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Changes in consumer behavior in the purchase and consumption of the restaurant sector caused by the lockdown

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Master in Marketing

Supervisor:

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Department of Marketing, Operations and General Management

November, 2022



**BUSINESS
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Department of Marketing, Strategy and Operations

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Resumo

Nos últimos dois anos, houve uma mudança significativa na vida da população mundial, uma mudança que ninguém esperava, o Covid-19. Após o surgimento deste vírus na sociedade, muitos fatores e medidas foram implementadas globalmente, como o teletrabalho, o distanciamento social e como o impedimento de sair de casa em diversos momentos e por diferentes circunstâncias, sendo que as pessoas tiveram de se adaptar a um novo estilo de vida. Assim, o comportamento do consumidor teve de se habituar a uma nova era, aparecendo mudanças significativas nos hábitos e comportamentos do consumidor em diversas áreas, incluindo a restauração. Esta dissertação tem como objetivo estudar o impacto na compra e consumo de restauração provocado pela Covid-19 e os respectivos confinamentos e também a compreensão dos comportamentos pós pandemia. Procedeu-se à recolha dos dados através de reuniões presenciais com famílias portuguesas. Os resultados obtidos indicam que a população voltou a consumir restauração pós pandemia. Verificou-se também que houve um aumento significativo na compra de restauração através de aplicativos de entrega de comida e que esse aumento se manteve até hoje. Além disso, confirmou-se que as promoções foram um grande impacto na experiência de compra de restauração. Adicionalmente, o comportamento de consumo no McDonald's alterou-se significativamente pelo aumento de compra através de aplicações de entrega de comida, todavia ainda existe alguma incerteza deste comportamento para o futuro. Por último, a experiência e consumo de McDonald's ainda não é um tópico de conversa entre as pessoas, pelo que precisa de ser trabalho no futuro.

Palavras-Chave: Covid-19; Comportamento do consumidor; Restauração; McDonald's; Entrega de comida online; Pandemia

Classificação JEL: Marketing (M31)

Abstract

In the last two years, there has been a significant change in the lives of the world's population, a change that no one expected, the Covid-19. After the emergence of this virus in society, many factors and measures were implemented globally, such as teleworking, social distancing and preventing people from leaving home at different times and for different circumstances, and people had to adapt to a new lifestyle. Thus, consumer behaviour had to get used to a new era, with significant changes appearing in consumer habits and behaviours in several areas, including the restaurant sector. This dissertation aims to analyse the impact on the purchase and consumption of the restaurant sector caused by Covid-19 and the respective lockdowns and also the understanding of post-pandemic behaviours. Data collection was carried out through face-to-face meetings with Portuguese families. The results obtained indicate that the population returned to eat out-of-home after the lockdowns. It was also found that there was a significant increase in the purchase of restaurant sector through online food delivery and this increase has continued until now. Furthermore, it was confirmed that promotions were a major impact on the restaurant purchase experience. Additionally, consumption behaviour at McDonald's has changed significantly due to the increase in purchases through food delivery applications, however, there is still some uncertainty about this behaviour for the future. Finally, McDonald's experience and consumption is not yet a topic of conversation among people, so it needs to be worked in the future.

Keywords: Covid-19; Consumer behaviour; Restaurant sector; McDonald's; Online food delivery; Pandemic

JEL Classification: Marketing (M31)

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List of abbreviations

WOM Word of mouth

1 Introduction

In the last years, there has been a drastic change in people's lives due to the appearance of one of the most talked names in recent times, the Covid-19. The Covid-19 pandemic left the world open-mouthed and unresponsive, becoming part of people's lives. This worldwide catastrophe caused millions of deaths and destroyed and damaged many lives.

The Covid-19 pandemic has manifested in different ways in the life of the global society: in health, eco-economy and work, social protection, education, stopping to be just a usual health crisis and it has become in a general and global crisis for society (Guillot et al., 2021). Countries were forced to adopt quarantine and, consequently, provide different measures because of the virus infectiousness (Shen et al., 2020).

This global virus has devastated the global economy, even the powerful countries (Chakraborty & Maity, 2020). With Covid-19 pandemic, the lockdown and the restriction of mass gathering was the one of biggest measures implemented over this season. Most of the educational, tourism, commercial, sports industries had to close (Chakraborty & Maity, 2020).

Restaurant sector has become really affected by the pandemic wave, since it was one of the main sectors with more impact. Since restaurants are something that people consume a lot, it is important to analyse and understand how people had to change regarding the matter, and how they adapted to do it.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and with the long-term lockdowns, consumers had to change their habits and behaviours towards restaurant sector. The main goal of this dissertation is to study the purchase and consumption impact caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and the respective lockdowns. Therefore, the core is to understand those main changes in consumer behaviour caused by the virus and, consequently, if those changes are expected to maintain in the consumer's lives.

This study is inspired by Solomon et al. (2016) model, and thus, it follows three main themes. Firstly, it refers to the contextualization of purchase and consumption, including habits of eating out of home or at home. Secondly, it is regarding to the online purchase, where is approached moments and ways of online purchase, motivations and barriers, and home delivery service versus take away service. Lastly, it discusses the post-purchase behaviour, when it comes to the reception and sharing of physical and digital experiences.

In a context of profound change in the Portuguese lives, as not seen since 1919, during the Spanish flu, it is important to understand how the context of confined families' lives changed the way they buy and consume regarding the restaurant sector. Therefore, with Covid-19 pandemic and the respective lockdown, consumers had to change their habits and behaviors in relation to the restaurant sector.

This dissertation is organized into five major points in addition to this introduction chapter, which aims to identify the main contents and purpose of this study. The second chapter where is presented a literature review related to the context of purchase and consumption of restaurants. The third chapter is the contextualization of the restaurant sector where it is a better overview and comprehension of this sector to this dissertation. The fourth chapter approaches the methodology, from the presentation of a conceptual model, to the In Situ data collection methodology, characterized by collecting information at the place of consumption, the family environment, and also the way of gathering and processing the information. Thirdly, the following chapter presents the analysis of detailed data obtained from visits to families. Moreover, the sixth chapter mention the main conclusions, which seeks to summarize and emphasise the points of data analysis, and it presents the main contributions, limitations and suggestions for further investigations.

2 Literature Review

This chapter is divided into three main parts, the general context of purchase and consumption in the restaurant sector, where it is approached the purchase and consumption habits, purchasing and consumption regarding restaurant sector, and the impact of Covid-19 pandemic in the same habits. Secondly, the online purchase, where it is talked about moments and ways of online purchasing, motivations and barriers that consumers have purchasing online, and the main differences between home delivery and takeaway. Lastly, it is important to concern about the post-purchase behaviours, mentioning the knowledge and sharing of experiences.

2.1 General context of purchase and consumption in the restaurant sector

This chapter contains previous literature from different researchers, and it is inspired by Solomon et al. (2016) model. However, this study evolved into a specific model applied to the restaurant sector context, where it will be also analysed the impact of Covid-19 pandemic.

2.1.1 Purchase and Consumption habits

First of all, it is essential to address the individual decision-making process by the consumer. The way in which the consumer evaluates and chooses products depends on the degree of involvement with the product, the marketing message and/or the circumstances in which the purchase is made (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard, & Hogg, 2016).

Antecedent factors such as moods and emotions, situational, temporal and shopping orientation can have an important role in consumers' decisions. Several different factors can affect a consumer decision whether to buy or not to buy a certain product or service. Consumer's moods can change radically during the day and the goal is to make consumers happy in the moment of the purchase. If consumers are happy and satisfied, they are more willing to engage with a brand and a purchase. (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard, & Hogg, 2016).

Consumers are more demanding and, therefore, companies must recognize that shopping today is about having an experience and they must offer something that differentiates

them from others. The purchase environment is so important in order to increase customers' engagement. For example, these researchers compare the shopping experience with the theatre, where the salespeople are the actors. The store environment is the set, and the store displays are the props. Moreover, the environment and atmosphere of the store focus on the smell, music, design, temperature, and a lot more features. (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard, & Hogg, 2016).

Nowadays, the current society is more concerned with the environment and so people or companies are more conscious in the way they dispose of their products. (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard, & Hogg, 2016).

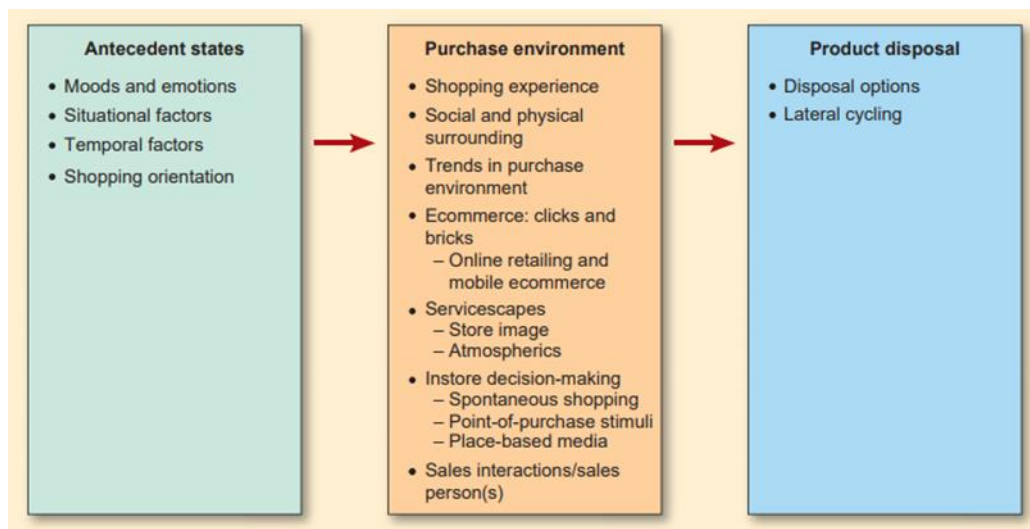


Figure 1: Issues Related to purchase and post-purchase activities
Source: Solomon et al. (2016)

2.1.2 Purchasing and consumption regarding restaurant sector

After understanding the purchase and consumption models, it is important to demystify food habits. Nowadays, purchase and consumption behaviours are often repetitive and practised in usual places, making consumers develop their own habits. When repetition in contiguity with contexts is characteristic of consumer behaviour, habits are crucial to understanding further how consumers behave in the marketplace (Ji & Wood, 2007). Habits are just a context-based form of response that can perpetuate consumer choices (JI & Wood, 2007).

In recent years with the economic development and with increased purchasing power it has contributed to a recent change in the availability of food (Rodrigues & Almeida, 2001).

However, sociocultural influences together with economic constraints can contribute to specific food choices, which allow to explain and clarify the differences in food consumption across European countries (Naska et al., 2000). Understanding the influence of socioeconomic variables on food consumption can be advantageous if the objective is to change eating behaviour, predict the outcome of interventions and generate hypotheses about food consumption in different circumstances (Moreira & Padrão, 2004).

In adolescence, young people are easily influenced by those around them, especially by the people they live with or see every day. Furthermore, they are easily influenced by advertising and changes in society (Höglund, Samuelson, & Mark, 1998). Previous studies affirm that children's and young people's food habits are influenced by socioeconomic status of their families (Samuelson et al., 1971; Hagman et al., 1986). However, according to Höglund et al. (1998), socioeconomic factors do not have a big impact on food habits in children up to 13 years old.

The relationship between the eater and the food is an aggregation of complex processes and factors. Therefore, Poulain and Larrose (1994) replied to this problem with a sequential process composed by the following four steps (table 1).

Table 1: Four steps of the sequential process of food habits

Identification	Process by which the food is recognised as belonging to the edible order of things.
Acquisition	Process by which the eater decides to consume a given food.
Appropriation	Process by which the eater comes to terms with a food, becomes familiar with it and prepares it for incorporation.
Incorporation	Process by which the eater ingests the food and the symbols that accompany it.

Source: Poulain and Larrose (1994)

People's time becomes scarce, and people's lives are increasingly bustling due to the excess of work, to sophisticated and more competent studies and to the high traffic, among other factors, and, consequently, causes changes in individual habits and family members in everyday life and in eating habits (Fantinel, Teixeira, & Ghizzo, 2011).

Thus, in recent years, the population's demand for out-of-home food services and food establishments is notorious, since this option meets the people's needs according to their daily schedule (Fantinel, Teixeira, & Ghizzo, 2011).

According to some studies such as Fantinel, Teixeira and Ghizzo (2011), eating out has become a very common practice, especially in urban centers with a considerably high dimension. Thus, this practice has been integrated into people's lives naturally.

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, the Institute of Marketing Research (2019) developed a study about out-of-home food trends. They concluded that compared to 2017, the number of times that Portuguese people purchase food out-of-home and eat out increased. The reason is linked to the following four factors: pace of life; a way to save time; concern for food balance; lack of knowledge to cook.

In addition, consumers are looking for convenience and advantages such as a good price, safety and the opportunity to try new foods.

From 2017 to 2019, home deliveries rose 3 percentage points, reaching 19%, although the remaining 81% reflects the number of people who pick up the meal at home. Moreover, the Portuguese people are increasingly adhering to technology and experimenting with new realities. According to the IMR (2019), 48% of respondents have reservation or restaurant applications on their mobile phones.

2.2.3 Impact of Covid-19 pandemic in purchasing and consumption habits

Consumer habits of buying and shopping has changed drastically in the last year and a half due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the respective lockdown (Sheth, 2020). However, according to Sheth (2020) "it is inevitable that some habits will die because the consumer under the lockdown condition has discovered an alternative that is more convenient, affordable, and accessible".

Food consumption at home and away has changed due to the Covid-19 pandemic and led to a change of attitudes and behaviour of households (Filimonau, Vi, Beer, & Ermolaev, 2021). This study concluded that the pandemic has caused a greater concern in the preparation of healthy food. Moreover, it has caused a more wastage of food in households during lockdown, from overcooking (Filimonau, Vi, Beer, & Ermolaev, 2021). Currently, there are

several doubts whether consumption out of home will increase or decrease when it returns to normal life.

2.2 Online purchasing

Following this dissertation, it is important to develop online shopping since, with the Covid-19 pandemic, this theme has increased radically and has become part of consumers' lives.

Online shopping is the consumer purchase process of products or services from any online seller (Mastercard Worldwide Insight, 2008). It is a convenient way to buy something and save time, but customers often feel unsure about sharing personal information or cards over the internet (John Horrigan, 2008). One of the biggest challenges for online sellers is to attract customers and convince them to make purchases online and not offline (Belhan et al., 1999).

Online shopping has evolved and became a quick and practical tool which allows consumers to make a purchase in a short period of time. Nowadays, online shopping is a convenient way to buy something and save time, but customers often feel unsure about sharing personal information or cards over the internet (Nasution et al., 2008).

Early adopters, such as Millennials and Generation Z, are the closest friends of new technologies, since they have an ease to learn and keep up with technological evolutions. On the other hand, older generations have less capability to adapt to new realities, leaving them doubtful and sceptical since it is not possible to feel, try and touch the products before the purchase. (North et al., 2003).

Frank and Peschel (2020) studied the beliefs of online consumers, and they achieved the following 3 different segments:

1. “Price oriented” customers: they reveal the highest values in price, product assortment, correct and fast delivery of the ordered goods.
2. “Time optimizers”: they reveal the highest values in price, product assortment, correct and fast delivery of the ordered goods.
3. “Cautious” customers: they reveal the highest values in personal service, the trust mark score of the retailer and the retail chain brand.

2.2.1 Motivations and barriers

According to most studies, convenience and time saving are the biggest motivators of online shopping, and the main obstacle is perceived risk (Blitstein, Frentz, & Pitts, 2020; Handayani, Nurahmawati, Pinem, & Azzahro, 2020; Harris, Dall’Olmo Riley, Riley, & Hand, 2017; Mortimer, Hasan, Andrews, & Martin, 2016; Robinson, Dall’Olmo Riley, Rettie, & Rolls-Willson, 2007). Moreover, consumers with time and physical restrictions are the most likely to start shopping online, since for them the risk is less of a concern (Morganosky & Cude, 2000; Elms, de Kervenoael, and Hallsworth, 2016; Hand et al., 2009).

Price, ease of use, usefulness and online experiences are the most important factors which influence online grocery shopping. Firstly, price is the main reason for consumers to buy (Kotler & Keller, 2006). and is the most effective way to stimulate consumers who are price sensitive (Brassington & Pettitt, 2006). For consumers, online consumption means a way to get good discounts and promotions (Yang & Mao, 2014).

Secondly, according to Davis (1989) ease of use is "the degree to which an individual believes in using a particular system would be free of effort". Nowadays consumers are more demanding, they desire an easy system which is user-friendly (Jaaf & Ong, 2009), a system in which does not require much effort (Teo, 2001).

Thirdly, Davis (1989) mentioned that usefulness is "the degree to which an individual believes in using a particular system would enhance his or her performance". It is important to match the following requirements: being fast; time saving; effort saving; cost reducing; and overall usefulness (Renny, Guritno and Siringoringo, 2013). Consumers are more willing to shop online if they feel that the site is beneficial and useful and if the purchase is carried out effectively.

Lastly, the online experience also influences the consumer's buying behaviour (Hansen, 2008; Mortimer et al., 2016). Customers are loyal to their offline chain in the beginning of innovation adoption, but their shopping priorities change over time (Dawes & Nenycz-Thiel, 2014; Melis et al., 2015). In order to create a pleasant and easy online experience it is fundamental to pay attention to characteristics such as: website design; visual appeal; hyperlinks; product assortment; information; security; and after sale services (Erdem et al., 2015).

According to Blitstein, J.L., Frentz, F., & Pitts, S.B.J. (2020), which performed a study in Germany and in the US, discovered that the motive most cited by respondents was “economy”, consumers’ belief that online food shopping offers a benefit in terms of cost and efficiency.

2.2.2 Home delivery versus takeaway

Home delivery is a key part of the customer’s online purchase cycle (Koster, 2003; Rao et al., 2011). Nevertheless, having home delivery service is a reason to enhance the customer service and enrich customer engagement and satisfaction (Starkey, 2010; Benady, 2013).

Furthermore, according to the several authors, home delivery presents the crucial factors such as speed of the process and precision (table 2).

Table 2: Home delivery factors

Speed of the process (Lim & Dubinsky, 2004; Brynjolfsson et al., 2009)	Directly affects the decision process at the moment of choosing in which the consumer will order the delivery (Gawor & Hoberg, 2019)
Precision (Boyer et., 2009)	Referring to the process between the company and the consumer while the delivery is being completed, when the customer needs the attendance to receive the product and it refers to the flexibility required to match consumer’s availability and individual constraints (Lim & Winkenbach, 2019).

Online food delivery has grown in popularity among consumers and restaurants due to the ubiquitous use of the internet and mobile phones (Cho et al., 2019; Jang et al., 2011; Kang & Namkung, 2019). This service allows consumers to order food online and receive it in their preferential location in a short period of time (Lan et. al, 2016).

In recent years, this service has increased restaurant's revenue leading to an improvement of capacity management, productivity, transactional marketing, and management of customer relationships (Kimes & Laque, 2011). Some researchers mentioned some benefits and barriers of online food delivery services (table 3).

Table 3: Customer's benefits and barriers for online food delivery

Online Food Delivery Services	
Benefits	Barriers
Convenience	Bad past experiences
Perceived control	Influence from friends and family
Access to a wide range of restaurants	
Doorstep Delivery	
Easy to use	

Source: Chain & Yat, 2019; Gupta & Paul, 2016; Yeo et al., 2017; Kimes, 2011; Alalwan, 2020; Das, 2018; Chen & Hsieh 2017.

Furthermore, another service that is very popular in recent decades is take-away service. Some researchers state that “takeaway foods are defined as hot meals made to order and take away from small, independent outlets” (Janssen, Davies, Richardson & Stevenson, 2017). The main difference between purchasing online or using a take-away method is the fact that in this last service consumers have to pick up the food at the restaurant's location. Nevertheless, it is still a convenient and practical way of eating out or at home. On the other hand, for entrepreneurs, it can bring some barriers such as less control, since the employees do not have the perception if the customer was satisfied or not of the whole experience, including the food. Additionally, consumers can be influenced positively or negatively from friends and family regarding some restaurants.

2.3 Post-purchase behaviour

After the first purchase, it is crucial to understand the post-purchase behaviour of consumers to clarify if the behaviour tend or not to keep purchasing the same product or service.

According to Solomon et al. (2016), post-purchase experience is a determinant component of consumer satisfaction or dissatisfaction with a such product or service, and those

past experiences and, consequently, the post-purchase evaluation play a big role in the consumer future purchasing choices.

2.3.1 Knowledge of physical and digital information

After the purchase is made and consumers have received and experienced the order, it will be time to evaluate their whole experience. In this way, consumers will be willing to share and receive opinions and feedback about those orders from friends, family, reviews, websites, and so further.

Since consumers are price sensitive and demanding, they want to ensure that the order which they consider making is the best alternative. Afterwards, if they receive positive feedback, it will facilitate a possible future purchase. Moreover, consumers will increase their own trust if they receive positive feedback from friends and family, and, in this way, will unlock uncertainty in their minds.

Word of mouth (WOM) has an important role in this point, since is a way of communication very effective that contributes to the willing of consumers follow recommendations, recommendation mainly from their familiar environment, such as friends, family, and colleagues (Bigne et al., 2019).

A positive brand image could affect positively WOM (Huang, 2022). According to (Lee et al., 2022), WOM is associated to the quality of the service provided which it is comprehended by the consumers and, consequently, it could result in a repurchase.

2.3.2 Sharing physical and digital information

According to Derbaix and Vanhamme (2003), positive and negative emotions are constantly associated to consumer's willingness to share experiences with others.

Previous consumer experiences impact online shopping intent and behaviour (Monsuwe, Dellaert & Ruyter, 2004). It is the result of consumers who already have an online experience, which can contribute to reducing customer uncertainties (Shim & Drake, 1990, cited in Leeraphong & Mardjo, 2013).

Moreover, consumer trust reduces consumer uncertainties (Luhmann, 2000) which leverages the willingness of using technological innovations (Gefen, 2020; Gefen, Karahanna & Straub, 2003). Therefore, past experiences of using online can alleviate consumer's doubts and problems, reducing the perceived risk.

3 Restaurant sector market

The restaurant sector is one of the most important sectors in the lives of consumers, and it is part of many people's daily lives. It is a habit ingrained in many people since the emergence of the sector, where the adhesion and consumption of this sector has no specific ages. Nowadays, consumers adhere to restaurants for both lunch and dinner meals, and there has been a noticeable impact during lunch by the hectic lives that tend to appear, as mentioned in the last chapter.

This sector is assumed by the lack of time due to hectic lives, as well as the pleasure of the experience and the moment provided by it, being motivated by different reasons for each person.

Nowadays, in this sector, there are different types of options to consume it: the traditional one where consumer have the meal in the restaurant room, takeaway services where consumer take the meal to home, and home delivery services by online channels.

According to Statista (2022), the turnover of the food and beverage service industry in Portugal declined to 7.6 billion euros in 2020. Meaning a decrease by 2.9 billion euros in comparison to the previous year of 2019. Moreover, restaurants and mobile food service activities in Portugal tend to increase dramatically in the next couple of years, and this growth started to have an impact since 2020 (Statista, 2021). Regarding the frequency of eating out in 2022, a third of Portuguese people eat at the restaurant or choose to take the food to home once a week (Statista, 2022). However, in 2020, the household consumption of restaurants services in Portugal declined drastically because of the Covid-19 pandemic, about 16 billion euros, when compared to 2019 (Statista, 2022).

With the evolution of technology, food delivery applications have emerged where the consumer began to be able to order meals for home through simple and quick clicks. Recent market brands such as Uber Eats, Glovo, and Bolt food have gained a lot of notoriety for joining this modality. However, the restaurants already practiced this modality of home delivery a long time before.

In 2020, it was declared a state of emergency in Portugal, which resulted in implementation of different measure to prevent the spread of virus. In addition, the restaurants had to close during the lockdown leading to decrease the restaurant consumption. However,

online food applications have increased, and consumers started to consume more through this model (Global Data, 2022).

With the Covid-19 pandemic some consumer habits in the restaurant sector may change through the consequences of the new lifestyle that consumers start to have. Therefore, this dissertation will study the importance of these new habits and consequences that Covid-19 had impacted on Portuguese families.

4 Methodology

This chapter is subdivided into two main topics: conceptual framework and the methodology type.

4.1 Conceptual framework

This study is inspired by Solomon et al. (2016) model because it is a global model that helps to the understanding and easiness of implementing relevant topics and information from other theories or authors, contributing to the final model applied to the context of the restaurant sector.

Through this model, which includes all topics related to the purchase and post-purchase activities, and through concepts and theories addressed in the literature review, we can extract and easily complement with topics of analysis relevant to the study. It is important to start with this model and complement with some crucial and determinant topics detailed in the literature review, such as online purchase, home delivery and takeaway.

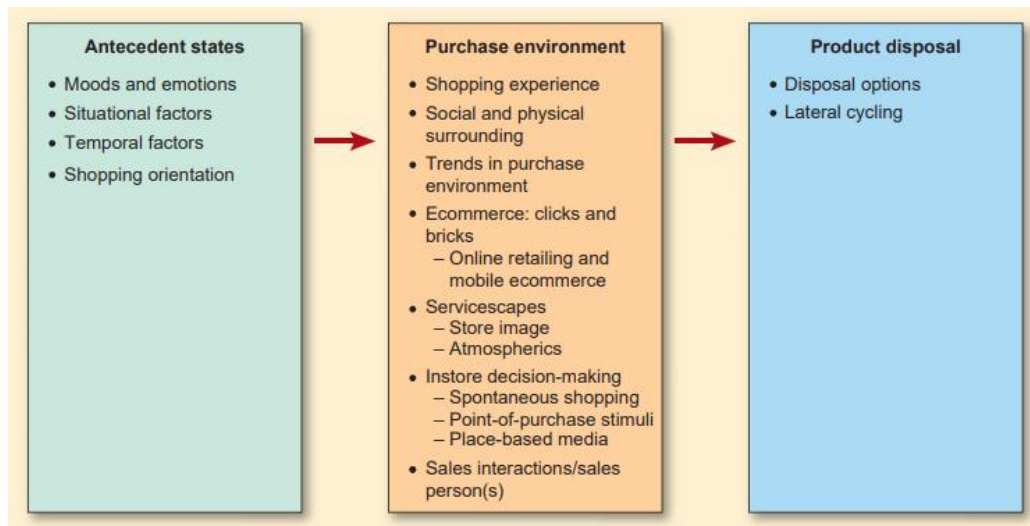


Figure 2: Issues related to purchase and post-purchase activities

Source: Solomon et al. (2016)

After the understanding of this model, we highlight the main themes in order to create the conceptual framework. According to the restaurant sector, this conceptual framework is composed by the following three main topics.

Firstly, it refers to the contextualization of purchase and consumption, mainly meal habits of eating out of home or at home. Secondly, it is regarding to the online purchase, where is approached moments and ways of online purchase, motivations and barriers, and home delivery service versus take away services. Lastly, it discusses the post-purchase behaviour, when it comes to the knowledge and sharing of physical and digital experiences about restaurant sector.

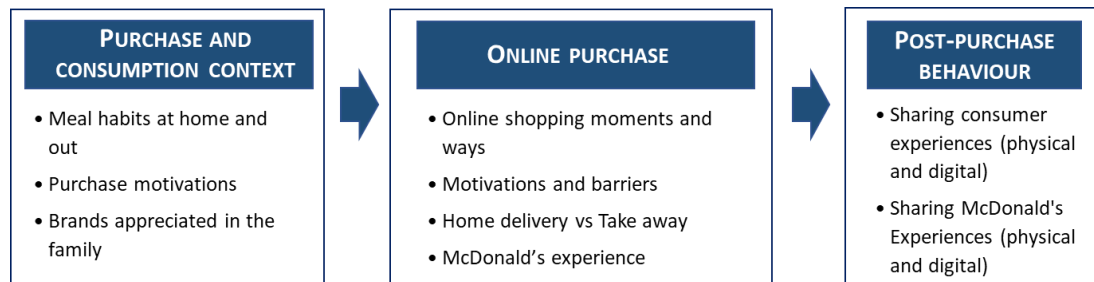


Figure 3: Issues related to the purchase and post-purchase in the restaurant sector
Source: Adapted from Solomon et al. (2016)

4.1.1 Research Questions

The following research questions will be answered during this study. Through them, it would be identified the main changes in purchasing and consumption behaviour in relation to the restaurant sector caused by Covid-19 and the respective lockdowns.

- RQ1: What is the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the general context of meal habits?
- RQ2: What is the impact of Covid-19 pandemic in the restaurant sector purchase?
- RQ3: What is the online purchase experience of the restaurant sector during and after the lockdowns caused by the Covid-19 pandemic?
- RQ4: What is the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the consumption of McDonald's meal habits, during and after lockdowns?
- RQ5: What are the post-purchase behaviours related to the McDonald's meals during and after the lockdowns caused by the Covid-19 pandemic?

4.2 InSitu methodology

4.2.1 InSitu qualitative methodology

In order to measure these research questions, a qualitative methodology was applied through the InSitu method.

According to Edvardsson et al. (2012) “InSitu therefore refers to information from customers/users that originate from a real-life, value co-creation situation; the information is thus created and documented in the use situation as or just after it occurs”.

InSitu is data which is collected in a customer's use situation (Edvardsson et al., 2012). By using this method, the credibility and honesty of the results of the data will be closer to reality, as respondents will be confronted with questions in an environment close to them, in their own home. In this way, in an informal way, respondents will be more comfortable by answering different questions, resulting in more sincere and truthful answers. Therefore, this method stands out from others such as interviews, focus groups and surveys, since those alternatives tend to have wider and less true results through a more formal approach with more open-ended questions.

Moreover, for this study it was conducted cooperative empirical research composed by six master's students and Marketing Futurecast Lab in order to collect all the data needed. During the InSitu method, it was analysed the main changes in the consumer behaviour in the purchase and consumptions of different categories of products, including the restaurant sector. These categories were mainly composed by brands which were interested in the study in question, originating the product categories measured on the empirical research. This approach contributed to achieve better outcomes that help in identifying the main changes of consumer behaviour.

4.2.2 Population and sampling

In what refers to the sampling of this study, it was considered different characteristics for the families, such as location, social class, and type of family.

The population for this study was fifty-two families who are living in Portugal composed of at least two members in their household, who belong to upper middle, middle or lower middle class. Regarding the location, this sample has families from Lisbon metropolitan area, Porto metropolitan area, Centro region, Alentejo and Algarve.

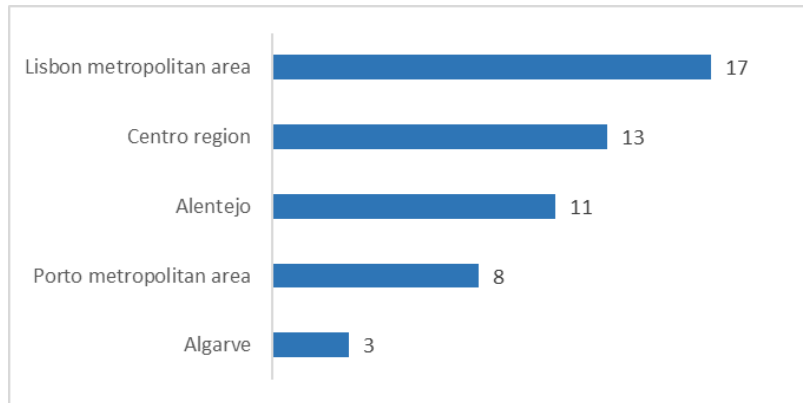


Figure 4: Sample family location

Regarding the type of family, there were couples without children, couples with school-age children, single parents, and other people.

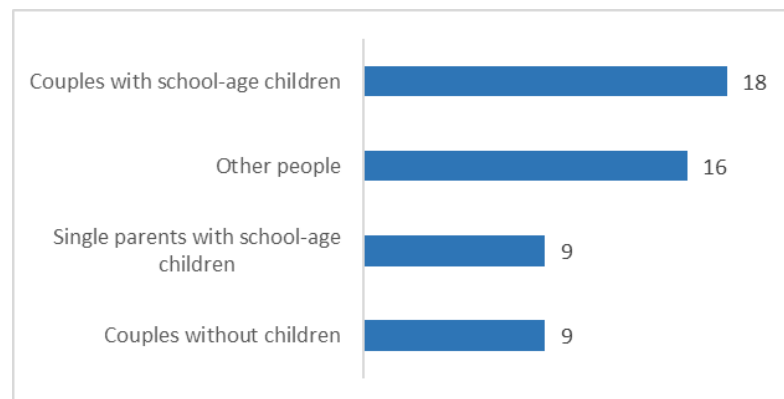


Figure 5: Sample family type

Lastly, in what regards social class, families of this sample belong to upper middle, middle or lower middle class. Lower and higher class were excluded because the Covid-19 pandemic presumably has less impact and in the case of the lower class it is also less interesting for manufacturer brands.

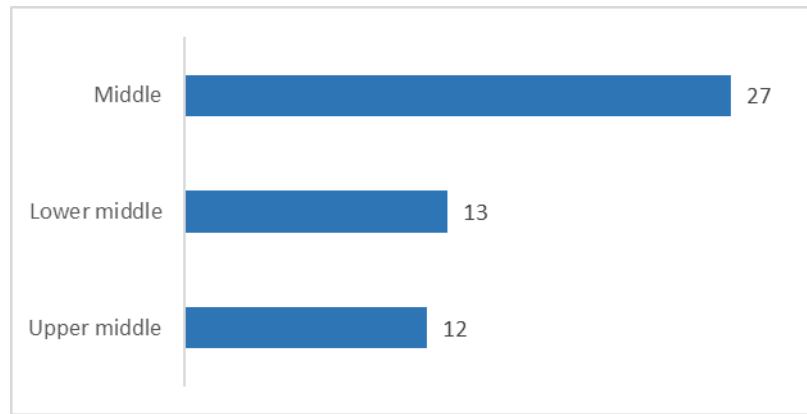


Figure 6: Sample family social class

4.2.3 Data collection method and data analysis

In order to perform the chosen methodology, a well-structured guide was necessary with all the relevant questions for the InSitu method, including all the questions referred to the restaurant sector.

All the six students were part of this data collection process. Moreover, it was scheduled meetings with the chosen fifty-two families, this method was composed by two dinners that occurred in different moments: first dinner and second dinner, both in different days. Usually, the two dinners were separated by one week, and both occurred generally between seven and eleven in the evening at the family's homes based and conducted by a script. The conversation was flowing on different topics related to the purchase and consumption of different product categories.

At both dinners, a recorder was placed in front of all family members in order to register all the information expressed by them, just after their authorization. After the first dinner, the students got through the first recording to highlight the missing questions that might not have yet addressed with the families or the information that might not be clear. In the second dinner, it was recorded topics and questions that were poorly clarified after the first dinner.

In order to have clearer and honest answers, the dinners were conducted with an informal conversation to make sure that all the questions were approached and addressed in the best way in order to gather all the important data for the analysis of this study.

As mentioned before, it was conducted a qualitative methodology. For the treatment and analysis of data, a qualitative analysis was carried out with comments that family members communicated during the meetings in order to clarify the results obtained, and to emphasize the importance of the behaviours and preferences that they have regarding the restaurant sector. Additionally, a quantitative analysis not statistically represented helped to understand the data of the family's behaviours and the corresponding preferences related to the restaurant sector, and also to be able to quantify the importance and the way they use and consume the subject in question.

Furthermore, it was created a Word document that gathered all the information and data recorded on both dinners from all the fifty-two families. For the restaurant sector, the data was divided into the following three parts: food and meal habits, meal purchase, meal consumption and post-purchase behaviours. For all of these parts, the corresponding recording of each of the fifty-two families was added.

Afterwards, an Excel document was needed to insert the obtained answers of each family meeting to proceed with quali-quantitative treatment. In this document, it was able to quantify all the data needed for the results and illustrated with tables and graphics that could complement and clarify the findings in question, to help in achieving the best conclusion possible.

5 Results and discussion

We decided to analyse and evaluate the main changes in the consumer behaviour during and after the lockdown in the restaurant sector. As it was stated by Fantinel, Teixeira and Ghizzo (2011), eating out has become a very popular in urban centers and it has been integrated into people's lives naturally.

As referred before by Filimonau, Beer and Ermolaev (2021) food consumption at home and away has changed due to Covid-19 pandemic and led to change of attitudes and behaviour of households. Therefore, we conduct an analysis to highlight the main modifications and changes during the lockdown, and analyse the new habits gained related to the general context of the purchase and consumption in the restaurant sector.

Moreover, the goal is to understand whether these changes in habits are maintaining or not in the post-pandemic era, or if they are returning to old habits before Covid-19 pandemic.

Therefore, this analysis started by a contextualization of restaurant sector, where food habits and restaurant sector preferences were measured by the families. Afterwards, we analysed the main changes in purchasing and consumption behaviour in relation to the restaurant sector caused by Covid-19 and the respective lockdowns, mentioned by the research questions detailed in the previous chapter.

5.1 Contextualization of restaurant sector

5.1.1 Food habits context

In what refers to food habits, we need to understand how families are composed during their meals, at lunch and dinner. The results showed that, among 52 families, 29% of the families had lunch with their family and 71% do it lonely or at work, during their day to day. Meaning that are more families having lunch separately.

"We always have lunch together, whether there are more people here or not."

Woman, 51 years old, local accommodation businesswoman, Grândola

“We all come home for lunch, which involves an effort in logistical terms, sometimes depending on the food from dinner of the previous day, we make more for the lunch in the next day”

Woman, 46 years old, kindergarten teacher, Covilhã

Regarding the notable number of having lunch alone or aleatory, based on comments during the interviews, we conclude that these families have this behavior because they work far from home, because of the convenience and easiness. Moreover, 60% of families, that have lunch alone or aleatory, are from Lisbon and Porto metropolitan areas, cities that have very hectic lives and where families look for fast-food services.

“As a rule, the girls have lunch at school, and we have lunch next to the workplace.”

Man, 61 years old, Managing Director, Oeiras

“When it comes to lunch, I either take home-cooked meals or I have lunch close to the office.”

Man, 24 years old, Audit consultant, Lisboa

“At lunch, we are not always together, my husband always takes lunch from home. I sometimes eat in the salon, or I come home”

Woman, 50 years old, hairdresser owner, Fátima

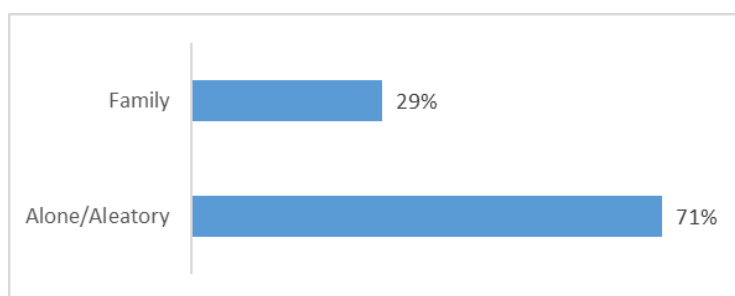


Figure 7: Number of families that had lunch with their family or alone/aleatory, during their day to day, among all the families interviewed

Regarding dinner, the results showed that, among 52 families, 94% of them had dinner with their family and only 2% do it lonely or aleatory, during their day to day. These results conclude that, after work, the families are at home to have a meal with their family. Interestingly, the 2% of families that do not have dinner with their family live in a large urban area, in order words, Lisbon metropolitan area.

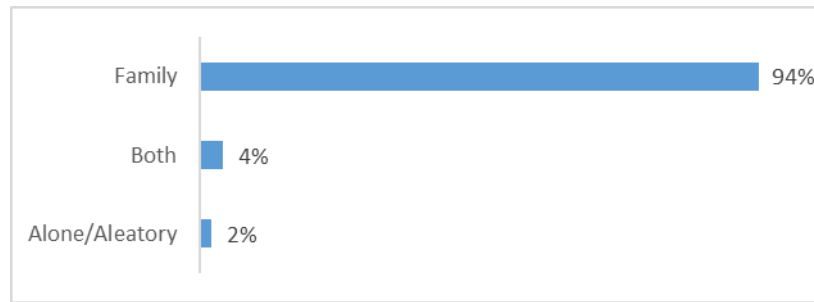


Figure 8: Number of families that had dinner with their family or alone/aleatory, during their day to day, among all the families interviewed

5.1.2 Preferences in the restaurant sector

In what regards to the preferences of restaurant sector, first we need to understand how many families in our sample consumed in the restaurant sector, which results showed that only four families from our 52-family sample did not consume and did not use any type of restaurant. Moreover, the same four families from the same sample did not order food, neither by takeaway nor by home delivery applications.

Deepening in this analysis, from the remaining 48 families, 79% families order by type of food. 17% answered that they order by type of food and by delivery channel, while 2 families stated that just order by delivery channel.

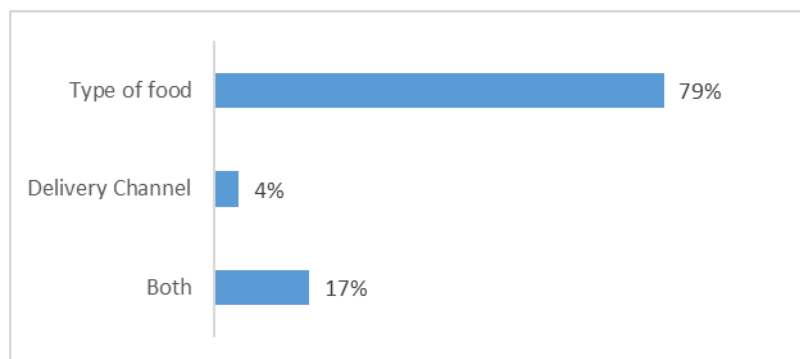


Figure 9: Sample's ordering reasons

In what refers to delivery channels used by the 48 families, 50% answered that they just use takeaway as their delivery channel, and 17% stated that they use applications. However, 33% mentioned that used both delivery methods: takeaway and applications.

It is important to highlight that all the families that just use applications are from Lisbon metropolitan area or Porto metropolitan area, mainly because it becomes more practical when consumer lives in a large urban area.

On the other hand, 70% of families that just do takeaway are from smaller cities, in order works, Centro and Alentejo. We concluded that consumers do not need to order through applications because the restaurants are very close to their home. Consequently, the delivery fee is not justified.

“As everything is so close, it makes more sense to go get it”

Man, 50 years old, commercial director, Fátima

“Here at home, we choose to use the applications since it makes it more practical and easier during the week while we work.”

(Woman, 38 years old, marketing specialist, Lisboa)

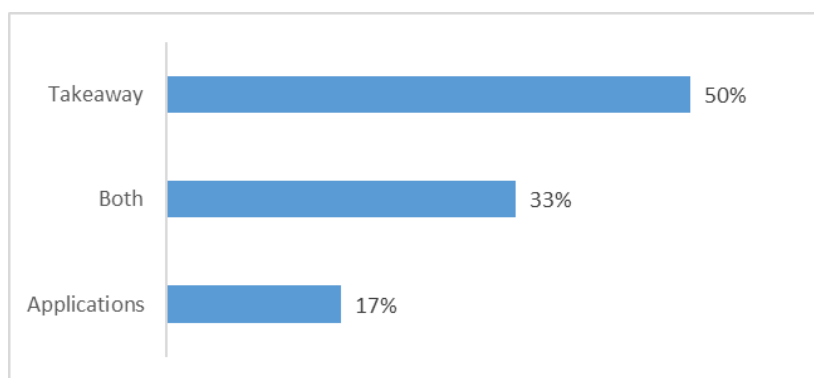


Figure 10: Sample's used delivery channel

When talking about the different brands that each family consumes for applications, based on comments made in the interviews, we can conclude that the top brand is *Uber Eats*. It is the brand which consumers used the most and which is the most beloved. 58% of the families answered that prefer to order through *Uber Eats*, and the second most preferred brand is *Glovo*, with 17% of family answers.

This big majority is due to the diversity and variety of options that users can have in using *Uber Eats*. Furthermore, it presents different promotions, becoming a trusted brand for its users.

“At this moment, we prefer to use Uber Eats because it has more diversified delivery services”

Woman, 38 years old, marketing specialist, Lisboa

“We ordered through the Uber Eats app because it appears that it takes 25 to 30 minutes, and it really takes that long”

Woman, 22 years old, waitress, Lisboa

“Uber Eats has more variety, it has good promotions, for example order one and get 2, but we consider the main reason the variety of options.”

Man, 44 years old, university professor, Porto

5.2 General context of meal habits

5.2.1 Impact of the pandemic in the general context of meal habits

Firstly, in order to understand the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in the general context of food habits mentioned in RQ1, it was conducted a couple of questions to our 52-family sample. As it was expected, 88% of the families stated that they changed some habits during the lockdowns, when it compares to the ones before the Covid-19 pandemic.

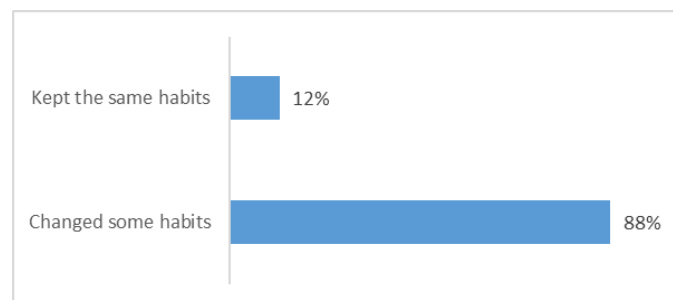


Figure 11: Changes in the general context of food habits during lockdown

There were different changes among the families regarding food habits, but the main change that impacted the most on the families' lives was the drastic decrease in their meals outside of the home. 100% of the families that changed some habits answered that they have started to always have their meals at home.

Regarding, the small number of families that kept the same habits, they were already used to have practically all the meal at home.

"Before the lockdown, I used to have lunch out due to work, and I had dinner at home. As we are working remotely, we started eating at home"

Man, 46 years old, market analyst, Lisboa

"In the lockdown, we started to eat at home"

Woman, 53 years old, insurance intermediary, Tavira

Moreover, there was also a bigger number of families that stated that they start to have all their meals in family, something that before lockdown was not happening.

"With the lockdown, we started to have all the meals, basically, in family. Something that hasn't happened in long time, and we valued a lot those moments"

Man, 53 years old, university professor, Lisboa

"We haven't had our meals together for many years."

Woman, 50 years old, dental clinic manager, Fátima

With lockdown, all the families from different regions changed their behaviours. However, the regions that had more impact were Lisbon and Porto metropolitan area, since in these regions there were families who had their meals out more often, as mentioned previously.

After the lockdowns, most of the families that had changed some behaviours did not keep that changes, which is considered an interesting fact. Therefore, most of all families tended to back to the old habits.

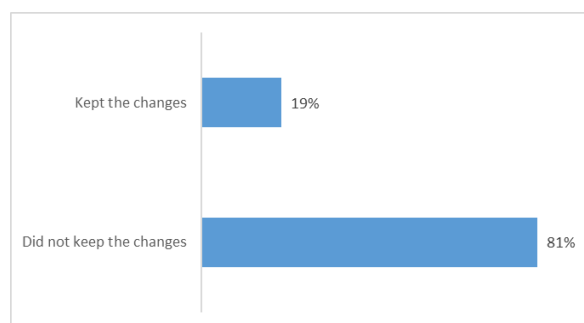


Figure 12: Changes in the general context of food habits after lockdown

If we take a closer analysis, the new habits gained during the lockdowns were maintained in families from the lower middle class (92% of these families kept the changes).

This change is due to the fact that they spent more money before the lockdowns, and they were no longer used to having all meals at home.

“When we started eating at home in the lockdown, we realized that we were spending a lot of money on meals out. Nowadays, we got to use to cooking and eating at home again.”

Man, 53 years old, machine technician, Alcácer do Sal

Although there is a high number of families that revert to old habits after lockdowns, 74% of them affirmed that they have increased the number of meals at home. However, due to their busy lives and jobs, it is difficult for them to always go home.

“Once we got back to normality, we started eating out more often. However, whenever there is a possibility, we go home.”

Man, 29 years old, account manager, Lisbon

“We started eating out several times again, yes. But since we now have remote working days, the increase in meals at home and with family has also increased, because we try to reconcile the days when we are all remote.”

Woman, 46 years old, key account manager, Porto

“It is really hard to always eat at home again, our work does not allow us to do that”

Woman, 49 years old, commercial, Porto

In conclusion, and according to the RQ1, most of the families affirmed that they changed some of their old habits during the lockdowns. The main change that occurred in this topic was the fact that families started to have all the meals at home. In this way, all the members of each family started to have meals together. The regions of Lisbon metropolitan area and Porto metropolitan area were the ones that had a higher impact of this change, where was a larger number of families with this change of behavior.

In what refers to the after-lockdown season, most of the families that had changed some habits, did not keep those changes made during the lockdowns. Many families that started to have meals at home during the lockdowns, did not keep that habit. The regions of Lisbon metropolitan area and Porto metropolitan area were the ones that had a significant number of families that started to eat out of the home again.

However, despite the families' behaviors having returned to the old habits, there was a significant increase in meals at home when we compared to the habits before Covid-19 pandemic. This increase is due to remote working days, and the regained habit of eating with the family.

5.2.2 Home Delivery

As concluded before, half of our sample use applications as their preferred delivery channel (17% of families just used applications and 33% used applications and takeaway services). However, there are still another half of the sample of families that did not use any kind of applications.

“As everything is so close, it makes more sense to go get it”

Man, 50 years old, commercial director, Fátima

“We never felt the need to do it, I think it could even be difficult to get used to nowadays.”

Woman, 53 years old, tutor, Grândola

During the interviews, it was asked about motivations and barriers of home delivery. The most common motivation among the sample of families was the convenience of not having to think about cooking or even saving time on busy days. (38%), followed by the easiness to use and order this kind of services (21%), and the variety of choice, including the alternatives that families can have using those applications (17%). Moreover, with less significative values, there were other motivations shared by the families such as safety of ordering these services during the pandemic (13%) and different promotions that families can find from different alternatives (13%).

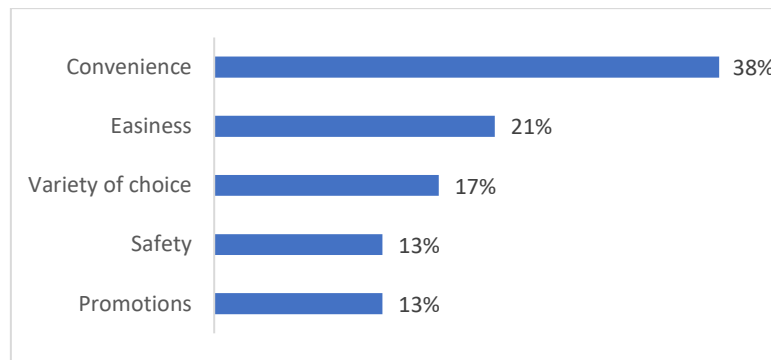


Figure 13: Motivations of home delivery

On the other hand, there were mentioned some barriers to home delivery, the previous negative experience was the most indicated disadvantage from the families due to errors and the quality of the orders at the time of delivery (38%). With a considerable value follows the delivery fee since some options have high priced fees (25%). Additionally, with a smaller significance, families mentioned delivery time, some orders take much more time than expected and mentioned in the application (8%), and these applications do not cover all the restaurants that families preferred (4%).

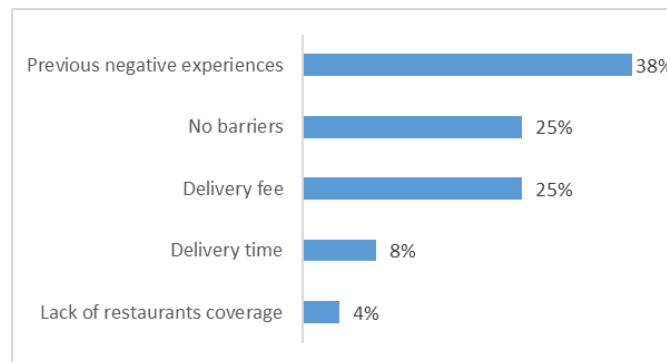


Figure 14: Barriers of home delivery

To sum up, families adopt these applications mainly because of the convenience and easiness of such orders. On the contrary, many families had previous negative experiences.

5.3 Purchase of restaurant sector

5.3.1 Impact of the pandemic on the purchase of meal delivery applications

Moving to the impact of Covid-19 pandemic in the purchase habits in the restaurant sector, mentioned in the RQ2, it was just used a sample of 48 families, since 4 families do not consume any type of restaurant service, being not relevant for our results.

Starting with the purchase of meal delivery applications, there is a notorious impact of the pandemic, since 67% of families affirmed that their purchase increased during the lockdowns.

As stated before, 50% of the families just used takeaway services before the Covid-19 pandemic, which it is an interesting fact to analyse here. All the families that were already using meal delivery applications increased their purchase. However, 42% of families that they have never used applications before Covid-19 pandemic started to purchase during the lockdowns, contributing to the increase of the matter in question.

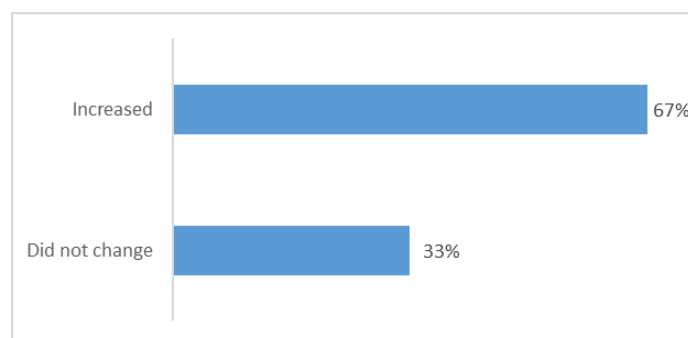


Figure 15: Changes in the purchase habits of meal delivery applications during the lockdowns

On the other hand, 33% of families affirmed that they did not change their purchasing behaviour during the lockdowns. Additionally, all this behaviour is from families that have never used applications before the pandemic season.

“We never felt the need to do it, I think it could even be difficult to get used to nowadays.”

Woman, 53 years old, tutor, Grândola

Curiously, all those families that did not change their purchasing behaviour are from smaller urban areas, such as Alentejo, Centro and one family from Algarve.

Moreover, the families that purchased the most belong to the middle and upper middle social classes, while families that purchased less belong to the lower middle class.

Families started to purchase more meal delivery applications mainly because of the inability to go to the restaurants, and the purchase of those applications became kind of salvation to those changes in the families.

“We couldn't go to restaurants during the lockdowns. Who wants to miss out on the pleasures of life? No one! And the restauration sector is one of them. These applications were a way to compensate.”

Man, 38 years old, sales representative, Lisboa

“Sometimes, we don't want to cook, in the lockdown time, we started to order a lot from food applications”

Woman, 52 years old, university professor, Lisboa

After the lockdowns, 81% of families kept the same behaviour in purchasing meal delivery applications. However, nine out sixteen families, who increased their purchased during the lockdowns, have decreased the purchasing behaviour after the lockdowns. All those nine families started to spend less time at home, resulting in a decrease in the purchase of meal delivery applications.

Among the families who started to purchase more during the lockdown, two affirmed that they just used these applications as the only possible solution in the lockdown, but as soon as the lockdown ended, they would reduce instantly the purchase in meal delivery applications.

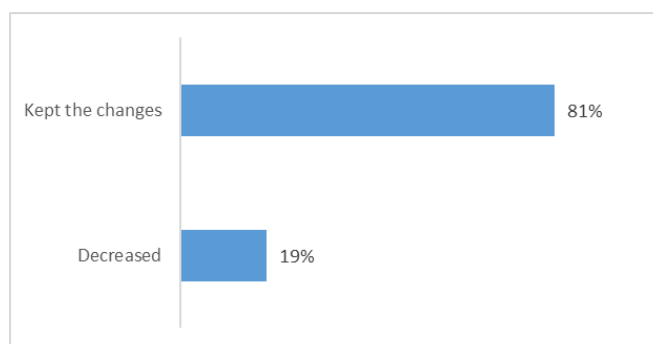


Figure 16: Changes in the purchase habits of meal delivery applications after the lockdowns

In conclusion, during the lockdowns, a considerable number of families started to purchase more through meal delivery applications, knowing that they did not use them before the Covid-19 pandemic, because they could not go to the restaurants. In fact, the families that have purchased the most belong to the middle and upper middle social classes and are from Lisbon metropolitan area and Porto metropolitan area.

After the lockdowns, a large proportion of families kept the changes made during the lockdowns. Fewer families started to have less time at home again and, consequently, they instantly decreased the purchase of meals delivery applications.

5.4 Purchase experience of the restaurant sector

5.4.1 Impact of the pandemic on the online purchase experience of meal delivery applications

Regarding the online purchase experience of the restaurant sector during and after the lockdowns caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, asked in the RQ3, there were different touchpoints that motivated families to purchase food in meal delivery applications for their daily meals, mainly during the lockdowns.

In this topic, we understand what were the main motivations that were determinant for maintaining their behaviours after the lockdowns.

There were different factors that motivated the families the most to buy and repeat their purchases. Firstly, most of all families affirmed that the promotions influenced a lot their purchase, since they were receiving them in their mobile phones or directly from the applications that they were using, according to the interviews. Our findings disclosed that 80% of families that belong to lower middle class were influenced by promotions.

“I often received free delivery notifications, which was very useful and compensated, sometimes the food is five or six euros and more than half of what you pay is just for delivering.”

Woman, 26 years old, civil engineer, Lisboa

“We looked a lot for promotions, and there were different alternatives where we could have good orders”

Woman, 30 years old, student, Porto

Moreover, several families admitted that that they took the opportunity to have different meals with the whole family at home, since they could buy meals that they were not used to

make. Additionally, 75% of the families of couples with school-age children affirmed that their children were motivating evidence to purchase more in meal delivery applications, and they influenced the parent's decision.

“During the lockdowns, we could have meals all together with different meals, it almost seemed that we were in a restaurant. We started to buy more to have that feeling”

Woman, 45 years old, logistics manager, Leça

“During the lockdown, they were always asking for fast food meals”

Man, 44 years old, professor, Lisboa

After the lockdowns, most of all families keep their behaviour regarding to promotions. In the interviews, families stated that this behaviour became a habit afterwards.

In what refers to different meals with the whole family, it did not happen the same. This evidence lost some weight in family's decision because 80% of them returned to the old habits since they preferred to have that entire experience in the restaurant itself.

To sum up, and according to the RQ3, during the lockdowns, promotions influence the purchase experience, mainly in families with lower middle class. After the lockdowns, families tended to keep this behaviour.

Furthermore, having a different meal with whole family were also a factor that influenced another change during the lockdowns. Most of families composed by couples with school-age children were influenced to purchase more in meal delivery applications.

After the lockdowns, most of the families keep this behaviour, promotions become a big impact in their purchase experience behaviour, resulting in a new habit.

5.5 Consumption of meals

5.5.1 Impact of the pandemic on consumption of McDonald's meals

According to the RQ4, now we will analyse the main impact of Covid-19 pandemic on consumption of McDonald's meal habits, during and after lockdowns.

In order to understand the main changes in the consumption of meals, we decided to ask to the families about *McDonald's* impact in the pandemic situation. Firstly, it was important to understand how many families were used to consume *McDonald's*. 71% of families affirmed that they consume McDonald's, in which 29% of them did not consume.

Moreover, we wanted to understand the main changes for the families that were used to consume it, and if it had an impact on their behaviour during and after the lockdowns.

Regarding the consumption of *McDonald's*, 54% of families affirmed that they changed their habits during the lockdowns, and 46% of families assumed that there were no changes in their habits of consumption. From the families that kept the same habits of consuming *McDonald's* at home, 65% were from Lisbon and Porto metropolitan areas.

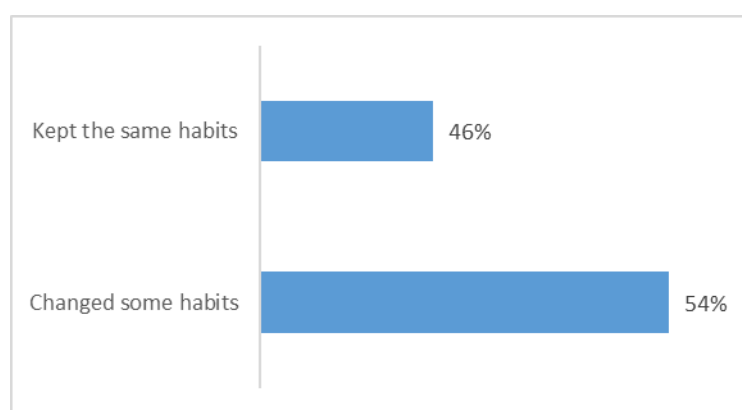


Figure 17: Changes in the consumption of McDonald's during the lockdowns

According to the interviews, families that kept their habits affirmed that they were already used to consuming *McDonald's* at home. Regarding the 54% of the families that were consuming more in the restaurant, they started to having those meals at home. This change occurred more in families from Alentejo and Centro.

The main change was the consumption experience, 60% of the families that changed their habits were couples with school-age children. Meaning that children have an impact on the family behavior.

“Our kids prefer to eat at McDonald's.”

Woman, 50 years old, Civil Engineer, Lisboa

“McDonald's has a different environment. They can have fun with Happy meal or in some entertainments placed there while we are eating.”

Man, 45 years old, Financial Director, Porto

After the lockdowns, 46% of families that maintain the same habits during the lockdowns did not change their behavior. 35% of families kept their changes, which is the most interesting value, meaning that those families started to have those meals at home, which is something that was not happening in pre-pandemic era. This is mainly justified by the increase in the purchase of meal delivery applications.

"We started to get used to ordering McDonald's in some applications"

Woman, 50 years old, Civil Engineer, Lisboa

Lastly, 19% of families assumed that they had returned to the old habits, mainly because of the experience that *McDonald's* provides with their own environment. Most of these families were couples with school-age children.

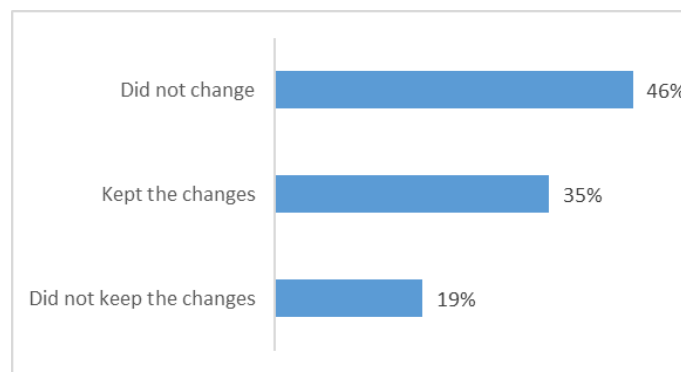


Figure 18: Changes in the consumption of McDonald's after the lockdowns

Furthermore, we asked the families what they did while they were consuming, most of them affirmed that they were used to having family conversations, 24% of them stated that usually are watching television, and only one family is on the internet.

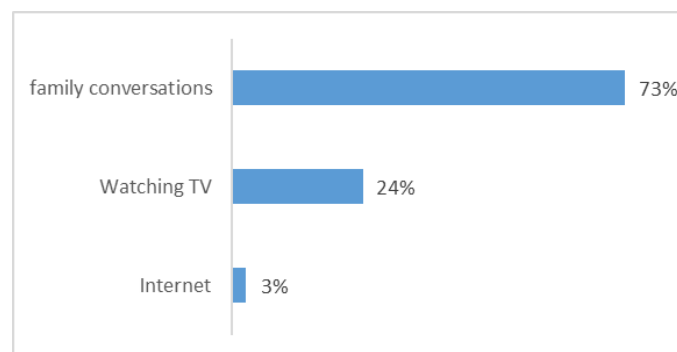


Figure 19: Consumption activities

To sum up, families that live in small urban areas, based on Alentejo and Centro, changed the most their habits of consumption. During the lockdowns, families that were used to having the McDonald's meal in the restaurant started to have those meals at home. The main change was influenced a lot by the consumption experience, most of the families that changed their habits were couples with school-age children.

After the lockdowns, most of families that changed their habits during the lockdowns kept those changes afterwards. Meaning that the majority stopped having McDonald's meals in the restaurant because of the habit of using more meal delivery applications. However, fewer families returned to the old habits, and most of these families are couples with school-age children.

Lastly, what families do most while consuming McDonald's, during and after lockdowns, is socializing with their family.

5.6 Post-purchase of the restaurant sector

Moving to the post-purchase behaviours related to the restaurant sector during and after the lockdowns caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, mentioned in the RQ5, it was deeply analysed the knowledge and sharing experiences behaviours.

5.6.1 Knowledge of experiences

Firstly, in the post-purchase of the restaurant sector, we started to understand the weight that the knowledge of different experiences had influenced the family's behaviour from our sample. For this analysis, we want to understand the main knowledge of experienced regarding the *McDonald's* meals.

Through the answers from the families, 69% of them did not remember any type of conversation about experiences that someone else could have shared with them.

"Yes, there usually is. But I can't tell you specific stories or events that I've heard."

Man, 23 years old, university student, Fátima

However, 29% of the families remembered some experiences that have been shared with them in person, and only one family remembered shared experiences from other people in a digital way.

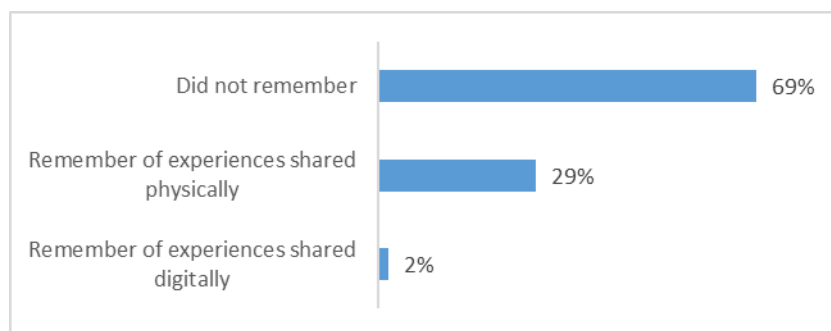


Figure 20: Experiences of McDonald's meals shared to the family's sample

According to the interviews, the experiences were mainly shared by family's friends or colleagues. Regarding the experiences that were shared by others physically, there were positive and negative experiences. Moreover, there was one negative comment that was related to a meal delivery application, which is *Uber Eats*. In this situation, the family changed the way of ordering *McDonald's* in *Uber Eats*, since they stated that they started to add some observations on the order to guarantee that *Uber Eats'* process would not fail again. Meaning that, this third party had influenced this family over its experience of *McDonald's* meal.

“Sometimes with friends comes to the conversation, often connected with uber eats and the things they forget in the orders. For example, the potatoes sauce that never comes. They also talked about a burger that wasn't in good conditions, which is something that happens sometimes.”

Woman, 29 years old, architect, Grândola

Additionally, there were some families that had heard experiences from new products or updates from *McDonald's* services.

“My friends ask me a lot if I have ever tried such a new hamburger”

Woman, 19 years old, university student, Grândola

“The McBifana that is back again, my friends started talking right away”

Woman, 20 years old, university student, Fátima

The family that remembered of experiences that were shared with them digitally mentioned that it was through the *Facebook* and other social media applications.

“I’ve seen many times McDonald’s compared to Burger King on social media.”

Woman, 15 years old, student, Grândola

To sum up, we conclude that *McDonald’s* meals is not an important matter in the experiences shared from other people, since there were a large number of families that did not remember any experience shared, and for the families who remembered there was no specific change in the family’s behaviour. Meaning that Word-of-Mouth does not have an impact or influence on the choice, purchase, or consumption of this service.

5.6.2 Sharing experiences

In this topic, we want to understand if the families interviewed shared some experiences about the *McDonald’s* meals with other people. The data taken from the interviews concluded that the findings of sharing experiences are similar to the knowledge of experiences. In these findings, 63% of the families did not remember if they shared some experiences of *McDonald’s* meals. Moreover, 33% of families shared experiences physically, and one family had already shared experiences in a digital and physical way. Therefore, families had a clear tendency to share the experiences in a physical way.

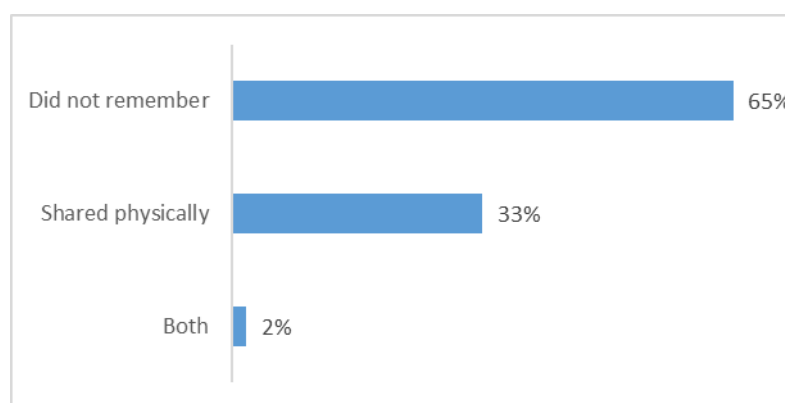


Figure 21: Sharing experiences of McDonald’s meals

According to the following family’s quotes, it is clear that some families had influenced the choices or McDonald’s experience of others, mainly friends or colleagues. It is interesting that one family mentioned that used *WhatsApp* about McDonald’s on meal delivery

applications, meaning that that family had influenced the choice of others. Moreover, once again, there were also negative experiences shared with friends or colleagues that could influence them as well.

“I have already shared with my friends about the problem of French fries are always cold at McDrive”

Man, 39 years old, professor, Sines

“I usually share with my friends at WhatsApp which is the cheapest platform to order McDonald's, for example, if it's Glovo or Uber Eats that has the cheapest delivery fee. I also share other types of promotions, I remember sharing product offers, such as towels or cups.”

Man, 19 years old, student, Porto

To sum up, and according to the RQ5, for sharing experiences and knowledge of experiences, Word-of-Mouth has not a big impact or influence over the choice, purchase or consumption of McDonald's meals, since there were no significant results to strengthen that matter. There is a clear tendency in young people to share experiences with friends through social media.

To conclude, knowledge and sharing experiences of McDonald's meals does not influence the family's behaviour, since most families affirmed that usually they do not remember to share or receive experiences from others.

6 Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Theoretical contributions

As highlighted and affirmed in the literature review, consumer habits of buying and shopping has changed drastically in the last year and a half due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the respective lockdown (Sheth, 2020). Therefore, it is expected that some habits will die and other will be born and, consequently, consumers have discovered and adapted to new alternatives.

Regarding the first research question “RQ1: What is the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the general context of meal habits?” and according to the literature review (chapter 2), we conclude that our results go in accordance with the literature, people have returned to the old habits regarding the meal habits since consumer’s demand for out-of-home food services and food establishments are notorious and have increased (Fantinel, Teixeira, & Ghizzo, 2011; IMR, 2019), mainly in urban centres.

Furthermore, we answered the second research question “RQ2: What is the impact of Covid-19 pandemic in the restaurant sector purchase?” and, in fact, the results are aligned with the literature, online food delivery has grown among consumers and restaurants (Cho et al., 2019; Jang et al., 2011; Kang & Namkung, 2019). Families started to move through meal delivery applications and they continued to keep purchasing after the pandemic situation.

Moreover, we were able to answer the third research question: “What is the online purchase experience of the restaurant sector during and after the lockdowns caused by the Covid-19 pandemic?”, promotions became a big impact in families purchase experience during the lockdowns, which is in accordance with the literature, people started looking more to get discounts and promotions (Yang & Mao, 2014). This resulted in a new habit in a post-covid era.

Regarding the fourth research question “RQ4: What is the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the consumption of McDonald’s meal habits, during and after lockdowns?” and according to the literature review, we conclude that our results go in accordance with the literature, not only families had changed some consumption behaviours because of the increase in the online food delivery (Cho et al., 2019; Jang et al., 2011; Kang & Namkung, 2019), but

also sociocultural influences (Naska et al., 2000) and household environment lead to change and adapt to the new habits (Höglund, Samuelson, & Mark, 1998).

Lastly, we answered the last question research “RQ5: What are the post-purchase behaviours related to the restaurant sector during and after the lockdowns caused by the Covid-19 pandemic?” and we conclude that McDonald’s meals do not influence the people behaviour since it is not a topic that is not very commented by Portuguese people.

6.2 Limitations and future research

This study was analysed with a sample of 52 families, which we may consider a reduced sample. Through this sample, the results may not be entirely significant to generalize a conclusion. Therefore, it would be recommended to carry out a study with a larger sample in order to obtain more representative and imperative results for the quantitative analysis of the study.

Furthermore, because a very qualitative analysis was used in a small sample, it may have led to greater difficulty in highlighting the main change in the analysed families, since the data obtained were extracted through longer conversations in which several factors and topics were mentioned, making it difficult to highlight the biggest change in behaviour among all families.

The distribution of families was not equitable, there was a greater number of families in specific regions, which may influence the results according to the lifestyle lived in that same region.

For future research work, it is suggested to carry out a more recent analysis, at a later stage of the Covid-19 pandemic, to understand whether or not these changes in consumer behaviour in the restaurant sector will actually continue, helping to understand which changes would have a greater impact for having remained until today.

Moreover, it was found that the experience of eating at home with ordered food was not the same experience as when consumers are experiencing the moment in the restaurant itself. Therefore, it would be interesting to companies analyse how they can improve the experience in their ordering and online services to the consumers, in order to mitigate the current gap/difference that is in people’s minds.

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