

Impact of COVID-19 on Food Behavior and Consumption in Qatar

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Introduction:

- COVID-19 affected agro-food systems from producers to processors, and consumers, at different levels, causing an impending global food emergency.
- It is likely that the effects of COVID-19 will differ from one country to another depending not only on the epidemiological situation but also, among others, on the level of socio-economic development.
- The government of Qatar took strong containment measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 with restrictions on daily living such as social distancing and the closing of businesses and schools.
- While these measures are essential to stop the virus spreading, several voices came to warn of their potential disruptive impact on the agri-food system.
- Therefore, this paper investigates the immediate impacts of COVID-19 on Qatari consumer awareness, attitudes, and behaviors related to food consumption.

Data and Methods:

- Online survey in Qatar using a structured questionnaire.
- Administered in Arabic from May 24 until June 14, 2020, through the Survey Monkey platform.
- The questionnaire consisted of 27 one-option, multiple-choice, and open questions and was structured into three sections: (1) socio-demographics (10 questions); (2) food purchase and consumption behavior (15 questions); and (3) emotions (2 questions).
- A total of 579 answers were collected.
- The data were analyzed with SPSS version 25.0.
- Means, variation ratio, frequencies, and percentages were calculated for descriptive data.

Results:

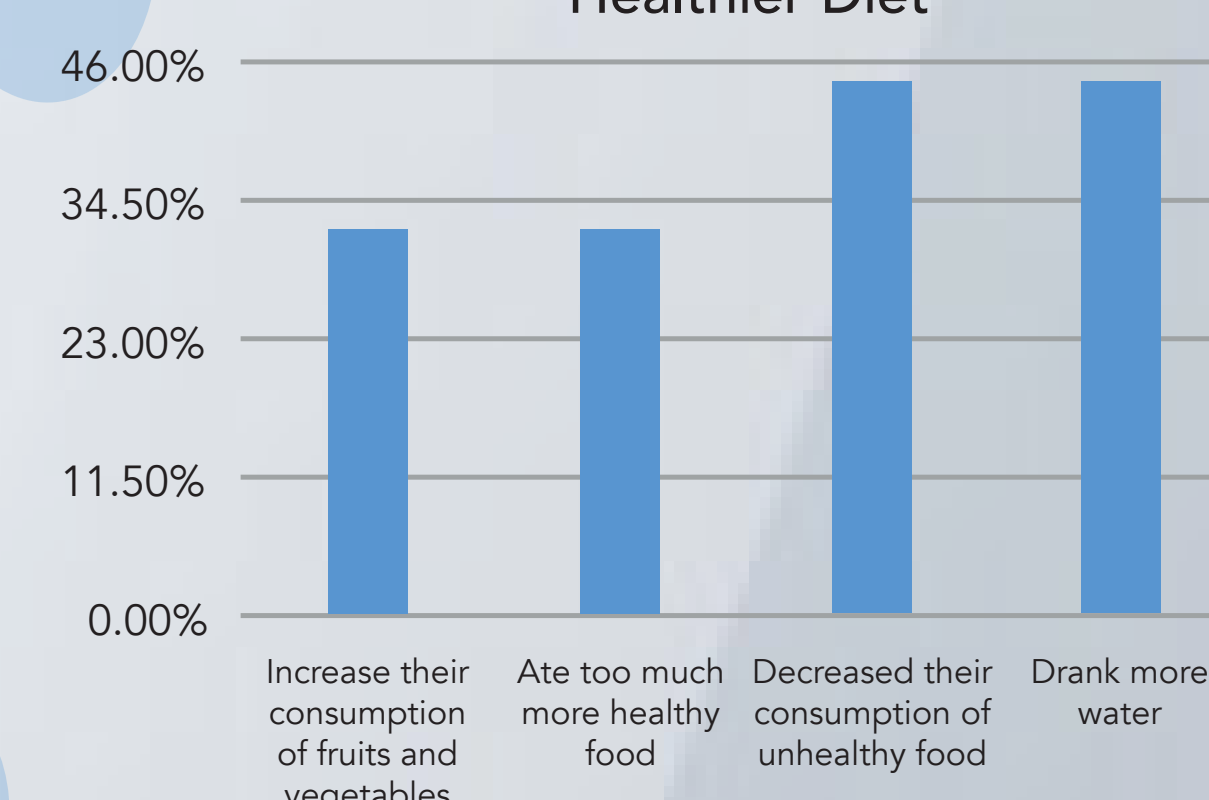
Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Participants

- 62.91% of the respondents were Qatari,
- 61.32% were women,
- 50.36% were married with children,
- 60.03% were active professionally, and 83.7% were highly educated.
- 53.89% of the respondents were 25 to 45 years old.

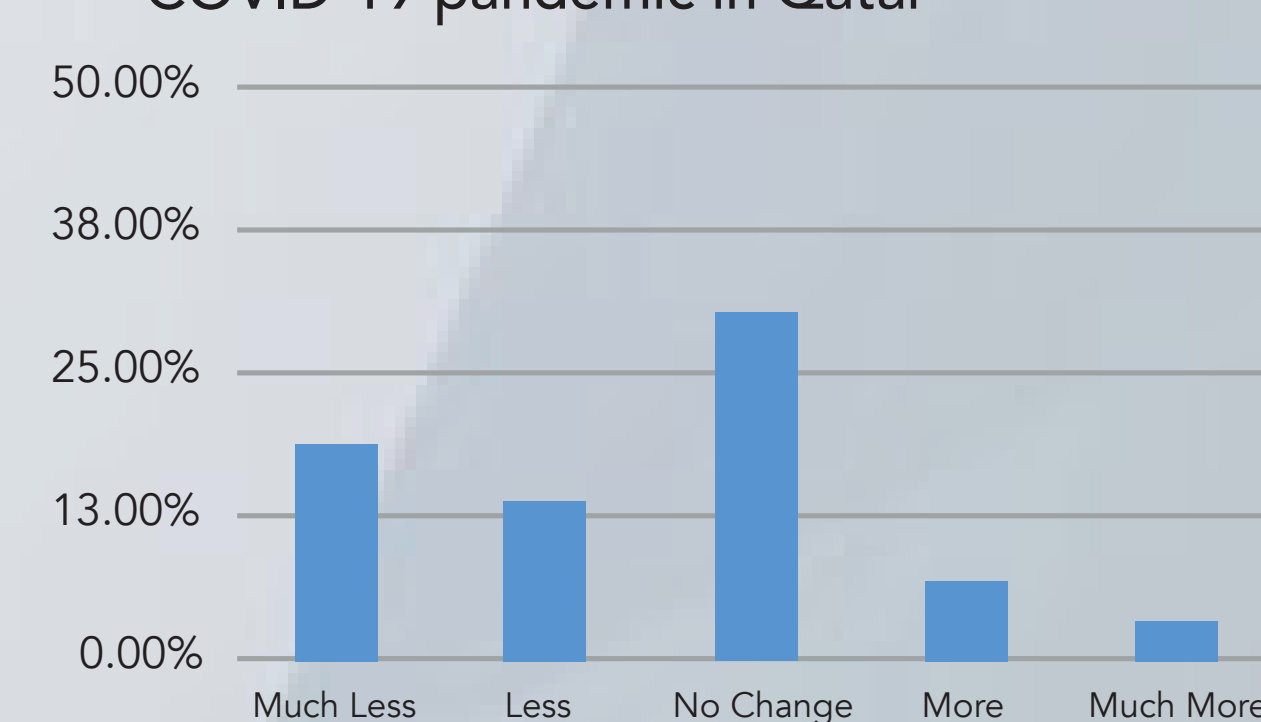
Food Behavior and Consumption Habits During COVID-19 Pandemic: Several positive changes:

- 1. More grocery shopping online:** 35.5% ordered more groceries online.
- 2. A shift towards a healthier diet:** Refer to Graph 1.0.
- 3. Absence of panic buying:** 73.35% did not stock up food.
- 4. More time for cooking and for family:** 42.90% are eating more with family members, 49.20% are cooking and preparing food much more frequently;
- 5. Less food waste:** Refer to Graph 2.0.

Graph 1.0: A Shift Towards a Healthier Diet



Graph 2.0: Food waste change during the COVID-19 pandemic in Qatar



Discussion and Conclusion:

1. The results indicated a shift towards a healthier diet during the COVID-19 pandemic. This constitutes a positive change compared to the pre-COVID-19 situation.
2. The quick and rigorous approach adopted by the Qatari government has helped to manage the spread of the virus and to reduce the spread of negative emotions such as depression, and fear, resulting in less consumption of unhealthy foods.
3. With barrier gestures, and social distancing becoming the norm, the coronavirus pandemic has transformed how consumers in Qatar get their food with a surge in online grocery shopping.
4. COVID-19 unleashed culinary capabilities. With the restaurants and coffee shops closed, entertainment options became limited and eating with family and cooking turned into new entertaining activities.
5. Absence of panic buying in Qatar could be explicated by the numerous policies and strategies implemented by the Qatari government to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on food supply. Despite the high reliance of Qatar on food imports, COVID-19 did not affect food supply or prices.
6. The policies and strategies adopted by Qatar in response to the blockade of 2017 prepared the country particularly well.