



COVID-19 And the Impact on South African Consumers' Dining Practices

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Abstract

Consumers' dining habits have undoubtedly changed as a result of COVID-19. It's been noted that despite the restricted access and opening of the restaurant industry, many consumers still tend to stay home, order in, or rely on convenience Ready to eat (RTE) products. This is the true unknown of the COVID-19 pandemic – consumer eating behaviour. The potential emergence of new consumer eating and food-related behavioural trends, post the pandemic may require innovative solutions to aid the restaurant and hospitality industries to transform and stay afloat. This study aimed at assessing how the restaurant and hospitality industries played a role in changing consumers' eating-out and home food provision behaviour. Results would greatly benefit the hospitality and food industry and consumers alike.

The methodology entailed a cross-sectional explorative-descriptive study that collected data using an online survey. The unit of analysis for this study was urban food consumers residing in Gauteng, South Africa. Due to time and monetary constraints, non-probability convenience sampling was employed. A total of 1024 questionnaires were captured and presented a sample of 61% millennials predominantly female belonging to the white (53.6%) and African (38%) population groups respectively.

The results presented indicated that COVID-19 has forced consumers to change many of their habits which includes where they get their meals from. Before COVID-19 out-of-home meals (44.3%) were consumed about twice a week, this changed during lockdown where 60% of the respondents indicated that out-of-home meals were consumed less than once a week. Although the frequency of eating out of home meals has decreased, food delivery service has become popular since the lockdown. Pre-COVID-19, consumers preferred to dine away from home or purchase takeaway food directly from the restaurants but recently meal occasions have migrated from restaurants to homes particularly in the fast-food and casual dining areas.

The findings confirm changes in dining practices and the need for the industry to understand what the consumer wants and expects in a novel world.

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Charmaine Sehoole is a lecturer in the Department of Consumer and Food Sciences at the University of Pretoria. She is responsible for undergraduate modules in Experimental Foods, Quantity Food Production,

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