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POST-COVID-19 SHIFTS IN FOOD CRAVINGS, ONLINE ORDERING CONVENIENCE, AND PURCHASE INTENTIONS: EVIDENCE FROM TURKIYE

Sinan ÇAVUŞOĞLU [1*]

[1] Bingöl University, Finance Banking and Insurance Department, Bingöl, Turkiye; sinankys42@gmail.com (S.C.)

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Abstract: This study aims to examine the influence of post-COVID-19 perceptions on food desire, perceived convenience of online food ordering, and purchase intentions in Turkiye. This research seeks to provide insights into how consumer behavior has been shaped in the aftermath of COVID-19. This study employed a convenience sampling method, gathering data from 435 individuals who order food online, both through digital platforms and offline locations in Gaziantep, Turkiye's leading gastronomic city. The research hypotheses were tested using SmartPLS (PLS-SEM), analyzing measurement and structural models. The findings revealed that post-COVID-19 perceptions positively affect food desire and the perceived ease of online food ordering. Both food desire and perceived ease enhanced purchase intentions significantly. These results underscore the psychological and behavioral impacts of COVID-19, particularly in the context of online food delivery services. The study concludes that post-pandemic consumer perceptions continue to shape food-related desires and online purchase behaviors. By providing empirical evidence, this research contributes to the literature by bridging a gap in understanding the relationship between risk perception, cravings, and purchase intentions in Turkiye's online food sector.

Keywords: COVID-19 perception, food desire, food online ordering, purchase intention, SmartPLS

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INTRODUCTION

COVID-19, as one of the most profound global crises of the 21st century, has represented a public health emergency and triggered far-reaching economic, psychological, and social consequences worldwide. Restrictions and lockdowns implemented in many countries have directly and indirectly influenced both businesses and employees. While specific sectors contracted dramatically, industries, such as e-commerce and logistics experienced rapid and substantial growth (Özcan & Erkasap, 2021). Compared with pandemics that emerged in the 20th and early 21st centuries, the distinctive characteristic of COVID-19 is that globalization has largely dissolved the spatial boundaries of production and consumption. This situation enabled the virus to spread globally at unprecedented speed, positioning COVID-19 as a unique phenomenon that simultaneously affected almost every society worldwide (Eroğlu, 2020).

Beyond its medical implications, the pandemic also created significant psychological consequences. Individuals reported rising levels of depression, anxiety, stigma, and social isolation (Artan et al., 2020). Even those with no previous mental health problems reported rising levels of stress, uncertainty, and intolerance (Yiğitbaşı & Yurcu, 2021). These circumstances highlighted the importance of understanding individual perceptions and attitudes during COVID-19 (Artan et al., 2020). Food consumption gained a psychological dimension among coping strategies, as people sought comfort, relief from loneliness, and emotional regulation through eating (Mathiesen et al., 2022). Previous research has shown that feelings of anxiety, fear, and isolation experienced during outbreaks often intensify food cravings (Moslehpour et al., 2018).

The rapid adoption of digital technologies further accelerated this process. Rather than visiting physical stores or restaurants, consumers increasingly preferred online transactions (Ramayah & Ignatius, 2005). Online ordering systems simplified the process by removing spatial and temporal limitations (Kılıçalp & Özdoğan, 2019). In Turkiye, the online food delivery market has expanded rapidly since 2020, propelled by the digital transformation triggered by COVID-19. According to the Ministry of Trade, the total e-commerce volume in Turkiye reached 3 trillion TL in 2024, representing a 61.7% increase from the previous year. Within this volume, the quick commerce (q-commerce) segment accounted for 249.8 billion TL, with online food delivery constituting the largest category at 66.18% (Uniconsult, 2025; İkas, 2025).

Estimates suggest that the online food delivery market reached nearly 150 billion TL in 2024, supported by approximately 23 million active users (Fortune Türkiye, 2024). Major players, such as Yemeksepeti, Getir Yemek, Trendyol Yemek, and Fuudy, dominate the sector, reflecting both intense competition and sustained growth (Ekonomist, 2024). For instance, Yemeksepeti, one of the pioneering platforms established in 2001, had surpassed one billion orders by 2022, serving over 30 million users and collaborating with nearly 80,000 restaurants (Egirişim, 2024). Consumer

* Corresponding author

preferences in 2024 revealed high demand for chicken döner wraps, burgers, lahmacun, pizza, and çiğ köfte, with pizza orders alone increasing by 12% compared to the previous year (Yemeksepeti, 2024). These developments demonstrate that online food delivery has become one of the most dynamic segments of the digital economy in Turkiye. Purchase intention, defined as an individual's tendency or willingness to buy a product in the future, has long been considered a critical component of consumer behavior (Ünüvar et al., 2018). COVID-19, however, reshaped the determinants of purchase decisions.

While factors, such as price, packaging, quality, and warranty traditionally influenced consumer choices (Onurlubaş, 2018), health concerns, hygiene, quarantine conditions, ease of use, and environmental responsibility, gained prominence during the pandemic (Shim et al., 2021). Despite the growing body of literature on the socioeconomic and psychological consequences of COVID-19, significant research gaps remain. First, only a limited number of studies have addressed the relationship between pandemic-related perceptions, food desire, perceived ease of online access, and purchase intentions.

Second, within the Turkish context, empirical evidence that integrates these variables in a single framework is scarce. Third, while most studies have concentrated on the early stages of the pandemic, consumer behavior in the post-pandemic period remains relatively unexplored. Addressing these gaps, the present study aims to examine how COVID-19 perceptions influence food desire, perceived ease of access to online food delivery, and ultimately, purchase intentions.

Conceptual Framework

The Perception of COVID-19

COVID-19 was first identified in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China, in December 2019 and was subsequently declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization on March 10, 2020, after it spread globally (Lee et al., 2020). The COVID-19 outbreak has caused several changes by significantly affecting many areas, especially the social, economic, health, and education sectors of countries. This pandemic, which caused significant changes in every part of life, caused a change in the working conditions of enterprises and led enterprises to move from a physical environment to a virtual environment. Agbim & Gbar (2021) stated that people started to use social media sites more often during the pandemic than before, which made people more inclined to shop online, causing an increase in the rate of shopping from social media sites.

The perception of COVID-19, which is expressed as the concern that people have about the negative effects of the virus, has caused some behavioral changes, including changes in eating behaviors and online purchasing behaviors (Mahmoud et al., 2022; Mondal & Hasan, 2024; Kabir et al., 2025). Consumers have changed their purchasing patterns due to COVID-19, resulting in an increase in online purchasing tendencies (Hacıalioğlu & Sağlam, 2021). According to the study conducted by McKinsey & Company on consumer spending habits, consumers began to spend more on food products than in the prepandemic period. A study conducted by Group M in 2020 revealed that 51% of the participants paid attention to a healthier diet during COVID-19 (Tolun & Bulut, 2021). This and similar studies show that consumers both change their eating habits and enter different trends in their spending habits due to COVID-19.

Food Desire

While the theory of planned behavior (TPB) claims that attitude strengthens behavioral intention, goal-directed behavior (GDB) states that attitude strengthens behavioral intention through desire. Perugini & Bagozzi (2001) proposed the GDB model, which includes all the original variables in the TBP but reveals that these variables affect intention through desire. The model puts forth desire as a critical factor in how motivational, emotional, and habitual processes explain the purchasing decision process (Perugini & Bagozzi, 2001; Lee et al., 2012). Desires represent the motivational state of mind where considerations and reasons to act are converted into a motivation to do so. This motivation or desire is assumed to be the closest determinant of intentions in GDB (Perugini & Bagozzi, 2001; Leyva-Hernández et al., 2025). Positive or negative expected emotions also affect the direction of desire (Lee et al., 2012). Food desire is defined as the increase in the willingness of an individual to consume a certain food product (Traş & Gökçen, 2021). The most important difference that separates food desire from hunger is that food desire involves personal and intense emotion (Akkurt et al., 2019). Food desire differs depending on the positive or negative mood of the person (Van Strien et al., 2016). People in a negative mood react to events by overeating (Alpers & Tuschen-Caffier, 2001). It has been found that food desire positively affects online ordering (Akgün & Zerenler, 2021). Food-related images on websites are important sources of increased food desire (Burger et al., 2011). On the other hand, social influences cause consumers to have more food desires while eating with other people (Ogden et al., 2013).

The Perceived Ease of Ordering Food Online

By providing easy ordering to the customers of food and beverage businesses in an electronic environment and eliminating physical distance, the online food ordering system also affects the sales activities of businesses through developments in technology (Kılıçalp & Özdoğan, 2019; Shetu, 2025). Trust is one of the biggest obstacles to online ordering in Turkiye. Consumers avoid online shopping because they do not find the virtual environment safe (Aydın & Derer, 2015). The majority of internet users in Turkiye do not shop online because they find virtual shopping unsafe (Kurt et al., 2022). With online ordering, innovations such as access and storage providers, marketplace shopping, buying and selling, demand collection systems, virtual marketplaces, search engines, advertising networks, network bringers, news providers, or social networks have emerged (Tomaş, 2014). To foster trust in consumers, customers should be insured in their monetary transactions made online, and intermediary institutions should be constantly supervised (Cop & Oyan, 2010). Additionally, the ability to place an order on a mobile device in a short time has been stated as an important reason for consumers to order food online (Das, 2018). The most well-known food ordering sites in Turkiye are Yemeksepeti, Tıkla Gelsin, Bring, Zomato, Acikinca, Yettim, Yemekumbara, Fiyuu, Rezzta, Domino's Pizza, and McDonald's. The number of online food orders is increasing daily (Cinnioğlu & Gündoğdu, 2022). Although different reasons lead

consumers to order food online, the main reasons are the rapid flow of life and the busy work tempo in urban life, which causes the need for fast food during or after work (Chai & Yat, 2019).

Purchase Intention

Intention refers to the deliberate willingness to translate attitudes and behaviors into action (Mutlu et al., 2011). Purchasing intention is the plan or desire of people to make a future purchase in the future (Ünüvar et al., 2018). In another studies, the desire to purchase a good or service within a certain period was defined, and consumers' purchase intentions generally developed according to marketing strategy and attitudes (Naseri, 2021; Genceli et al., 2025). Intention, which is the first stage of the purchasing process, results in purchasing behavior (Peña-García et al., 2020; Vuong et al., 2025). The COVID-19, which started in 2019 and has since affected our lives, has led to the formation of purchase intentions related to health, hygiene, quarantine, ease of use, and environmental responsibility (Shim et al., 2021).

Theoretical Framework

People started paying attention to their nutritional status in addition to hygiene and social distancing during COVID-19. During the pandemic, people tend to eat more than usual due to stress, loneliness, and depressed moods (Özer & Okat, 2021). Lifestyle, health status, and sex are also stated to be factors affecting food desire. Fear and anxiety that people increasingly started experiencing during COVID-19 caused people to desire food less or to enjoy what they eat less (Aman & Masood, 2020; Da Silva et al., 2020). Muscogiuri et al. (2020) showed the opposite results indicating that the desire for food increases due to stress during quarantine. In support of this thesis, Høier et al. (2021) argued that there was an increase in people's desire to eat during the pandemic. The SOR paradigm (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) posits that environmental stimuli (S) influence internal organismic states (O), which in turn drive behavioral responses (R).

In the context of the COVID-19, the perception of the virus acts as a stimulus that generates emotional and psychological responses, such as anxiety, fear, and loneliness, which can trigger an increased desire for food. Previous studies have shown that emotional states during outbreaks significantly affect food cravings and consumption behaviors (Moslehpour et al., 2018; Mathiesen et al., 2022).Based on this theoretical foundation, the first hypothesis is formulated:

H_1: The perception of COVID-19 has a positive effect on food desire.

Restrictions and the need to stay at home, which were one of the significant steps implemented by governments during COVID-19, have made it challenging for restaurants to adhere to these restrictions. Restaurants use online ordering systems to address these issues. People frequently purchase meals online due to the perceived advantages of cost, time savings, and benefits (Hong et al., 2021). Other elements that favorably influence the perception of online meal ordering include perceived utility, social influence, customer attitude, and behavioral intention (Jun et al., 2021). Considering that the spread of the pandemic can be prevented with online orders (Muangmee, 2021), the risks of leaving home to shop during the pandemic and social distancing period caused consumers to seek online ways to perform such activities (Soares et al., 2023). Mehrolia et al. (2021) reported that there was a significant increase in people ordering food online during COVID-19. The Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989) explains the adoption of new technologies based on perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. In this study, online food ordering platforms represent the technological context. The perception of COVID-19 can increase individuals' reliance on online ordering systems. Previous studies support that perceived usefulness and ease of use significantly affect technology adoption in e-commerce (Ramayah & Ignatius, 2005; Kılıçalp & Özdoğan, 2019). The following hypothesis was proposed in light of the above information.

H_2: The perception of COVID-19 has a positive effect on the perceived ease of ordering food online.

Desire emerges as one of the factors affecting the purchase intentions of consumers (Topal & Nart, 2017). The important factors that increase people's desire to eat online are visual appeal and adequate information (Brewer & Sebby, 2021; Petit et al., 2022). Electronic word-of-mouth marketing and watching eating videos (e.g., mukbangs) are said to increase food desire (Sosanuy et al., 2021; Chen, 2021). Dönmez & Bekar (2016) stated that consumers primarily eat out for social, psychological, and economic reasons and necessities rather than to satisfy the physiological need for hunger.

Nişancı et al. (2018) stated that psychological factors are more effective than other factors. The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) asserts that behavioral intentions are shaped by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. In this context, food desire reflects individuals' attitudes toward consumption, which, along with their perceived behavioral control over accessing online ordering platforms, influences their purchase intentions. Previous studies confirm that behavioral intention can be significantly predicted by attitudinal and control-related factors, especially in consumption contexts during crises (Ünüvar et al., 2018; Shim et al., 2021). Hence, the third hypothesis is formulated:

H_3: Food desire has a positive effect on purchase intention.

Chakraborty et al. (2021) stated that the increasing use of online food ordering applications during the current pandemic and quarantine period significantly affects purchase intention. Previous studies have emphasized that online food order intentions positively affect purchasing behavior (Van der Heijden, 2003; Soares et al., 2023) and that perceived ease of use, consumer attitudes, and trust are the most important influencers (Nguyen et al., 2019; Cho & Sagynov, 2015). The visual appeal of the menu and detailed information about the menu content and the ease of ordering food online positively affect purchase intentions (Akgün & Zerenler, 2021). The convenience and ease of online ordering positively influence repurchase intentions (Armağan & Eskici, 2019). TAM also provides theoretical support for the effect of perceived ease of online ordering on purchase intention. Perceived ease of use influences both attitudes toward technology and the behavioral engagement likelihood (Davis, 1989; Tran & Khoa, 2025). In the context of online food delivery, consumers who perceive the ordering process as simple and convenient are more likely to intend to purchase (Kılıçalp & Özdoğan, 2019). The following hypothesis was proposed in light of the above information.

H_4: Ease of perceiving food ordering online has a positive effect on purchase intention.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Sample Technique

This study was conducted to determine the effect of the perception of COVID-19 on the relationship between food desire and the perceived ease of ordering food online. This study also set out to determine how consumers' food desires and the ease of online ordering affect their purchase intentions (Figure 1). The population of this research consists of consumers who order food online.

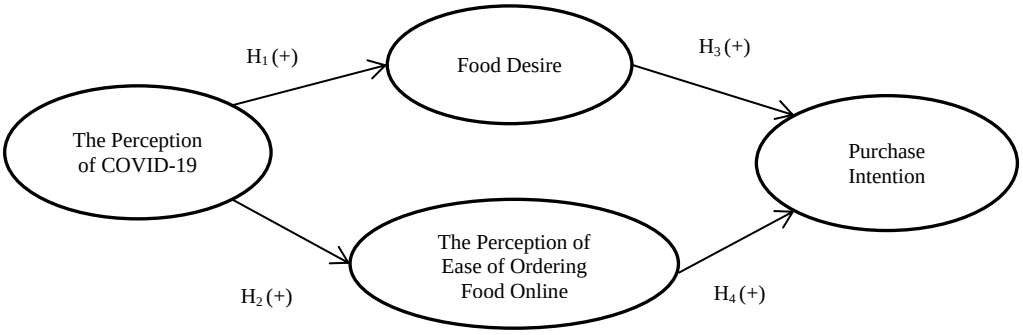

Figure 1. Research Model

Study Sample

The population of this study consisted of individuals in Turkiye who place online food delivery orders. In this context, the research was conducted with users of Turkiye's most widely used online ordering system, Yemeksepeti.com. Given the broad scope of this research population, reaching the entire universe was not feasible; therefore, for both cost and time considerations, a sample representative of the population was selected. Krejcie & Morgan (1970) argued that, at a significance level of 0.05 and a sampling error of 0.05, a sample size of 387 is sufficient for populations exceeding 10,000. Considering that the population in this study exceeds 10,000, it was determined that reaching at least 387 participants would be required for a representative sample. A questionnaire technique was employed to collect data from the target audience. The questionnaire, defined as a structured data form consisting of a set of pre-tested questions designed to collect information from participants, was used in this study (Büyüköztürk, 2005). Data were collected through convenience sampling, both online (via Facebook, WhatsApp groups, and social media platforms) and offline, between February 13 and April 15, 2025. The choice of convenience sampling was primarily due to the absence of prior information that would allow for the grouping of participants and the collection of data at equal intervals.

A total of 323 questionnaires were collected online. In addition, physical questionnaires were distributed in Gaziantep, recognized as one of Turkiye's leading gastronomy cities, yielding 112 responses. In total, 435 valid responses were obtained. Both online and offline surveys employed identical question forms and five-point Likert scales, ensuring consistency in item wording and response options. The Turkish translation of the items was applied uniformly across both modes, and participants in each setting received the same instructions. Following data collection, both datasets underwent cleaning and verification processes to ensure completeness. Statistical checks indicated no significant differences between online and offline responses, justifying the combination of both datasets into a single unified dataset for analysis.

Scales

The questionnaire form consisted of two sections. The first section included questions related to demographic characteristics, while the second section contained statements designed to measure perceptions of Covid-19, appetite for food, perceived ease of online food ordering, and purchase intention. Since the original scales were in English, translation into Turkish was required. For this purpose, experts in the field were consulted to translate the scales into Turkish. To resolve discrepancies in translation, the items were reviewed by different academics, and the wording of the scales was refined. Additionally, the Turkish version of the items was back-translated into English by two academics to ensure consistency. After these processes, the scales were finalized for use in the questionnaire. All statements in the questionnaire were measured on a five-point Likert scale.

The Perception of COVID-19

For the perception of COVID-19, the scale developed by Ahorsu et al. (2022) was used. There are seven statements about perceptions of COVID-19. (1) I am scared of catching COVID-19. (2) Thinking about COVID-19 is disturbing. (3) I am scared of losing my life due to COVID-19. (4) I am worried about watching COVID-19-related news on social media. (5) I have trouble sleeping because I am scared of catching COVID-19. (6) I avoid going out because I am scared of catching COVID-19. (7) I avoid meeting other people because I am scared of catching COVID-19.

Food Desire

The scale developed by Brewer & Sebby (2021) was used for the food desire variable. There were seven statements about food desire. (1) I feel hungry after seeing the menu. (2) The menu made my mouth water. (3) The menu increased my desire to eat. (4) I started feeling nauseous while looking at the menu. (5) I felt an urge to eat after seeing the menu. (6) When I saw the menu, I wanted to grab the food and eat it. (7) I felt an irresistible urge to eat when I saw the menu. For the items under the food appetite construct, participants were asked to respond considering their online orders from Yemeksepeti.com.

The Perception of Ease of Ordering Food Online

The perception of ease of ordering food online scale was adapted from the study of Brewer & Sebby (2021). The scale consists of seven statements. (1) I like to be able to order online without getting out. (2) I like doing things online. (3) I like having food delivered to my home. (4) I like that my food is ready when I arrive at the restaurant. (5) When I order online, I do not have the obligation to think about what to cook. (6) Ordering food online helps me avoid the crowd. (7) Ordering food online made my life easier during the pandemic.

Purchase Intention

The purchase intention scale was adapted from Wang et al. (2011). The scale consisted of three items: (1) After seeing the menu, I intend to order food from this platform. (2) After seeing the menu, the likelihood that I will order food from this platform is high. (3) I consider the chance of ordering food from this platform to be high. For the items under the purchase intention construct, participants were again asked to respond considering their online orders from Yemeksepeti.com.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographics

The demographic characteristics of the participants were as follows (Figure 2-3). A total of 29.4% of the participants were aged between 25 and 34 years. Fifty-two percent of the participants were male, while 48% were female. A total of 56.1% were married, while 43.9% were single. A total of 36.6% of the participants had a bachelor's degree.

A total of 18.4% of the participants had very low incomes, 20.5% had low incomes, 45.1% had medium incomes, 9.2% had high incomes, and 6.9% had very high incomes (Figure 2). After COVID-19 started, 28.0% of the participants had ordered food online last week, while 23.4% had ordered it within the last couple of weeks. Before the pandemic started, 33.6% of the participants ordered food online sometimes, while 26.2% ordered it rarely. After the pandemic started, 40.2% of the participants frequently ordered food online, while 35.9% always ordered food online (Figure 3).

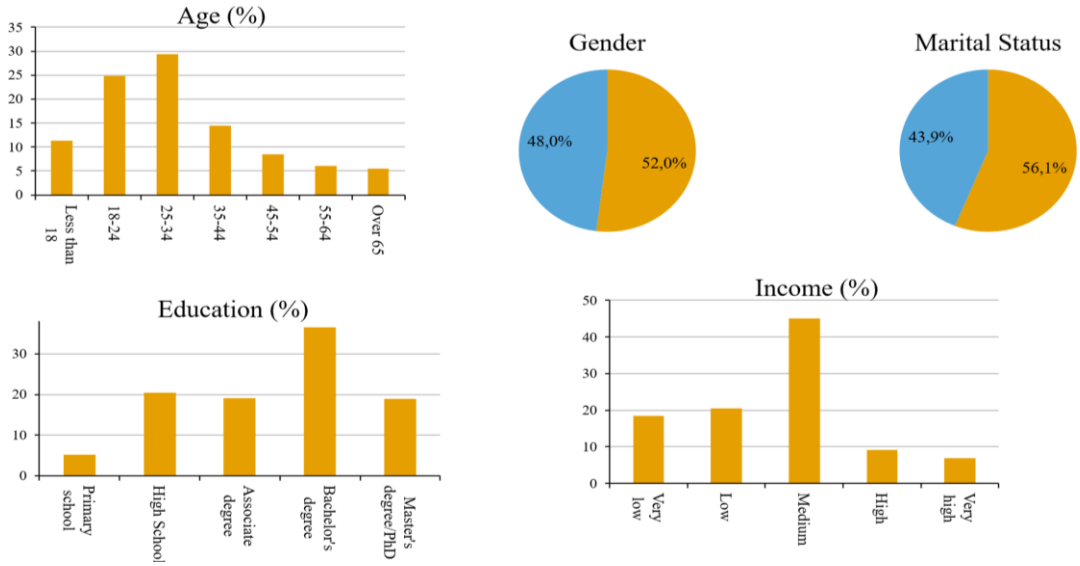

Figure 2. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

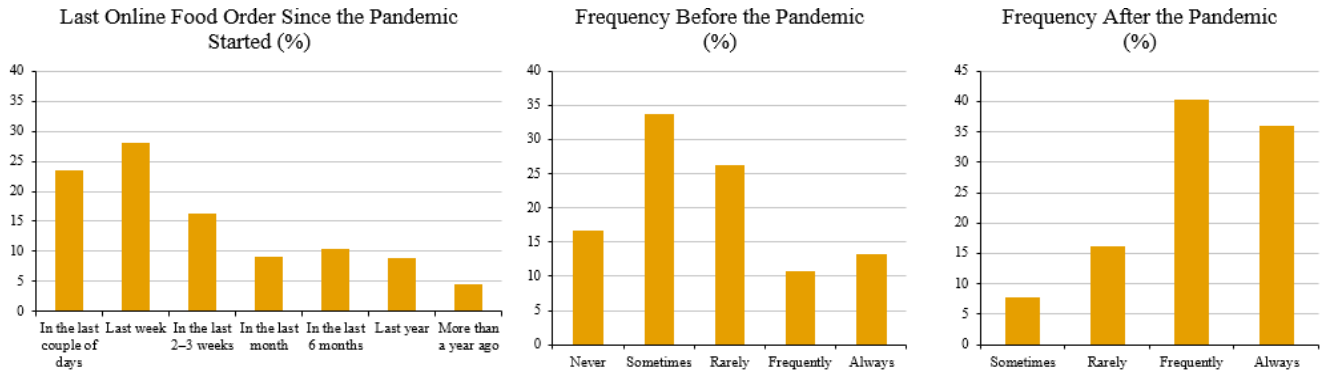

Figure 3. Online Food Ordering Behavior of Participants

Data Analysis

The SmartPLS statistical program was used for data analysis. Smart data analysis can be used as an internal and external model (Hair et al., 2014; Çavuşoğlu, 2021a). While evaluating the external model, reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha (CA) and rho-A) were calculated. The internal consistency of the variables was determined by the composite reliability (CR) coefficient. Factor loadings and average variance explained values (AVE) were calculated for

convergent validity. The external model was tested for discriminant validity (Fornell-Larcker & Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio-HTMT). In the internal model, variance inflation factor (VIF) analysis was performed to determine whether there was a multicollinearity problem among the variables before testing the hypotheses. R^2 analyses were subsequently performed to determine how much the dependent variables explained the independent variables, f^2 was used to determine the effect size of the scales, and Q^2 analysis was used to determine the predictive power of the dependent variables. After the analyses of the internal model were completed, path analysis was carried out to test the hypotheses.

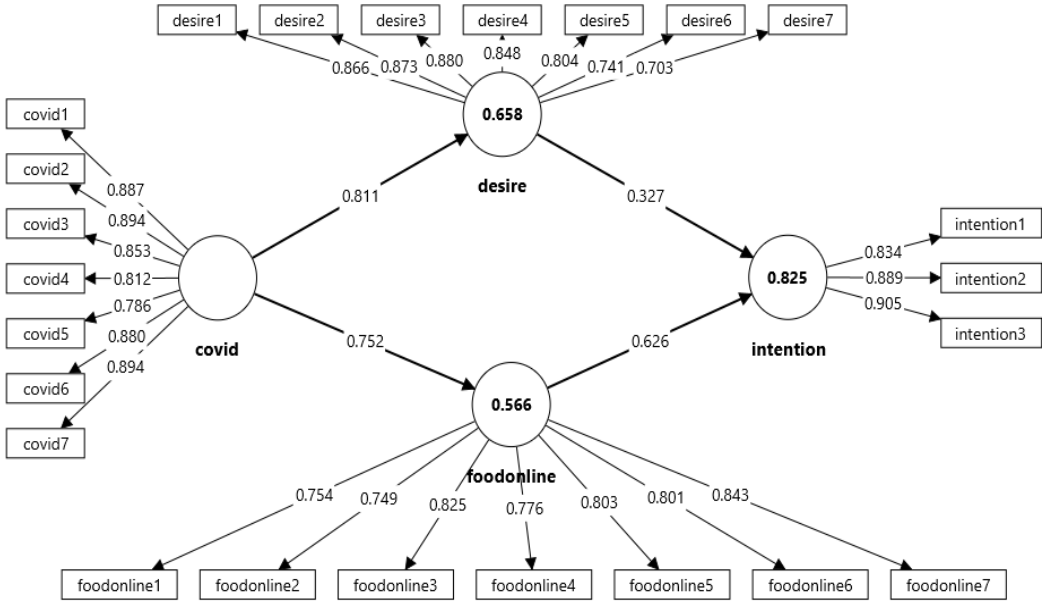

Figure 4. Reliability and validity

External Model Results

Reliability and validity tests of the scale were carried out for the external model. The CA, rho, and CR values obtained for reliability and validity should be greater than 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), and factor loadings and AVE values should be more than 0.50 (Kaiser, 1974). The analysis results revealed that the reliability coefficient (CA and rho-A) and composite reliability (CR) values were above 0.70, and the factor loadings and average variance explained values (AVE) were above the threshold (Table 1 and Figure 4). The Fornell–Larcker test was also conducted to detect the distinctive features of the scales (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). As a result of the analyses performed in the present study, it was determined that all the square root values of the AVEs in the diagonals in Table 2 were greater than the correlation loads, thus confirming discriminant validity.

HTMT ratio was detected for accurate discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2016). HTMT values are expected to be less than 1 (Voorhees et al., 2016). The analyses showed that the values are indeed fewer than 1 (Table 3). The goodness-of-fit values of the variables in the research model were used to determine the external model. SRMR and NFI values were analyzed through SmartPLS. The results of these analyses revealed that the SRMR was 0.078, which is lower than the critical threshold of 0.08 (Hu & Bentler, 1999). For NFI, Hair et al. (2013) stated that a value close to 1 indicates a good fit. The results showed that the NFI value was 0.815. All the values showed that the research model met the goodness of fit criterion.

Table 1. Reliability and Validity

Variables	CA	CR	rho-A	AVE
The Perception of COVID-19	0.940	0.952	0.941	0.738
Food Desire	0.917	0.934	0.925	0.671
Perceived ease	0.902	0.922	0.905	0.630
Purchase Intention	0.849	0.908	0.853	0.768

Table 2. Fornell–Larcker Results

Variables	1	2	3	4
The Perception of COVID-19	**0.859**			
Food Desire	0.811	**0.819**		
Perceived Ease	0.752	0.765	**0.794**	
Purchase Intention	0.751	0.725	0.726	**0.876**

Table 3. HTMT Results

Variables	1	2	3	4
The Perception of COVID-19				
Food Desire	0.864			
Perceived Ease	0.808	0.861		
Purchase Intention	0.837	0.926	0.809	

Internal Model Results

To determine the internal model, the VIF, R^2, f^2, Q^2, and path coefficients were determined (Çavuşoğlu, 2021b). According to Diamantopoulos & Siguaw (2006), VIF values below 3 do not pose a problem. The relevant values were fewer than 3 (Table 4). The R^2 values of the variables were analyzed. The R^2 value refers to how well independent variables explain dependent variables. The R^2 results are shown in Figure 5. The perception of COVID-19 explains 65% of food desire, 56% of the perception of ordering food online, and 82% of purchase intention. In the evaluation of the internal model, f^2 analysis was performed, which determines the share of independent variables in the explanation rate of dependent variables.

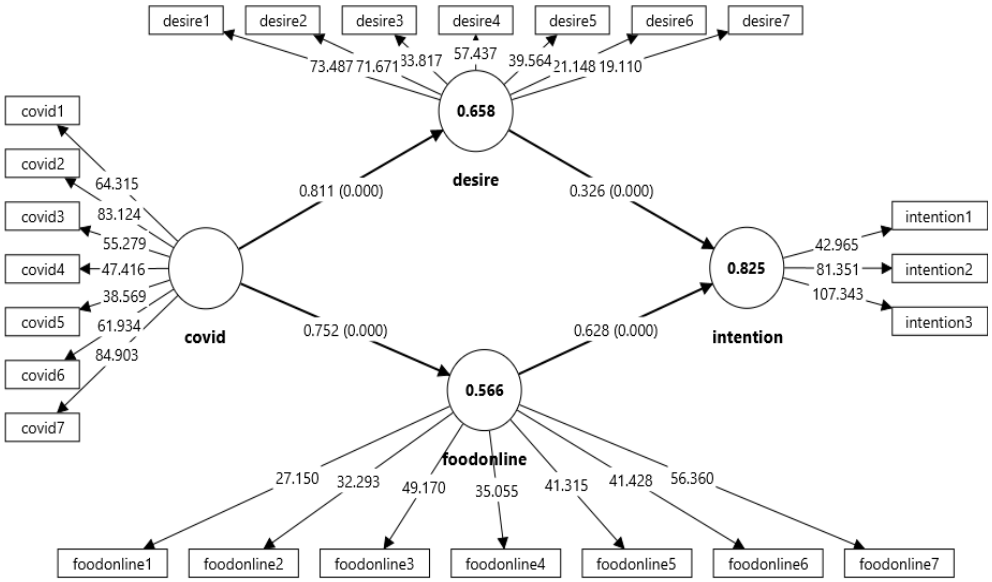

Figure 5. Structural Equation Modeling

A f^2 value above 0.02 was considered sufficient (Cohen, 1988). The results obtained suggest that the values are sufficient (Table 4). Q^2 analysis is a method for calculating the predictive power of a model. Sönmez Çakır (2020) stated that the Q^2 coefficient should be different from 0. The Q^2 values were different from 0 and had sufficient predictive power (food desire: 0.436; the perception of the ease of ordering food online: 0.350; purchase intention: 0.629). All necessary conditions were met in the evaluations of the internal model, and the hypotheses were tested later. The perception of COVID-19 had a positive effect on food desire and the perception of ordering food online. H_1 and H_2 were accepted (Table 4). On the other hand, it was determined that food desire and the perception of ordering food online have similar positive effects on purchase intentions. Therefore, H_3 and H_4 were accepted as well (Table 4 and Figure 5).

Table 5 shows that the perceived ease of ordering food online is the most important factor in purchase intentions, with an effect of 0.472. Food desire is also seen as a strong factor in explaining purchase intention, with an effect of 0.264.

Table 4. Hypotheses Results (p <0.001***, p <0.01**, p <0.05*; COVID-19: The perception of COVID-19, FD: Food Desire, PEOFO: The perception of the ease of ordering food online, PI: Purchase Intention)

Hypotheses		ß	S.D.	t value	p value	VIF	f^2
Model							
H_1	COVID-19 >>> FD	0.811	0.019	42.203	0,000***	1.000	1.920
H_2	COVID-19 >>> PEOFO	0.752	0.023	32.268	0,000***	1.000	1.304
H_3	FD >>> PI	0.326	0.042	7.841	0,000***	2.712	0.226
H_4	PEOFO >>> PI	0.628	0.039	15.906	0,000***	2.712	0.826

Table 5. The Direct and Indirect Effects of the Structural Equation Model (p=<0.001***, p=<0.01**, p≤ <0.05*)

Direct and Indirect Effects	ß	S.D.	t value	p value
COVID-19 >>> FD >>> PI	0.264	0.033	8.009	0,000***
COVID-19 >>> PEOFO >>> PI	0.472	0.034	13.931	0,000***

CONCLUSION

This study aims to determine the influence of the perception of COVID-19 on food cravings and the effect of the perceived ease of online food ordering on purchase intention. Furthermore, this study seeks to identify how consumers' food cravings and perceptions of online ordering ease influence their purchase intentions. For this purpose, 435 data points were collected from individuals in Gaziantep, Türkiye, who place food orders both in person and online. The study presents the results related to the research variables. The analysis confirmed that COVID-19 perception significantly increases individuals' food desire. This result indicates that pandemic-related concerns, anxiety, and psychological stress trigger emotional eating behaviors. The finding aligns with previous research indicating that fear, loneliness, and uncertainty during health crises enhance cravings and the desire for comfort foods (Moslehpour et al., 2018; Mathiesen et al., 2022).

Thus, H_1 is supported, confirming that COVID-19 perceptions act as a stimulus that positively affects consumers' food-related attitudes and cravings. The results demonstrate that the perception of COVID-19 significantly enhances the perceived ease of ordering food online. Individuals who are more concerned about COVID-19 tend to prefer contactless and convenient alternatives, such as online food delivery platforms. This finding is consistent with the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989) and previous studies showing that environmental pressures, such as health risks, increase individuals' reliance on digital solutions for daily needs (Ramayah & Ignatius, 2005; Kılıçalp & Özdoğan, 2019). Therefore, H_2 is supported.

The analysis also confirmed that food desire positively influences purchase intention. Consumers who exhibit stronger cravings or desire for food are more likely to translate this internal motivation into concrete behavior, such as placing an order through an online platform. This finding is consistent with the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), which posits that attitudes and desires shape behavioral intentions. Previous research has similarly highlighted the role of emotional and hedonic factors in driving purchase intentions during crises (Ünüvar et al., 2018; Shim et al., 2021). H_3 is therefore fully supported.

Finally, the perceived ease of ordering food online had a significant positive effect on purchase intention. Consumers who perceive the online ordering process as simple, convenient, and efficient are more likely to act on their intention to purchase. This result aligns with the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989) and corroborates previous evidence that perceived usability and convenience are critical determinants of e-commerce adoption (Kılıçalp & Özdoğan, 2019).

Consequently, H_4 is confirmed. Overall, this study examined the impact of COVID-19 perception on food cravings and the effect of perceived ease of online food ordering on purchase intention. The findings revealed that COVID-19 perception significantly increased individuals' food cravings. This indicates that pandemic-related psychological stress and uncertainty reinforced emotional eating tendencies. Additionally, it was found that the perception of COVID-19 also increases the perceived ease of placing online orders. Individuals who are more concerned about the pandemic tend to prefer safe, contactless, and practical shopping alternatives. The research results show that both food desire and the perceived ease of online ordering positively influence purchase intention. This reveals that emotional and technological factors jointly shape consumers' behavioral intentions. From a theoretical perspective, the findings align closely with the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) framework (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974), the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991), and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 1989; Dyussekeyeva et al., 2025).

Within the S-O-R framework, the perception of COVID-19 is an external stimulus (S) that evokes internal emotional and cognitive responses (O), such as food cravings and perceived ease of online ordering, ultimately leading to behavioral responses (R) in the form of purchase intentions (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). The TPB is also supported, as consumers' attitudes (e.g., positive emotions toward food), subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control shape behavioral intentions (Ajzen, 1991; Muna et al., 2025). Similarly, the TAM framework is validated through the significant influence of perceived ease of use on behavioral intention, emphasizing that convenience and usability are central determinants of online food purchasing behavior (Davis, 1989). Collectively, these theoretical frameworks provide an integrated understanding of how emotional and technological dimensions interact to shape consumer behavior under crisis conditions.

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. First, the use of a convenience sampling method for both online and offline surveys may limit the representativeness of the sample, and thus the findings may not be fully generalizable to all online food delivery users in Turkiye. Second, data were collected during a specific period (February 13-April 15, 2025), which reflects consumer behaviors only within this timeframe and does not account for seasonal or temporal variations. Third, this study focuses solely on the online food delivery sector, so the results may not be applicable to other e-commerce or service industries. Fourth, as the data rely on self-reported measures, potential biases such as social desirability or recall errors cannot be excluded. Finally, since this research was conducted only in Turkiye, cultural, economic, and technological differences may limit the applicability of the findings to other countries. Further research could address these limitations in several ways. Employing probability sampling or larger, more diverse samples would enhance generalizability. Comparative studies across different e-commerce sectors could reveal whether the observed relationships are sector-specific. Longitudinal research could examine changes in consumer behaviors over time, while cross-cultural or international studies could provide insights into the role of cultural and economic contexts. Additionally, incorporating other variables, such as price sensitivity, trust, brand loyalty, sustainability, and platform security, could enrich the understanding of online food ordering behaviors. Finally, utilizing mixed methods, including qualitative interviews or experimental designs, could help validate and deepen the findings of survey-based studies.

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