

Factors Influencing Online Shopping Intentions In The Post-Pandemic Era: A Retrospective Study Among Lebanese And Iraqi Consumers

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the transition to a more digitized world and brought about significant changes in online shopping habits that could have long-term implications. With governments implementing restrictions and consumers concerned about potential health risks associated with in-store buying, there has been a notable surge in online shopping. However, since late 2022, governments have started easing regulations, and consumers are gradually returning to brick-and-

mortar establishments. The primary objective of this study is to investigate the factors influencing internet shopping following the pandemic. A retrospective quantitative study was conducted over two periods, focusing on the same sample of consumers in Lebanon and Iraq. The findings reveal that previous online purchasing experiences, attitudes toward online shopping, and perceived usefulness all play crucial roles in shaping online shopping intentions in the post-COVID-19 era.

Keywords: Retrospective study, COVID-19 Pandemic, Post COVID-19, Online Purchase Intentions, Factors of Online Shopping, Lebanon, Iraq.

1. Introduction

Since the World Health Organization (WHO) officially declared the outbreak of the coronavirus (COVID-19) on January 30, 2020, and its transformation into a global pandemic on March 11, 2020, the world has been in a state of public health emergency (Ciotti et al., 2020). This new situation has turned the world's nations into one big prison. Countries have closed their borders by land, air, and sea, making it impossible to move and travel between them. Internally, World Health Organization recommendations, such as mandatory social distancing, domestic quarantine, and complete (or partial) closure of markets, schools, and other public and private facilities, have been implemented to prevent the virus. However, these efforts were insufficient to contain the health crisis and limit its global spread. The virus has spread to over 213 countries, causing a pandemic and infecting over 663 million people worldwide, with over six million deaths. Since the Chinese city of Wuhan officially declared the deadly virus in December 2019, it has continued to this day, with the emergence of new mutants that could be even more lethal. The coronavirus pandemic has left a significant adverse effect not only on health and social levels but additionally on the global (McKee and Stuckler, 2020; Zakhem et al., 2022; Ozili and Run, 2023), regional, and local economies (Hiscott et al., 2020; Moloney, 2020).

This also coincided with a significant shift in the purchasing and consumption habits of a large portion of the world's consumers (Paramannand, 2021; Tran, 2021; Zwanka and Buff, 2021; El-Khoury, Choudhary, and Alam, 2023). By reviewing the literature, we can identify a number of behaviors that have changed

individuals' habitual lifestyles, such as the abandonment of going to the movies, the cessation of traveling, the abandonment of going to restaurants, and the preference for open and well-ventilated places. Additionally, there has been a steady increase in the tendency to store remotely, i.e., via the Internet, using numerous means, which has led to the promotion of this trend in shopping (Alhaimer, 2021; Gu et al., 2021; Merlo, Giraldi, and Berto, 2023). Furthermore, some researchers indicated that the health crisis has helped, to varying degrees, in changing the behavior of Arab consumers (Ben Ali, Yahyaoui, and Muqimeh, 2020; Benwesiad, 2021; Faour-Klingbeil et al., 2021; Nahas, 2021). The findings of a study conducted on a sample of Algerian consumers by Ben Ali, Yahyaoui, and Muqimeh (2020) show that the COVID-19 pandemic caused a change in the consumption pattern of individuals who followed the list of priorities related to the inconvenient event in carrying out the purchase process. They indicated that at the top of the list were purchases of basic necessities, especially food and beverages, and consumers kept them in large quantities due to domestic quarantine and the general (total or partial) closure of countries. This situation forced stores to reopen at certain times and led to consumers' willingness to buy sterilization, cleaning products, and health care items that have become vital, such as masks, medical gloves, and hand sanitizers.

According to Benwesiad (2021), the pandemic had a positive but weak moral impact on Algerian consumers' orientation toward online shopping. These consumers didn't show significant tendencies to shift to online shopping after the pandemic ended, at the expense of abandoning their traditional shopping behavior (Ben Ali, Yahyaoui, and Muqimeh, 2020).

However, these findings do not contradict the fact that a significant proportion of Arab consumers have become more open to digitalization, as confirmed by the findings of a survey conducted by PwC Middle East (2020). The main objective of this survey was to determine the impact of social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic on Arab consumers' attitudes and habits. According to the study's results, 67% of consumers have become more digital than before, particularly in terms of purchasing through smartphones. Furthermore, despite a decrease in total monthly spending during the pandemic, online purchases increased significantly, particularly in countries where online

purchases were previously uncommon, like most Middle Eastern countries.

Furthermore, continued quarantine and full or partial closures, as well as increased consumer awareness of the need to avoid crowds in public places, particularly markets and stores, to reduce the risk of infection, were some of the major factors contributing to a significant and radical increase in global e-commerce sales (Zidane, 2021). As a result, in addition to increased online shopping, more purchases are being made at grocery stores and locally owned businesses such as independent butchers (Faour-Klingbeil et al., 2021). Many studies (Ali, 2020; Al-Hattami, 2021; El-Khoury, Choudhary, and Alam, 2023) have shown that the COVID-19 pandemic has enormous growth potential for online shopping, particularly in developing countries, attracting a large number of researchers interested in studying consumer behavior. A large number of researchers, for example, have been interested in studying how and to what extent the COVID-19 pandemic affects consumer behavior and online purchase intention (Toska et al., 2022; Truong and Truong, 2022; Roy and Datta, 2022), along with the determinants of this consumption trend during the pandemic period (Koch, Frommeyer, and Schewe, 2020; Negger and Uddin, 2020; Al-Hamli and Sobaih, 2023).

According to a Fabius et al. (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic was a pivotal turning point in consumer habits and attitudes, as decades of digital changes in the business world and their impact on consumer behavior receded in a matter of days during the pandemic period (Bouzakhem et al., 2023). According to this study, the crisis prompted new behaviors in eight areas of life, the most significant of which was the increase in online shopping as a result of the e-commerce boom (Fabius et al., 2020).

2. Problem Statement

After reviewing the literature on the impact of the pandemic on consumer behavior in the Arab World, it was discovered that there are few studies that focus on the changes and possible fluctuations in online purchasing attitudes and intentions during and after the pandemic, either by examining consumers' online purchasing intentions during the pandemic (Salem and Nor, 2020; Alhaimer, 2021; Al-Hattami, 2021) or in the post-pandemic period (Bourchich and Nejjar, 2021; Andijani and Kang, 2022; Al-Hamli and Sobaih, 2023; El-Khoury, Choudhary, and Alam, 2023).

However, none of the available studies examined the impact of online shopping determinants during COVID-19 on post-pandemic online purchase intentions in a single framework to provide insights into online purchase intentions of consumers in Lebanon and Iraq. We chose these two countries because they have similar characteristics and are easily accessible, and because the findings show that Lebanese and Iraqi consumers' attitudes toward online shopping have changed significantly since the pandemic began. According to Nahas (2021), the first year of the pandemic saw a significant increase in e-commerce in Lebanon, as more consumers requested online payments. In addition, as demonstrated by Hamade (2021), Lebanese consumers increased their use of e-commerce during COVID-19 as businesses/stores became more reliant on their online presence to conduct business, especially during long quarantine periods. In fact, they were also satisfied with the quality, service offered, communication, and COD payments during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the Iraqi context, Ali (2020) hypothesized that the high online purchasing rates of Iraqi consumers, as well as the increase in coronavirus infection cases in Iraq and globally, could point to a link between the pandemic and high online purchasing rates locally and globally.

As a result, we expressed interest in conducting a study to investigate the impact of certain online shopping determinants during the pandemic on post-pandemic online shopping intentions.

The study was conducted in two phases, with data collected in two consecutive time periods, to enable this analysis and determine the presumed influence of selected online shopping determinants during COVID-19 on post-pandemic online purchase intentions:

- **Period 1:** COVID-19 pandemic: data collection on online shopping determinants (online shopping experience- attitude toward online shopping- online shopping perceived value- online shopping perceived usefulness) (Phase I).
- **Period 2:** Data collection on online purchase intentions following COVID-19 (Phase II).

During these two time periods, the study was conducted on the same sample of consumers in Lebanon and Iraq. During the pandemic, they were asked to fill out the questionnaire for the first time. They were then contacted in the first two months of 2023 (following the pandemic) and asked to complete the questionnaire a second time. In total, 370 consumers responded to our online

survey in phase I, and 356 responded in phase II of the current study.

3. Research Question:

How did the factors of online shopping affect the post-pandemic online shopping intentions? A retrospective longitudinal study on a sample of Lebanese and Iraqi consumers before and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

To tackle the aforementioned question, the following sub-questions will be addressed:

- R.Q.1:** What **level of online trust** have consumers demonstrated?
- R.Q.2:** Do the **online shopping experiences** during COVID-19 have a statistically significant impact on post-pandemic online purchase intentions of consumers in Lebanon and Iraq?
- R.Q.3:** Do **online shopping attitudes during** COVID-19 have a statistically significant impact on post-pandemic online purchase intentions of consumers in Lebanon and Iraq?
- R.Q.4:** Does **online shopping perceived value** have a statistically significant impact on post-pandemic online purchase intentions of consumers in Lebanon and Iraq?
- R.Q.5:** Does **online shopping perceived usefulness** during COVID-19 have a statistically significant impact on post-pandemic online purchase intentions of consumers in Lebanon and Iraq?

4. Literature Review

According to Gu et al. (2021), the number of e-commerce articles published by 2020 has nearly tripled since 2000. They stated that the rise in interest was primarily due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its significant impact on online purchasing intentions and consumer behavior.

The theoretical framework related to the growth of online purchasing during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, online purchasing intentions (OPI) definition' and related factors, are all examined in this section of the research.

Growth in Online Shopping During and Post COVID-19 Pandemic:

"Because electronic commerce is still in its infancy, teething problems were to be expected. But just keep an eye on it as it

grows", stated by John PEET in *The Economist* on February 24, 2000.

Prior to COVID-19, the use of the Internet for shopping was not a common occurrence in the lives of consumers. In other words, while online shopping is now an essential part of our daily lives, it was not always so. Before the pandemic, consumers could not always get everything they wanted with the click of a mouse. E-commerce, also known as electronic commerce, is a concept that emerged in the wake of globalization and has grown in importance in everyday life.

Online shopping, according to Rizwan et al. (2014), is a procedure in which users buy products and services directly through the Internet. An online shopping transaction is an e-commerce transaction in which customers make a purchase on a platform and engage directly with the seller. According to Al-Maghrabi, Dennis, and Vaux Halliday (2011), E-commerce is also known as E-shopping, online shopping, and internet shopping.

Online shopping, according to Cunningham (2019), is an E-commerce activity that consists of purchasing items on a seller's website with a credit or debit card. As a result, consumers purchase items all over the world via a digital platform. The emergence of the notion of a virtual organization with the shift to the information society is one of the primary reasons for the widespread use of E-commerce (Demirel and Eriş, 2019).

We already know that pandemic stress can affect our brains and change our shopping habits, whether it is panic buying behavior, defined as a sudden increase in consumption and quantity of one or more necessary goods due to an adverse situation, or stockpiling due to a pandemic. However, while online shopping has been around for years – decades, in fact – it has only recently gained popularity. Even though Amazon has been around since the mid-1990s, online purchases in the United States accounted for slightly more than 6% of total retail sales in 2010. As a result, humanity has experienced a decade in days in terms of digitization. Furthermore, as UNCTAD predicted on October 8, 2000, ten months after the pandemic, the global health crisis has permanently changed online shopping. Mukhisa Kituyi, Secretary-General of UNCTAD, stated on 8th October 2020, "The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the transition to a more digitalized world. The changes we are making now will have lasting effects as the global economy begins to recover."

The Boston Computer Exchange was the first e-business to be established in 1982. Generally, this was an online marketplace where people could sell their used computers. With the development of the Internet a few decades ago, another type of business emerged, electronic stores (e-shops). However, it was not until the late 1990s that online purchases between businesses and consumers became viable when a critical mass of installed home computers was reached, continents were opened to improve Internet telecommunications, and mass merchants appeared on the scene (Aldrich, 2011). Terms like Online Shopping, E-commerce, and E-Business were invented during this time period. Despite its widespread use and development, online shopping, like the Internet itself, is considered relatively new.

Thus, the global coronavirus pandemic had a significant impact on E-commerce and can be viewed as a key moment that encourages people to buy more online in the future, as some online buyers had never bought online prior to the pandemic (Içek and Muzaffaer, 2021). People who were isolated had to meet some of their needs through online shopping. Experts predict that even after the pandemic, there will be changes and differences in almost every aspect of our lives (He and Harris, 2020).

Online Purchase Intention (OPI):

Intention is defined by Blackwell, Miniard, and Engel (2001) as a factor used to assess the likelihood of future behavior. "Intention represents a person's immediate behavioral orientation toward a particular behavior and reflects the person's motivation for that behavior" according to the definition (Hagger, Chatzisarantis, and Biddle, 2002, p.4). Intentions are intended to capture motivational factors that influence behavior, and they are indicators of how hard people try and how much effort they are willing to put in to perform the behavior (Ajzen, 1991).

People have a variety of intentions, including those related to their consumption behavior, known as Purchase Intention (PI) (Jauhari, Kusumawati, and Nuralam, 2019). According to Shah et al. (2012), PI is a type of decision-making that investigates why consumers purchase a specific brand. The willingness (desire) of a person to purchase and acquire a product or service is referred to as PI (Andrade, 2022). Thus, PI is a dimension of actual consumer purchasing behavior (Zeithaml et al., 1996). According to the godfather of marketing, Kotler (2000), PI is defined as a pattern of

consumer behavior in which consumers are stimulated by external components and make a purchase decision based on their individual characteristics and decision-making process.

Companies use purchase intent as a tool in their marketing mix strategy, particularly when introducing new distribution channels and segmenting markets and consumers to be targeted via these channels (Morwitz, Steckel, and Gupta, 2007). Intention is significant because it is regarded as the primary predictor of actual behavior (Axelord, 1968; Mountain and Kasprzy, 2015); It is formed before the consumer makes the final purchase decision (Armstrong and Kotler, 2011).

The Internet has an impact on consumer decision-making at three stages: pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase (Sheth and Mittal, 2004). As a result, researching consumers' actual purchase intentions in the online shopping environment is critical to the success of any online business (Mountain and Kasprzyk, 2015). So, online consumer purchase intention, also known as online purchase intention (OPI), measures the strength of a consumer's intent to buy a product or service over the Internet (Salisbury et al., 2001). In other words, it is the degree to which consumers intend to engage in a specific online purchase behavior (Delafrouz, Paim, and Khatibi, 2011).

We use Pavlou's (2003) definition of OPI in this study, which is a situation in which a consumer is willing to engage in online transactions.

Factors Influencing Online Purchase Intention:

Because there is little interaction between buyers and sellers in the online environment, understanding the factors that influence OPI is critical (Rishi and Al-Khasawneh, 2017). In other words, as more consumers around the world access and use the Internet, studying buyers' motivations and the reasons that prevent them from buying or not buying online is becoming increasingly important. The Middle East, in particular, which has one of the fastest E-commerce growth rates, is on the cusp of an Internet revolution. According to the BIGCOMMERCE (2021) report, COVID-19 shopping trends are characterized by the growth of the digital economy, with over 67% of consumers confirming that they are beginning to shop differently as a result of the pandemic.

In general, online shopping is rapidly increasing due to the convenience and availability of high-speed Internet services. Consumers are increasingly using the Internet as technology

becomes more accessible, information becomes more readily available, and opportunities to interact via the Internet evolve. The ability of online businesses to attract consumers to make purchases on their websites is critical to their success. Despite the fact that the number of people using the Internet and visiting various shopping websites is increasing every day.

Furthermore, previous online shopping experiences, impulse buying orientation, quality orientation, and online trust all have a significant impact on OPI, according to the findings of a study conducted by Rishi and Al Khasawneh (2017) on a sample of 478 UAE consumers. Moreover, based on their experiences during lockdowns, consumers may continue to shop online more frequently than before the pandemic.

Shaw, Eschenbrenner, and Baier (2022) revealed that, based on their online shopping experiences during the closures, post-pandemic shoppers continued to shop online more frequently than pre-crisis shoppers. They found that the perceived usefulness of online shopping and, ultimately, the intention to continue making online purchases were influenced by convenience, efficiency, and the protection of online personal information. Creating a pleasurable online shopping experience thus contributes to these retention intentions.

In addition, situational factors such as relationships with international retailers, different product sizing systems, warranties on other products, international credit card payment options, the availability of international shipping on the retailer's website, and the cost of international shipping could influence consumers. These factors may have an impact on the prevalence of Internet purchasing in developing countries like Saudi Arabia (Brosdahl and Almousa, 2013).

Following this overview of the most important factors influencing global online shopping, the study will concentrate on the factors that may influence the OPI included in the research model. This will highlight the determinants that may have an impact on online purchasing intentions.

4.1 Online Purchasing Experiences

In general, an individual's reaction to a new activity is influenced by three factors: the sum of previous experiences, context, and stimulation (Helson, 1964). In terms of consumption, previous experiences have a significant impact on future consumption behavior (Ling, Chai, and Piew, 2010).

Online shopping, in particular, is a relatively new business for many consumers and is regarded as even riskier than offline shopping (Laroche et al., 2005). This means that online shoppers rely heavily on the quality of the experience, which is primarily determined by previous shopping experiences. Consumers evaluate their online shopping experience in terms of product information availability, payment methods, delivery terms, service offered, risk, confidentiality, customization, ease of navigation, entertainment, and pleasure (Mathwick, Malhotra, and Rigdon, 2001; Parasuraman and Zinkhan, 2002). Moreover, Chen, Shang, and Kao (2009) and Pappas et al. (2014) consider that the frequency of online shopping is part of the online shopping experience. As a result, it may be related to the consumer's number of online purchases.

From the results of several studies (Mathwick, Malhotra, and Rigdon, 2001; Shim et al., 2001; Parasuraman and Zinkhan, 2002; Ling, Chai, and Piew, 2010), it can be concluded that consumers' online shopping experience has a significant impact on their future online purchase intention. In other words, prior online shopping experiences have a direct impact on Internet shopping intentions (Eastlick and Lotz, 1999; Kawaf and Tagg, 2017).

In fact, consumers are more likely to continue shopping online in the future if their previous online shopping experiences were positive and resulted in satisfactory outcomes (Shim et al., 2001). Such previous experiences reduce the perceived risk of online shopping among consumers. When these experiences are rated negatively, consumers are less likely to shop online in the future. This highlights the significance of converting existing Internet shoppers into repeat customers by providing satisfying online shopping experiences (Atulkar and Kesari, 2019).

We believe that consumers who had positive experiences with online shopping during COVID-19 will continue to do so once business resumes normalcy (after COVID-19). As a result, the hypothesis below is proposed:

- **Hypothesis 1:** Consumers' online purchase intentions (post COVID-19) are positively influenced by their online purchase experiences (during the COVID-19 pandemic).

4.2 Attitude toward Online Shopping

Several theories, including the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Pavlou and Chai, 2002), the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1977), and the Technology Acceptance Model,

have proposed that attitude influences behavioral intention (Davis, 1989; Venkatesh et al., 2003). Fishbein and Ajzen (1977) define attitude as the degree to which behavior is questioned. Cherry (2021) defines attitude as a set of feelings, thoughts, and actions directed at a specific entity, individual, object, or circumstance.

Attitude is also understood in relation to various behaviors, and it has been identified as one of the primary indicators that play a significant role in the prediction of intention (Trafimow, 1996). Understanding what influences consumer attitudes can thus help in the prediction of consumer intentions. Considering this argument, attitude has a strong, direct, and positive influence on consumers' intentions to use the new technology or system (Davis, 1993; Van der Heijden, Verhagen, and Creemers, 2001).

Furthermore, individual behavior is therefore evaluated based on attitudes toward the behavior. An individual's attitude toward a behavior is defined by his/her positive or negative feelings about doing it. In other words, the assessment of someone's beliefs about the consequences of his/her behavior, as well as the desirability of these consequences, determines his/her attitude (Ajzen, 1991). People are more motivated to engage in a behavior toward which they have a positive attitude, so attitude is widely assumed to be a strong predictor of behavioral intentions. Before engaging in a behavior, an individual will evaluate the advantages and disadvantages and behave accordingly (Koay, Tjiptono, and Sandhu, 2021). Thus, understanding consumer attitudes can help marketing managers forecast online shopping rates and predict future growth in online retailing (Delafronz, Paim, and Khatibi, 2011).

An online shopper's attitude, according to Fishbein and Ajzen (1977), is defined as his or her positive (favorable) or negative (unfavorable) assessment of online shopping behavior. It is regarded as the consumer's psychological state. As a result, attitude is defined as a state of joy, happiness, pleasure, disgust, hatred, or dislike for a particular behavior (Triandis, 1979).

We anticipate that consumers who had a favorable attitude toward online shopping during COVID-19 will continue to do so when business resumes normalcy (after COVID-19). As a result, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- **Hypothesis 2:** Consumers' online purchase intentions (post COVID-19) are positively influenced by the attitude toward online shopping (during the COVID-19 pandemic).

4.3 Online Shopping Perceived Usefulness

According to Davis (1989), perceived usefulness is "the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would enhance his/ her job performance" (Davis 1989, p.320). Utility has a significant impact on a user's willingness to use a specific technological tool (Natrajan, Balasubramanian, and Kasilingam, 2018).

Perceived usefulness reflects consumers' perceptions that using a website to make a purchase improves the buying process's outcome. In other words, price comparison and order tracking make the purchasing process more efficient and effective (Aref and Okasha, 2020). The system's usefulness may influence the decision of whether or not to buy from an online store (Al-Maghrabi et al., 2011). According to Wu (2003), perceived usefulness is the sum of benefits that meet a consumer's needs or desires. Kim, Ferrin, and Raghav (2008, p.547) defined perceived usefulness in this context as "a consumer's belief about the extent to which he or she will become better off from the online transaction with a certain website".

Rogers (1995) previously stated that the perceived relative advantage of an innovation, expressed as economic profitability, social prestige, and/or other benefits, is an important factor in the decision-making process for innovation acceptance. Eastin (2002) identified economic advantages, time savings, and general convenience as advantages or benefits.

Consumers who shop online can also benefit from window shopping, seeking information, and comparing prices easily and without feeling pressured to buy. Previous research has found that one of the most important factors influencing purchase decisions is the perceived benefits of online shopping versus traditional stores (Eastin, 2002; Zhao, Deng, and Zhou, 2007; Kim, Ferrin, and Raghav, 2008). In this study, we define perceived usefulness in terms of convenience and time savings (Kim and Kim, 2004; McKinney, 2004) and so analyze this construct from a utilitarian approach. Indeed, online shopping allows customers to buy goods and services whenever and wherever they choose.

We anticipate that consumers who found online shopping useful during COVID-19 will continue to do so when business resumes normalcy (after COVID-19). As a result, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- **Hypothesis 3:** Consumers' online purchase intentions (post COVID-19) are positively influenced by perceived usefulness (during the COVID-19 pandemic).

4.4 Online Shopping Perceived Value

Consumer value perception has been extensively investigated and researched in behavioral marketing research to discover its ability to contribute to a better understanding of buyers' purchasing decision-making process, according to Zauner et al. (2015). The consumer's perceived value is defined as what he or she receives in comparison to what he or she sacrifices (or pays) (Wang et al., 2004).

In other words, it represents a balance between the product's or service's quality or benefit and the consumer's sacrifices in paying the price. As a result, if the benefits received exceed the price paid, the consumer is extremely satisfied. If, on the other hand, the benefit is less than the cost, the consumer is likely to be dissatisfied. Furthermore, according to several researchers, the consumer's perceived value is the relationship between product quality and price (Johnson et al., 2006)

As a result, if the consumer receives more benefits than the price paid, he is satisfied and, as in the case of online shopping, is likely to repeat the purchase process. Consumer value is inherent because it is linked to the use of specific products or services as well as the subjective perception of value (Wang et al., 2004).

Consumers' perceived value increases their purchasing intentions in the context of commerce (Baker et al., 2002). Specifically, several studies (Chen, 2012; Ponte et al., 2015; Abou Ali, Ali, and Mostapha, 2021) have shown that when value is perceived as an important antecedent, perceived value positively affects intention to store online; simply put, the higher the perceived value, the greater the intention to store online. According to Wu et al. (2014), many online stores use a variety of marketing tactics to pass on greater e-shopping value to buyers and increase their purchasing intentions, such as discounts, free shipping, free samples, and different payment options.

The majority of researchers have defined consumer value in terms of getting (benefits) and giving (sacrifices) (Day, 1994; Slater, 1997; Woodruff, 1997). However, this study adheres to Hamel and Prahalad's (1994) approach, which holds that "perceived value" mainly consists of benefits. As a result, it is regarded as the net benefits that consumers anticipate from the use of social

commerce websites (Chen et al., 2018). It also differs from perceived usefulness of online shopping in that the consumer evaluates the benefits received from the online purchase, whereas perceived usefulness is more related to a direct and immediate benefit perceived from the online purchase.

We hypothesize that consumer who saw online shopping as valuable/beneficial during COVID-19 will continue to do so when business resumes normalcy (after COVID-19). As a result, the following hypothesis emerges:

- **Hypothesis 4:** Consumers' online purchase intentions (post COVID-19) are positively influenced by perceived value/benefit (during the COVID-19 pandemic).

5. Research Model

The model used in this study was developed to investigate the impact of online shopping during COVID-19 (via main factors of online shopping) on post-pandemic online shopping intentions, (see Figure 1). A study conducted during and after the pandemic on a sample of Lebanese and Iraqi consumers. The following variables are included in the research model:

- (1) **Independent variables:** online purchase experiences, attitude toward online shopping, perceived usefulness of online shopping, perceived value of online shopping, and perceived risk of online shopping (period 1).
- (2) **Dependent variable:** Online purchase intention (period 2).

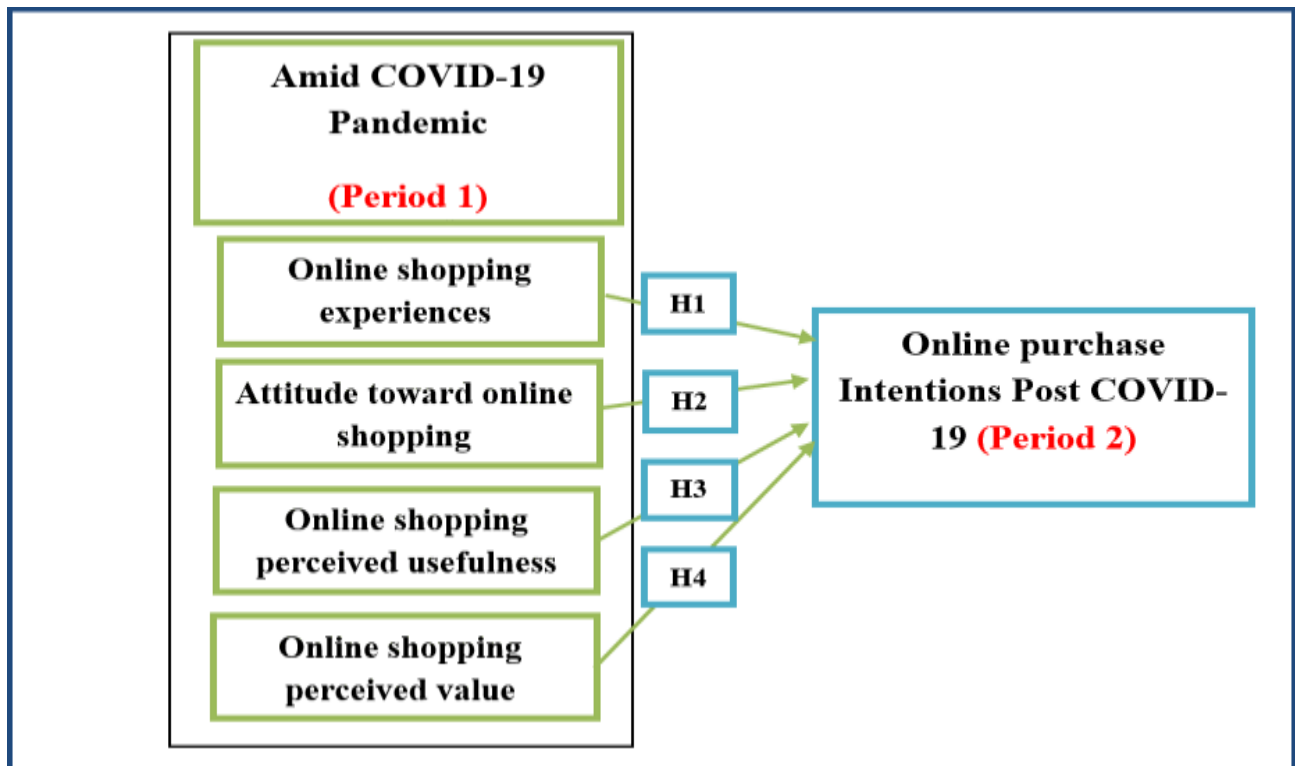


Figure1. Research Model (Periods 1 and 2)

6. Research Method

A retrospective- two periods- study was designed to test the research hypothesis and answer its questions. A retrospective longitudinal study makes use of previously collected data from online surveys and/or another research. For the current study and to collect the necessary data, a structured and self-administered online survey was conducted among a convenience sample of Internet users in Lebanon and Iraq. To enable this analysis and to determine the presumed influence of selected online purchasing factors during COVID-19 on post-pandemic online purchase intentions, the study was conducted over two time periods - and in two phases.

- **Period 1: COVID-19 pandemic (Phase I):** It corresponds to data collection on determinants of online shopping (online shopping experience- attitude toward online shopping- online shopping perceived value- online shopping perceived usefulness)/**Questionnaire 1.**
- **Period 2: After the pandemic (Phase II):** It corresponds to data collection on online purchase intentions after the pandemic/**Questionnaire 2.**

6.1 Measures

To carry out the survey, two questionnaires were created to measure the independent and dependent variables of the research model. These questionnaires were developed and combined using previous research findings, expert recommendations, and results from semi-structured interviews with five online shoppers.

Most of the items used to measure the selected research constructs were adopted from previous research in the field of online shopping. The wording of some measurement items was modified to correspond with the context of this study. The authors created only measurement's related to online purchase experiences during COVID-19 based on literature, expert suggestions, and interviews with five online shoppers. Indeed, to ensure that respondents fully understand all of the questions, we decided to translate the measures into Arabic, a language with which they are more familiar than English. Then after that, all measures were back-translated into English to ensure consistency of meaning.

The questionnaire was divided into three sections based on the research model, as follows:

- (1) **Section 1:** Ordinal scales were used to measure demographic information derived from measures of demographic variables (age, gender, education, and nationality) and to measure trust in online shopping (binary variable, yes/no).
- (2) **Section 2:** Contains items that evaluate independent variables (online purchase experiences, attitude toward online shopping, online shopping perceived usefulness, and online shopping perceived value).
- (3) **Section 3:** Contains items that evaluate the dependent variable (online purchase intentions after the COVID-19 pandemic).

Sections 1 and 2 of the survey were completed during phase I of the study (Questionnaire 1), while section 3 was completed during phase II (Questionnaire 2).

Responses in Sections 2 and 3 are based on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5), as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The 5-point Likert Scale

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

6.2 Sampling Technique and Data Collection

Since the questionnaire was distributed as Google Forms link, a convenience sampling was performed. The questionnaire was distributed online to a number of consumers from Lebanon and Iraq, and one condition for selecting respondents was that they were able to use the Internet. Social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram were also used to distribute the questionnaires.

The study was conducted on the same sample of consumers in Lebanon and Iraq during the two selected periods, as their email addresses were collected. Therefore, they were asked to complete **questionnaire 1** during the pandemic. Then, in 2023 (after the pandemic), they were contacted and asked to complete **questionnaire 2**.

In phase I of the study, 370 Lebanese and Iraqi consumers completed online questionnaire 1, but only 360 agreed to participate in **phase II** and responded to online questionnaire 2. The data collected were later used for descriptive statistics and regression analysis in SPSS v. 29.

6.3 Test of Reliability Analysis of the Study Instrument

Assessment of the measurement model involves calculating the internal consistency of the constructs it measures, known as reliability analysis using Cronbach's Alpha (Cronbach, 1951), a widely used measure of reliability in the social and behavioral sciences (Bonnet and Wright, 2014).

Cronbach's reliability coefficients for all variables were found to be greater than 0.80, indicating that the reliability analysis results are acceptable and very good because the values ranged from 0.81 to 0.90 (Fisher, 2007), as shown in Table 2. A higher value indicates a strong relationship between the tested items (Mohamad et al., 2015).

Table 2. The reliability analysis of the study instrument

Constructs	Cronbach Alpha	Number of items
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1. Online purchase intentions after the COVID-19 (Dependent variable)	0.862	7
Independent Variables		
1. Experiences	0.906	10
2. Attitude	0.922	8
3. Perceived Usefulness	0.871	6
4. Perceived Value	0.846	6

7. Research Results

7.1 Data Analysis

Demographic characteristics of the respondents

The demographic characteristics of the respondents were assessed using the frequency and percentage distribution of the relevant data in Table 3.

Table 3. Demographic characteristics of the respondents (General Sample N=370)

Demographic variables	Sub-groups	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	204	55.1%
	Female	166	44.9%
	Total	370	100
Age	16-20	17	4.6%
	21-25	49	13.2%
	26-30	95	25.7%
	31-40	144	38.9%
	41-50	55	14.9%
	51 and above	10	2.7%
	Total	370	100
Marital Status	Single	167	45.1%
	Married	192	51.9%
	Divorced	10	2.7%
	Widowed	1	0.3%
	Total	370	100
Nationality	Lebanese	166	44.9%
	Iraqi	204	55.1%
	Total	370	100
Education	High School	6	1.6%
	Bachelor	142	38.4%

	Higher Education	222	60.6%
	Total	370	100

The general sample includes 55.1% men and 44.9% women. In terms of age, the majority of respondents (288 out of a total of 370, or 77.8%) are between 21 and 40 years old. In addition, more than half of respondents are married (51.9%). In terms of nationality, Iraqi consumers represent 55.1% of the total sample, while Lebanese consumers represent 44.9%. Finally, almost all respondents have a university degree.

7.2 Hypotheses Testing: Regression analysis (SPSS 29)

A multiple regression analysis was performed to test the study hypothesis, which included four independent variables such as prior online shopping experience, attitude toward online shopping, perceived online shopping usefulness, perceived online shopping value, and the dependent variable (online shopping intentions after COVID-19).

According to the Model Summary (Table 4), R column indicates the value of R, the multiple correlation coefficients that reflect the quality of the prediction of the dependent variable. A value of 84.2% indicates very good prediction quality. In addition, R-square (or coefficient of determination) indicates the proportion of the variance of the dependent variable that can be explained by the independent variables, and the value of $R^2 = .709$ means that our independent variables explain 71% of the variability of our dependent variable, which is a very good percentage.

Table 4. Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.842^a	.709	.706	.3929092
a. Predictors: (Constant), Experience, attitude, value, Scoring Usefulness				
b. Dependent Variable: Intentions				

The F-ratio in the ANOVA table (Table 5) determines whether the overall regression model fits the data well. The table shows that the independent variables predict the dependent variable statistically significantly, with $F_{\text{calculated}} = 222.5 > 3.319$ which

corresponds to F table for (4,365, and as $p < 0.01$. Thus, the regression model fits well with the data.

Table 5. ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p-value
1	Regression	137.407	4	34.352	222.518	<.001^b
	Residual	56.348	365	.154		
	Total	193.755	369			

a. Dependent Variable: Intentions. b. Predictors: (Constant), Experience, Attitude, Value, Usefulness.

With the exception of perceived online shopping value ($p \geq 0.01$), the results show that the relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variables was statistically significant ($p \leq 0.01$), as shown in ANOVA's table (5 above) and Coefficients' table (6).

Thus, the effects of prior online shopping experiences ($\beta = .535$, $p \leq 0.01$), attitude toward online shopping ($\beta = 0.098$, $p \leq 0.01$), and perceived usefulness of online shopping ($\beta = 0.220$, $p \leq 0.01$) during the COVID-19 pandemic on online purchase intentions after COVID-19 were empirically demonstrated. As shown in the summary of hypotheses evaluating the research model, H1, H2, and H3 were confirmed, while H4 was not confirmed (as shown in figure 2).

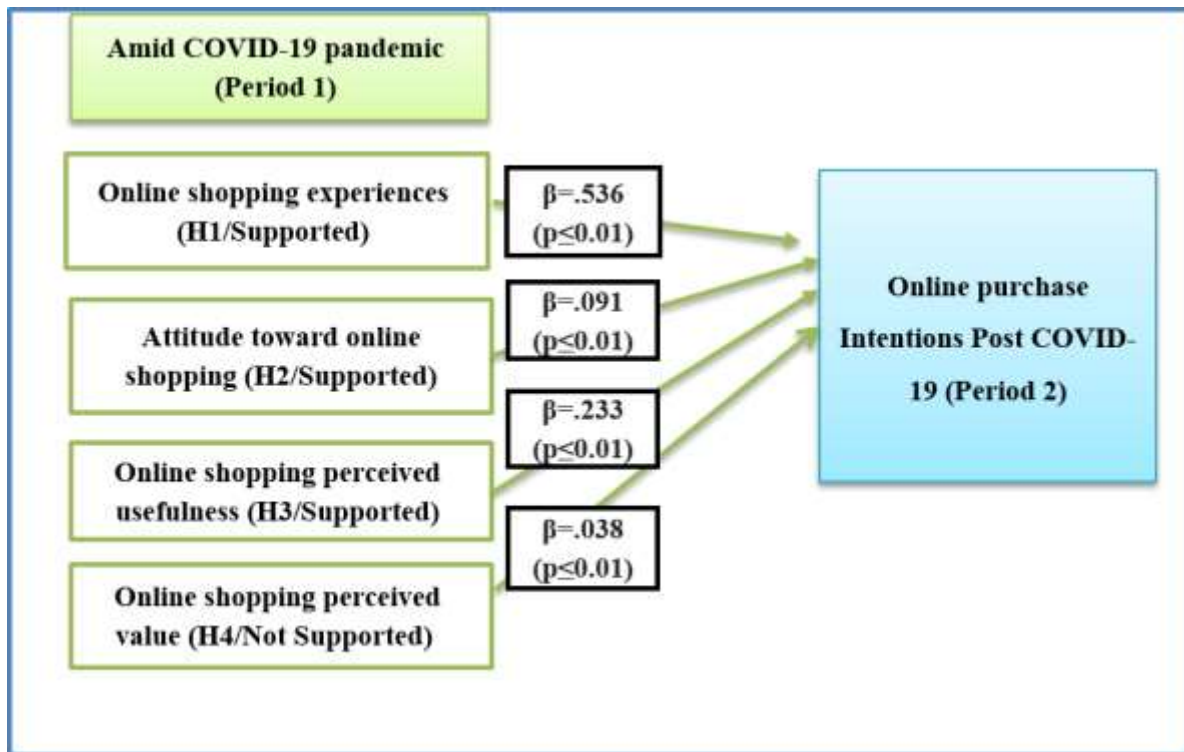


Figure 2. Hypotheses Evaluation Summary

Table 6. Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	p-value	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	.350	.106		3.299	.001		
	Experience	.536	.045	.541	11.881	<.001	.384	2.605
	Attitude	.091	.025	.122	3.588	<.001	.692	1.446
	Usefulness	.233	.056	.238	4.175	<.001	.244	4.094
	Value	.038	.054	.040	.700	.485	.249	4.023

a. Dependent Variable: Intentions

Based on table 6, the general form of the equation to predict is as follows:

$$\text{Post COVID-19 Online Purchase Intentions} = .350 + .536 * \text{Experiences} + .091 * \text{Attitude} + 0.233 * \text{Usefulness}$$

8. Discussion of Results

Four determinants of online shopping during the COVID-19 pandemic are used and analyzed in this study to assess their impact on online purchase intentions and repeat purchases after the pandemic. The findings revealed that during the COVID-19 pandemic, Lebanese and Iraqi consumers' online shopping experiences ($\beta = .535, p \leq 0.01$), attitude toward online shopping ($\beta = .091, p \leq 0.01$), and perceived usefulness ($\beta = .233, p \leq 0.01$), had a positive and significant influence on their intentions to purchase and repurchase when shopping online after the pandemic. Hypotheses 1, 2 and 3, are therefore confirmed.

These findings are consistent with previous studies and research. Several research studies have shown that consumers' prior online shopping experiences have a direct and significant impact on their future online shopping intentions, such as (Kawaf and Tagg, 2017; Tran, 2020; Bezirgani and Lachapelle, 2021). Shim et al. (2001) confirmed that if previous online shopping experiences were positive and resulted in satisfactory outcomes, consumers are more likely to continue shopping online in the future. Consumers are less likely to shop online in the future if they have a negative experience. This highlights the significance of converting existing Internet users into repeat customers through satisfying online shopping experiences (Atulkar and Kesari, 2019).

Furthermore, many researchers argue that favorable attitude toward online shopping among consumers will have a significant impact on their online purchase intentions (Ming-Shen et al., 2007; Dharmesti et al., 2021).

Moreover, perceived usefulness in terms of convenience, speed/time savings, ease of use, prices/cost savings, and item selection have a positive impact on shopping intentions, as confirmed by numerous studies on online consumer behavior (McKinney, 2004; Kim and Kim, 2008). It has been also found that one of the most important factors influencing purchase decisions is the perceived usefulness (benefits) of online shopping in comparison to traditional stores (Eastin, 2007; Zhao et al., 2007; Kim et al., 2008).

9. Limitations and Recommendations

This study, like any other, has limitations that may point future researchers in new directions, such as sample size, contextual study, and variables included in the conceptual model. Increasing the sample size and expanding the context would be beneficial and would open up new opportunities for the study.

Several factors, according to studies, influence online shoppers' purchasing intentions. This study looks into a variety of factors. However, if the factors in different studies are consistent, the model of factors influencing online shoppers' purchasing intentions can be expanded and used to guide management applications. Depending on the study context, future researchers will be able to include or exclude variables. These suggestions could be useful to future researchers.

10. Conclusions and Implications

We propose to test and analyze the impact of online shopping factors collected during the COVID-19 pandemic on post-pandemic online purchase intentions in a single framework in this retrospective- two periods- study to provide insights into online purchase intentions of consumers in Lebanon and Iraq. The proposed conceptual model incorporates previously investigated significant factors when tested individually or in pairs, as well as factors that were combined but not tested over two time periods. Consumer intentions to shop online after the COVID-19 pandemic are defined as the likelihood that a consumer intends to make an online purchase following the COVID-19 period. Prior experiences, attitude, perceived usefulness, and perceived value are all independent variables. To test our hypotheses, we conducted an online survey of 370 Lebanese and Iraqi consumers over two time periods (during and after the COVID-19 pandemic). The findings suggest that prior online shopping experiences, attitude toward online shopping, and perceived usefulness all influence post COVID-19 online shopping intentions. Previous online shopping experiences have the most influence.

This study contributes to the literature by demonstrating how the constructs of online shopping experiences, attitude toward online shopping, and perceived usefulness of online shopping influence consumers' intention to purchase and repurchase when shopping online, particularly in the Lebanese and Iraqi contexts.

Our research has several methodological contributions. First, we used a mixed method in this study, as we conducted both a

qualitative and quantitative study. Moreover, the decision to conduct a retrospective longitudinal study is particularly intriguing, because this type of cohort-study is typically associated with medical and psychological studies, and it is rarely used in business studies. As a result, our study is considered one of the first in the Arab world to use a retrospective study as the research design and a longitudinal time horizon in a single framework.

In addition to the theoretical and methodological contributions listed above, our research has a number of practical implications. Indeed, understanding consumer attitudes can assist marketers and managers in forecasting online retailing rates and future growth, as an increase in purchase intention is associated with an increase in purchase likelihood (Delafrooz, Paim, and Khatibi, 2011). This means that if consumers have a strong desire to buy something, positive engagement will encourage them to do so (Martins et al., 2019).

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