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CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IN GROCERY SHOPPING: QATARI COMMUNITY DURING THE BLOCKADE

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ABSTRACT

While Qatar had the highest GDP in the world in 2016, it faced the dilemma of a blockade in June 2017. This had a direct effect on the Qatari community who united and showed clear signs of patriotism. Consumers turned from the blockade countries' food products to products that were local or those that came from supporting countries. This blockade was seen as an economic opportunity for local brands as well as many international brands since 40% of the food that was previously available came from blockade countries (IISS, 2017). With this, many new brands entered the market and soon prospered. This research aims to compare the changes in the grocery shopping consumer behavior of the Qatari community at the start of the blockade and more than two years later. An Arabic language online survey is conducted on a non-probability-snowball sample of 194 respondents in 2017 and is repeated on a sample of 189 respondents in 2020. Results show that the subjective norm the Qatari community's consumers have towards grocery products continues to be associated with the political positions of the countries of production. They also show that the most successful marketing technique used by grocery brands is "patriotism." Moreover, they show that the Qatari community has become more focused on learning the properties and competitive advantages of the products. Conclusions show that the Qatari community has remained consistent with giving priority to buying groceries that support the country and its allies throughout the blockade. They also show that the consumers have become more aware in comparing available products and making educated buying decisions. Further research should be conducted to examine the changes in attitude and consumer behavior after blockade is lifted.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

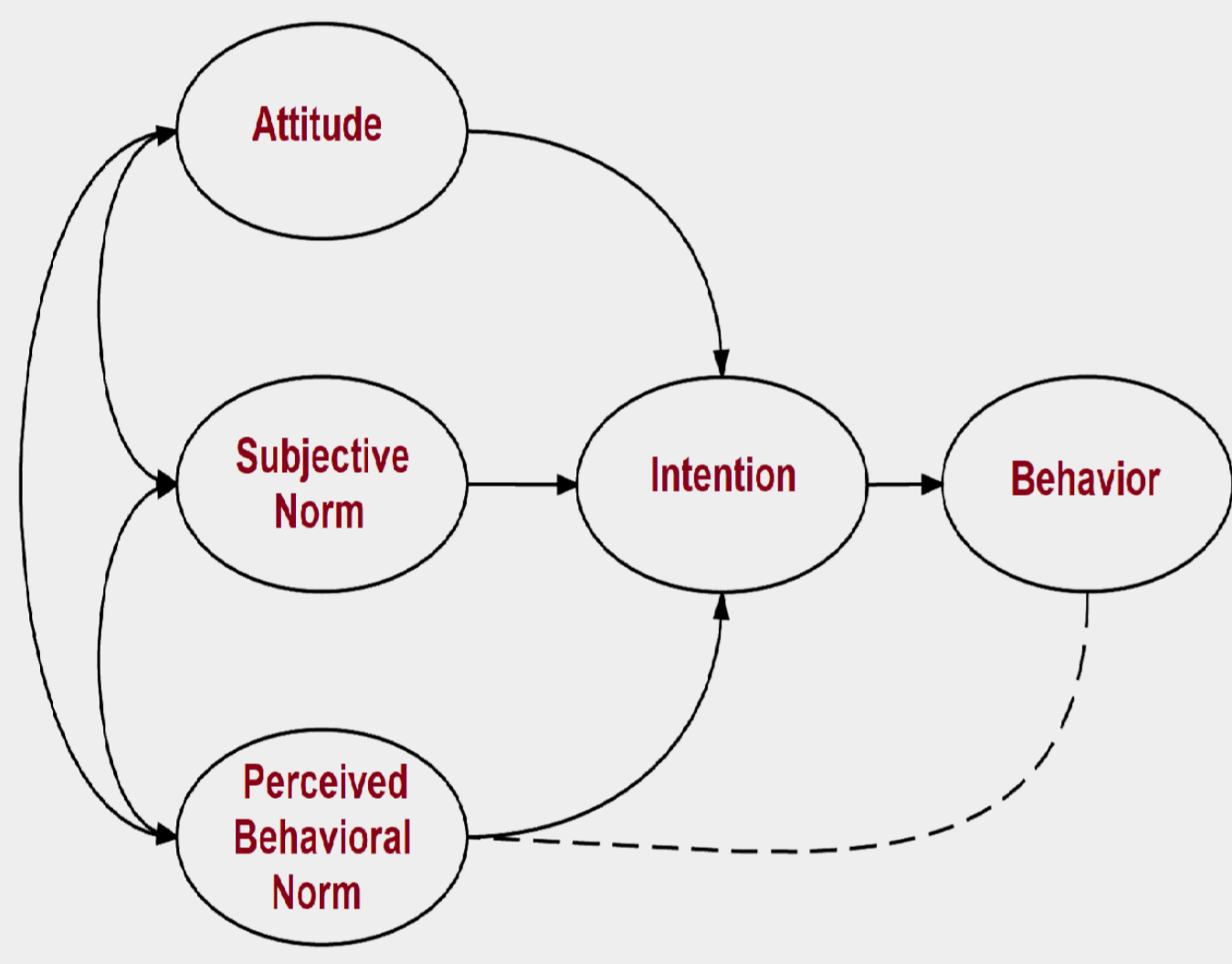
- ▶ Before the blockade Qatar imported 90% of its food, 40% of which came through Saudi Arabia (IISS, 2017)
- ▶ In June 2017 Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt announced a trade, transport and political boycott on Qatar (Cornwell and Barrington, 2020)
- ▶ "No product or commodity carries the immediacy or political sensitivity of food," (Lipmann, 2010)
- ▶ Negotiations have been taking place to resolve the Qatar Blockade (Cornwell and Barrington, 2020)

BACKGROUND

- Qatar Blockade started on June 5, 2017 with a Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt announced that they had "severed diplomatic relations with Qatar and also placed a land and air embargo," (Hamid, 2017).
- The Qatari government immediately announced that it would start a "Support Local Goods" campaign.
- The Qatar National Food Security Program (QNSFP) that envisions the production of 60-70% of food locally by 2020 was already set before the blockade (Tok, Alkhater and Pal, 2016, p302).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

- Theory of Planned Behavior
- Developed by Icek Ajzen in 1985
- Links beliefs and behavior



METHODOLOGY

- Pilot study
- Online survey (Survey Monkey)
- Open-ended, closed-ended and ranking questions
- Fisher's Exact Test for Count Data (p-value statistical significance)
- Conducted in Oct. & Nov. 2017
- Repeated in Jan. and Feb. 2020
- Arabic and cross translated

SAMPLE

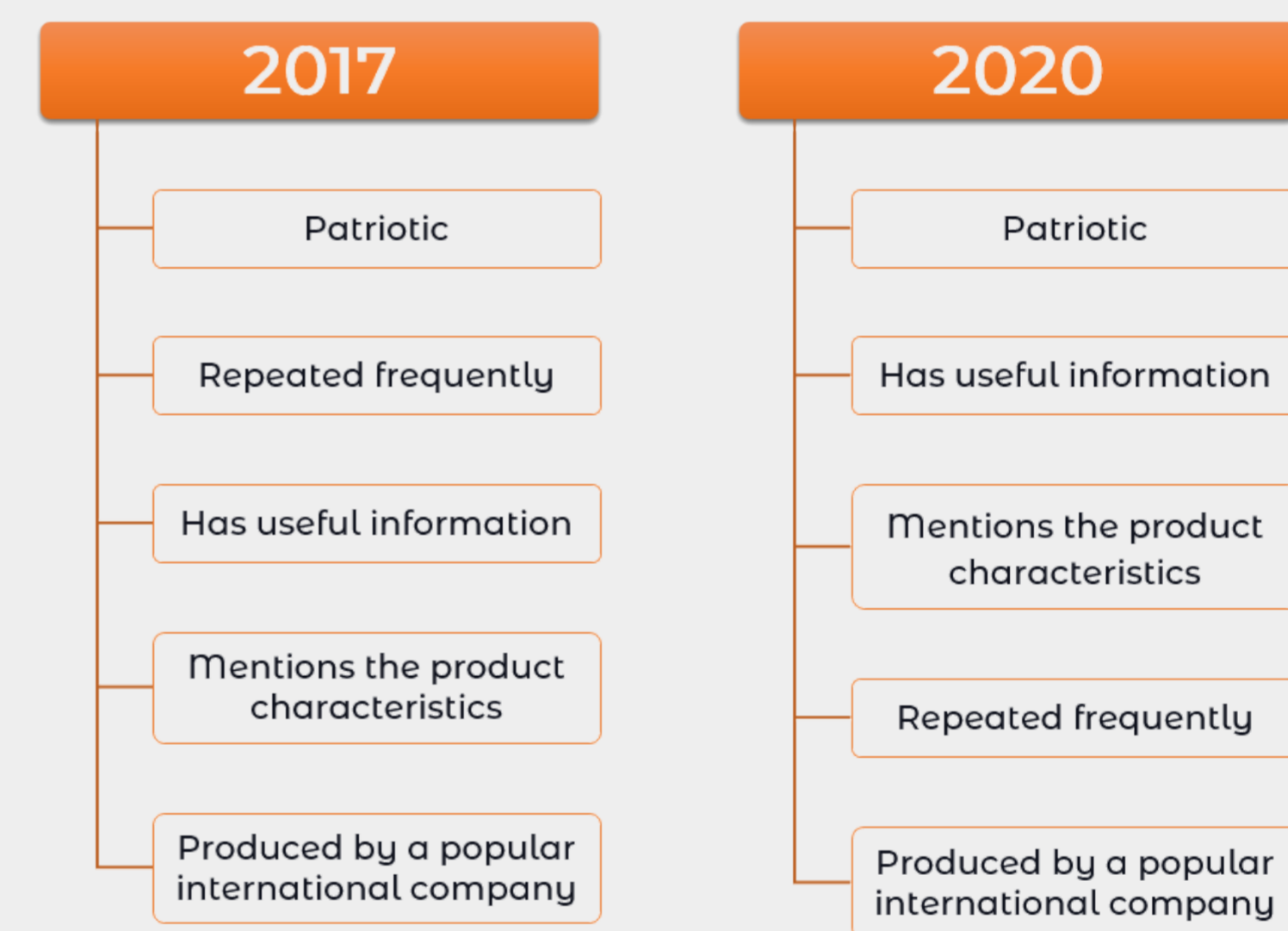
- Population size: 1,953,297 (World Population Prospects, 2019)
- Qatari community
- Twenty years and above
- Non-probability/snowball sample
- 95% confidence level and a 5.01 margin of error
- Sample size: 383 respondents (194 in 2017 & 189 in 2020)

RESULTS

FACTORS AFFECTING GROCERY SHOPPING CHOICES



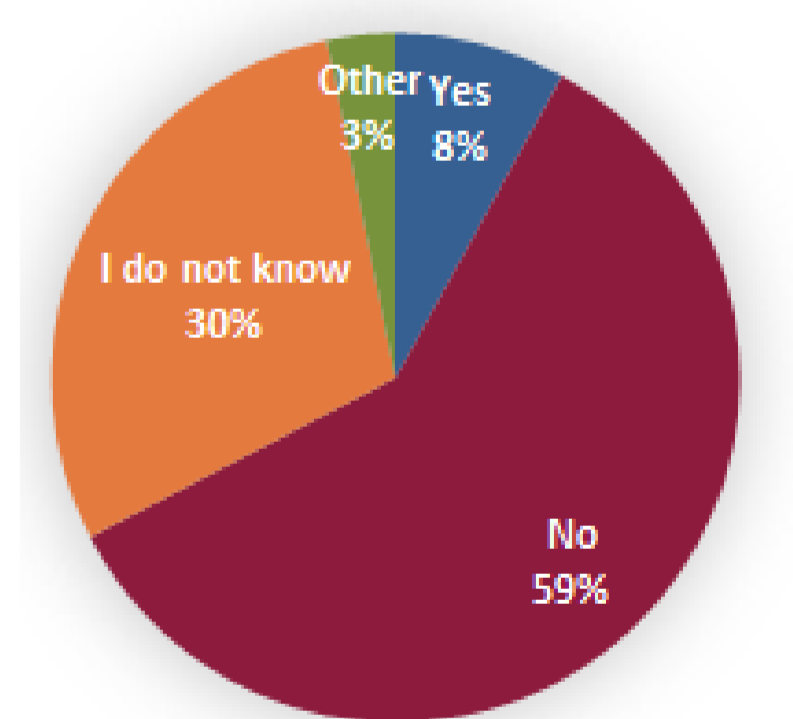
EFFECTIVE GROCERY MARKETING TECHNIQUES USED DURING THE BLOCKADE



TOP FIVE COUNTRIES QATARI COMMUNITY BUYS GROCERIES FROM

- 1 Turkey
- 2 Qatar
- 3 Kuwait
- 4 Oman
- 5 Iran

AFTER THE BLOCKADE: WILL THE QATARI COMMUNITY BUY BLOCKADE-COUNTRY PRODUCTS? (2020)



Sample open-ended answers:
No: "The local products are excellent. They must be supported. And I do not trust the blockade countries or their products."
Yes: "With the end of the siege, a new phase will begin and as long as the government imports it, I buy it."

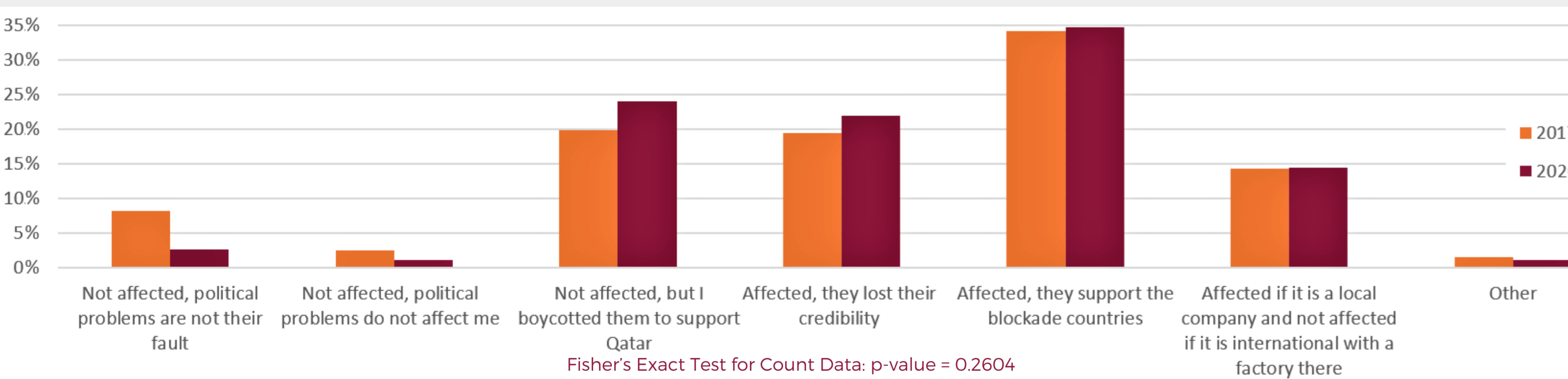
LIMITATIONS

- Response bias: respondents may have replied with the most socially acceptable answers.
- Time constraints
- Number of respondents

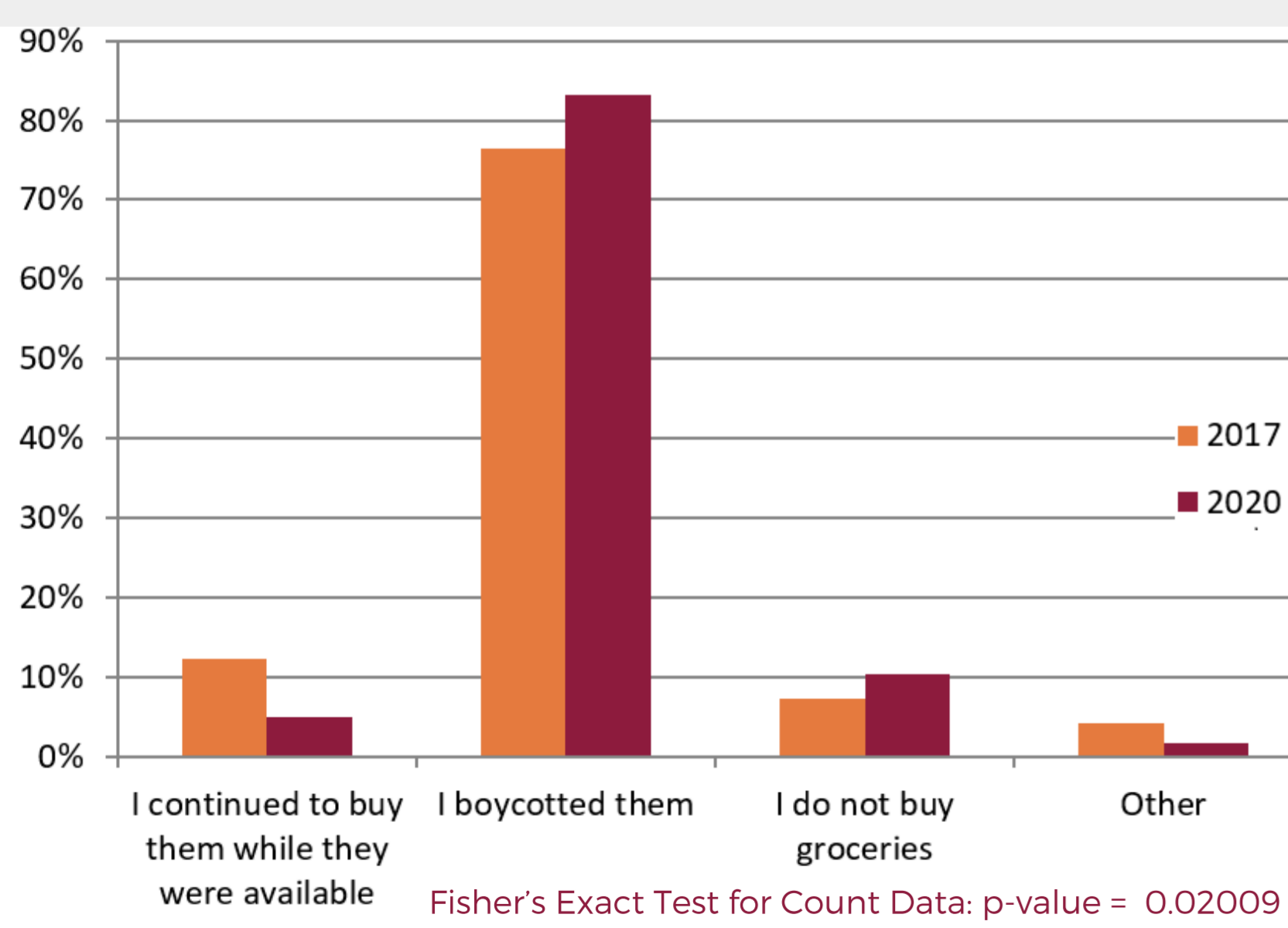
FUTURE RESEARCH

Examine the attitudes of the Qatari community toward blockade countries' products after the blockade gets lifted.

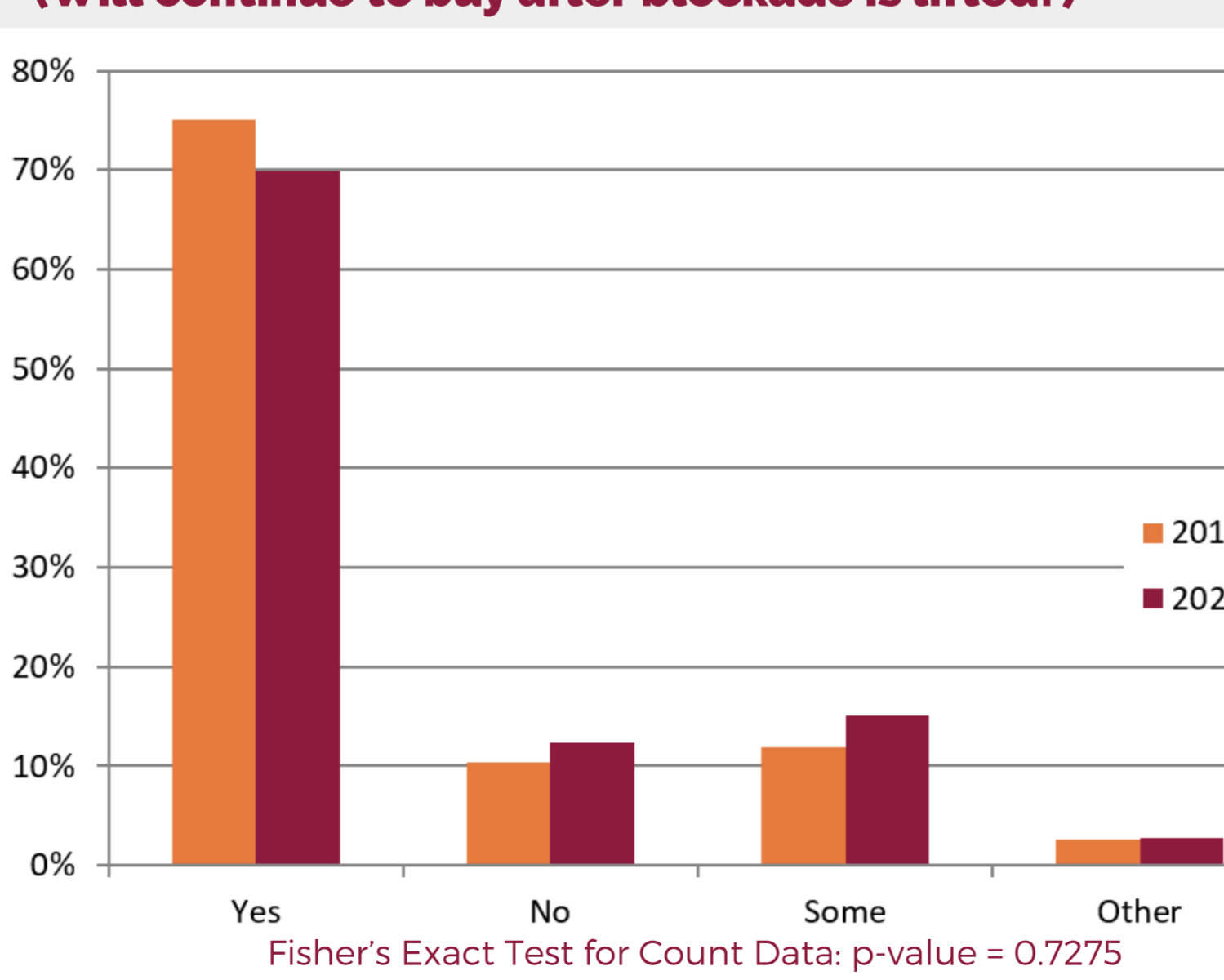
ATTITUDE TOWARDS BRAND IDENTITY OF GROCERY PRODUCTS MADE IN BLOCKADE COUNTRIES



QATARI COMMUNITY'S CONSUMER BEHAVIOR TOWARDS GROCERY PRODUCTS MADE IN THE BLOCKADE COUNTRIES



LOYALTY TO CURRENTLY-USED GROCERY BRANDS (Will continue to buy after blockade is lifted?)



ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

- During the blockade, the Qatari Community followed the government's guidance in order to avoid any negative repercussions for themselves or the country. Many also turned to opinion leaders for guidance.
- The Qatari community showed a high sense of patriotism in making food-buying decisions.
- Political factors pushed consumers to form negative connotations with the brand names of the food products coming from the blockade countries. This was more evident in 2020.
- Most of the respondents substituted grocery products from blockade countries with others that fulfilled their needs and supported Qatar.
- The results show that the Qatari population was willing to buy brands that abided by their own patriotic rules, social advice, packaging and convenience, but was not concerned with advertisements or sensitive to price.
- In 2020 the respondents still saw patriotic advertising techniques as the most effective, but started focusing more on the information on the packages and product characteristics as opposed to how many times the advertisements were repeated. This shows that the Qatari community became more aware as consumers.
- The patriotic attitudes of the Qatari community continued throughout the two and a half years of the blockade.

HYPOTHESES 1, 2 & 3 Supported by results

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