

TALLINN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

School of Business and Governance

Department of Business Administration

Nupel Oral

**CHANGES IN CONSUMER BEHAVIOR DURING COVID-19:**

**A STUDY IN THE FINNISH RESTAURANT SECTOR**

Bachelor's thesis

Programme International Business Administration, specialisation Marketing

Supervisor: Aino Kiis, MA

Tallinn 2021

I hereby declare that I have compiled the thesis independently and all works, important standpoints and data by other authors have been properly referenced and the same paper has not been previously presented for grading.

The document length is 10604 words from the introduction to the end of conclusion.

Nupel Oral .....

(signature, date)

Student code: 184015TVTB

Student e-mail address: nuoral@ttu.ee

Supervisor: Aino Kiis, MA

The paper conforms to requirements in force

.....

(signature, date)

Chairman of the Defence Committee:

Permitted to the defence

.....

(name, signature, date)

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## **ABSTRACT**

The hospitality industry, especially the restaurant sector, is in the most vulnerable position during the epidemic period. The Covid-19 has changed the entire experience of restaurant dining and made consumers preventive towards visiting food enterprises. This study aimed to examine the changes in the intention to visit restaurants during the Covid-19, and how food enterprises can build trust among their customers. A quantitative research method is used by conducting an online questionnaire with a sample size of 150 to gain a more profound knowledge of the major effects of the Covid-19 in consumer behavior. The results indicate that the most prominent reasons impacting consumers dining out decision are the fear of catching the virus from crowded places such as restaurants and cafes, and secondly the concerns relating to the precautionary measures taken in restaurants i.e staff hygiene, providing hand sanitizers, and the most importantly socially distanced tables. These aspects must be taken into consideration by restaurateurs in terms of improving the customer satisfaction and ensuring safety especially during this epidemic period. This thesis verifies that the frequencies of dining at restaurants have changed as the fear of contagion has resulted in skipping the dining out experience and shifting to delivery apps instead. As a matter of fact, psychological factors have the biggest impact on consumer behavior since not only the economic situation or social factors, but mostly perception, motivation and attitudes influence nowadays individuals dining out decision.

**Keywords:** Covid-19, Consumer Behavior, Food Enterprises, Trust, Risk Perception

## INTRODUCTION

This study is conducted by an International Business Administration student studying at Tallinn University of Technology as the student's bachelor thesis. The thesis is planned to conduct an empirical study, with the goal of finding out the changes in consumer behavior during the Covid-19 pandemic, generally in the restaurant sector. The author is mainly focusing in Finland's restaurant sector and what influences consumers' attitudes and decision-making when visiting food enterprises. Also, the author will explore the effects of food delivery and how Finnish restaurants can proactively instill trust among their customers. This study will provide a deeper insight into consumers' purchase behavior changes, specifically Finnish consumers' attitudes in Finland.

At the end of 2019, it started to appear new reports of a new virus in China. The World Health Organization was informed about several cases of a mysterious disease in Wuhan by Chinese authorities, and the virus was declared a severe outbreak in January 2020.

By all appearances, the covid-19 pandemic has become a very actual issue today, and the disease has shaken the world in an unprecedented way. The outbreak measures have had significant effects on the economy, especially in food and beverage enterprises.

Covid-19 has changed the way we live, and we are still living in very unparalleled times. Social distancing and other restrictions, such as quarantines and lockdowns, have changed consumer behavior significantly. The pandemic has brought structural changes to lifestyles that can last long even though the vaccine for Covid-19 is already found.

Unfortunately, the coronavirus is causing increasing damage to the Finnish restaurant sector as it has affected other countries as well. To prevent the spread of the Covid-19 epidemic, following preventive measures, including safety laws, rules, and regulations, will be required in the future. Additionally, significant income losses have been experienced in food and beverage enterprises due to the increased unemployment rate and restaurateurs shutting down the businesses.

The Covid-19 epidemic on food businesses has caused changes in consumption habits across Finland. The entire experience of restaurant dining has changed because of the pandemic. People have become wary and strict about going outside to public places, and for this reason, deciding

to go to a restaurant requires a lot of thought these days. Individuals avoid eating out to comply with the social distancing rules and have mostly moved to online food ordering instead. Consumers are mostly behaving preventively in these times. Therefore, they keep away from restaurants to minimize personal contact since consumers are afraid of becoming infected by Covid-19, mostly in public places. (Yang *et. al.*, 2020).

Along with the key issues which restaurants are currently facing, there are several changes in the style of working which needs to be done. These changes include different precautionary measures for ensuring a safe environment for both workers and consumers. Risk perception has increased significantly and resulted in a high uncertainty level in consumption for consumers. For this reason, the author seeks to observe effective strategies for restaurants in order to obtain a safe workplace and restore confidence among their consumers.

In this empirical research, the study's main purpose is to determine and provide the factors that impact consumer behavior in food enterprises during the Covid-19 pandemic. The author seeks to analyze the effects of Covid-19 more specifically on the Finland's restaurant industry. The research problem is formulated to be *'The lack of knowledge of Covid-19 effects and its impact on consumer behavior in Finland's restaurant sector'*.

Primarily, the research's main objective is to find out what kind of elements affect the consumer behavior in case of visiting restaurants and how food enterprises can survive the pandemic by building trust and safety for their customers. The thesis will mainly scrutinize Finnish consumers insights and attitudes towards this matter. To examine consumers' attitudes and intentions to visit restaurants during the virus, the author will use a quantitative method. According to Cohen (1980), the meaning of a quantitative research is a social research that employs empirical methods and empirical statements. Another essential part of a quantitative study is that empirical statements are expressed in numerical terms. The definition of quantitative research is described concisely by Creswell (1994) as following, *"Explaining phenomena by collecting numerical data that are analyzed using mathematically based methods (in particular statistics)."*

The research questions' main purpose is to state a specific problem that the author wants to mainly focus on the research. Thereby, the research questions for this bachelor's thesis are as following;

RQ1: What factors impact on consumer's decision making in restaurant industry during the Covid-19?

RQ2: Has the frequency of food ordering changed?

RQ3: What kind of strategies should be used to build trust among consumers?

Multiple previous studies have been published according to the same issue. These studies have shown that perceived safety is one of the major factors affecting consumers' intention to visit restaurants during the virus (Hakim, *et.al.*, 2021), and that consumers' trust in governments plays a big role in their decisions to dine out (Dedeoglu, *et.al.*, 2021). In previous research, authors have tested different hypotheses relating to the negative impacts of the pandemic in the restaurant industry (Madeira, *et.al.*, 2021), and the effects of online ordering during the Covid-19 (Yang, *et.al.*, 2020).

As a self-evident truth, this topic appears to be a major issue nowadays. The covid-19 has changed almost all aspects of our lives. In view of the fact that this topic is of high relevance, the author is getting involved in contributing to something worthwhile. Relevance of the thesis subject is important to generate readers' interest and attention and make them identify with the issue that all of us are currently facing.

The first chapter will be the theoretical framework where the author will introduce the basics of Covid-19 and its effects on food enterprises. The second chapter will cover the methodology part, including the choice of method, data collection, and analysis. After the research methodology, there will be the third chapter presenting the results of the empirical study and also a discussion. With a final conclusion and a list of references, the author will finish the thesis.

Lastly, the author would like to give her thanks to her supervisor, Aino Kiis, who has been available and supportive during the research period and has given clear bits of advice throughout the writing process. In addition, the author would like to thank all of her professors throughout this bachelor's program whose teaching skills have been preparing her for writing this thesis and all of the respondents in this paper for making this study research study possible despite the challenging times of the ongoing pandemic. Finally, the author wishes to thank her family who supported with love and encouragement.

# 1. THORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, the author will present the main works of literature regarding the research. The purpose of creating this chapter is to give a brief overview to readers of the study, introduce and describe the specific theory why this research problem exists.

The main parts of the theoretical framework are as follows: The Impact of Covid-19 in the restaurant sector, the side-effects of coronavirus in consumer behavior, and how consumers' intentions to visit restaurants have changed. The relevant factors affecting consumer attitudes will also be specified in this study.

The intention of this chapter is to give an understanding of the research process, data collection, and analysis to ease the reader to gain an acknowledgment about the results of the paper overall. Additionally, the theoretical framework helps the researcher to get a base for the research questions and to choose the correct method for the study.

## 1.1. Covid-19

Covid-19, also known as Coronavirus, is an ongoing infectious disease that was identified as the cause of a disease outbreak by the World Health Organization (WHO) on January 30, 2020. The disease was initially identified with high fever, dry cough, and shortness of breath in Wuhan, China. The World Health Organization officially labeled Covid-19 as a pandemic in March 2020 (WHO, 2020). The definition of a pandemic is described as “*An epidemic occurring worldwide, or over a very wide area, crossing international boundaries and usually affecting a large number of people*” (Rutherford, et., al, 2017).

As of today, March 18, 2021, there have been confirmed altogether 120,667,101 Covid-19 cases and 2,670,274 deaths by now. At the same time, until March 18, 2021, Finland has confirmed 70,262 cases with 805 deaths in total (WHO, 2021).



The Covid-19 virus spreads primarily through respiratory droplets when an infected person talks, sneezes, or coughs when the virus enters through the nose or mouth. It infects the cells lining your throat and lungs from its pathway until it produces new virus parts and multiplies. In the worst case, this threatening disease can even lead to multiple organ failures. Most of the people who get infected by Covid-19 experience mild to moderate symptoms and recover without the need of a special treatment.

At the moment, wearing a face mask is at the top of the measures taken against the pandemic all over the world. In addition to using the face mask, washing hands regularly with soap and keeping the social distance are perceived as effective ways to prevent the global virus. The symptoms of the virus affect people differently, and surprisingly many people don't experience any symptoms at all after becoming infected with Covid-19. Since people being asymptomatic can spread the virus without knowing they are sick, it is important to stay away from others, especially for people at higher risk of getting the virus.

The risk of getting coronavirus may be increased with those individuals with underlying diseases that significantly impair lung or heart function or the body's immunity. Age is a significant risk factor for the severe virus. Based on current data, individuals over the age of 70 are the most likely to get the coronavirus since older people have more long-term illnesses predisposing to the serious virus. (THL, 2020). Age has significant moderated effects, reducing disease denial effects.

As the whole world is fighting against the deadly coronavirus pandemic, governments demand maintaining social distance to avoid exposure and slow its spread to the country. In particular, people are supposed to limit close contact with people outside of the family, outdoors, and indoors. In addition to previous measures, quarantines and lockdowns are serious restrictions implemented in many countries where the number of Covid-19 cases has highly increased.

## 1.2. The impact of Covid-19 in restaurant sector

As a matter of fact, the food sector is an essential part of the tourism sector. That is why it is extremely significant to restaurateurs to understand the main factors contributing to consumers' gastronomic experience especially during the epidemic (Madeira, *et.al* 2020).

Social-distancing measures have left many consumers favorite activities out of reach, such as going out for a dinner or going for a coffee with friends. At present, restaurants are either forced to close or running the businesses with several restrictions to avoid making close contact with other people. Restaurants in Finland are currently offering only takeaway and food delivery services due to government restrictions. People who usually prefer restaurant meals have turned to online ordering and delivery options due to mandatory restrictions. The intentions of dining out is decreased significantly caused by the general caution in public places (Lock, 2021). In addition to the fact that the global virus has affected social lives and public health to a great extent, it has mainly damaged the hospitality industry, especially the restaurant sector which has been greatly disrupted from the beginning of the Covid-19 crisis. The Covid-19 pandemic has dramatically led the restaurant industry to a vulnerable position due to the natural disaster's increasing frequency (Dube, *et.al.*, 2020). All the actors in food and beverage businesses, such as suppliers, customers, employees and employers are negatively affected by the pandemic (Aksoy, *et.al.*, 2020).

The pandemic has substantially impacted the restaurant sector because their revenue comes mainly from face-to-face service (Hakim, *et.al.*, 2021). Restaurants are one of the most important areas where social life exists. Restaurants cannot exist for a long time without social lives. It is obvious that the government restrictions on social lives have directly affected also restaurants. Although governments are trying to solve this situation by closing restaurants for the time being, this solution is on the verge of plunging the restaurant industry into bankruptcy. Even though closing the businesses is dramatically hurting the country's economic development, it is also very challenging for the individuals who run the businesses. There are many negative effects for the most restaurant businesses under these circumstances, for instance, economic slowdown, tourism coming to a standstill, orders for consumers to stay at home and huge uncertainty can even cause a bankruptcy for the business in the worst case of scenario. Overall, the hospitality industry, especially food enterprises is the most damaging industry in the post Covid-19 scenario right now. After all, even if coronavirus disappeared tomorrow, people will still be avoiding visiting restaurants and public places for a long time to come. As a realistic and feasible fact, it is highly

believable for consumers to prefer less and less daily activities such as going outside, meeting with friends and going to restaurant or cafes even when the pandemic period is over. Restaurants remaining closed can have also long-term effects on customer relationships which can weaken the consumer communication between customers and restaurants. The impression created by consumers in this period will leave strong and lasting marks on the future brand image and customer loyalty.

This time of the epidemic period is also very stressful for the employers since the uncertainty continuously lies ahead. It is essential that restaurant industry will need to reinvent itself altogether (Jain, 2020) since uncertainty risks cause financial distress to food enterprises with decreased customer influx (Kim, *et.al.*, 2021). During these difficult times, food services will need to pursue creative and innovative solutions to uphold their businesses. At the moment, restaurants are able to remain open and are allowed only to offer takeaway food by delivery, drive-through and collect services. Nevertheless, food enterprises still end up in cutting back hours and limiting staff (Lund, *et.al.*, 2020).

Unfortunately, not all restaurants are able to survive the pandemic. It is obvious that smaller businesses might not have enough resources to ride out a protracted shutdown unlike larger chains. Instead, many small food enterprises might need to remain permanently closed because of the lack of the operational sustainability (Kim, *et.al.*, 2021).

### **1.3. Factors affecting consumer behaviour**

Marketing is all about the needs of the customer and ends with their satisfaction. Marketers need to be concerned with factors affecting consumer behavior since the situational influences affect the buyer's decisions and interests towards a product. Additionally, marketers must study consumer behavior in order to present a product or service that creates a positive impact on them. Consumer behavior refers to the purchase decisions of people to satisfy their needs, wants, and desires. It helps understand how individuals and organizations make specific decisions when selecting certain types of products and services. According to Gajjar, buying roles change with changes in consumer lifestyles (2013).

Four significant sections affect consumer behavior: cultural, social, personal, and psychological factors. The author has explained these four factors below.

**Cultural factors** play a massive role within consumer behavior which comes from an individual's traditional background. Nevertheless, culture includes society's behavior, values, customs, and also traditions.

Cultural factors include buyer culture, subculture, and social class.

Culture's influence can be a highly complex belief, and its influence varies from country to country. Therefore, cultural factors need to be examined since it can be an essential issue for marketers when speaking about consumer behavior. An essential part is to analyze different groups, regions, and countries carefully. (Gajjar, 2013).

**Social factors** also have a significant impact on consumer behavior. As we know, people are social beings, and people influence each other's buying behaviors. Additionally, it is essential to seek confirmation from the people around us. (Ramya et al., 2016)

Some of the important social factors are family, reference groups, role, and status.

*Family* plays a decisive role in shaping a person's buying behavior and developing preferences from early childhood.

According to Ramya and Mohamed Ali, family influences in two ways on buying behavior of a member. Firstly, family influences in the individual personality, characteristics, attitudes, and evaluation criteria. Besides, the family influences the decision-making process involved in the purchase of goods and services.

When it comes to the *reference groups*, it is evident that comparing ourselves to others has become a standard regardless of whether we are part of the group or not.

A *reference group* is defined as a group of people with whom an individual associate. These groups in question strongly influence a person's attitudes, values and behavior directly or indirectly. Following the social norms gives a sense of belongingness and social acceptance.

The third and the last social factor is *role and status*, which comes from groups like family, clubs, and organizations to which they belong. Individuals have different roles and statuses in society, and it consists of the activities that a person is expected to perform.

The most common factor that affects consumer behavior is **personal factors**. According to Gajjar, some essential sections in personal factors appear to be the economic situation, lifestyle, age, personality, occupation, and self-concept. Age is a significant segment factor that influences consumer behavior since individuals' necessities change continuously, and our wellbeing requires numerous different needs. Moreover, age brings changes to way of living and individual qualities, as well as personal requirements.

It is obvious that youthful individuals spend more money from fun traveling when older individuals generally prefer staying indoors but still have well-related costs that may increase under certain circumstances. Nevertheless, individuals in different age groups can have totally different needs than individuals of the same age.

*Economic situation* and *occupation* also matter a great deal, since individuals with low pay cannot spend a great deal on products or services. When it comes to *personality*, it is described as "*Personality changes from person to person, time to time and place to place.*" (Gajjar, 2013). Personality includes different characteristics such as dominance, aggressiveness, self-confidence, which determine consumer behavior.

**Psychological factors** that influence an individual's decision to make a purchase are mainly perception, motivation, learning, beliefs, and attitudes.

*Perception* is the process that makes the consumer aware of the business, products, and brands, etc. By perception, consumers understand the world around them based on the information they receive from their sensing process (Durmaz, 2014).

The primary and essential point of this factor is *motivation*, which starts the buying process by recognizing a need. Buying products for convenience, style, and prestige generally depends on a persons' motivation. Overall, wants and needs become a motive that influences consumer behavior to have satisfaction, so marketers need to understand their potential customers' motives.

*Learning* can change individuals' behavior from different experiences, and it mostly depends on skills, knowledge, and intention. According to Durmaz, individuals learn from earlier experiences and seek to maintain consistency by relating to new stimuli in terms of past experiences. On the other hand, *beliefs* are described as a conviction that consumers have made through their previous experiences (Rani 2014).

In addition to beliefs, *attitudes* can occur regarding religion, culture, politics, clothes, music, and it has a significant influence on consumer behavior as well. People may have certain beliefs and attitudes towards certain products, which influences the purchase decision.

In this paper, the author will focus mainly on two factors: Social and psychological aspects of consumer behavior.

As a self-evident fact, people are social beings, and lives depend on social and physical interactions, which has unfortunately come to a standstill due to the coronavirus.

Covid-19 has affected consumers for the most part socially and psychologically. Before the pandemic, deciding to go to a restaurant was a community decision, but now it has obviously

become private. Even though carrying hand sanitizers has become the new norm, the fear of catching the virus continually lingers at the back of consumers' minds. Socially, people are avoiding gathering in large numbers and observing the social distances as much as possible. In this particular situation, there might occur different doubts from consumers' perspectives relating to visiting restaurants, for instance, perceived safety, social trust, risk perception, and characteristics such as age and employment status (Hakim *et al.*, 2021).

The psychological need for safety has also increased, making consumers avoid people and preferring those restaurants that follow all the safety measures and have built a social trust among the consumers. The perceived risk of Covid-19 has caused mental stress, anxiety, and boredom to consumers which has apparently affected in consumption patterns (Brewer *et al.*, 2021). Especially, psychological preparedness has increased since selecting a clean restaurant involves less risk. On the other hand, before going to a restaurant, consumers will probably think about if the restaurant is too crowded and order food delivery instead.

#### **1.4. Covid-19 precautions in restaurants**

For all businesses, the health and wellbeing of customers are the top priority.

Tens or hundreds of customers daily visit restaurants, and all of them has their actions when coming to the restaurant, such as touching the door handles, cutlery, menus etc.

Consumers have become anxious and wary, whether the restaurants are following the Covid-19 safety measures or not. To control the spread of coronavirus at least in the restaurants, following precautionary measures will help keep customers and staff safe. Under these circumstances, it is important to make sure that restaurants are well ventilated and follow strictly safety protocols. Restaurants took some physical and hygienic precautions. For example, nowadays pandemic rules decide the table layout, not interior designers anymore, even the design of the tables has evolved. Tables have begun to be divided with transparent panels. Unfortunately, there is now a transparent panel between you and your partner who you go out for dinner. While restaurants try to adapt to pandemic conditions with these physical changes in the interior, they have to be more meticulous about hygiene than before. Since hygiene and health precautions have become much more critical during the pandemic, it is necessary to investigate and explore the relationship between dining out motivations and visit intention to upscale restaurants.

Some necessary and obvious safety procedures for the staff in kitchen include requiring wearing face masks during the work hours and washing hands regularly since hands are one of the most common ways to spread the virus from person to another. Also, workers should regularly change gloves as necessary and later on, the single-used gloves should be directly disposed.

For the restaurant hall and customers, there needs to be additional measures taken.

It is crucial to make sure proper hand hygiene, approved sanitizers, disinfectants for customers' use and observing social distances while interacting with the customers in the restaurants. Also, reducing the capacity is expected from restaurants to maintain distance between tables and allocate enough space to provide a safer environment. It is obvious that consumers will prefer restaurants with outdoor seating on summertime rather than eating inside since it reduces Covid-19 exposure considerably. According to the U.S Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2020), outdoor seating is seen as the lowest-risk restaurant dining experience in terms of allocating the minimum spacing between tables which is 1.8 meters.

On top of the previous measures, restaurants must be able to provide information about precautionary actions taken in the restaurant by relying on print, online media or visual means to make sure for incoming guests that in the case of any sickness or symptoms matching with Covid-19, the person shall report to concerned health authorities. By these means, the restaurants buying pattern will not be affected at the time of pandemic (Shahbaz, et.al., 2020).

## **1.5. Consumer trust**

The definition of trust is expressed as a positive expectation and feeling that an individual is relying upon. An essential element of trust is always expecting the best from the outcomes (Hosmer, 1995). Apparently, one of the biggest factors shaping consumers' attitudes appears to be trust. During the days of the epidemic, consumers' risk perception has considerably increased, which automatically affects their intentions. According to Dedeoglu and Bogan (2021), consumers' trust in the government will greatly impact their intention to visit food enterprises, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. It is obvious that measures taken by governments have reduced the spread of the virus by important means.

As a matter of fact, consumers will be more worried about getting infected by Covid-19 when visiting restaurants than the food in general (Byrd, et.al., 2021).

In the case of food and beverage enterprises, the normalization process will be when consumers and businesses evaluate their pre-epidemic experiences from a different perspective.

Even if consumers return to eating and drinking outside during the pandemic, their health and safety concerns will continue until the definitive treatment is found. Restaurants must pay special attention to build trust with consumers in order to gain their solidarity that allows consumers to support the local restaurants in return.

Thus, adaptation activities regarding the consumers' expectations will gain importance in the normalization process. New regulations that came into effect after the opening period and efforts to create a safe environment in restaurants will have an essential place on businesses' agenda.

This situation will require some new regulations in the functioning of restaurants.

In this process, the importance of making innovations in different areas will increase for businesses that aim to regain their customers and continue their operations by new conditions.

Innovations that focus on the systems at the center of the business, products, services, and customer-oriented aspects will help build trust in consumers and gain their solidarity back.

During the epidemic days, when health concerns peak, security surpasses all other expectations of consumers. The concept of trust emerges in two different ways in the restaurant sector, namely, trust in the physical space where the service is provided, and trust in meeting the needs as expected.

Examining existing customer experience in the light of new insights and redesigning it in line with consumer needs will play an important role in establishing trust in consumers and regaining them.

Customer experience appears as the sum of every moment the customer interacts with a company, not just when they shop. This experience, which extends from the first time the customer hears about the institution and after he/she does the shopping, plays a decisive role in the next shopping decision. The customer unconsciously records everything he/she experiences as a minus or a plus point throughout the experience.

## **1.6. Effects of food delivery**

Food delivery and online ordering is a growing factor for the restaurant industry. Online ordering has become very important for consumers as well as businesses. After technology developed the



food delivery service, it significantly impacted the business industry as it globally changed positively the quick-service restaurant sector. The new developed online food ordering system gives a distinctive comfort zone to customers all around the world.

According to Singh et al., online food ordering is continuously increasing as smartphones are getting more commonly used. Its convenience and ease build motivation for consumers to shop from the online ordering systems since all it requires are only a few clicks (2017). Additionally, making possible to consumers to access the restaurants' menu from the internet gives the consumer more potential to place the order.

Customers can choose their favorite restaurant and dishes conveniently from the online ordering app and choose the suitable payment method for themselves, such as mobile wallets, cash, or debit cards. People are more comfortable when they can read the menu online without the pressure of deciding quickly before the waitress comes to take the order. (Moondra et.al., 2020)

As a matter of fact, keeping relations with customers alive by increasing digital channels' presence will be important since most of the people are isolated.

During these days of isolation, the food delivery is becoming more and more important due to health and safety concerns related to the Covid-19 outbreak. In this case, it is extremely necessary to improve the digital customer experience and promote online food ordering platforms for consumers. Food delivery apps have been in huge increase and online food ordering has significantly grown in popularity. According to Brewer, et.al., (2021) the major reasons why consumers prefer ordering food online, appears to be convenience and control.

Since a lot of the businesses were, and are still shut down, many people struggle with getting their food from groceries for several reasons such as quarantines, lockdowns, and fear of contagion. Most people are skipping the in-store experience and shifting to delivery apps instead, which has several benefits, especially under these circumstances. Food ordering has become much easier with food delivery applications and they offer high convenience with time and effort saving (Abdelrassoul, et.al., 2020).

Nevertheless, food delivery applications might have also negative effects on restaurants. For example, when it comes to fine dining restaurants, they need to place a premium on taste, service and ambiance (Gupta, 2019). Through delivery, it might decrease the effect of luxury in fine dining, since the environment and atmosphere of the venue are a big part of the experience. The service part of fine dining is important, and it lacks when using delivery. It takes a while for the

food to be delivered and served, which can affect the taste, temperature and quality of the meal. Additionally, the way the food is served, including containers affects the experience as well.

## **2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of the methodology chapter is to give information about the various approaches and methods that will be used in this study. In this chapter the author will explain the analysis process overall and show how it was conducted step by step from the research design to data collection and analysis. Additionally, the sampling procedure will be justified.

### **2.1. Choice of Method**

The author has chosen the quantitative approach as a data collection instrument to gain a deeper insight and explore consumer behavior changes by conducting a questionnaire.

Choosing qualitative research method could have resulted in difficulties due to the circumstances of Covid-19 in case of interviewing with a face to face plan for instance. Since the information and data were collected via questionnaires, the author will be using primary data in this research. By using a quantitative method, the author can conduct a more extensive study by gathering a more considerable amount of data. The online survey was created and designed in Google Forms platform, allowing the author to quickly and easily conduct the questionnaire. Additionally, Google Forms gives an opportunity to create different types of questions in the survey. These include single and multiple responses, open-ended questions, linear scales, verification boxes, etc., which offer a chance to gain a deeper insight into attitudes, changes, and opinions.

At the beginning of designing the questionnaire, the author developed the main required information for the research. After all of the questions were developed, the author was able to determine the question content and sequence. After finishing the questionnaire, a pilot test was made to pretest the questionnaire and find out the possible problems which may arise during the survey. The pilot test was sent to supervisor and a small pilot audience in order to examine how likely the research process will work in the real study. Finally, after ensuring the survey's validity, the questionnaire was ready to be sent to the real audience.

Altogether, the survey consists of 19 clear and specific questions, including statements related to eating out motivations, changes in consumption habits, concerns about eating out, and important safety initiatives influencing to decision of eating at a restaurant.

The author kept the survey questions as neutral as possible to make them easy to follow so that respondents could conveniently answer in all questions.

The questionnaire includes multiple choice questions, checkboxes, linear scales, multiple choice grids, likert-scale question and one open-ended question.

The first three questions are demographic questions asking the gender, age, and current participant location. Since the data was to be obtained about consumers in Finnish restaurant sector, a control question was inserted in the survey whether the respondents live in Finland. Secondly, seven questions are asked relating to opinions and changes of dining out and ordering delivery before and after the Covid-19 pandemic. The next step was to determine the major factors influencing consumers' dining out decision during the pandemic. For examining, the author created a multiple choice table with five different factors. Next, a checkbox question with seven sections was formed about the most important safety initiatives influencing the decision of dining out. In the following question participants were asked about what aspects make them order food delivery during the Covid-19. Another critical factor in this research is consumers' possible price sensitivity towards restaurants during this epidemic period. Thereby, the author has included three questions concerning this issue relating to price sensitivity and promotional expectations in terms of ordering food from restaurants. The concept of the following category was consumers' trust in the restaurant sector and how consumers' solidarity affects their intentions to visit food enterprises. Finally, the last three questions were asked relating this issue.

The author created the questionnaire in English, in case that people also from different nationalities living in Finland could understand the concept and easily answer in the questions.

## **2.2. Sampling and data collection**

First of all, an online questionnaire was conducted to gather primary data for the research. The respondents were reached through different social media platforms, i.e., from Facebook, Instagram, Whatsapp, and LinkedIn. In addition to spreading the link on social media, the author had different and comprehensive connections from the restaurant sector in Finland, which was a big helping hand in terms of collecting answers.

The survey design is used to collect data for describing the population of 152 from a sample of 150. The number of people who answered the survey was 152, and two of them were under the age of 18. Thereby, the final number of valid respondents was set to n=150, as the target group was people in ages between 18 to 55 and more. However, two respondents under the age of 18 were excluded from the study. The author collected answers from three days which started on the 9<sup>th</sup> of April 2021 and ended on the 12<sup>th</sup> of April 2021 providing a wide range of respondents during this short period of time.

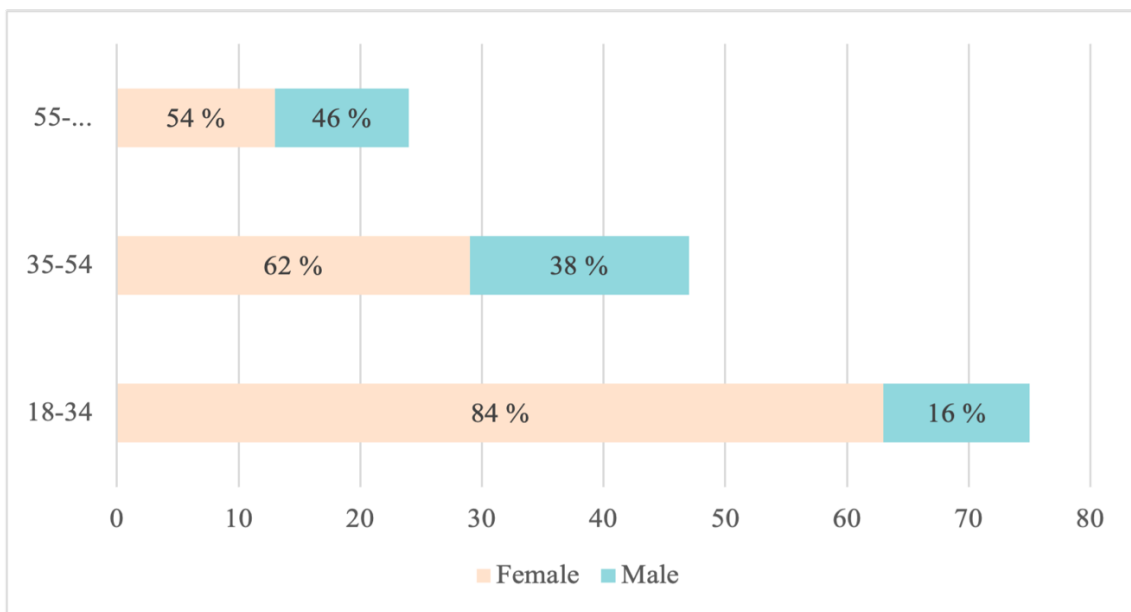


Figure 1.  
Source: Oral (2021), Demographic Summary

From the figure above can be seen that the majority of the respondents were females. When the female respondents reached to 106 the male respondents was only 42. Three of the respondents preferred not to say their genders.

Nevertheless, the questionnaire was only targeted to people living in Finland since the research is concerning the consumers in the Finnish restaurant sector. The respondents were divided to three

different age groups and the majority of the participants were in the age of between 18–34, which was 51 % of the total of respondents. The second largest age group was 32 % of the respondents in ages of 35–54. Lastly, the third age group consisted of 16 % of respondents in ages of 55 and above.

### **2.3. Data Analysis**

Google Forms was used to create the questionnaire. The tool automatically combines the gathered data in the form of a spreadsheet. After finishing the data collection period, the raw data of the survey results were exported from Google Forms to MS Excel sheet to be analyzed. The data was analyzed with descriptive statistical analysis method, which demonstrates an overview of the empirical data. The analyzing process started with arranging the data properly in the MS Excel. Later on, the author summarized the data through pivot tables and converted the summaries into charts to absorb the information in much simpler way. Finally, the author was able to draw conclusions based on the information presented by charts.

According to Cohen (1980), the meaning of a quantitative research is a social research that employs empirical methods and empirical statements. Another essential part of a quantitative study is that empirical statements are expressed in numerical terms. The definition of quantitative research is described concisely by Creswell (1994) as following, “*Explaining phenomena by collecting numerical data that are analyzed using mathematically based methods (in particular statistics.*” In quantitative research, there are several sampling techniques available, which can be divided into two main methods, non-probability and probability sampling. The author chose the non-probability sampling so it would allow collecting data more quickly and let the author select sample elements by personal judgements. Accordingly, convenience sampling was chosen to represent the target group in this research. There are several reasons for choosing exactly this sampling method. Firstly, the author chose the specific online platforms that were easy to access, and readily available. Convenience sampling, also called as opportunity sampling, is used when samples are selected from the population because they are easy to find and conveniently available. Considering the time frame, especially in modern times of the global pandemic, convenience sampling was seen as the most suitable option for the purpose of the thesis. By using this sampling

method, the author was able to reach out to a wide range of respondents in a quick and inexpensive way. Additionally, the author was able to take the advantage of having different connections from the Finnish restaurant sector which had a significant assistance in this study.

### 3. EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

The following chapter presents the results of the empirical study, including the discussion part. The author has run different analyzes from the collected data from the online questionnaire and presented the descriptive statistical analysis is. This chapter intends to give an overview of the surveys' results of which the author has conducted into charts by using MS Excel. Additionally, the discussion part is presented to describe the importance of the results and determine the fresh insights about the research problem's new findings.

#### 3.1. Results

The questionnaire was designed to determine the most important factors that impact consumer behavior in food enterprises during the Covid-19 pandemic. The main objective was to find out what kind of elements affect the consumer behavior in case of visiting restaurants and how food enterprises can survive the pandemic by building trust and safety for their customers. The tables of the study results are inserted below.

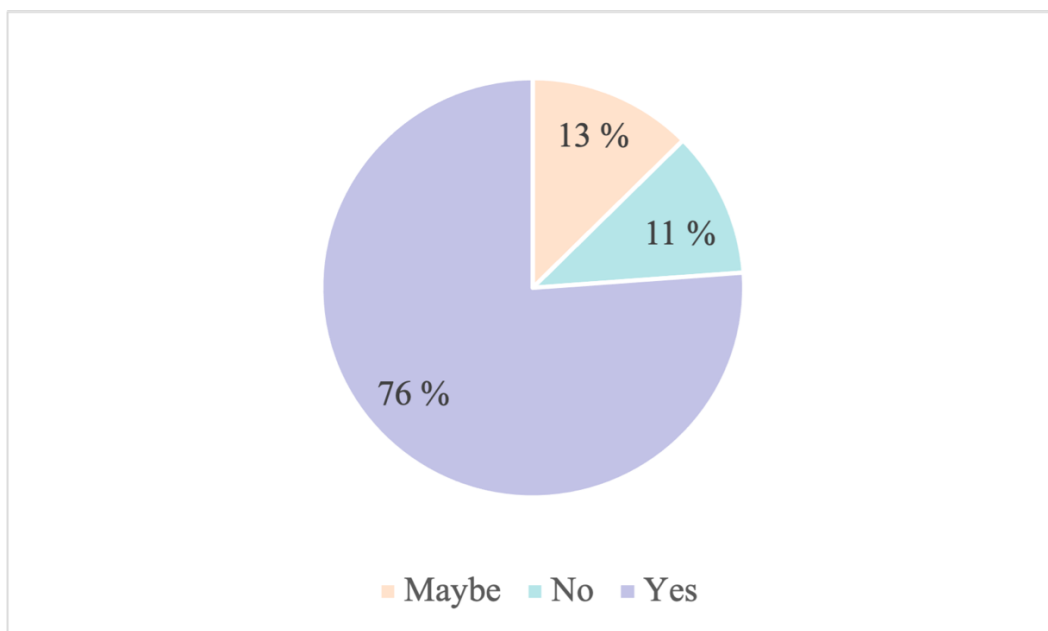


Figure 2.  
Source: Oral (2021), Has the Covid-19 Affected in Respondents Culture of Eating



At the beginning of the questionnaire, the respondents were asked whether the Covid-19 pandemic affected their eating culture. Food culture refers to several factors, such as attitudes, habits, as well as the consumption of food. As can be seen from the Figure 1, the Covid-19 pandemic has apparently affected in consumers' daily life, since the majority of the respondents (76%) stated that the Covid-19 has influenced their culture of eating. 11% of the participants stated that the Covid-19 has not changed their food culture during this period of epidemic. Lastly, 13% of the respondents who were not sure of their answer selected the third option which was *maybe*.

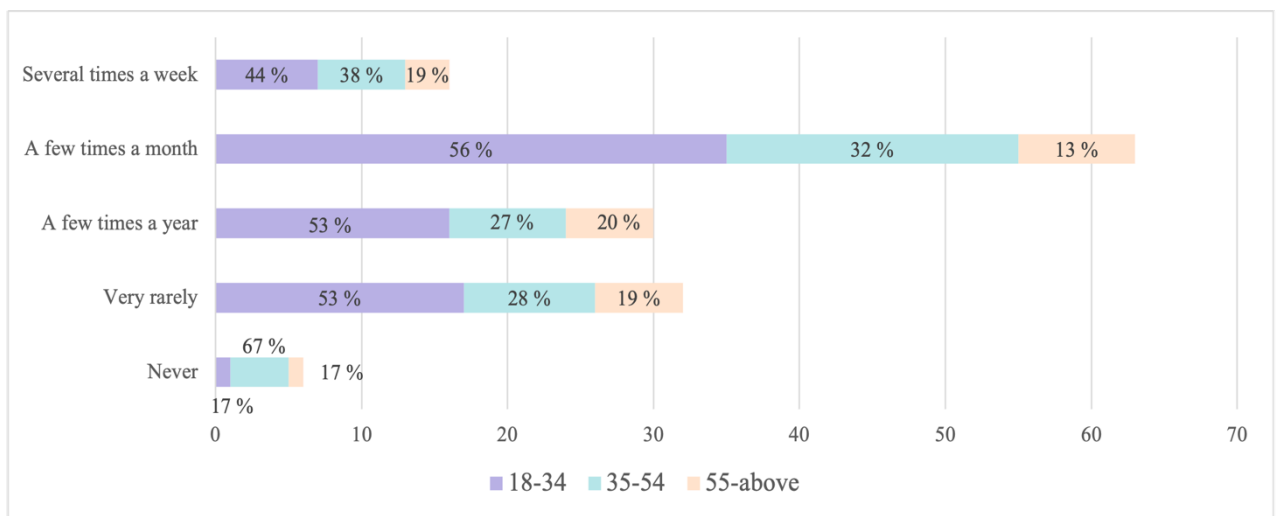


Figure 3.  
Source: Oral (2021), Willingness Towards Visiting Restaurants During the Covid-19

In this question, respondents were asked how often they have eaten at a restaurant during the pandemic before the last lockdowns. The table above gives information about respondents willingness to visit restaurants during the pandemic.

Respondents were divided into three age groups as can be seen from the table above. Figure 3 shows that the willingness to go to a restaurant during the pandemic is more among the age group of 18-34 when comparing to the age group of 35-54 and 55 and above. On the other hand, the age group of 35-54 shows more willingness in terms of visiting restaurants than the elder age group (55 and above). When it comes to the respondents who have chosen *never* visiting a restaurant during the pandemic, the age group of 35-54 was the least willing to visit restaurants at all.

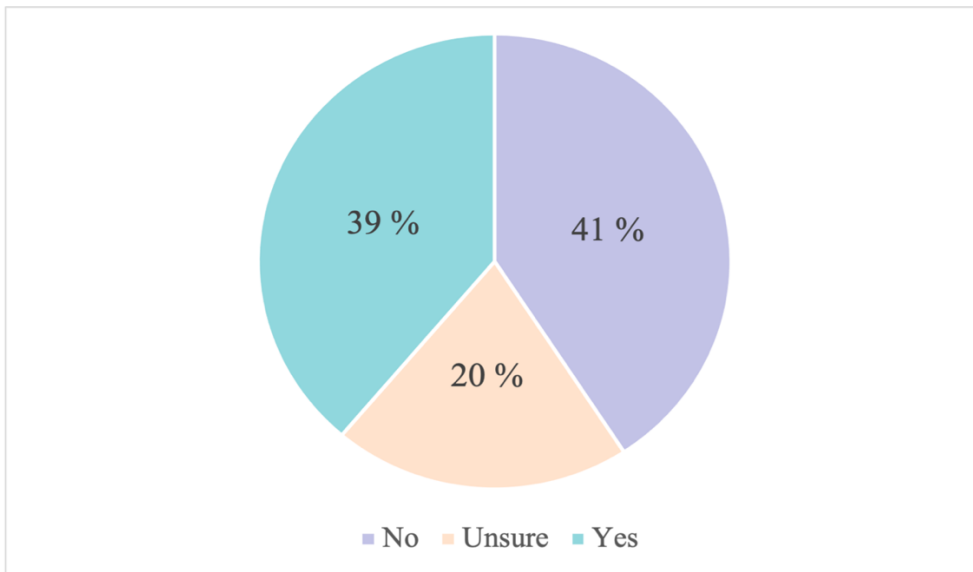


Figure 4.  
Source: Oral (2021), Are Respondents Comfortable With the Thought of Eating Out

Figure 4 measures the comfortability rates of the respondents in terms of eating out during the Covid-19. Results are conflicting since the respondents who have answered *yes* and *no*, are almost evenly divided. 41% of the respondents who have answered *No*, are not comfortable with the thought of visiting restaurants during the pandemic. At the same time, 39% of the respondents have stated that they are not uncomfortable about visiting food enterprises. Lastly, 20% of the participants have chose the *Unsure* option. To be concluded from the pie chart's information, the majority of the respondents (41%) are not comfortable with the thought of eating out during these days of the pandemic.

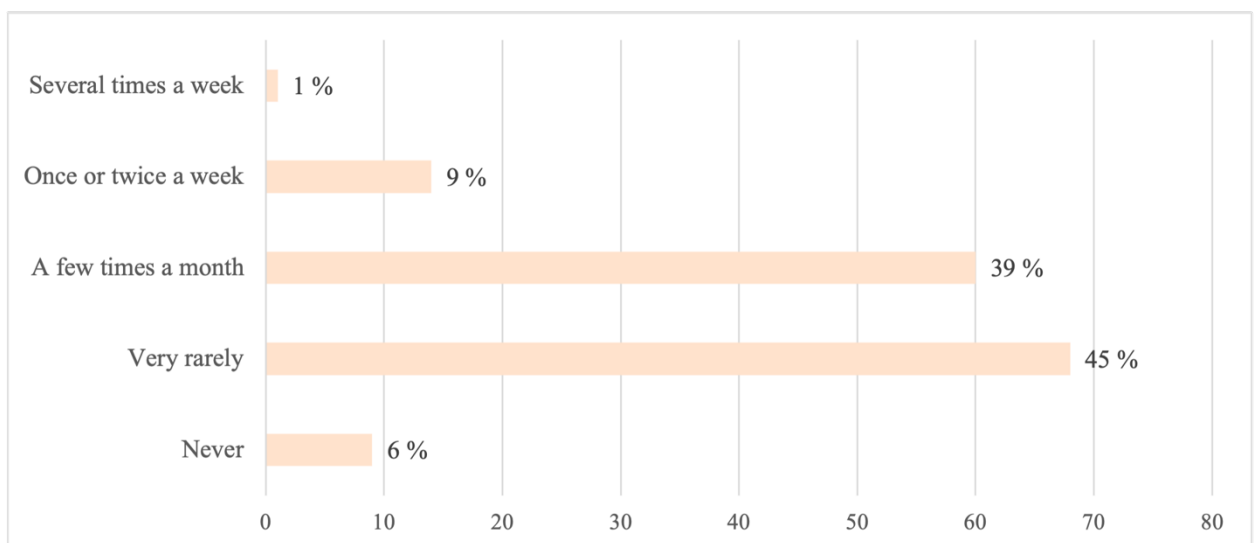


Figure 5.

Source: Oral (2021), How Often Respondents Ordered Food Delivery or Takeout Food Before The Covid-19 Pandemic

From the given table, it can be inferred that the majority (45 %) of the respondents have stated that they ordered *very rarely* food from restaurants with delivery or takeout service before the Covid-19. While 39 % of the participants expressed that they were used to order delivery or takeout food a few times a month, figure 5 shows that only 9 % of participants ordered delivery and takeout food once or twice a week. Finally, 6 % of the respondents said they never used previously mentioned services, and only 1 % stated that they intended to order food delivery and takeout food several times a week.

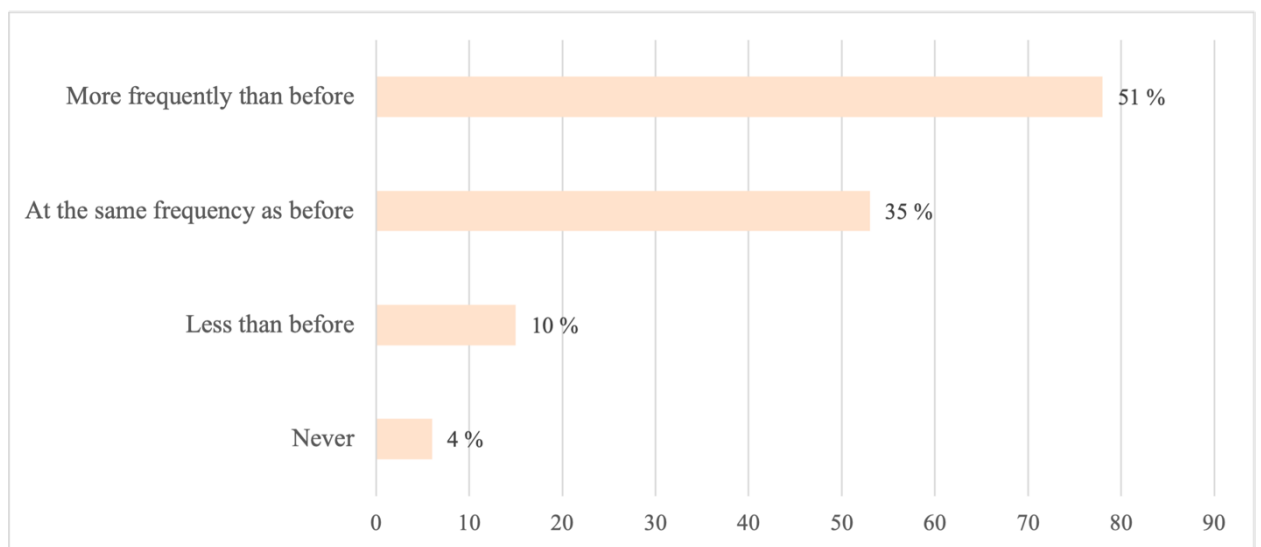


Figure 6.

Source: Oral (2021), How Frequently Respondents Order Food Delivery During the Pandemic

Figure 6 illustrates the frequency rates of ordering food delivery during the Covid-19 pandemic. As can be seen from the above, the majority of the respondents (51%) are inclined to order food delivery more frequently than before the beginning of the virus. Furthermore, 35 % has expressed that their frequency has not changed and it has stayed at the same frequency as before. While 10 % have stated that they order food delivery less than usual, only 4 % has not ordered food delivery at all during the pandemic.

When comparing the figure 5 and figure 6, significant changes can be seen in use of food delivery. Respondents have stated that they ordered food with delivery or takeout options less frequently before the pandemic than during the pandemic. In figure 6, the respondents were asked how often they ordered food delivery before the Covid-19 pandemic and the majority (41%) chose the option

of *very rarely*. Nevertheless, figure 6 shows how the frequency of ordering food delivery has significantly increased during this period of pandemic.

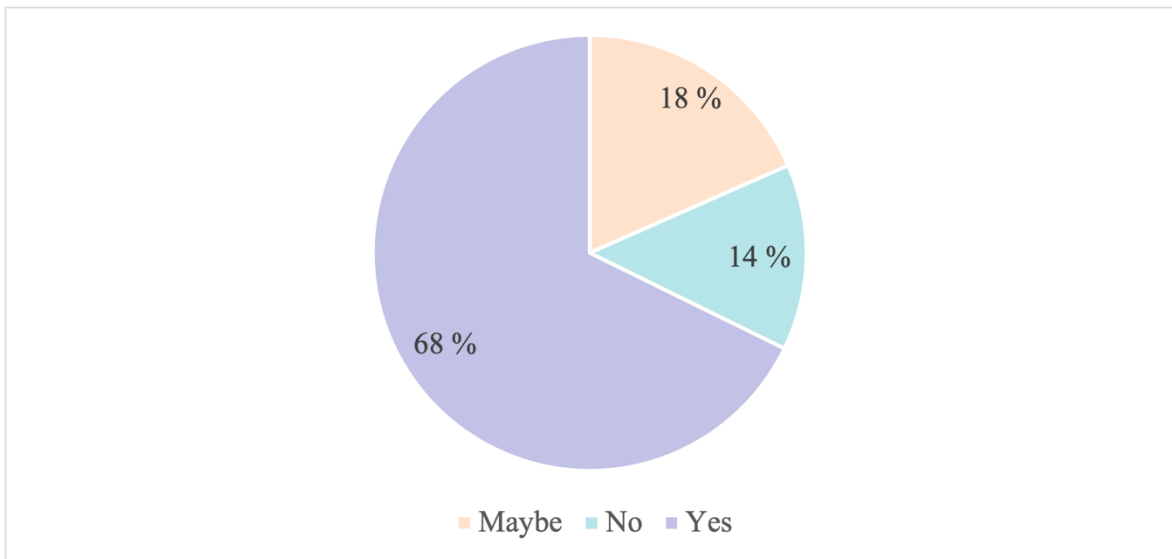


Figure 7.  
Source: Oral (2021), Would Respondents Be Ready To Dine Out if Restrictions Were Lifted

Figure 7 demonstrates the results of the respondent’s willingness to dine out if the restrictions imposed by the government were lifted. The given pie chart above shows that the majority of the respondents (68%) would be ready to dine out after the restrictions. 14% of the population said they would not be ready to visit restaurants after the restrictions and the rest of the respondents (18%) have answered *maybe* in this question.

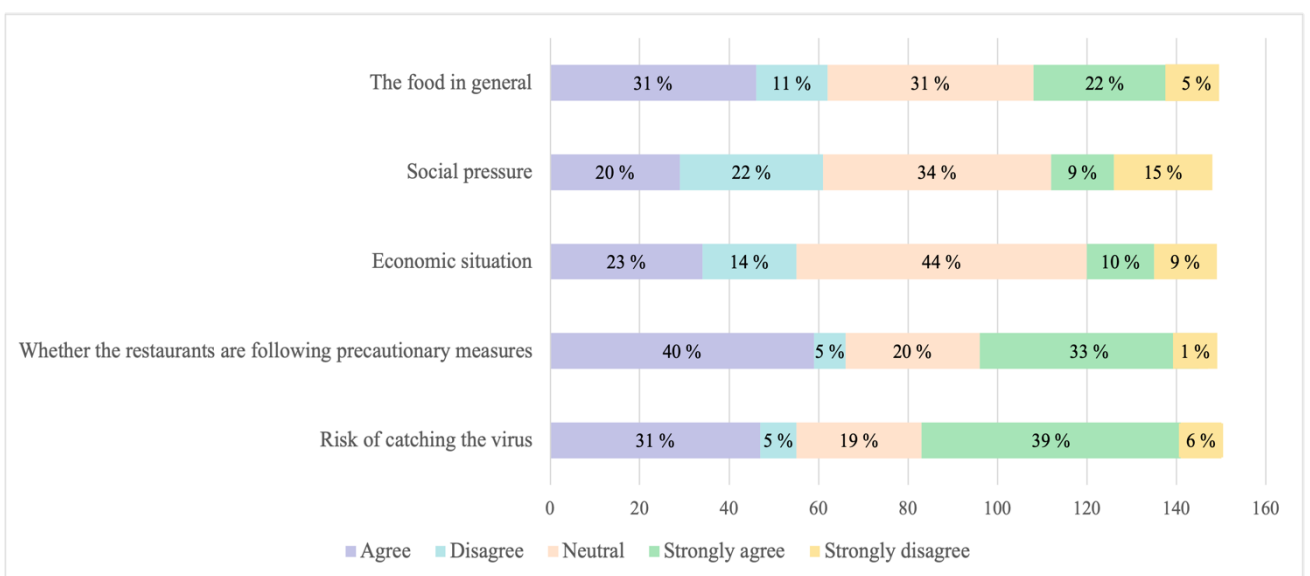


Figure 8.

Source: Oral (2021), Major Factors Influencing Respondents Dining Out Decisions

Figure 8 illustrates the results of the important factors influencing respondents dining out decision during the Covid-19. This question has mainly taken five factors into account i.e. The food in general, Social pressure, Economic situation, Whether the restaurants are following the precautionary measures, and lastly Risk of catching the virus. In the first question, respondents were asked how strongly the food in general plays a role in deciding to eat out. 31 % of the population agreed with the importance of the food, while 22 % strongly agreed with this statement. At the same time, 31 % were neutral, 11 % disagreed and 5 % of the respondents strongly disagreed. The second statement was whether the social pressure is influencing respondents dining out decision. 20 % of the population agreed with its influence while 9 % of the population strongly agreed. The majority of the population (34%) were neutral, 22 % disagreed, and the last 15 % of the respondents strongly disagreed. With this table can be inferred that social pressure does not have a big influence on dining out decisions. The third statement measures the respondents economic situation's influence in terms of eating out during the virus. In this case, 23 % of the population agreed and 9 % strongly agreed upon its influence. On the contrary, 44 % of the respondents were neutral, 22 % disagreed, and 9 % strongly disagreed. To be concluded, the majority of the respondents were neutral about the impact of economic situation in their decision. Moreover, the fourth section illustrates how the precautionary measures influence on respondents dining out decision. About 40 % of the population agreed and 33 % strongly agreed with its importance. Besides, 20 % of the people were neutral while only 5 % disagreed and 1 % strongly disagreed. As a matter of fact, precautionary measures appear to be one of the most important factors concerning the dining out decision. Finally, the fifth and the last statement was the concern of catching the Covid-19 virus. 31 % of the respondents agreed and 39 % strongly agreed with its impact. 19 % of the respondents were neutral, 5 % disagreed and 6 % strongly disagreed. All in all, the biggest factors playing role in dining out decision appears to be the food in general, precautionary measures taken by restaurants, and risk of catching the virus. Respondents were mostly neutral about the impact of economic situation and the social pressure influencing decision of eating out.

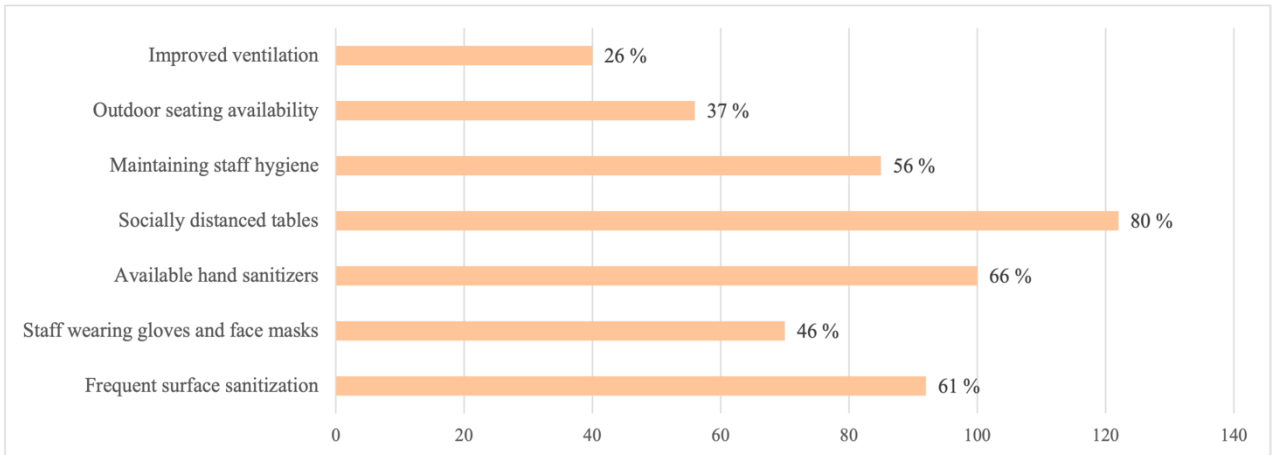


Figure 9.

Source: Oral (2021), Importance of Different Safety Initiatives in Dining Out Decisions

Figure illustrates the most important safety initiatives influencing respondents eating out decisions. The table has seven different factors which are improved ventilation, outdoor seating availability, maintaining staff hygiene, socially distanced tables, available hand sanitizers, gloves and face masks worn by the staff, and lastly frequent surface sanitization. According to the graph, the most significant factor (80%) appear to be *socially distanced tables*, which shows that respondents consider the social distance as the most important factor in restaurants. The second most important factor was considered as *available hand sanitizers* in the restaurants which was total of 66 % of the respondents. The third factor came off as *frequent surface sanitization* with 61 % and *staff hygiene* was the fourth most important initiative with 56 %. In addition to maintaining staff hygiene, the respondents (46%) stated as the fifth most important factor that face masks and gloves should also be worn by the staff. On the other hand, as the second least important factor 37 %, the respondents chose *outdoor seating availability*, and the last and least important factor (26%) was chosen as *improved ventilation*.

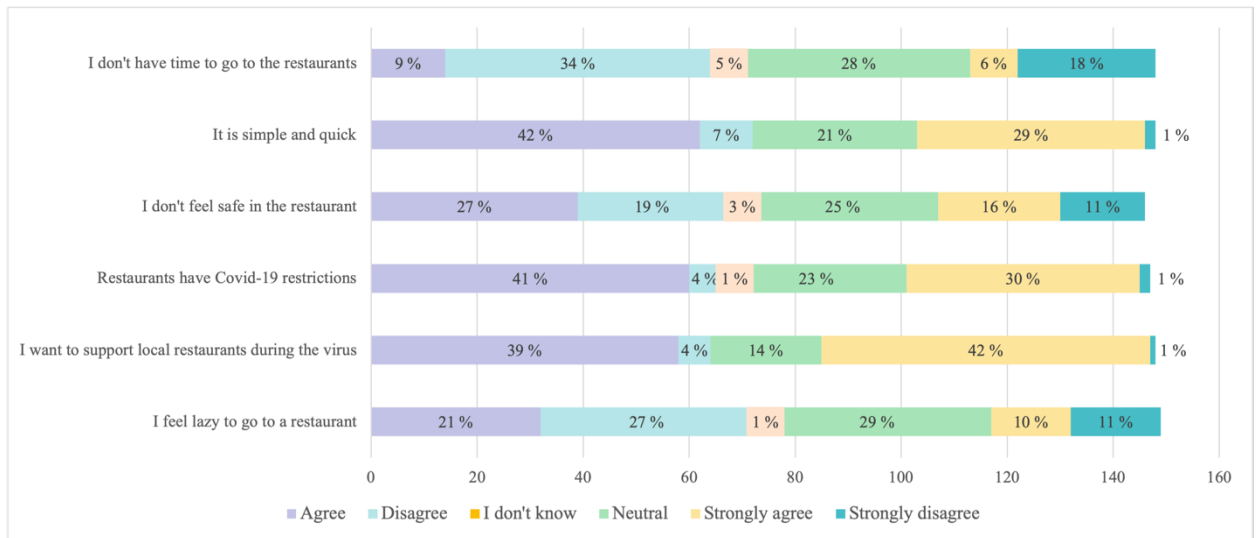


Figure 10.  
Source: Oral (2021), Main Reasons to Choose Food Delivery

Figure 10 includes six different options regarding choosing food delivery and the answers are measured on a six scale of *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. The first option was whether the respondents don't have time to go to the restaurants. 9% of the population agreed, and 6% strongly agreed. 28% of the were neutral upon this section and 5% did not know. On the other hand, the majority (34%) disagreed and 6% strongly disagreed. In the second statement, the reason to choose food delivery was stated as simple and quick. Most of the respondents (42%) agreed with its influence and 29% strongly agreed. Additionally, 21% of the population were neutral, 7% disagreed and only 1% strongly disagreed. Third reason to choose food delivery was the concern about not feeling safe in the restaurants. Again, the majority (27%) agreed with this statement and 16% of the population strongly agreed. While 4% were neutral, 1% said they didn't know. The amount of respondents who disagreed upon this statement was 19% and the last 11% of the people strongly disagreed. The next section illustrates the influence of restaurant restrictions on choosing food delivery. 41% of the participants have agreed and 30% have strongly agreed. While 23% of the people were neutral, only 1% said they don't know. 4% of the respondents disagreed and only 1% strongly disagreed. The following statement measures the respondents willingness to support local restaurants during the Covid-19. 39% of the respondents agreed and the majority (42%) strongly agreed upon this statement. 14% were neutral about it and 1% didn't know. On the contrary, 4% of the population disagreed and only 1% strongly disagreed. The sixth and the last section measures laziness towards going to restaurants and therefore using the food delivery service. 21% agreed with this option and 10% strongly agreed. The majority of the respondents (29%) were neutral and only 1% stated that they don't know. Furthermore, 27% disagreed while

11 % strongly disagreed. To be concluded, respondents still have willingness to dine out and support their local restaurants but apparently they have become more wary during the pandemic, and they avoid restaurants also because of the restrictions imposed by the government. Additionally, most of the respondents have stated that they choose food delivery since it is simple and quick which makes them lazy in terms of dining out.

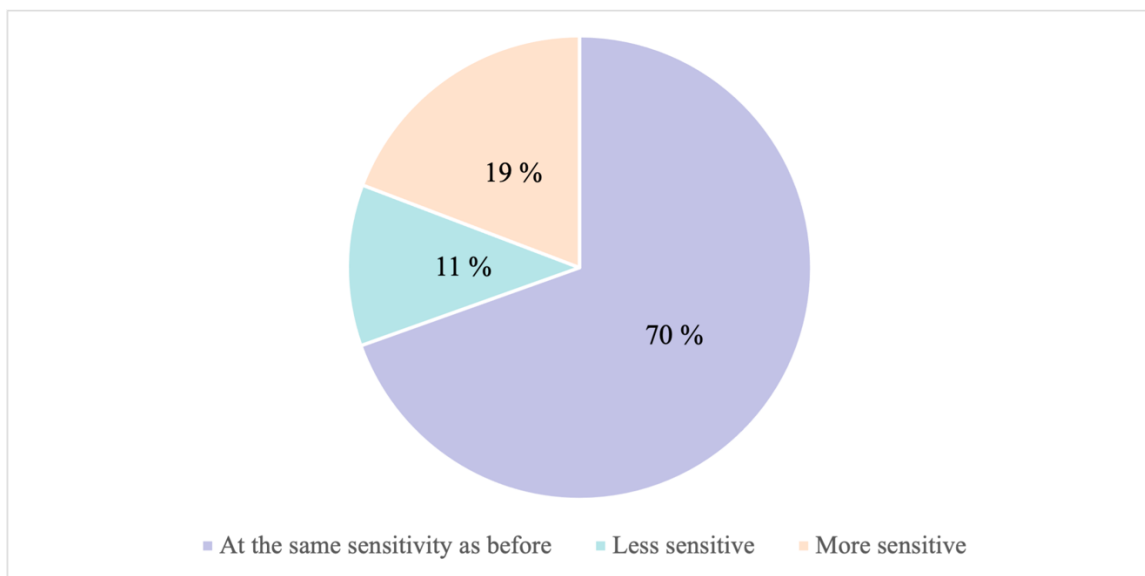


Figure 11.  
Source: Oral (2021), Respondents Price-sensitivity During The Pandemic

Figure 11 demonstrates the proportion of the respondents on the basis of price-sensitivity during the Covid-19. As can be seen from the pie chart, the majority of the population (70%) don't see any change in their price-sensitivity. On the contrary, 19 % have stated that their sensitivity towards prices has increased during the pandemic and the rest of the population (11%) said they are less sensitive than before the Covid-19.



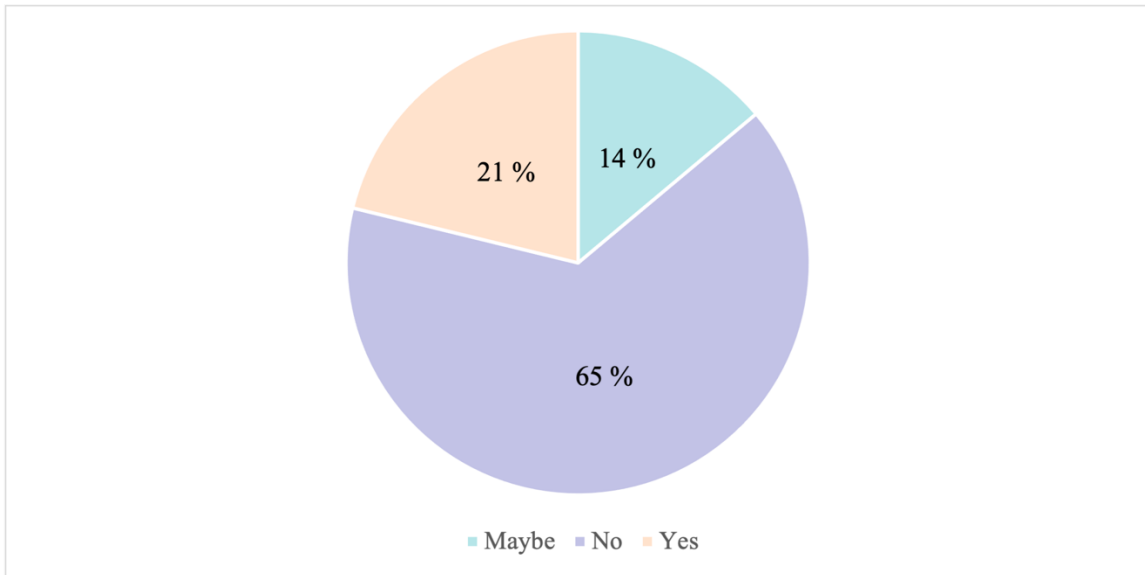


Figure 12.  
Source: Oral (2021), Respondents Promotional Expectations from Restaurants

Figure 12 shows the respondents promotional expectations from restaurants during the virus, such as special offers, discounts, etc. According to the pie chart, the majority (65%) of the population does not expect promotions from restaurants during the Covid-19, while 21% of the respondents appear to expect these promotions. The rest of the population (14%) answered *maybe*.

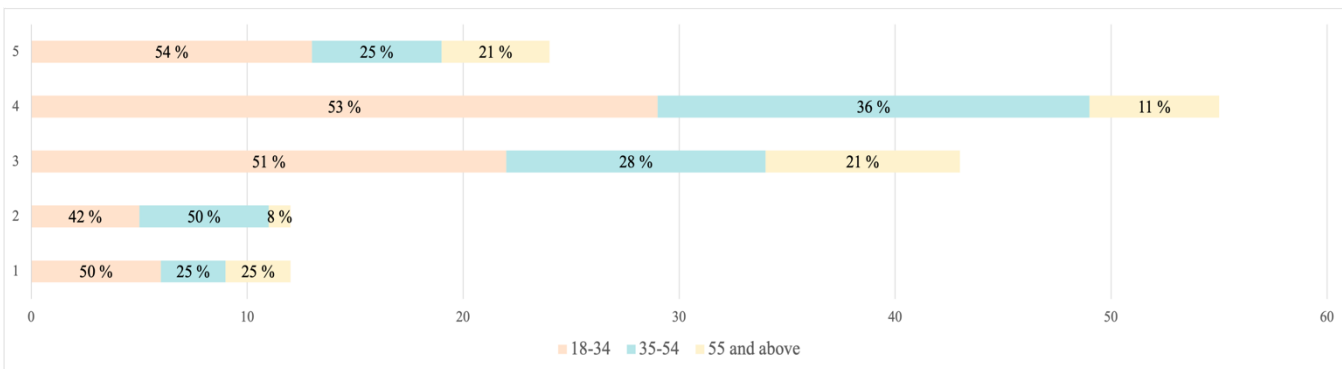


Figure 13.  
Source: Oral (2021), How Highly Were Respondents Purchasing Decisions Affected by the Restrictions Imposed by the Government

Figure 13 below shows how the purchasing decisions of three different age groups are affected by the government restrictions. This graph was measured with a linear scale from 1 to 5, where 1 stands for *Not affected at all* and 5 for *Highly affected*. Apparently, the most answered scales were 4 and 3. As it can be seen, the purchasing decisions were affected for the most part in the age

group of 18-34. Secondly, the age group of 35-54 was also highly affected but not as much as the previous age group. When examining the graph, the third age group (55 and above) seems to have a very mild effect overall.

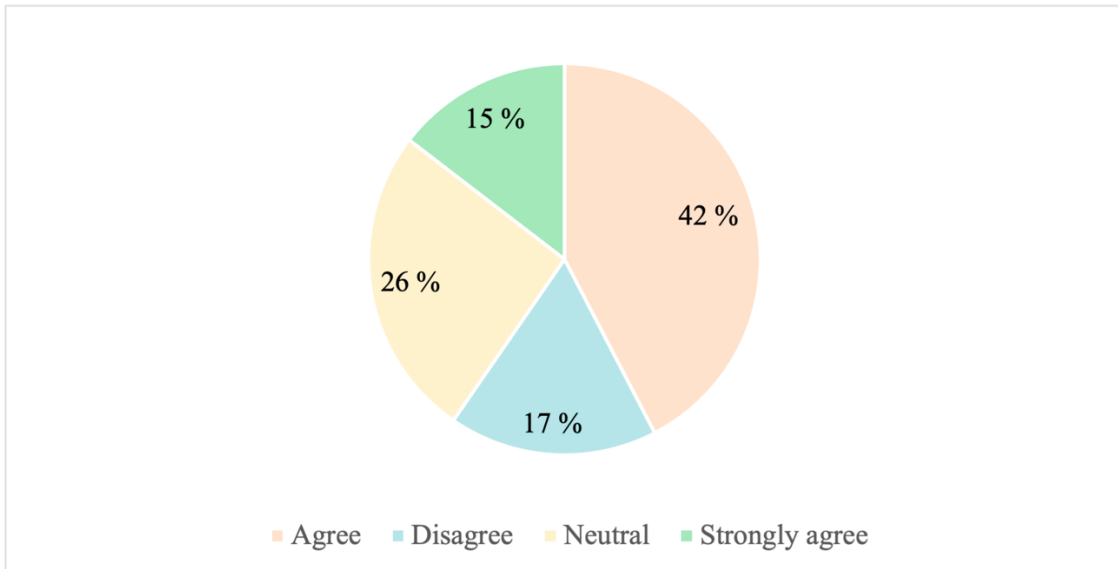


Figure 14.  
Source: Oral (2021), The Distribution of Choosing Only Familiar Restaurants During the Pandemic

In this question, the respondents were asked whether they prefer the restaurants they already know. In the pie chart, 42 % of the population agreed that they prefer to visit familiar restaurants and 15 % strongly agreed. While 26 % remained neutral, 17 % of the respondents disagreed upon this statement.

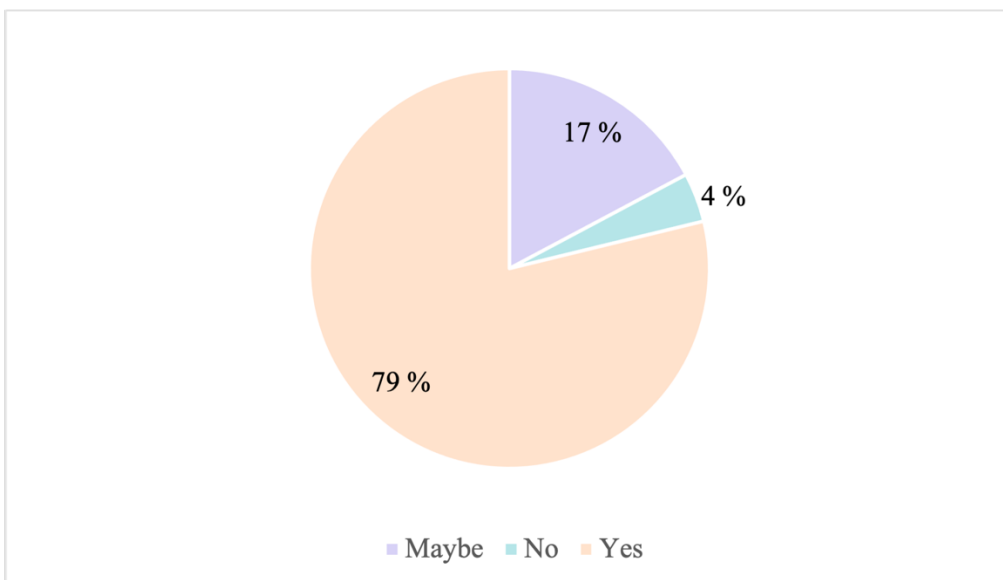


Figure 15.

Source: Oral (2021), Respondents Willingness to Eat at a Restaurant With a Proper Sanitation Plan

The pie chart above measures the respondents willingness to dine at the restaurants with a proper sanitation plan. It is self-evident that the restaurant’s hygiene and safety measurements have a significant impact on respondents choices in order to eat out during the Covid-19 virus. In this question, the majority (79%) have stated that they would be ready to eat at restaurants if the sanitation plans are taken into consideration. On the other hand, 17 % of the respondents was not sure about their decision and only 4 % said they would not be ready even with a frequent sanitation plan. Also, when looking back to figure 10, the frequent surface sanitization in restaurants is considered as the third most important factor from all of the seven different factors.

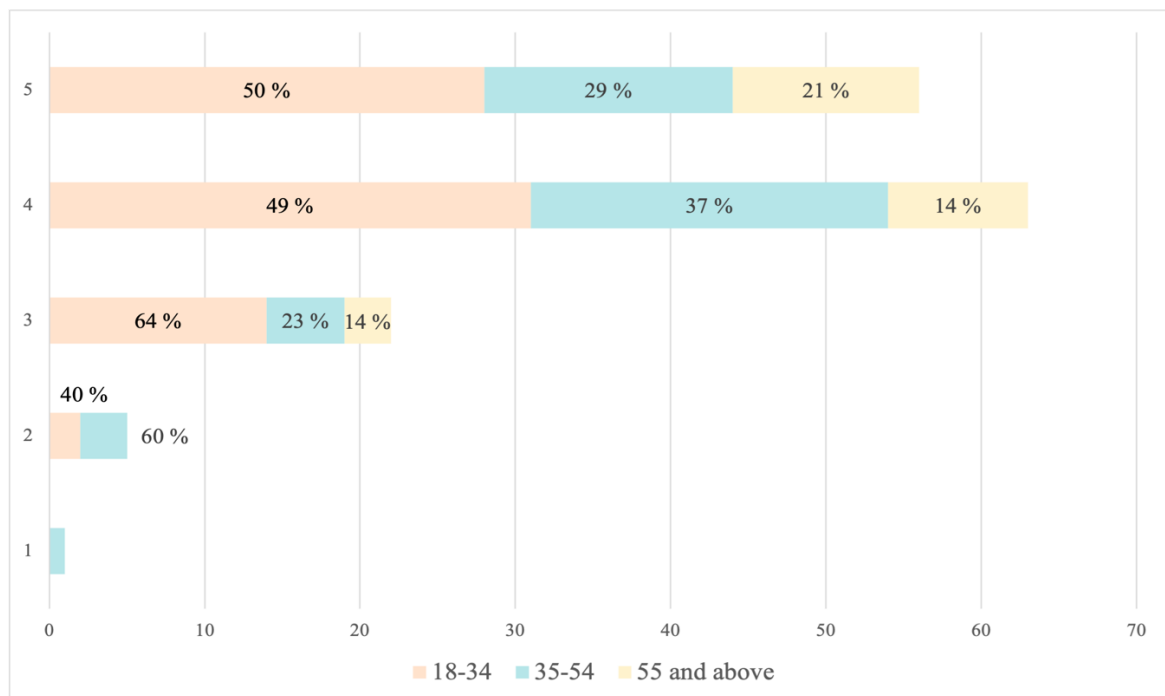


Figure 16.

Source: Oral (2021), Satisfaction Level Towards Safety Precautions Taken in Restaurants

Figure 16 demonstrates the satisfaction level of respondents towards safety precautions taken in restaurants and this was the last question in the survey. This graph was also measured with a linear scale from 1 to 5, where 1 expressed *not satisfied at all* and 5 expressed *very satisfied*. The majority of the age group of 18-34 were mostly satisfied with the safety precautions taken in restaurants, as can be seen from the scales 4 and 5. The most part of the respondents (37%) in the age group of 35-54 have expressed their satisfaction level as 4 and 5. In the third age group (55 and above) the majority (21%) have stated their satisfaction level as 5 and 14 % as 4.

In addition to the one-variable analysis, a two-variable analysis is also performed. Tables below shows the statistical association between the two characteristics.

Table 1.

		Would you be more likely to eat at a restaurant with a proper sanitation plan?				
		Maybe	No	Yes		Total
Gender	Female	1	20	1	84	106
	Male	0	4	5	34	43
	Prefer not to say	0	2	0	1	3
Total		1	26	6	120	152

There is statistically significant, but weak association between gender and preferred to eat in a restaurant with a proper sanitation plan;  $X^2 = 16.223$ , Cramer's  $V = .231$ ,  $p = .013$  ( $\alpha = .05$ ).

Table 2.

		I choose food delivery because... [Restaurants have Covid-19 restrictions]							
		Agree	Disagree	I don't know	Neutral	Strongly agree	Strongly disagree	Total	
Gender	Female	4	44	3	0	23	31	1	106
	Male	1	14	3	1	11	13	0	43
	Prefer not to say	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	3
Total		5	61	6	1	34	44	2	152

Statistically significant and weak association also between gender and chosen food delivery, because restaurants have Covid-19 restrictions;  $X^2 = 31.315$ , Cramer's  $V = .321$ ,  $p = .002$  ( $\alpha = .05$ ).

### 3.2. Discussion

The purpose of the discussion chapter is to describe the most important findings of this study and to examine fresh insights about the research problem. The main idea was to examine the most important factors impacting consumer behavior in restaurant sector during the Covid-19 and what

kind of elements are mostly influencing respondents dining out decision. According to the results of the study, the majority (76%) of the respondents have stated that Covid-19 has significantly affected in their eating culture. Respondents were asked how often they visit restaurants during the pandemic and the results showed that respondent's willingness towards visiting food enterprises is more among the age group of 18-34 when comparing to the elder age groups. This is possibly because older individuals prefer staying indoors since the risk the Covid-19 virus is greater with the increasing age. However, the majority of the respondents (41%) have stated that they are not comfortable with the thought of visiting restaurants, while contrastingly 39 % of the respondents said that they were not uncomfortable about the thought of dining out. Additionally, the study measured how often respondents ordered food delivery or takeout food before the pandemic started, and from the results can be seen that the majority (45%) answered *very rarely*, and 39 % answered *a few times a month* in this question. By this means, it is obvious that before the Covid-19 respondents have preferred to dine at the restaurants instead of ordering delivery food. On the other hand, the author wanted to measure also the frequency of ordering food delivery during the period of the pandemic. 51 % of the respondents stated that they are inclined to order food delivery more frequently than before and 35 % said their ordering frequency has remained at the same frequency. This is because people have safety and health concerns, and it is resulting in shifting to delivery apps instead of the in-store experience. Furthermore, the respondents were asked if they would be ready to dine out in case the restaurant restrictions were lifted. The majority (68%) said they would be ready to dine out after the restrictions imposed by the government were lifted and only 14 % answered *no* in this question. Obviously, the restrictions have a big impact on respondents' willingness towards going to the restaurants. When it comes to the major factors influencing respondents eating out decision, the major concerns are clearly the risk of catching the virus and the concerns about whether the restaurants are following the precautionary measures or not. These factors may cause uncertainty for the individuals who would like to visit food enterprises also during the virus. When the respondents were asked about which safety initiatives taken in restaurants are the most important, maintaining *socially distanced tables* appeared to be the most significant factor by answers of 80 % of the respondents, which means that respondent's pay special attention to social distancing rules. The second most important factor (66%) was considered as *available hand sanitizers* in restaurants. Also, 61 % of the respondents considered *frequent surface sanitization* as an important safety initiative. When it comes to choosing food delivery, the respondents' main reason to order delivery food was supporting their local restaurants, its easiness, and the precautionary restrictions which restaurants have started to use. The author also measured the price-sensitivity level of respondents in terms of dining out. 70 % of the

respondents didn't see any changes in their price-sensitivity, 19 % said they are more sensitive, and the rest of the population (11%) stated that they are less sensitive than before the Covid-19. The next question measured respondents' expectations about promotions made by restaurants i. e. special offers and different kind of discounts. According to the results, the majority (65%) did not have any expectations while 21 % said they have. 14 % of the respondents answered *maybe*. Later on, the author examined with a linear scale (1-5) the government restrictions' effects on three different age groups' purchasing decisions. Apparently, the most answered scales were 3 and 4, which stands for *affected* and *highly affected*. The purchasing decisions were affected for the most part in the age group of 18-34. The following question illustrated the distribution of choosing familiar restaurants to go. The majority (42%) agreed on preferring visiting restaurants that they already know, and 15 % strongly agreed, and 26 % remained neutral. Only 17 % of the respondents disagreed on this statement, which means that trust is an essential element influencing consumers' attitudes towards visiting food enterprises. The next statement was whether the respondents' willingness to eat at a restaurant would increase with a proper sanitization plan. The results were positive since 79 % of the respondents stated that they would be ready to dine out with frequent sanitization in restaurants. In other words, respondents pay special attention to restaurants' hygiene and maintaining frequent sanitization plan in the food enterprises, and if these measures are followed, the most part of the respondents would be fine with dining out. The last question was about satisfaction level towards safety precautions taken in restaurants and it was measured with a linear scale from *not satisfied at all* to *very satisfied*. The author examined again three age groups of which the age group of 18-34 was mostly satisfied with the precautions taken in restaurants. While 49 % of this age group stated they were *satisfied*, 50 % of them answered *very satisfied*. The most part in the age group of 35-54 have expressed their satisfaction level as 4 and 5. The majority of the third age group (55 and above) which was 21 % stated their satisfaction level as 5, and 14 % of them stated as 4.

When comparing the results of this research and the previous studies concerning restaurants and Covid-19, it is obvious that especially consumers' trust is a major factor affecting their intentions to visit restaurants (see Figure 14). By this mean, trust appears to be an essential element influencing consumers attitudes towards dining out during the Covid-19. Hakim, et.al have also stated that investing in safety aspects, for example a proper sanitation plan may increase consumers' intention to dine out (see Figure 15).

## CONCLUSION

This research aimed to investigate the changes in consumer behavior in Finland's restaurant sector since the Covid-19 pandemic has started. The research problem of this thesis was *'the lack of knowledge of Covid-19 effects and its impact on consumer behavior in Finland's restaurant sector'*.

This study is examining the factors that impact consumers' decision making in restaurant sector and how restaurants can build trust among their customers. Primary data was collected via the questionnaire which was conducted in Google Forms by the author. The questionnaire was designed to gain a deeper insight and explore consumer behavior changes and it had a total of 19 questions. The respondents were reached through different social media platforms and the author had different connections from the Finland's restaurant sector. The population size was set to=150 respondents and the target group was people in ages between 18 to 55 and above.

As an essential part of the Covid-19 crisis has been closing down most of the businesses, particularly bars and restaurants to avoid close contact with people. As a self-evident truth, the Covid-19 has become a major issue changing almost all aspects of individuals' lives.

The Covid-19 has had a significant impact on consumers' buying behavior and intentions to visit restaurants due to the risk of catching the virus from crowded places. From all four factors that affect consumer behavior, psychological factors clearly predominate in this study. According to the respondents, not just the economic situation or social pressure, but mostly perception, motivation and attitudes influence individuals dining out decision.

This thesis had three research questions altogether, and the first research question was *'what factors impact on consumer's decision making in restaurant industry during the Covid-19?'*. Respondents' answers in this question were clearly the fear of catching the virus from the restaurants and the concerns about whether the restaurants are following the precautionary measures. By this means, it is extremely important for restaurants to maintain safety for their customers. The second research question was *'has the frequency of food ordering changed?'*, and the results show that there are major differences between food ordering habits before and after the pandemic. Respondents have generally preferred to dine at the restaurants before the Covid-19 instead of ordering delivery food. The frequency of ordering food delivery was measured in the study and the majority of the respondents stated that they are inclined to order food delivery more

frequently than before. In addition, the government restrictions relating to restaurants have had a big effect in consumers dining out decision.

The third research question was '*what kind of strategies should be used to build trust among consumers?*', and this was measured with determining the most important safety initiatives which respondents would prefer. The most essential safety initiatives influencing consumers' dining out decision appear to be social distancing rules, available hand sanitizers, restaurants' frequent surface sanitization and also maintained hygiene by the staff.

All in all, the majority of the respondents have agreed on the negative effects of the Covid-19 in their dining out decisions since the Covid-19 have obviously made respondents more wary due to risks of getting infected.



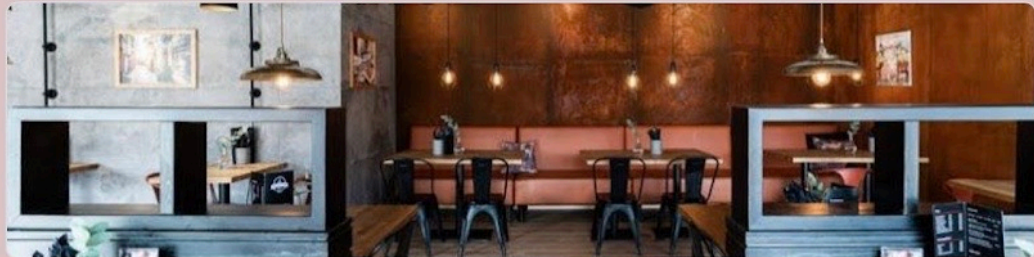
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# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1. Questionnaire



### Changes in consumer behavior during Covid-19; A study in the Finnish restaurant sector

Dear participant,

I am conducting a questionnaire for my bachelor thesis from Tallinn University of Technology. The purpose of this questionnaire is to collect information about how the pandemic has changed the intentions of visiting restaurants and which factors influence most on consumers' purchasing decisions.

Your participation in this research is voluntary and your replies will remain completely anonymous. This survey will take approximately 5 minutes to complete.

Thank you in advance for your time and cooperation!

Do you live in Finland?

- Yes
- No

Has the Covid-19 pandemic had an effect on your culture of eating?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

How often have you eaten at a restaurant during the Covid-19 pandemic (before last lockdown)?

- Several times a week
- A few times a month
- A few times a year
- Very rarely
- Never

How often did you eat out at a restaurant before the Covid-19 pandemic?

- Several times a week
- A few times a month
- A few times a year
- Very rarely
- Never

Are you comfortable with the thought of eating out at a restaurant during the crisis?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

How often did you order delivery or takeout food before the Covid-19 pandemic?

- Several times a week
- Once or twice a week
- A few times a month
- Very rarely
- Never

How frequently do you order food delivery during the pandemic?

- More frequently than before
- At the same frequency as before
- Less than before
- Never

Would you be ready to dine out right after the restrictions were lifted?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

What are the major factors that influence your dining out decision during the Covid-19 pandemic?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Risk of catching the virus	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Whether the restaurants are following precautionary measures	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Economic situation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social pressure	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The food in general	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Which safety initiatives are the most important in your decision to dine out?

- Frequent surface sanitization
- Staff wearing gloves and face masks
- Available hand sanitizers
- Socially distanced tables
- Maintaining staff hygiene
- Outdoor seating availability
- Improved ventilation

I choose food delivery because...

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	I don't know
I feel lazy to go to a restaurant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I want to support local restaurants during the virus	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Restaurants have Covid-19 restrictions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I don't feel safe in the restaurant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is simple and quick	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I don't have time to go to the restaurants	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How price-sensitive are you in terms of ordering food during the Covid-19 crisis?

- More sensitive
- At the same sensitivity as before
- Less sensitive

Do you have promotional expectations from restaurants during the pandemic?  
(Discounts, special offers, or coupons)

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

How highly were your purchasing decisions affected by the restrictions imposed by the government?

How highly were your purchasing decisions affected by the restrictions imposed by the government?

- |              |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                 |
|--------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
|              | 1                     | 2                     | 3                     | 4                     | 5                     |                 |
| Not affected | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Highly affected |

I always choose to go to the restaurants that I already know

- |   |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
|   | Strongly agree        | Agree                 | Neutral               | Disagree              | Strongly disagree     |
| - | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Would you be more likely to eat at a restaurant with a proper sanitation plan?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe



Would you be more likely to eat at a restaurant with a proper sanitation plan?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

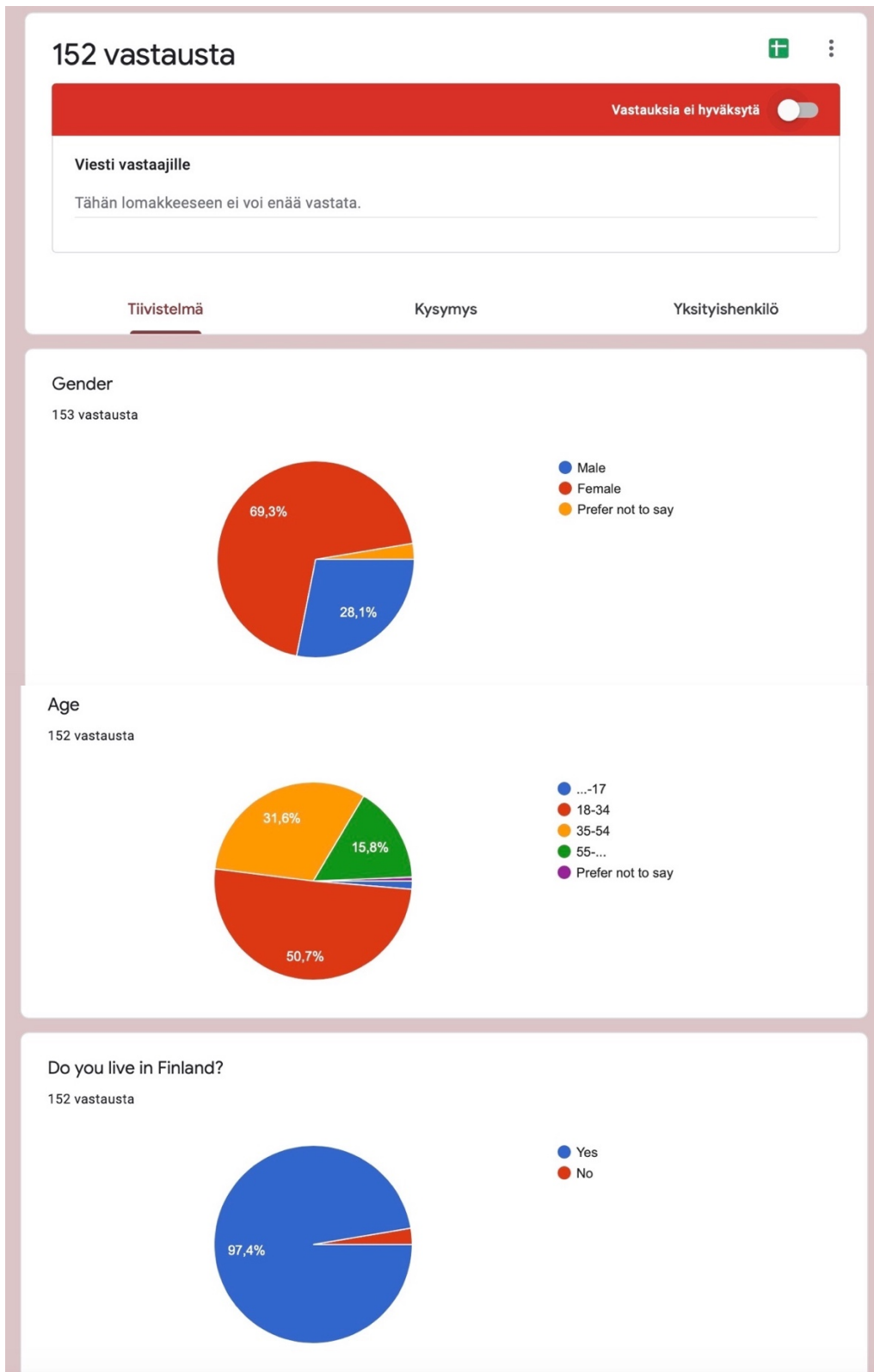
How satisfied are you with how the restaurants are taking safety precautions overall?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not satisfied at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very satisfied

Thank you for your time! Have a good day :)

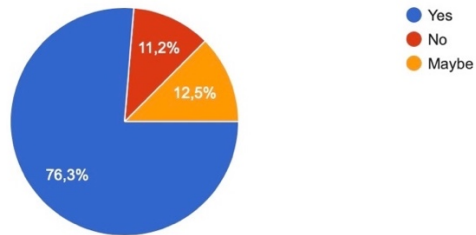
Kuvaus (valinnainen)

## Appendix 2. Results of the questionnaire



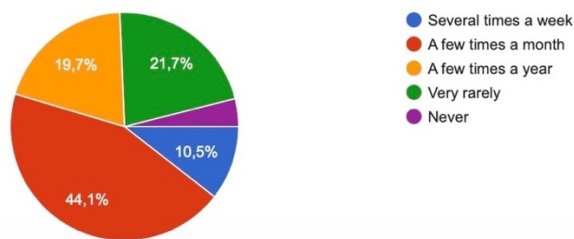
Has the Covid-19 pandemic had an effect on your culture of eating?

152 vastausta



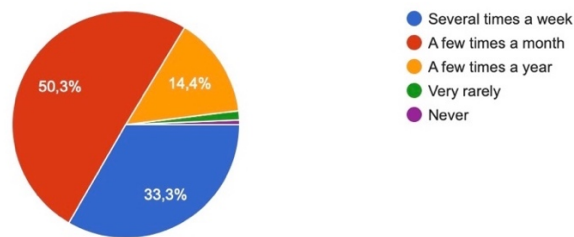
How often have you eaten at a restaurant during the Covid-19 pandemic (before last lockdown)?

152 vastausta



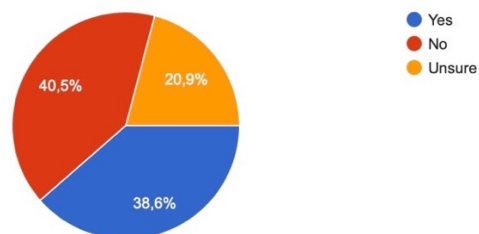
How often did you eat out at a restaurant before the Covid-19 pandemic?

153 vastausta



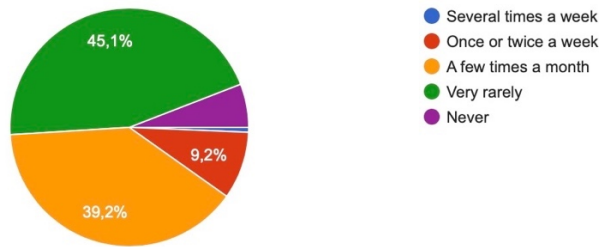
Are you comfortable with the thought of eating out at a restaurant during the crisis?

153 vastausta



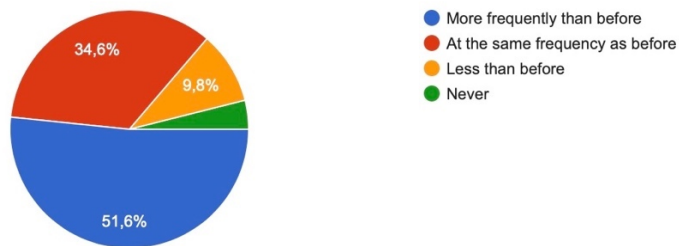
How often did you order delivery or takeout food before the Covid-19 pandemic?

153 vastausta



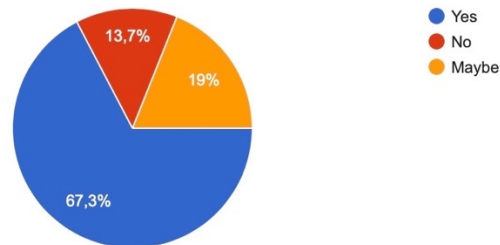
How frequently do you order food delivery during the pandemic?

153 vastausta

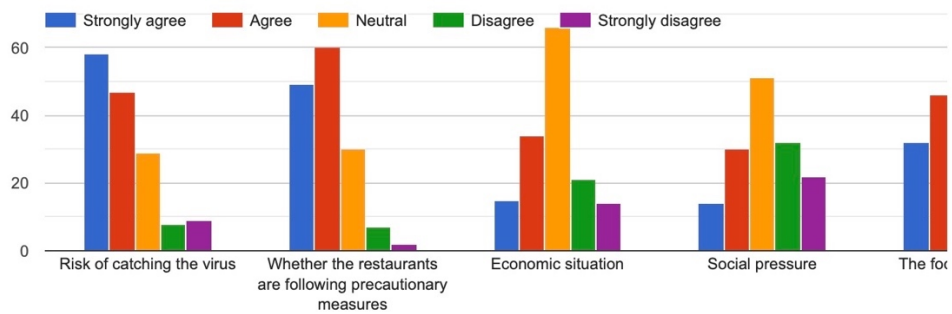


Would you be ready to dine out right after the restrictions were lifted?

153 vastausta

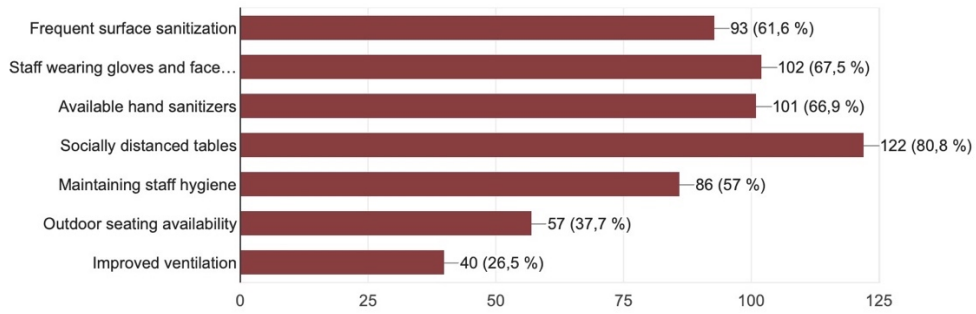


What are the major factors that influence your dining out decision during the Covid-19 pandemic?

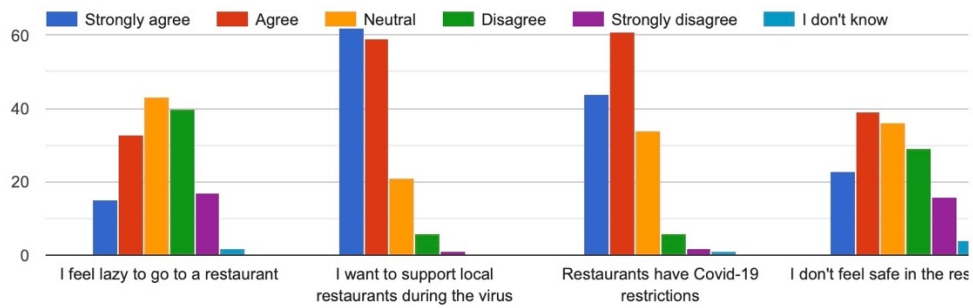


### Which safety initiatives are the most important in your decision to dine out?

151 vastausta

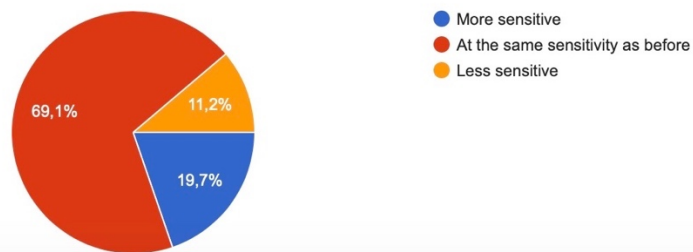


### I choose food delivery because...



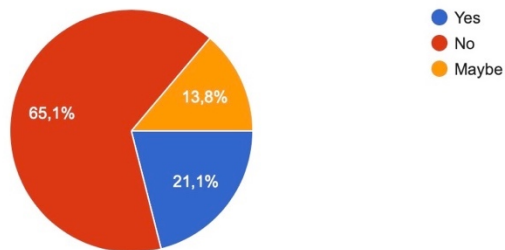
### How price-sensitive are you in terms of ordering food during the Covid-19 crisis?

152 vastausta



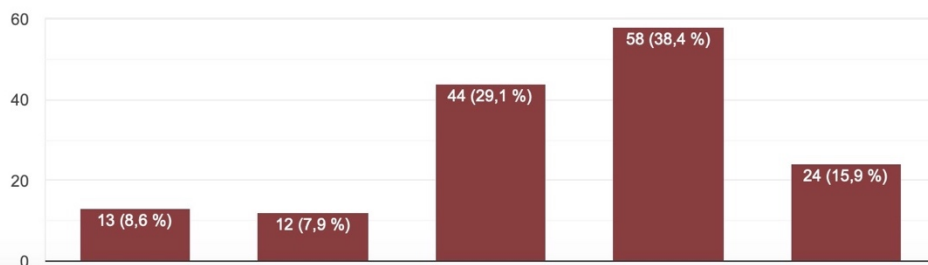
Do you have promotional expectations from restaurants during the pandemic? (Discounts, special offers, or coupons)

152 vastausta

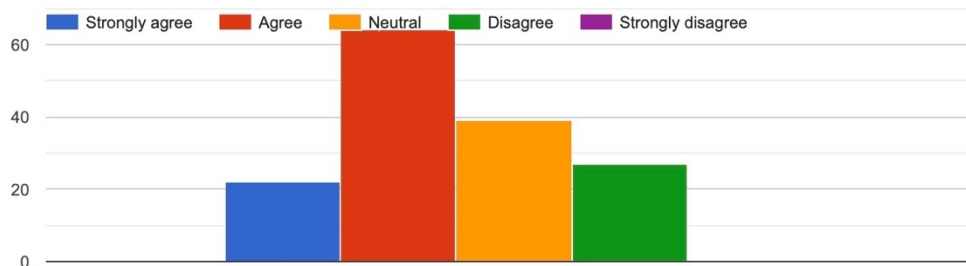


How highly were your purchasing decisions affected by the restrictions imposed by the government?

151 vastausta

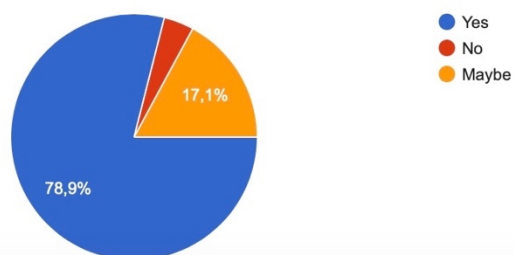


I always choose to go to the restaurants that I already know



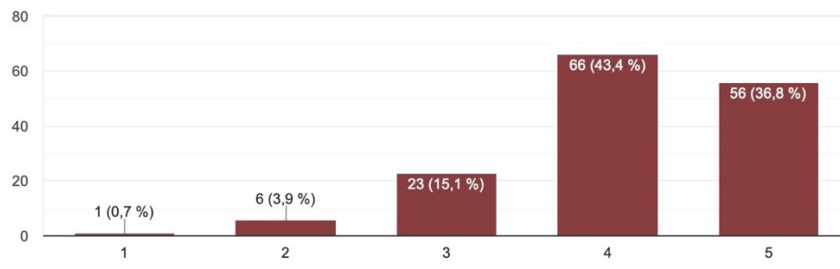
Would you be more likely to eat at a restaurant with a proper sanitation plan?

152 vastausta



How satisfied are you with how the restaurants are taking safety precautions overall?

152 vastausta



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