefer to order food during COVID-19?	OFD	220	75.9
	Drive-Thru	130	44.8
	Pick-up / Take-out	165	56.9
	Domestic Runner	150	51.7
Application most used	GoMamam	100	34.5
	Freshco	50	17.2
	Heydomo	65	22.4
	Ta-Pow!	30	10.3
	Domesic Runner	30	10.3
Do you want to recommend OFD to friends and relative	Yes	280	96.6
	No	10	3.4

Table 3 shows that 84.5 percent of consumers are willing to order online since it is convenient allowing them to save time and do not even have to leave their house. Furthermore, OFD services provide consumers with convenient and efficient access to food from a diverse range of restaurants at various times and locations (Chai & Yat, 2019; Yeo, Goh, & Rezaei, 2017; Gupta & Paul, 2016), saving consumer time from having to walk around the restaurants to select a menu. In addition, OFD is a complex system that enables customers to obtain halal food at their preferred taste, time and location (Ahmad Nizar & Zainal Abidin, 2021). Besides, Alalwan (2020) asserted that OFD does provide customers with much more thorough, up-to-date, and reliable information about restaurants, menu options, customers' prior experiences through online ratings and reviews, or indeed monitors their orders and the status of those orders. These OFD characteristics were convenient and made consumers' lives easier.

In this regard, Zhao & Bacao, (2020) shown that OFD services have grown in popularity and have gradually evolved into beneficial platforms for the food service industry's survival throughout the COVID-19 outbreak. Customers' rising desire to enjoy the food at home, along with self-protection during the outbreak, has resulted in new consumption habits that will allow OFD services to continue to be used. Even. 96.6 percent of the respondents said they would recommend their friends and family about OFD services.

Table3 Willingness of Purchase Food via OFD Services

		Frequency (f)	Percent
Valid	Easy to serve / save effort in meal preparation	200	69
	Convenient / save time and not have to leave my home	250	86.2
	Maintain social distancing	225	77.6
	Avoid COVID-19 contamination	200	69
	Reduced personal contact	200	69
	Food safety	95	32.8
	The regulations in force specific to the COVID-19	130	44.8
	Confident deliveryman followed all the safety precautions	85	29.3
	None	5	1.7

## CONCLUSION

In the era of COVID-19 and the uncertain future, it is imperative for restaurants to update, pivot, and innovate their business strategy in order to satisfy the customers' requirements of evolving consumer demands. OFD demonstrates that it is a practical solution to the problem of effortless eating. COVID-19 has a significant impact on consumption patterns, and in the aftermath of the pandemic, people are more likely to eat at home. This study aids food premises in Brunei Darussalam in taking proactive measures to deal or adapt to any issue that arises as a result of the presence of OFD services, which has undoubtedly become a significant platform for the majority of Brunei's residents.

Furthermore, according to the findings, OFD was more popular in Brunei-Muara district than in other districts. Perhaps, as a result of this study, OFD businesses will be able to expand their partnership with eateries in other districts.

Our research intends to investigate the emergence of OFD amidst COVID-19 outbreak in Brunei Darussalam, as well as consumers' willingness to order through OFD. Presumably future research should look on the behavior of OFD consumers in Brunei Darussalam that leads to purchasing decisions.

Another important aspect of the OFD readiness is the deliveryman's assurance that he followed all food safety requirements. However, to the best of our knowledge, there is little awareness of the safety and quality of prepared food items during delivery from the restaurants to customers via OFD services. Moreover, information of OFD in the halal food supply chain is limited, raising concerns about the halal purity of foods delivered through this service. Therefore, future research should focus on (1) the notion of an OFD that delivers halal food, (2) the opportunity for an innovative framework or guidelines for OFD services that deliver halal food that meets *halalan thayyiban* requirements, and (3) OFD upholds the halal supply chain.

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