



**Fast food restaurants in Jordan in the time of COVID-19 pandemic**

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## Abstract

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<p>The aim of this thesis is to gain knowledge and understanding of how Jordanian fast food industry survived the COVID-19 pandemic and what kind of changes the pandemic forced restaurants to do to their business practices. The author started the project and have been collecting material in the fall 2023. Research interviews were made in November 2023.</p> <p>The approach is a research-based thesis that makes use of qualitative investigation methods. To obtain a realistic and accurate image of the Jordanian restaurant industry and the implication of COVID-19 to fast food restaurants under question two research methods are applied.</p> <p>In order to understand the Jordanian restaurant market, the national COVID-19 responses, general trends and consumer preferences, the first part is the study of existing data available from reliable and trustworthy sources. This method allows the research to gain a considerable amount of data to answer some of the wider research questions. In combination with the first method in depth, semi structured interviews will be carried out to answer the more qualitative aspects of the research. The interviews have been carried out on fast food restaurant managers in Amman, Jordan.</p> <p>The results of this thesis will answer to the need to practical information, how the fast food restaurants co-opted and survived seemingly ever changing COVID-19 restrictions and business environment.</p>
<b>Keywords</b> COVID-19, fast food, Jordan, restaurants

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## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Background

This research aims to understand the issues related to how fast food restaurants in Jordan dealt with the COVID-19 pandemic, how they were able to maintain their position in the labor market and avoid financial collapse at that time, and what methods they used in serving their customers and how this affected the employees in the sector.

The Corona virus appeared in late 2019 in China and then began to spread throughout the world. It spread quickly by people travelling and through person-to-person contact. The first confirmed case of infection with the virus was recorded in Jordan on March 2nd, 2020. The initial restrictions affecting businesses were introduced two weeks later. King Abdullah II signed a royal decree to enact the National Defense Law, activating the state of emergency to contain the spread of the virus. These measures included the closure of schools and universities, air and land border crossings, and the closure of private businesses, banks, and non-essential public services as well as all public religious gatherings and social events. (Kebede, Tewodros A. et al. 2021., p.13).



**Figure (1):** Timeline of relevant defense orders in Jordan. (18)

Figure (1): Timeline of relevant defense orders in Jordan. (Kebede, Tewodros A. et al. 2021., p14)

Despite the great difficulty of estimating the size of the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the economic growth rate in Jordan, expectations issued by the International Monetary Fund indicate a decline in GDP in Jordan in 2020 by - 3.7 percent with unemployment climbing to 24.7 percent in the fourth quarter of 2020 and young unemployment rates reaching record highs. Despite this expected decline in the growth rate in Jordan, it is considered good considering the rates of decline in advanced economies in 2020. (The Jordanian Banks Association 2020).

Jordan has indeed taken proactive steps to control the spread of COVID-19 and protect its population. The government has implemented regulations and guidelines such as social distancing, travel restrictions, and a national curfew. They have also focused on case detection and contact tracing, clinical management of cases, and ensuring the functioning of the public health system. Additionally, efforts have been made to increase resources for intensive care units and mobilize resources for vulnerable populations. The involvement of civil society organizations has also been emphasized in raising awareness and providing services. These measures demonstrate Jordan's commitment to controlling the spread of the virus and safeguarding the health of its citizens. (Aljaloundi, J. 2021. Alqutob, et al 2020)

## **1.2 Purpose and Research Questions**

For a better understanding of this study's objectives, the researcher came out with o research questions. The main research question of this study is: How COVID-19 affected the local Fast Food restaurant industry and how that period affected to each restaurant's performance?

The research question of this study is can be further broken down into:

1. How did the managers of the local fast food restaurants respond to the restrictions placed on their operations?
2. What changes and innovation regarding fast food restaurant management COVID-19 period brought to the business?

### **1.3 Delimitations**

This research will be conducted on the management perspective regarding the fast food restaurant industry within the geographical location of Amman, Jordan. With managers the focus will be on the impact COVID-19 has had on their fast food restaurants as well as the actions they have taken to adapt to the changing situation. This research will not reflect the real situation in each part of Jordan, because the COVID-19 measures differed in region. Although the research is aiming for generalizing in its findings, the collected data does not allow to draw too broad conclusions especially outside fast food industry.

## 2 Overview of the tourism and restaurant industry in Jordan

It is estimated that currently around 19.8% of Jordan's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is derived from tourism and has maintained an average of 20% in the past ten years. The Jordanian government understands that tourists bring in revenue and boost major sectors of businesses in the country such as hotels, airlines, restaurants, and marketplaces. Over the last decade improvement to the local economy by tourism sector has become a lifeline for a variety of Jordanian businesses. (Ammanvision.jo). It is estimated that total domestic consumer spending on restaurants and hotels in Jordan was 826,5 million USD and it's expected to grow to 1,400 million USD by 2028. (Figure 2).

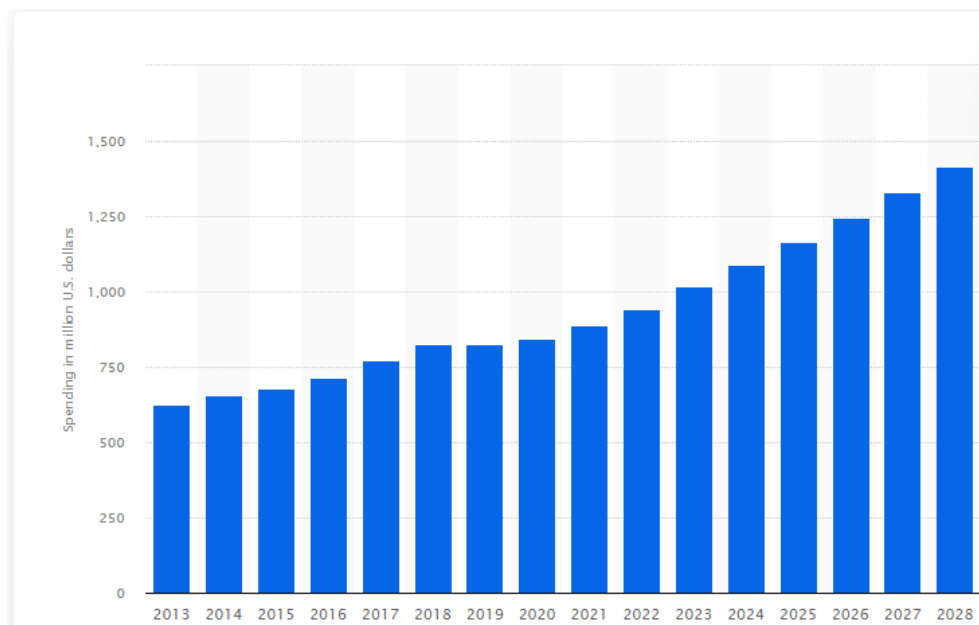


Figure 2. Total consumer spending on restaurants and hotels in Jordan from 2013 to 2028 (Statista.com)

World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) has estimated that travel and tourism directly supported 80,500 jobs (7.3% of total employment) in 2017. This is expected to rise by 3.7% per annum to 124,000 jobs (8.4% of total employment) in 2028. (Shahateet, Partale 2019, p. 16)

Head of the Jordanian Union of Restaurants and Confectionery Proprietors Mr. Omar Al-Awwad estimated that Jordan currently has approximately 20,000 restaurants. These



restaurants employ more than 100,000 service persons. (Jordan News 2023) It's quite impossible to estimate the amount of revenue generated through the restaurants, since not all businesses report it.

The fast food market is one of the most excellent restaurant markets in Jordan, where the Jordanian people depend on this restaurant segment because of its abundance and its low prices. As food generally takes 5% of the monthly income, and the demand for it increases in the summer, as it is considered a season for picnics and tourism. With the entry of the COVID-19 pandemic into Jordan, restaurants have experienced with a low occupancy rate due to the low number of customers willing to visit restaurants.

## **2.1 Key players in the fast food market**

The fast food industry in Jordan has witnessed robust growth over the years, driven by factors such as a young population, changing lifestyles, and increasing disposable incomes. The fast food market is characterized by the presence of both international fast food giants and local players, creating a diverse and competitive landscape. Notable global brands like McDonald's, KFC, and Pizza Hut have established a strong presence. Local chains like Shawarma Street and Manousheh Express cater to more traditional tastes. The impact of COVID-19 on the restaurant industry in Jordan has been significant. The pandemic has forced fast food restaurants to adapt their marketing strategies to changing conditions and consumer behavior. Digital media and online advertising have become crucial tools for fast food restaurants to reach their target audience and mitigate the effects of the pandemic.

The study conducted by Habes et al. (2020) examined the relationship between digital marketing advertising and mitigating the effects of COVID-19 in Jordan. The researchers found that digital media advertising, specifically information sharing, healthcare advertising, and healthcare awareness, were strong predictors of COVID-19 awareness. This highlights the effectiveness of digital media in disseminating healthcare information during a healthcare crisis. Moreover, previous studies have also emphasized the importance of digital media in healthcare communication during the times of emergency. Anand et al. (2013) discussed the role of social media in effective health communication.

## **2.2 Market size and growth trends.**

Before the pandemic, the fast food restaurant market in Jordan was growing steadily. The country has a thriving fast food industry with a variety of international and local chains operating across the country. Famous international fast food chains such as McDonald's, Burger King, KFC, and Pizza Hut had a large presence in Jordan.

While the immediate impact of COVID-19 was challenging, the fast food industry in Jordan may have experienced several trends during and after the pandemic. The pandemic accelerated the adoption of digital technologies in the restaurant industry. Online ordering and mobile apps became more popular, and restaurants invested in improving their online presence. There may have been a growing demand for healthier fast food options as consumers became more health-conscious during the pandemic. Restaurants that offered nutritious menu items may have seen increased demand. As vaccination rates increased and pandemic restrictions eased, the fast food industry in Jordan might have started recovering and potentially growing again. People may have returned to dining out, albeit cautiously.

### **3 Impact of COVID-19 on Fast Food Restaurants**

COVID-19 has greatly affected the vitality of fast food restaurants in Jordan, as it has made restaurants blockaded and restricted in time and practical effort and unable to fulfill their obligations.

#### **3.1 Effects of lockdowns and restrictions on restaurant operations**

The COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdowns and restrictions have had significant impacts on restaurant operations. These restrictions included closure of Dining Areas where Restaurants were forced to close their dining areas and restrict operations to takeout, delivery, or outdoor dining only. This led to a significant decline in revenue for many establishments that relied heavily on dine-in customers. When restaurants were allowed to reopen, they had to operate at reduced capacity to ensure social distancing between customers. This meant fewer tables and customers, resulting in lower sales and longer wait times for customers.

With limited dine-in options, restaurants had to pivot their focus to takeout and delivery services. Many establishments invested in online ordering systems, partnered with third-party delivery platforms, or developed their own delivery infrastructure to meet the increased demand for off-premise dining. Restaurants implemented various safety measures to protect both customers and employees. This included regular sanitization of high-touch surfaces, mandatory mask-wearing for staff, and the installation of physical barriers between tables. These measures were necessary to comply with health guidelines and ensure a safe dining experience.

To streamline operations and reduce costs, many restaurants simplified their menus during the pandemic. This allowed them to optimize their inventory, minimize food waste, and maintain efficiency in the kitchen. The combination of reduced sales, increased expenses for safety measures, and ongoing operational challenges put significant financial strain on restaurants. As a result, many establishments, particularly smaller and independent ones, were forced to close permanently. The pandemic accelerated the adoption of online ordering systems and contactless payment methods in restaurants. Customers increasingly preferred to place orders and make payments through mobile apps or websites to minimize physical contact.

### **3.2 Innovation and Adaptation**

Despite the challenges, many restaurants embraced innovation and adapted their business models to survive. This included offering meal kits, implementing virtual dining experiences, and creating outdoor dining spaces. Some establishments also focused on expanding their delivery radius or partnering with local grocery stores to diversify their revenue streams. (Shah, T., Kautish, P., Mehmood, K. 2023)

### **3.3 Changes in consumer behavior and preferences**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, there have been notable changes in consumer behavior and preferences. Here are some key findings from the study conducted in Jordan. The study found that there was an increased interest in healthy eating habits and nutrition during the pandemic. This was reflected in the higher consumption of fruits and vegetables among respondents. The pandemic led to changes in food choices, with a significant reduction in the consumption of fast food and sugar. This suggests a shift towards healthier eating habits. The study found that there was an increase in appetite and weight gain among respondents during the pandemic. This could be attributed to factors such as stress, boredom, and changes in daily routines. (Shah, T., Kautish, P., Mehmood, K. 2023)

The use of social media platforms to access dietary and nutrition-related content increased during the pandemic. This indicates that social media played a significant role in shaping consumer behavior and providing information on healthy eating. The study examined the attitude towards dietary supplements and found that there was no significant change in the views about taking them during the pandemic. This suggests that the use of dietary supplements remained consistent among respondents. (Shah, T., Kautish, P., Mehmood, K. 2023)

These findings highlight the impact of the pandemic on consumer behavior, with a greater emphasis on health and nutrition. It is important to note that these findings are specific to the Jordanian population and may not represent global trends. Further research and data analysis would be required to provide a comprehensive understanding of changes in consumer behavior and preferences during the pandemic. (Shah, T., Kautish, P., Mehmood, K. 2023)

#### **4 Economic challenges faced by fast food businesses.**

Fast food restaurants are one of the most important economic factors in Jordan, as they represent 85% of the Jordanian restaurant industry, but with the entry of the Corona pandemic and furthermore the Russian-Ukrainian war, the prices of food commodities rose, which led to a decline in restaurant sales by 35%, as well as some internal factors. (Royalnews 2023). Fast food restaurants experienced a decline in sales during the pandemic due to lockdown measures and restrictions on dining-in many restaurants had to rely solely on takeout and delivery services, which may not have been sufficient to offset the loss of dine-in customers. At a same time, fast food restaurants faced labor challenges. Some employees may have been unable or unwilling to work due to health concerns or personal circumstances this led to staffing shortages and increased costs for hiring and training new employees. The combination of reduced sales and increased costs put significant financial strain on fast food businesses. Many establishments, particularly smaller and independent ones, struggled to cover their expenses and maintain profitability some restaurants had to close permanently due to financial difficulties. Last my not least, fast food businesses faced increased costs during the pandemic. This included investments in safety measures such as personal protective equipment, sanitization supplies, and employee training additionally, the shift to delivery and takeout services may have required additional expenses for packaging, delivery logistics, and technology upgrades. (Hussain, K., et al. 2023)

##### **4.1 Adaptations Made by Fast Food Restaurants**

To cope the situation the Fast Food Restaurants employed several methods to cope. For example, by rewarding loyal customers, maintaining communication with them, and taking care of new customers and providing them with contactless services such as food delivery via drone, providing the electronic menu in a better way, and creating a special application for your restaurant where they know what they want.

Businesses implemented safety measures such as regular sanitization, mandatory mask-wearing, and social distancing protocols to ensure the safety of customers and employees. These measures were crucial in maintaining a safe environment and building trust with customers.

Many businesses, including restaurants and cafes, have transformed their operations to focus on takeout and delivery services. This allowed them to continue serving customers while adhering to the restrictions imposed on dining services. They also used a new strategy at that time, which was to provide customers with raw ingredients and have them cook them at home to maintain their safety when eating.

Businesses collaborated with other companies to share resources, reduce costs, and reach a wider customer base. For example, restaurants partnered with local farms or suppliers to source fresh ingredients, while retailers collaborated with logistics companies for efficient delivery services. (Hussain, K., et al. 2023)

#### **4.2 Emphasis on hygiene and safety measures.**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, businesses across various industries, including fast food, placed a strong emphasis on hygiene and safety measures to ensure the well-being of their customers and employees. For example, Fast food businesses implemented rigorous cleaning and sanitization protocols to maintain a clean and safe environment. This included frequent disinfection of high-touch surfaces, such as tables, chairs, and payment terminals. Employees were provided with personal protective equipment, such as masks and gloves, to minimize the risk of virus transmission. This helped create a sense of safety for both employees and customers.

Many fast food restaurants introduced contactless ordering and payment options to reduce physical contact and maintain social distancing. This included mobile ordering apps, self-service kiosks, and cashless payment methods. Fast food businesses implemented measures to ensure social distancing among customers. This included rearranging seating areas to maintain appropriate distance between tables and implementing floor markings to guide customers in maintaining a safe distance while waiting in line.

Businesses prioritized the health and well-being of their employees by implementing health screening measures, such as temperature checks, and providing training on proper hygiene practices. This helped create a safe working environment and reduce the risk of virus transmission.

Transparent Communication: Fast food businesses communicated their safety measures and protocols to customers through various channels, such as signage, websites, and social media platforms. This helped build trust and reassurance among customers.

These measures were implemented to comply with local health guidelines and regulations and to ensure the safety of both customers and employees. By prioritizing hygiene and safety, fast food businesses aimed to instill confidence in their customers and maintain their operations during the pandemic. (QSR magazine.com 2021)

### **4.3 Introduction of delivery and online ordering options.**

Fast food businesses have introduced delivery and online ordering options as a strategy to cope with the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. These options allow customers to order their food remotely and have it delivered to their doorstep, minimizing the need for in-person contact and complying with social distancing measures. By implementing delivery and online ordering services, fast food businesses have been able to continue serving customers and generate revenue during a time when dine-in services were restricted or limited. This strategy has helped businesses adapt to the changing consumer behavior and preferences during the pandemic, providing convenience and safety to customers while maintaining their operations. (QSR magazine.com 2021, McKinsey 2023)

## 5 Challenges Faced by Fast Food Restaurants

Fast Food Restaurants faced significant supply chain disruptions and ingredient shortages during the pandemic. The pandemic has disrupted global supply chains, leading to delays in the transportation and delivery of goods, including food ingredients. Lockdown measures and restrictions on international trade have also contributed to ingredient shortages, as some regions experienced reduced production or limited access to certain ingredients. These disruptions and shortages have impacted the availability and cost of ingredients for businesses, making it challenging to maintain regular operations and meet customer demand. (McKinsey 2023)

Employee safety and labor shortages have been significant challenges faced by businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic. To ensure employee safety, businesses have implemented safety protocols such as regular sanitization, mandatory mask-wearing, and social distancing measures. These measures aim to minimize the risk of virus transmission in the workplace and protect the health and well-being of employees.

However, labor shortages have been a common issue due to various factors. Some employees may have been unable to work due to illness or the need to care for family members. Additionally, fear of contracting the virus or concerns about workplace safety may have led some employees to choose not to return to work. This has resulted in staffing challenges for businesses, leading to increased workloads for existing employees and potential impacts on service quality and productivity. (Restaurant Business 2023)

Specific examples of fast food chains in Jordan and their response to the pandemic include:

**McDonald's:** McDonald's Jordan implemented several measures to ensure the safety of its customers and employees during the pandemic. This included implementing contactless delivery and pickup options, enhancing cleaning and sanitization protocols, and enforcing social distancing measures in their restaurants.

**KFC:** KFC Jordan implemented measures to prioritize the safety and well-being of their customers and employees. This included implementing contactless delivery and pickup options, enhancing cleaning and sanitization procedures, and ensuring compliance with social distancing guidelines in their restaurants.



**Hardee's:** Hardee's Jordan introduced several initiatives to adapt to the changing circumstances during the pandemic. They focused on enhancing their delivery services, implementing strict hygiene protocols, and offering special deals and promotions to encourage customers to order from their restaurants. (QSR magazine.com 2021)

### **5.1 Financial struggles and closures**

Financial struggles and closures have been significant challenges faced by businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic. The economic impact of the pandemic, including lockdown measures and reduced consumer spending, has led to financial difficulties for many businesses, particularly small and independent establishments. The loss of revenue and increased operating costs, such as implementing safety measures and adapting to new regulations, have put a strain on businesses' finances. As a result, some businesses have been forced to close permanently. According to a survey conducted by Yelp, as of September 2020, approximately 60% of business closures due to the pandemic were permanent. This has had a significant impact on the fast food industry, with many establishments unable to sustain their operations and meet their financial obligations. (McKinsey 2023)

### **5.2 Government Support and Regulations**

Government support and regulation during the COVID-19 pandemic varied across Jordan, with the government implementing strict measures such as lockdowns and travel restrictions. Financial assistance programs, including grants and wage subsidies, have been introduced to support companies in the fast food industry. Regulatory flexibility measures have been implemented, such as easing restrictions on delivery services and extending working hours. Health and safety guidelines have been issued to ensure the safety of customers and employees. Tax relief measures have also been implemented to ease financial burdens. However, it is important to note that specific supports and regulations may vary depending on state and local government policies.

Government policies and support provided to the fast food industry varied during the COVID-19 pandemic in Jordan, through financial assistance, such as providing material aid to damaged restaurants, as well as tax exemption, and adherence to instructions and

guidelines, public safety, discipline in defense orders, as stores are closed at the time specified by the government.

### **5.3 Regulations and guidelines related to COVID-19.**

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Jordan has implemented several regulations and guidelines to control the spread of the virus. These measures include:

1. Enforcing public health infection prevention and control measures, such as social distancing.
2. Seizing all forms of inbound and outbound movement and international travel.
3. Enacting the Defense Law, which transferred the authority to the Minister of Defense to work and formulate orders according to the situation.
4. Implementing a national curfew to ensure complete country isolation.
5. Lockdown on all border arrivals to the country before March 17 from pandemic countries.
6. Isolating confirmed and suspected COVID-19 cases from airport arrivals in hospitals under strict supervision of qualified medical staff.
7. Ordering the necessary equipment and supplies for diagnosis under the disposal of the National Crises Management Center.
8. Vigorous efforts to detect and keep track of cases and contacts by outbreak surveillance teams at the national level.

These measures aim to flatten the disease spread curve and increase the capacity of the health system to absorb new cases. It is also recommended to increase and expand resources of intensive care units, increase the capacity and number of trained health staff in public health and epidemiology, ensure the provision of essential public health programs, and mobilize resources to provide services for refugees and vulnerable populations. (Alqutob, R. et al. 2020).

## 5.4 Consumer Perception and Behavior

Despite the industry's success, it faces several challenges. Economic uncertainties, fluctuations in currency values, and inflationary pressures can affect consumer spending habits. Moreover, the increasing awareness of health and wellness has led to a growing demand for healthier food options, posing a challenge for traditional fast food chains that often offer indulgent and calorie-rich menus.

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted consumer confidence and expectations. The crisis has created a growing sense of uncertainty and anxiety among consumers, leading to changes in their trust and expectations towards businesses and service providers. Consumers are now focusing more on health and safety measures implemented by companies. They expect businesses to prioritize the health and well-being of their customers and employees, including implementing strict hygiene protocols, providing personal protective equipment, and ensuring social distancing measures are in place. Additionally, consumers have higher expectations about companies' reliability and responsiveness during this crisis. They expect companies to quickly adapt to changing circumstances and provide clear and timely communications regarding any disruptions or changes to their products or services. (McKinsey 2021)

The pandemic has also highlighted the importance of empathy and understanding on the part of businesses. Consumers expect companies to show compassion towards their concerns and challenges during this difficult time. This can include flexible policies, understanding customer needs and providing support and assistance where necessary.

Overall, the COVID-19 pandemic has reshaped consumer confidence and expectations, with a greater focus on health, safety, reliability, responsiveness and empathy. Companies that can meet these new expectations are more likely to build and maintain trust with their customers during and after the crisis. (Peters, S. 2023)

Social media and online reviews have played a significant role in shaping consumer trust and expectations in various industries, including the fast food industry. Here are some key points supported by research. Social media platforms and online review websites provide consumers with a wealth of information and recommendations about fast food

establishments. Consumers can read reviews, view ratings, and see photos shared by other customers, which helps them make informed decisions about where to dine.

Studies have shown that social media and online reviews have a strong influence on consumer behavior. Positive reviews and recommendations can increase consumer trust and encourage them to try a particular fast food restaurant. On the other hand, negative reviews can deter potential customers and impact their perception of a brand.

Social media platforms allow fast food establishments to engage directly with their customers. They can respond to reviews, address concerns, and provide updates on promotions or new menu items. This interaction helps build trust and loyalty among consumers. Social media platforms enable customers to create and share user-generated content, such as photos and videos of their dining experiences. This content can serve as authentic and influential marketing material, as it showcases real customers enjoying the food and atmosphere of a fast food restaurant. Social media and online reviews provide fast food establishments with an opportunity to manage their brand reputation. By monitoring and responding to customer feedback, businesses can address any issues, demonstrate their commitment to customer satisfaction, and improve their overall reputation. (Khare, A., Alkonda. V. 2021)

## **6 Future Outlook of Fast Food Industry**

Predictions for the post-pandemic state of the fast food industry in Jordan are subject to uncertainties and can vary based on various factors. However, some potential predictions can be made based on current trends and observations. It is expected that the fast food industry in Jordan will experience a period of recovery and growth as the pandemic subsides and restrictions are lifted. As people resume their normal activities and dining out becomes more accessible, there may be an increase in consumer demand for fast food options. The pandemic has heightened awareness of health and safety measures. Fast food establishments in Jordan are likely to continue prioritizing hygiene and sanitation practices to ensure the safety of their customers. This may include enhanced cleaning protocols, contactless delivery options, and adherence to social distancing guidelines. The shift towards delivery and takeout services during the pandemic is expected to continue even after the crisis. Consumers may continue to prefer the convenience and safety of ordering food for delivery or pickup, leading to a sustained demand for these services in the fast food industry. (Almu'atasim, et al. 2022)

The pandemic has accelerated the adoption of digital technologies in the food industry. Fast food chains in Jordan may continue to invest in online ordering platforms, mobile apps, and digital marketing strategies to cater to changing consumer preferences and enhance the overall customer experience. Fast food chains may focus on menu innovation and adaptation to cater to evolving consumer preferences. This may include introducing healthier options, plant-based alternatives, and catering to specific dietary requirements to meet the changing demands of customers. It is important to note that these predictions are speculative and may be influenced by various external factors such as the overall economic recovery, consumer behavior, and government regulations (Almu'atasim, et al. 2022)

### **6.1 The potential for recovery and growth.**

The potential for recovery and growth in the fast food industry in Jordan post-pandemic is a speculative prediction and may vary based on various factors however, it is supported by general observations and trends in the industry.

The fast food industry is expected to experience a period of recovery and growth as the pandemic subsides and restrictions are lifted as people resume their normal activities and dining out becomes more accessible, there may be an increase in consumer demand for fast food options. This can be attributed to factors such as convenience, affordability, and familiarity with fast food brands.

Additionally, the shift towards delivery and takeout services during the pandemic is expected to continue even after the crisis. Consumers may continue to prefer the convenience and safety of ordering food for delivery or pickup, leading to a sustained demand for these services in the fast food industry.

Furthermore, the adoption of digital technologies and online platforms is likely to continue playing a significant role in the fast food industry. Fast food chains in Jordan may continue to invest in online ordering platforms, mobile apps, and digital marketing strategies to cater to changing consumer preferences and enhance the overall customer experience.

It is important to note that these predictions are speculative and may be influenced by various external factors such as the overall economic recovery, consumer behavior, and government regulations (Almu'atasim, et al. 2022)

## **7 Methodology**

### **7.1 Research Approach**

The research method was used: interviews (qualitative research). Interviews, in short, are a powerful and versatile research tool that allows researchers to explore, understand and interpret a wide range of phenomena in a detailed and context-rich manner.

### **7.2 Research Design**

Comprehensive focus on the decided thesis topic in relation to the hospitality industry More specifically restaurants, the decision made was to use qualitative research methods to be able to validate the research questions. The researchers' goal is to find out what was happening in fast food restaurants in Jordan, especially the capital, Amman, and how restaurants were able to develop during the COVID-19 period. Being quick and innovative in taking action or in other words adapting to new opportunities and also knowing how different marketing strategies have been implemented in the company to reach more customer groups and continue to earn profit margins are explored. Consumer behavior in the local area will also be known if it causes any change in purchasing habits. Through and through conducting interviews we will know what the research sub-questions are. From the interview, assumptions and interpretations of the data will be extracted and presented to the readers. (Tenny, S., Brannan, J., Brannan, G. 2022)

### **7.3 Data Collection**

In this research, information was obtained by five restaurant managers in Jordan, where questions (qualitative research) were asked about what happened during the time of Covid 19 and how they faced those difficulties and challenges at that time. Secondary research methods were also used to collect information from articles and books about Fast food industry itself and the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects to industry.

#### **7.3.1 Interview**

The interview process was conducted with five fast food restaurant managers in the Jordanian capital, Amman, and the interview was conducted face-to-face, where I visited them to their work locations. These interviews were conducted between Nov 5<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

The questions asked from the Restaurant managers:

1. Can you describe the safety procedures and protocols your restaurant has put in place to ensure the health and well-being of customers and employees during the pandemic?
2. What challenges have you faced in managing staff during the pandemic, including issues around staffing levels, training and staff wellbeing?
3. How have you adjusted your menu offerings and pricing structure to accommodate changes in customer behavior and preferences during the pandemic?
4. Can you share any thoughts on your restaurant's financial performance during the pandemic? How have you been able to maintain profitability or mitigate losses?
5. Looking to the future, what long-term changes or innovations in restaurant management do you think will remain relevant even as the pandemic subsides? How do you plan to adapt to these changes?

#### **7.4 Sample selection**

Five random restaurants were chosen to be included into the research, two local and three international restaurants from the fast food category. Each manager was met and asked the same questions. These restaurants and restaurants managers were chosen to participate because they are the group that was exposed to the problems related to the COVID-19 pandemic and they suffered a lot in how to maintain the functioning of their restaurant and how to keep it steadfast, as for the pressures in general.

#### **7.5 Credibility**

I made sure that all restaurant managers were interviewed in their offices, where they felt comfortable and that there was no psychological pressure on them, and that there was no one but me and the manager who was interviewed, so that the matter was completely confidential.

#### **7.6 Validity**

Validity examines whether the conclusions reached from primary data sources are consistent. Its relationship to the study must be believable and applicable to reality and in



qualitative studies it is. It is difficult to achieve the highest quality of validation because the information collected. From the person's experience however, the managers interviewed are competent because they have experience running their business for years and understand what influences the market and the possibilities that can be taken the next level. To ensure the validity of the interview questions, they were divided into different question parts. (Tenny, S., Brannan, J., Brannan, G. 2022)

In this study, it can be said that the generalization applies to reality because data collected from managers who participated in the interview as well as those who were interviewed is current and relevant, and therefore the data must be recognized as valid. The conclusion can be drawn from the sample appropriately.

### **7.7 Dependability**

I chose to interview restaurant managers to obtain good information from a reliable source, as restaurant managers lived all the pandemic events directly, as no questions were taken into account, and each of the managers was asked all the interview questions, but they were all asked the same questions. To ensure that the answers are reliable, not literally similar to other managers, and trustworthy.

### **7.8 Confirmability**

Based on the interviews that I conducted, I was able to obtain sufficient information and achieve what was required. There were no problems in obtaining it, especially since the interviews worked well because information was obtained that was not clearly present in the secondary research method.

In the beginning of the research, the process of obtaining information was carried out using secondary research methods, which constituted the largest percentage of qualitative research information. Through interviews, very accurate information was obtained about the events of the pandemic that occurred. (Tenny, S., Brannan, J., Brannan, G. 2022)

### **7.9 Ethical Considerations**

The researcher is obligated to obtain institutional review board approval when conducting research on human subjects. What is meant is to inform restaurant managers that the data will be recorded and will be used for study purposes only and then deleted.

Follow the General Data Protection Rules (GDPR), which is an important part of the Jordanian Human Rights and Privacy Law. Before conducting the survey, participants are generally informed of the time it takes to complete the interview and are told that the terms of sharing this information with researchers must be agreed to by the procedure. They were informed that the data collected is only for research purposes for use in this dissertation. Each person was given a code to hide the identity of the person and the restaurant in question.

## **8 Results**

The aim of the interviews was to answer the research question: How COVID-19 affected the local Fast Food restaurant industry and how that period affected to each restaurant's performance? Questions were broken down to further answer the additional questions:

1. How did the managers of the local fast food restaurants respond to the restrictions placed on their operations?
2. What changes and innovation regarding fast food restaurant management COVID-19 period brought to the business?

In this chapter, the interview results will be introduced.

### **8.1 Characteristics of the restaurants selected to the study**

The restaurants and the managers selected to be interviews can be categorized as follows. All Restaurants belongs to Fast Food category and all restaurants are located in Amman, Jordan. Three of the restaurants have seating capacity up to 50 persons, two up to one hundred persons and one almost 200 hundred persons. These restaurants represent the average size of the Fast Food establishments in Amman area. In general, these restaurants employ around 30 persons each at any time.

Its notable that regardless of the seating capacity of the restaurants, each restaurant serves hundreds of customers daily. On average each restaurant serves between 100 to 500 customers each day.

It's good to not that each of these restaurants were closed a for three months prior during the hight of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **8.2 Characteristics of the restaurant managers selected to the study**

To be able to understand better the managers and their responses, each manager was asked background questions regarding their experience in the industry prior year 2020 and COVID-19 pandemic.

Two of the managers have at least five years' experience and three of the managers have at least eight years of restaurant experience. When asked how long managerial experience they have, the experience changed between four to fifteen years.

All managers have a long experience from the restaurants they currently work at. Three managers have at least five years' experience, one has four years' experience and one two years' experience.

### **8.3 Open questions related to COVID-19 period**

Each manager was asked the same questions regarding their own experience during the COVID-19 period as well as how their restaurants performed during the time.

**Question 1.** Can you describe the safety measures and protocols your restaurant has put in place to ensure the health and well-being of both customers and staff during the pandemic?

**Manager 1.** Social distancing/commitment to wearing a mask/regular use of a thermometer/use of gloves in all circumstances/continuing to wash hands and use sanitizer.

**Manager 2.** Follow public safety procedures

**Manager 3.** Wearing masks, physical distancing, and using sanitizer after touching everything in the restaurant

**Manager 4.** Reducing the overall cost of products and others

**Manager 5.** Following the government guidelines in general

**Question 2.** What challenges have you faced in managing staff during the pandemic, including issues related to staffing levels, training, and employee well-being?

**Manager 1.** Staff forgot to follow the guidelines

**Manager 2.** Failure to wear protective equipment by employees caused the transmission of infection among them.

**Manager 3.** Training was not an important matter at that time because time was short in customer service and we were forced to dismiss new employees and keep the experienced ones in the restaurant. The thing we faced most was the infection of an employee with the virus. This caused a decrease in the number of employees present at work, and I personally was working in place of the employee. The person suffering from the disease.

**Manager 4.** Reducing the overall cost of products and others

**Manager 5.** Adapt, follow and develop public safety guidelines

**Questions 3.** How have you adjusted your menu offerings and pricing structure to accommodate changes in customer behavior and preferences during the pandemic?

**Manager 1.** Reducing the number of employees to prevent the spread of the epidemic / reducing the employment rate by 50% to force employees to take the vaccine / Government procedures regarding the number of working hours.

**Manager 2.** According to customers' opinions

**Manager 3.** The price list did not change at that time, but the company made extensive offers on delivery or car service, especially since the restaurant has a good reputation for cleanliness. People were buying while feeling safe.

**Manager 4.** Reducing the overall cost of products and others

**Manager 5.** Adapt, follow and develop public safety guidelines

**Question 5.** Can you share any insights on your restaurant's financial performance during the pandemic? How have you managed to maintain profitability or mitigate losses?

**Manager 1.** Special offer on delivery orders/sell the raw material to let them cook in there home

**Manager 2.** Reducing the overall cost of products and others

**Manager 3.** Obtaining the goods in a manner appropriate to the circumstances, so that the quantity is not large, in addition to not wasting the quantity of food as much as possible.

**Manager 4.** Reducing the overall cost of products and others

**Manager 5.** Adapt, follow and develop public safety guidelines

**Questions 6.** Looking ahead, what long-term changes or innovations in restaurant management do you think will continue to be relevant even as the pandemic subsides? How do you plan to adapt to these changes?

**Manager 1.** HE don't know

**Manager 2.** Adapt and follow guidelines for public safety

**Manager 3.** I do not know what plans will be made in the upper administration, but I believe that the same measures will be taken if another pandemic occurs in the world.

**Manager 4.** Reducing the overall cost of products and others

**Manager 5.** Adapt, follow and develop public safety guidelines

## 9 Discussion

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in tremendous changes in the overall Jordanian economy and society. When we look into the Fast Food industry in specific, we can clearly see several changes happening in the ways consumers behave. For example, in fast food restaurants, the ways people order has shifted mostly to non-human contact methods, such as online orders and drive-through orders. This study discusses these challenges and opportunities from three perspectives: consumer, employee, and organizational strategy perspectives.

How COVID-19 affected the local Fast Food restaurant industry and how that period affected to each restaurant's performance? All managers noted that COVID-19 period had a great impact on their restaurants, it affected their customers and especially their employees.

For example, Manager 3. noted that *"Training was not an important matter at that time because time was short in customer service and we were forced to dismiss new employees and keep the experienced ones in the restaurant."* This is a clear indication that COVID-19 had significant impact on employees. Restaurants tried to keep the most experienced staff and let go the most junior which enabled restaurants to keep up the service levels and adapt to customer changing habits.

Since COVID-19 affected the customer traffic fast food restaurants had daily, they had to become creative to stay in the business and even survive. As Manager 1 noted, their restaurant designed a *"Special offer on delivery orders/sell the raw material to let them cook in there home."* Also, restaurants become creative with their pricing options. Manager 3 explained that, *"The price list did not change at that time, but the company made extensive offers on delivery or car service, especially since the restaurant has a good reputation for cleanliness. People were buying while feeling safe."* This illustrates the clear creativity of the restaurant owners and managers and how they adapted to the difficult situation. This is partly the reason of the changing customer habits as well, they preferred eating home more than dine in, and they were more drawn to delivery services.

As not for any business in Jordan, COVID-19 created a difficult environment to operate for fast Food restaurants. Government placed several restrictions for businesses which forced them to close for certain periods of a time. Each restaurant took different kind of measures how to respond these restrictions. For example, Manager 1 said they took several hygienic measures such as “*Social distancing/commitment to wearing a mask/regular use of a thermometer/use of gloves in all circumstances/continuing to wash hands and use sanitizer*” during the COVID-19 pandemic time. Based on the interviews, most of the restaurants took similar measures.

One area of the research was to understand how the fast food restaurant managers see the future after the COVID-19 pandemic subsides and what innovations they made and implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic might stay. Almost all managers interviews said that innovations around hygienic and public safety standards will remain as in general the benefits of these measures increase customer satisfaction.



## 10 Conclusions

In conclusion, based on the literature and interviews, the fast food industry in Jordan has demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. The challenges posed by disruptions in supply chains, changes in consumer behavior, and operational constraints prompted businesses but the businesses struggled through the time and not only survived but grew they businesses. The COVID-19 pandemic has clearly accelerated the adoption of digital technologies in the fast food industry. An in any country, fast food chains in Jordan will continue to invest in online ordering platforms, mobile apps, and digital marketing strategies to cater to changing consumer preferences and enhance the overall customer experience. As the world gradually recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic, the fast food industry in Jordan is poised for a rebound. Consumer confidence is expected to improve, and pent-up demand for dine-in services may contribute to a resurgence in on-site consumption. Businesses that have successfully adapted to the challenges of the pandemic are likely to emerge stronger and more resilient.

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