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Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis on the Preference of Courier Service Providers with Analytic Hierarchy Process Model

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ABSTRACT

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Received 9 July 2023 Received in revised form 29 November 2023 Accepted 8 December 2023 Available online 19 December 2023 The rising interest in E-commerce has increased the reliance on courier service providers in Malaysia. However, the logistical performances of the courier service providers in Malaysia still require improvement especially in the enhancement of information system adoption as the providers are suffering from bottlenecks in some hubs and centres which affect the satisfaction of clients and the reputation of the online retailers. Online retailers place high concern in the performances of the courier service providers as their services affect the sales and revenues of the online retailers. Therefore, the goal of this study is to propose a framework to determine and rank the factors that affect the selection of courier service providers among online retailers in Malaysia with Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) model. This study found that real time notification, cost and timeliness are the three most important factors of consideration while GDEX is the highly preferred courier service provider among the online retailers. This study can serve as a guide to the courier service providers to improve based on the top factors that influence the selection of their services.

Keywords:

Analytic hierarchy process; courier service; e-commerce; preference

1. Introduction

Digital literacy is one of the compulsory skills for working adults and students in performing their daily tasks. According to Abdullah *et al.*, [1], there are approximately 20 million internet users in Malaysia in 2019, with half of them engaging in online transactions such as e-commerce. The United Nations has also projected that greater than 80% of the populations in developing countries will make up the urban community in 30 years [2]. Therefore, more individuals will engage in this digitalized supply chain. The number of clients in e-commerce is also expected to exceed 75% of the total population in 2022 as the market volume is expected to keep increasing over the years, particularly as COVID-19 became a major force for e-commerce adoption during the pandemic [1]. With e-commerce, the parcel volume to be delivered is increased as courier service providers perform logistical activities such as route planning, sorting and last mile delivery.

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In Malaysia, even though some courier service providers have invested in smart warehouses and hubs with immersive technology and automation to allow machine interaction to reduce human error and expedite the delivery process, smaller hubs and centers still rely largely on human capital to process all orders [3]. Some hubs and centers suffer bottlenecks which affect their competitiveness and increase their volatility. Moreover, Nekhoroshkov *et al.*, [4] found that Malaysia has a below average rating among countries in Asia Pacific in logistical performances. This is a disadvantage which adds on to one of the drawbacks of e-commerce which is the inability to obtain instant possession of products ordered. As the lead time between the order placement and the successful delivery of products increases, there will be higher uncertainty in the order which may lead to dissatisfaction of clients that will reflect on the bottom line and reputation of the online retailers. As such, online retailers will perform thorough consideration when selecting the courier service providers.

Therefore, the goal of this study is to propose a framework to determine and rank the factors affecting the selection of courier service providers among the online retailers in Malaysia. Since there are several factors which can affect the selection of courier service providers, this is a multi-criteria decision making (MCDM) problem, analytic hierarchy process (AHP) can be used to rank the factors and alternatives [5,6]. Based on our understanding, past studies have not applied AHP to analyze the factors affecting the selection of courier service providers among the online retailers in Malaysia. AHP has been used to simulate the thoughts of decision makers to rank the preferences of a given domain with respect to a certain criterion [7,8]. AHP has been largely adopted to study supplier selection [9-12], strategy selection [13,14] and location selection [15,16] while also ranked public implementations [17,18]. Therefore, AHP is used to rank the factors affecting the selection of the courier service providers and the alternatives which are the courier service providers. In Malaysia, there are five major players in the courier services segment. They are DHL, GDEX, Pos Laju, City-Link and Skynet, which will be used in this study.

2. Methodology

This paper aims to determine the factors affecting the selection of courier service providers among the online retailers in Malaysia. This multi-criteria problem can be solved with analytic hierarchy process (AHP) developed by Saaty [19]. In AHP, the scenario will be decomposed into a hierarchy to determine the optimal decision criteria and alternative [20]. The strength of AHP is in the determination of the prime criteria and alternative that match the goal of the study by using pairwise comparisons at the respective hierarchical level [21]. A hierarchy structure with three levels is proposed as the conceptual framework to analyze the factors affecting the preference of courier service providers in Malaysia, with this goal making up the top level of the hierarchy. There are six (6) decision criteria, which are in the middle of the hierarchy, as they are made up of cost, timeliness, order accuracy, simplicity of order placement, payment option and real time notification [22,23]. The bottom of the hierarchy structure consists of the decision alternatives which include five prominent courier service providers in Malaysia with high market capitalization [24]. They are DHL, GDEX, Pos Laju, City-Link and Skynet. In AHP, there is no defined method to determine the sample size as there is no direct comparison of attributes [25-27]. Therefore, in this study, 33 online retailers have participated to identify the factors affecting the preference of courier service providers in Malaysia.

There are seven (7) steps to develop the AHP model for this study [28-30].

i. Step-1: Formation of hierarchy structure with three levels consisting of goals, criteria and alternatives using the decomposition principle. Table 1 presents the proposed framework of hierarchy structure in determining the preference of courier service providers in Malaysia.

Table 1Proposed framework

Levels	Items		
Goal	To determine and rank the factors affecting the preference of courier service providers among on retailers in Malaysia		
Criteria	Cost		
	Timeliness		
	Order accuracy		
	Simplicity of order placement		
	Payment option		
	Real time notification		
Alternative	DHL		
	GDEX		
	Pos Laju		
	City-Link		
	Skynet		

- ii. Step-2: Transformation of the AHP model into a two-way Likert scale pairwise comparison questionnaire to be distributed to the target respondents.
- iii. Step-3: Formation of matrix structure using the results of the questionnaires as in Eq. (1).

$$A_{n \times n} = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & a_{12} & a_{13} & a_{14} & a_{15} \\ a_{21} & 1 & a_{23} & a_{24} & a_{25} \\ a_{31} & a_{32} & 1 & a_{34} & a_{35} \\ a_{41} & a_{42} & a_{43} & 1 & a_{45} \\ a_{51} & a_{52} & a_{53} & a_{54} & 1 \end{pmatrix}$$
 (1)

iv. Step-4: Pairwise comparison among criteria and among alternatives to identify the relative importance using the comparative judgement principle. This comparative judgement principle follows the Saaty's scale as presented in Table 2 [31].

Table 2Saaty's Scale for Comparative Judgement Principle

Ratings	Definitions
1	Equal importance
3	Slight importance
5	Strong importance
7	Very strong importance
9	Extreme importance
2,4,6,8	Intermediates

v. Step-5: Normalization of matrix to determine the weights of criteria and alternatives. Normalization is performed by first obtaining the column sum of each matrix and then divide each element by the sum to create a normalized matrix. The mean of each row of the normalized matrix indicates the weight of the criteria or alternative as shown in Eq. (2).

$$c_{ij} = \frac{a_{ij}}{\sum_{i=1}^{n} a_{ij}}$$
, i = 1,2,3,4,5 and j = 1,2,3,4,5 (2)

vi. Step-6: The final weights of the alternatives can be calculated to determine the prioritization using matrix Y, with the following formulation in Eq. (3).

$$Y = A \times C \tag{3}$$

where Y is the final weights of the alternatives calculated in the matrix, A is the weights of alternatives with respect to every single criterion and C is the weights of the criteria.

vii. Step-7: AHP allows the checking of reliability of a study with consistency ratio (CR), which is formulated with the quotient of consistency index (C) and random index (R). CR should be less than 0.10 for reliable results with the calculation in Eq. (4) [31].

$$CR = \frac{c}{R} \tag{4}$$

3. Results

Figure 1 and Table 3 demonstrates the weightages of the six factors affecting the selection of courier service providers among online retailers in Malaysia.

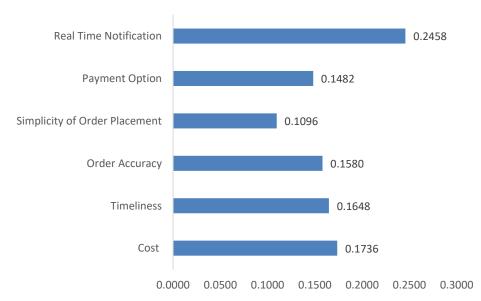


Fig. 1. Weightages of factors affecting the selection of courier service providers among online retailers in Malaysia

Figure 1 and Table 3 show that real time notification is the most important factor in selecting a courier service provider among online retailers in Malaysia with a weightage of 0.2458. The second and third most prominent factors are cost and timeliness, with weightages of 0.1736 and 0.1648 respectively. Order accuracy (0.1580), payment option (0.1482) and simplicity of order placement (0.1096) are ranked fourth, fifth and sixth in the selection of courier service providers among online retailers.

Table 3Ranking of factors in selecting courier service providers

0 0				
Factors	Weightages	Ranking		
Real Time Notification	0.2458	1		
Cost	0.1736	2		
Timeliness	0.1648	3		
Order Accuracy	0.1580	4		
Payment Option	0.1482	5		
Simplicity of Order Placement	0.1096	6		

Firstly, real time notification is ranked first because tracking and tracing system offers a feature for both retailers and clients to visualize the locations of their parcels, be it in transit or preparing for last mile deliveries so that the clients may plan ahead to receive their orders. This can also prevent parcels from being lost if the parcels are left at the doorstep when the clients are not available for pick up, thus enhancing the security and safety of parcels and reducing the risk of lost as some notification systems come with GPS coordinates and proof of delivery [32]. Real time tracking and notification system also improves transparency whereby this also increases customer engagement and comfortability with their delivery expectations [33]. Moreover, Akter and Wamba [34] noted that visibility is a driver that promotes online purchasing behaviour as clients often feel a sense of relief knowing some key information on the parcel status. This would then increase the sales of the online retailers. Besides, online retailers can also check delivered parcels from the notification system and take appropriate actions such as insurance claims if the parcels are missing or stolen [35].

Cost is the second factor affecting the selection of courier service providers. In general, the online retailers aim for value maximization in which the online retailers would select the courier service provider with the lowest cost but has the greatest value and quality. Online retailers often compare the cost and value of the services provided by the courier service provider to make sure that the cost matches the services [36]. Some online retailers also prefer to engage with courier service providers which are affordable and would offer special rates to the long-term clients [37,38]. Moreover, some delivery costs are borne by the clients. High cost of delivery will deter the clients from purchasing from the online retailers as delivery cost affects clients' intentions [39].

The third factor involves timeliness. Timeliness refers to the most favourable duration from order placement to the reception of parcels at the clients' location. Nowadays, with information systems and various optimization software for storage, picking, sorting and transport planning, courier service providers can deliver in lesser time possible and at a higher speed [40]. Timeliness of courier service providers also proves the reliability of the providers as they can deliver within the expected date of delivery [41]. Late deliveries will cause client dissatisfaction especially if the clients have paid for priority shipment. Late delivery may have negative effect on the online retailers as the clients are not satisfied with the services and may refrain from transacting with the online retailers [42,43]. Therefore, online retailers find that timeliness is also among the top three factors to consider when selecting a courier service provider.

Next, order accuracy is the fourth factor under consideration by the online retailers. Order accuracy involves the consistency of client's order with the parcel delivered to the correct location. Delivery to an inaccurate location may eventually cause the parcel to be lost or its content exposed for unintended purposes and may be damaged. However, nowadays, many courier service providers have scanning systems with barcodes or radio frequency identification to reduce order errors during fulfilment. Some major hubs also have automation systems for sorting packages and assigning the right vehicle. Location mapping can also reduce the chances of delivery to the wrong location and

ensure complete deliveries [44,45]. Therefore, this may be a reason that order accuracy is only ranked fourth when selecting a courier service provider.

The fifth factor is payment option. When courier service providers accept a variety of payment modes, it is more convenient for both the online retailers and their clients as they are able to select their preferred mode of payment. As people are moving towards digitization, in Malaysia, there are a number of payment options available such as cash on delivery, online banking, credit or debit cards, E-wallets, payment at convenience store, instalment plans and the option to pay later. These payment options, especially the cash on delivery and pay later options, increases the confidence level of the clients especially to those who worry about non-delivery or non-fulfilment of their orders. Therefore, it may be a less concerning factor to the online retailers [46].

Lastly, simplicity of order placement is the least important factor in selecting a courier service provider among online retailers in Malaysia. Simplicity of order placement does not have a direct relationship with order delivery and client satisfaction, thus does not affect the sales and profit of the online retailers and therefore, may be the reason it is ranked last in this study. Moreover, many courier service providers have developed their websites and mobile applications for delivery order placement and self-printing of the airway bills. Glitches may be observed in the order placement systems but are quickly resolved and smoother and user-friendly interfaces have been designed for order placement [46].

Figure 2 depicts the ranking on the selection of courier service providers among online retailers in Malaysia with respect to each factor.

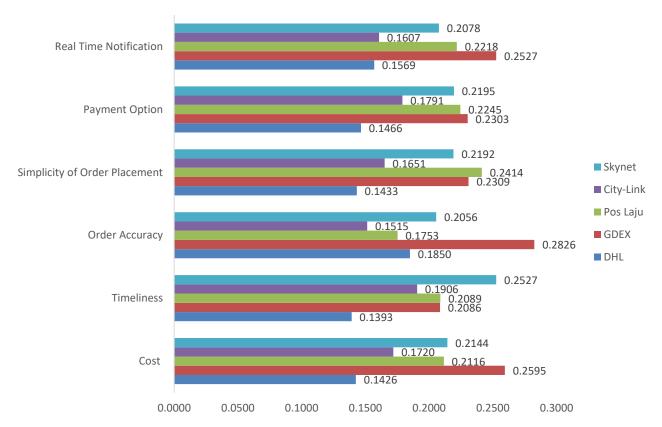


Fig. 2. Selection of courier service providers with respect to each factor

Based on Figure 2, out of the six factors, GDEX has the highest performance in four factors, namely cost (0.2595), order accuracy (0.2826), payment option (0.2303) and real time notification (0.2527). Skynet is the best performer in timeliness (0.2527) while Pos Laju is having the best order placement

system (0.2414). On the other hand, DHL has the lowest performance in five factors including cost (0.1426), timeliness (0.1393), simplicity of order placement (0.1433), payment option (0.1466) and real time notification (0.1569). City-Link has the lowest weightage in order accuracy (0.1515).

GDEX is a listed company on the main market of Bursa Malaysia and has been gaining profits until 2021 which shows that GDEX is a high performing company especially in the cost and service quality which gain the attention and satisfaction of online retailers. GDEX is also constantly focusing on the improvement of digital and technological competency which eventually helps to speed up the delivery processes, minimize errors, simplify the order and tracking processes while also train its employees to be digital literate and responsible to enhance its services [47].

Figure 3 demonstrates the overall ranking in the selection of courier service providers among online retailers in Malaysia.

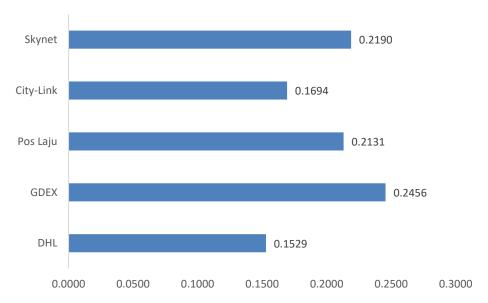


Fig. 3. Overall ranking in the selection of courier service providers

As seen in Figure 3, GDEX (0.2456) has the highest overall weight and is the most selected courier service provider among the online retailers with respect to cost, timeliness, order accuracy, simplicity of order placement, payment option and real time notification. The second most selected courier service provider is Skynet with a weight of 0.2190, followed by Pos Laju with a weight of 0.2131 and City-Link with a weight of 0.1694. DHL is the least selected courier service provider with the lowest weight of 0.1529. The consistency ratio in this study is 0.0470 which is well below 0.1000. Therefore, the results of this study are acceptable.

4. Conclusions

The study has achieved the goal to determine and rank the factors affecting the selection of courier service providers among online retailers in Malaysia with AHP model. The factors include cost, timeliness, order accuracy, simplicity of order placement, payment option and real time notification. The top three important factors are real time notification, cost and timeliness as they have high influence to client satisfaction and the sales and profitability of the online retailers. GDEX is the most selected courier service provider among the online retailers due to its constant efforts in enhancing its digital competencies to deliver the best services. Based on the factors affecting the selection of courier service providers, DHL may improve by enhancing its real time notification, cost and

timeliness to deliver better services to the online retailers and other clients. Since life is mostly back to normalcy after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in the end of 2019, future studies can be performed to survey the trends of online retailing as people are gradually moving back to purchasing from physical stores and how this would impact the courier service providers.

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