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Research Article

The Impact of The Pandemic on the Informal Eating Out Habits of Filipino Diners in Dubai, United Arab Emirates

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ABSTRACT

The study assessed the effect of the pandemic on the informal eating habits of Filipino diners in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, according to the following dimensions: dining experience, online food orders, take-away orders, marketing promotion, and brand loyalty. The main instrument used in the study to collect data is an online questionnaire made by the researcher. The researcher created an online survey questionnaire using Google Forms and disseminated it through Facebook, Messenger, and email. A total of 414 surveys were answered. The acquired data were analyzed, synthesized, and statistically treated. The major goal of this study is to design and facilitate a program that will aid Dubai, United Arab Emirates restaurant owners, and leaders who are members of the Philippine Business Council in Dubai and the Northern Emirates in getting Filipino diners back into the dining scene and increasing their profitability. The researcher's recommendation is to host a conference with the theme "Catering to the Filipino Palate: Enhancing the Dining Experience in Dubai" to assist restaurants in customizing their offerings and services to Filipino customers' needs (the dining experience), to enhance restaurants' online ordering systems, and to maximize takeaway orders. (Order Food Online), to provide insights on how restaurants may develop successful marketing strategies and promotions to draw in and keep consumers (Marketing Promotions), and to emphasize the value of upholding one's principles and heritage while serving a wide range of diners.

Keywords: *Brand Loyalty, Dining Experience, Eating Out Habits, Filipino Diners, Marketing Promotions, Online Food Delivery, Takeout Orders*

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly had a significant impact on various aspects of people's lives around the world (Gori et al., 2021). One area that has been greatly affected is the dining industry, including both formal and informal eating out habits. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has caused numerous challenges and disruptions to the global economy, with the restaurant industry being one of the hardest hit (Chen et al., 2022). In particular, this essay will focus on the impact of the pandemic on the informal eating habits of Filipino diners in Dubai, United Arab Emirates and how it has led to changes in their dining behaviors.

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced governments around the world to implement strict lockdown measures and safety protocols in order to contain the spread of the virus (Crosta et al., 2021). As a result, many dining establishments in Dubai, including those frequented by Filipino diners, were temporarily closed or faced restrictions on their operations. This has led to a significant shift in the eating habits of Filipino diners in Dubai, as they were no longer able to dine out freely or engage in their usual informal dining practices. According to a study conducted in Canada, respondents reported a change in their eating habits during the pandemic (Alhousseini & Alqahtani, 2020).

While several studies have looked at how COVID-19 affected consumer behavior, there haven't been many that explicitly examined how Filipino diners in Dubai during the epidemic handled eating out. Existing research has mostly focused on how purchasing and cooking habits change at home, offering little insight into the preferences, actions, and routines of Filipino eaters in Dubai. Given the current situation, it is critical to determine if Filipino diners will continue to choose home delivery owing to convenience and safety concerns or return to the eating-out scene.

This study attempts to fill that understanding gap by studying how the pandemic impacted Filipino customers' informal eating-out behavior in Dubai and looking at variances across various sociodemographic groups. The study will examine changes in eating behaviors across a range of socioeconomic categories by comparing eating patterns before and after the

pandemic. To gain a thorough understanding of how Filipino diners in Dubai changed their tastes and behaviors both before and after the pandemic, it will be necessary to study several important factors, including dining experience, takeaway orders, online food delivery, marketing promotions, and brand loyalty.

The results of this study will further our knowledge of how the pandemic affected eating habits and have real-world repercussions for Filipino diners and eateries in Dubai. The study's findings will help formulate strategies for enhancing dining experiences, adjusting to shifting consumer tastes, and ensuring the long-term viability of the Filipino dining scene in Dubai.

Methods

This study employed the descriptive method in obtaining data on the impact of the pandemic on the informal eating out habits of Filipino diners in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. A researcher-made survey questionnaire was given to four hundred fourteen (414) Filipino overseas workers residing in Dubai, United Arab Emirates through the approval of the Food Trip UAE Facebook Community Group admin and referral of the members. The descriptive approach identifies the impact of the pandemic on the eating out habits of Filipino diners in Dubai in the areas of Dining Experience, Takeout orders, Online Food Delivery, Marketing Promotions, and Brand Loyalty. To address clarifications, validate the ratings, test the suggestions, and get more information from the respondents, face-to-face interviews and virtual interviews via Facebook Messenger were conducted as part of the survey process.

Filipino expatriate employees who reside in Dubai and are active participants in the Facebook group Food Trip UAE made up the study's respondents. They are unidentified Filipino workers with interests in a range of specialties. Eighty-five thousand four hundred (85.4k) people are part of the community, however, some of them are now inactive owing to busy schedules and other personal commitments, while others were deported during the pandemic's peak or relocated to other countries.

Result and Discussion

This presents the data gathered after successfully conducting the survey of the respondents (i.e. Dubai diners). The data gathered is presented in tables to show clarity, organization, and ease of interpretation. Generally, the tables in this study present the numerical findings that show the weight and impact of each category.

Furthermore, the information is broken down into two categories: the profile of Filipino diners in terms of age, marital status, monthly income, length of time in the United Arab Emirates, industry, frequency of eating out, and who they are eating out with, as well as the eating habits of Filipino diners in Dubai in terms of dining experience, takeout orders, online food delivery, marketing promotions, and brand loyalty.

Table 1. Gender of the Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	145	35%
Female	264	63.80%
Other	5	1.20%
TOTAL	414	100.00%

According to Table 1, more women than men—63.8% of Filipino diners in Dubai, United Arab Emirates—were female, compared to 35% of men and 1.2% of other genders. The result clearly shows that there are more female overseas foreign workers here in Dubai versus other Middle East countries based on job opportunities and type of industry.

The gender statistics suggest that women are the primary diners among our respondents and should be our primary target market for any campaign. By nature, Filipino women are more interested in bonding, reunions, meetings, and celebrations of special occasions. They always choose to accomplish this in a hassle-free setting, which is a restaurant.

Table 2. Age Group of the Respondents

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
18 - 24 Years Old	21	5.07%
25 - 34 Years Old	122	29.46%
35 - 44 Years Old	137	33.10%
45 - 54 Years Old	103	24.88%
Above 55 Years Old	31	7.49%
TOTAL	414	100%

The table reveals that respondents aged 35 to 44 make up 33.1% of the sample, while respondents aged 25 to 34 make up 29.5%. Following the third highest age group in Dubai, which is over 55 years old at 7.4%. The new grads or the youngest group, which is 18 to 24 years old is only at 5%.

The data on the age group imply that our biggest diners in Dubai are between 35 - 44 years of age and probably married with kids. These groups are those who had prior experience and had been employed in Dubai for some time. Although people aged 25 to 34, who

account for 29.5% of the population, are either single or live with their partners or spouses and are likely to have steady jobs. The 25% of people in the 45-54 age group who have already established themselves in the workforce and have been able to sponsor their family to live with them and a part of the consideration when they eat out. 7.7% of those over 55 years old consider Dubai, United Arab Emirates, as their second home; these individuals probably have stable work and have better spending power. Despite being the youngest, the 18-24 age group, which accounts for 5% of answers,

represents individuals who are just beginning their careers in Dubai and are the group who are conservative with their spending and always on the lookout for discounts.

Table 3. Marital Status of the Respondents

Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage
Single	158	38.20%
Married	228	55.10%
Separated	16	3.90%
Widowed	6	1.40%
Divorced	6	1.40%
TOTAL	414	100%

According to data about marital status, the bulk of the respondents (55%) were married, followed by never-married singles (38%) and separated respondents (3.9%). Widowed and divorced people each had a 1.4% share.

The data on marital status suggest that the majority of the respondents—those with greater responsibility—are married, albeit it is unclear from the data on marital status whether their spouse lives with them or is a Filipino citizen. These are the kind of diners who give their dining options a lot of thought. Children's preferences are a key factor in this group; certain promotions, such as "kids eat

free," are probably enticing to them, while spending behavior varies depending on the season, especially if it's the time of year when children are enrolling in school. While the 38% of singles who have never been married as well as the separated and divorced typically maintain their families and pursue careers in Dubai, They frequently hang around and have coffee dates with friends, and new limited-time offers and value-centric promotions also draw them in. These social interactions and gatherings are not only a source of enjoyment but also an opportunity to strengthen personal relationships (Xu et al., 2019).

Table 4. Monthly Income of the Respondents

Monthly Income	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 3,000 Aed.	37	9%
3,000 to 10,999 Aed.	102	25%
11,000 - 15,999 Aed.	8	2%
16,000 to 20,000 Aed.	41	10%
More than 2000 Aed	123	30%
Prefer not to disclose	98	24%
TOTAL	409	100%

The table presents that 1.25% of respondents make between 3,000 and 10,999 AED. Followed by 30% of respondents who make over 20,000 AED. 10% of the respondents made between 16,000 and 20,000 AED. per month, while 24% chose to keep their earnings private for personal reasons. 9% of the respondents reported having a monthly income of under 3,000 AED.

From the data on the monthly income, because of their experience and length of time in Dubai, 30% of respondents with incomes of more than 20,000 AED per month are in senior

or higher positions. This analysis is supported by the fact that 36.6% of our respondents have lived in Dubai for more than 15 years and that they are the kind of diners who are constantly on the lookout for what's hot and new. The 25% also includes individuals in lower-level occupations, such as teachers, healthcare professionals, and salespeople who choose quick and easy meals during the workday. The 10% of respondents who work in media agencies or at executive and managerial levels earn between 16,000 AED and 20,000 AED are the group who regularly eat out and conduct business

meetings away from the office setting. Considering that 16% of our respondents work in the hotel, fast-moving consumer goods, or food and beverage industries, the remaining 9%, which

represents the starting pay in Dubai, can be considered employed in these fields. Staff meal discounts and value meals are the focus of this group because of the savings.

Table 5. Eating Out Frequency of the Respondents

Eating Out Frequency	Frequency	Percentage
Daily	35	8.50%
Weekly	80	19.30%
Twice a Week	66	15.90%
Every Weekend	37	8.90%
Monthly	45	10.90%
1 – 2 Times per Month	98	23.70%
Others	53	12.80%
TOTAL	414	100%

The table illustrates the respondents' differences in terms of how frequently they eat out. 23.7% of respondents say they dine out once or twice a month, while 12.8% indicate they do so sometimes, 19.3% say they go out once a week, 15.9% said they go out twice a week, 10.9% claim they go out once a month, 8.9% mention they only go out on the weekends, and only 8.5% say they go out every day.

There are many reasons why 23.7% of respondents, or 98 people, dine out 1-2 times each month. They may have limited funds, difficulty finding places to eat, busy schedules, and a variety of other considerations. Nonetheless, there is a good potential that this bunch will convert into regulars. The 12.8% of individuals in the other groups who occasionally dine out do so because they have special events or are invited, not because they do it frequently. While 19.3% of people who work on a weekly schedule view eating out during the workweek as a treat. It's likely that the 15.9% of respondents

who regularly eat out thought about taking a break or treating themselves.

Whereas 10.9% of monthly diners are pampering themselves at the end of the month or when their salary comes, which happens after every month. 8.9% of people who eat out on the weekends do it as a treat or to catch up with friends. While 8.5% of the respondents said they eat out every day, this may be because they live in a shared residence where it is more practical to eat out than cook at home or because of the nature of their job or office where there isn't an adequate pantry or heating equipment to warm their packed meals.

The pandemic has also influenced the food choices of Filipino diners in Dubai. In a study conducted in Canada, it was found that respondents' eating habits changed during the COVID-19 pandemic as they consumed more snacks and increased cooking meals at home (Alhousseini & Alqahtani, 2020).

Table 6. Eating Out Companion of the Respondents

Eating Out Companion	Frequency	Percentage
Alone	26	6.30%
Family	259	62.70%
Friends	95	23%
Colleagues	23	5.60%
Others	10	2.40%
TOTAL	413	100%

According to the table, 62.7% eat in casual restaurants with their families, while 23% of

respondents go out to eat with friends. While 26 of the respondents, or 6.3%, eat alone, 5.6%

of them eat out with their coworkers, and 2.4% of them go out to eat with others. The data on the eating-out company may imply to us that Filipino diners in Dubai use eating out as a family retreat or family bonding at a rate of 62.7%, which is consistent with married as the highest percentage result in the respondents' marital status. Whereas 23% of people dine out with friends, which is in line with the city's singles rate. 6.3% of people who ate alone can be categorized as those with varying schedules for breaks or those who prefer the companionship of social media while eating and normally eat in a food court setting. 5.6% of them exclusively

eat out with their coworkers on workdays, usually for lunch.

While some go out to eat with their customers or suppliers. We can confirm that Filipino diners can be influenced by their family members or colleagues in terms of where to eat and when to eat, that's why the right type of targeted promotion and communication is vital. This is supported by a previous study which found that dietary routines during Ramadan, a significant period of fasting for Muslims, were also impacted by the pandemic (Alghamdi et al., 2020).

Table 7. Summary of the Eating Out Habits of Filipino Diners in Dubai

n = 414		
Factors	Mean	Description
Dine-in Experience	3.5	Very Great Impact
Online Food Orders	3.27	Very Great Impact
Take Away Orders	3.16	Great Impact
Marketing Promotion	3.04	Great Impact
Brand Loyalty	3.35	Very Great Impact
GRAND MEAN	3.26	Very Great impact

Legend:

Mean range	Description	Equivalent
3.26 – 4.00	Strongly Agree	Very Great Impact
2.51 – 3.25	Agree	Great Impact
1.76 – 2.50	Moderately Agree	Moderate Impact
1.00 – 1.75	Disagree	No Impact

The study's grand summary weighted mean is 3.26, which is described as having a "very great impact" when the dimension means are added up. This suggests that the elements listed under "Dine-In Experience," "Online Food Ordering," "Take Away Orders," "Marketing Promotions," and "Brand Loyalty" have all frequently influenced how Filipino diners in Dubai choose to eat out. The fact that the respondents considered the elements to have a "very great impact" simply proves that the study successfully identified the variables influencing Filipino diners' eating habits. Dine-in experiences, online ordering, takeout, marketing promotions, and brand loyalty are all taken into account when determining eating-out habits in the survey.

First of all, as it is the first quality that customers look for in a positive dining experience, hospitality is crucial. The study found that since

people eat out to unwind and take a break from their everyday activities, elements like food, drinks, ambiance, and service contribute to a pleasurable dining experience. Respondents are willing to spend as long as they would enjoy their in-person dining experience. Respondents believe that these characteristics are necessary for a memorable dine-in experience because of the weighted average of all dine-in experiences, which is 3.50.

Second, respondents are certain that the cleanliness, hygiene, and presentation of the meal are essential components of online ordering. Table 3 shows that online meal orders are highly regarded and have a "very great impact". The weighted mean for this dimension is 3.27, according to the statistics. Respondents "highly agreed" that it is advantageous to order meals online because it is convenient and frees up more time for them to complete other

important activities as opposed to traveling a long distance to a restaurant and dealing with the inconvenience of traffic and other delays.

Thirdly, the respondents believe that timing matters when ordering a takeaway. The majority of respondents with a 3.16 weighted mean, agree that ordering takeout enables them to swiftly help satisfy their appetite while still engaging with the restaurant brand. While not always considered a healthier option, students and working people still prefer to order takeaways because of their hectic schedules. The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the restaurant sector, forcing many businesses to shut down or operate at reduced capacity (Kajzar, 2022). As a result, Filipino diners in Dubai have had to adapt and find alternative ways to satisfy their culinary cravings.

The fourth element, which earned the highest weighted mean at 3.29, indicates that Filipino diners saw marketing promotion as a useful method to draw customers and induce purchases. The majority of the time, respondents cite marketing promotions as justification for choosing where to go out with their friends and families. Promotions and marketing play a significant role in the dining choices of Filipino diners in Dubai. Even during the pandemic, Filipino diners in Dubai are still influenced by marketing promotions when choosing where to dine. Restaurants that offer value for money and prioritize customer satisfaction are preferred by Filipino diners in Dubai. Moreover,

the study emphasizes that memorable experiences play a crucial role in shaping customers' perception and behavioral intentions when it comes to dining out (Song et al., 2021). The weighted mean for this dimension in Table 5 is 3.04, which places it in the "great impact" category.

Fifth, respondents overwhelmingly agree that if restaurants continue to be genuine in their principles, they may quickly obtain brand loyalty. Building solid ties with their customers is essential since loyalty leads to frequent visits and recommendations. It is quite advantageous for a restaurant to establish a community of customers who have similar interests because, as long as customer service is constantly prioritized, these patrons will quickly become brand ambassadors. At 3.35, Table 6's weighted mean is "very great impact".

The data reveals that the study has reached a 3.26 weighted mean after integrating and finding the grand mean of dine-in experience, online food orders, takeaway orders, marketing promotion, and brand loyalty. This indicates that the study's respondents "strongly agree" and believe the eating-out habit elements to be true. Consequently, firms must develop and improve their marketing strategies based on the diner's habit results of the study to target the customers they want (Thongsri & Chang, 2019). This is in line with Blackwell's theory of consumer behavior.

Table 8. Relationship between the Filipino Diners Profile and Their Eating Out Habit

UAE Filipino Diners Profile	Correlation Coefficient	p-value	Decision	Description
Gender	-0.04	0.417	Do not reject the Null.	The relationship is not significant.
Age Group	0.038	0.447	Do not reject the Null.	The relationship is not significant.
Marital Status	-0.046	0.351	Do not reject the Null.	The relationship is not significant.
Monthly Income	0.056	0.258	Do not reject the Null.	The relationship is not significant.
Years in UAE	0.031	0.524	Do not reject the Null.	The relationship is not significant.
Industry	-0.017	0.728	Do not reject the Null.	The relationship is not significant.

UAE Filipino Diners Profile	Correlation Coefficient	p-value	Decision	Description
Frequency of Eat Out	0.037	0.451	Do not reject the Null.	The relationship is not significant.
Eat Out Companion	-0.051	0.303	Do not reject the Null.	The relationship is not significant.

Legend:

If $p < 0.05$, the relationship is significant.

If $p > 0.05$, the relationship is not significant.

According to Table 8, there is no evidence to support the null hypothesis that there is no correlation between the profile of Filipino restaurant diners in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, and the respondents' evaluation of the eating-out habit dimension. The result suggests that the diners' profile may not be a significant factor in determining eating out habits.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that the impact of the pandemic on the informal eating out habits of Filipino diners in Dubai, United Arab Emirates is consistent with Blackwell's theory of consumer behavior. According to Roger D. Blackwell, firms need to comprehend consumer behavior since it aids in the development of their marketing plans. Understanding consumer behaviors towards dine-in experience, online meal ordering, take-away orders, marketing incentives, and brand loyalty will provide you with the proper guidelines to create the proper strategic plan and the right tone of voice to reach, engage and win the customers.

The impact of the pandemic on Filipino diners in Dubai has resulted in a shift in their dining habits. Filipino diners in Dubai have been forced to rely more on alternative dining options such as food delivery services and takeaways. According to a study conducted by Wang et al, diners' patronage intentions were greatly affected by safety measures and the crowdedness of restaurants (Sun et al., 2022). This suggests that the perception of safety plays a crucial role in Filipino diners' decision to eat out or opt for food delivery services during the pandemic. Filipino diners in Dubai are more likely to choose dining establishments that prioritize hygiene, communicate safety measures

effectively, and provide a comfortable dining environment.

Before the pandemic in 2020, eight out of 10 Filipino diners in Dubai dined out four times a week, highlighting the Filipinos' propensity to eat out as evidence of the nation's growing affluence. During the lockdown, due to fear and convenience, Filipinos have been switching from eating out to ordering home-delivery food for years. This has forced several restaurants to close their doors and put others into survival mode due to low-profit margins and high commission fees from delivery aggregators. The study's objective is to provide businesses with the right strategic approach for enticing Filipino diners by studying their current behaviors.

Recommendations

The proposal aims to improve the dining experience of Filipino diners in Dubai, UAE by organizing a one-day conference called "Catering to the Filipino Palate: Optimizing the Eating out Experience in Dubai."

The target audience for the conference is restaurant owners and leaders who are members of the Philippine Business Council Dubai and Northern Emirates (PBC-DNE).

The conference will provide Filipino restaurant owners and leaders with insights into the food preferences and eating habits of Filipino diners, as well as the latest consumer trends. This information will help them tailor their offerings and services to meet the needs of Filipino diners, ultimately improving their business performance. The proposal also benefits the PBC-DNE by supporting their mission to assist Filipino leaders, restaurant owners, and businesses. The conference can be incorporated into the PBC-DNE's League of Food and

Beverage Entrepreneurs (LFBE) program, which aims to educate members about the food and beverage industry and promote the growth of Filipino-owned restaurants. Filipino diners in Dubai are the primary beneficiaries of this proposal.

Through collaboration between the PBC-DNE and restaurant owners, Filipino diners can expect improved customer service, customized food and drinks, better service models, enhanced value for money, and effective marketing engagement. The identified concerns include dining experience, online food ordering, marketing promotions, and brand loyalty. These areas with the highest scores will be treated as opportunities in the SWOT analysis. The proposal suggests implementing strategies to enhance the dining experience, optimize online ordering, conduct effective marketing and promotions, and maintain authenticity.

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