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HEALTHY FOOD TRENDS AMONG SAUDI CONSUMERS

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ABSTRACT

Saudi Arabia has seen a marked change in the lifestyle this change included eating habits also where there has been a trend towards unhealthy food consumption, especially among young people. The aim of this study is to determine the healthy food trends among Saudi consumers. Across-sectional study was conducted through Saudi population from Jeddah city. The study included 251 participants of both genders. The questionnaire was answered electronically. The questionnaire included two parts; the first represents the participant's personal information as gender and age, while the second part includes eight multiple choice questions about buying fast foods. The statistical analysis program SPSS version 22 was used in the study. The survey result shows the participants about 89.2% are eating fast food, 88.4% encourage their friends to buy healthy foods, and 59.6% expected decreasing the demand on fast unhealthy food consumption in case the existence of restaurants offers more

healthy options. The motivation behind buying fast food for 38.3% was its taste, while 36.3% buy fast food due to the speed. There is a high prevalence of fast-food consumption. Nevertheless there is a desire among the community to stop consumption, indicating their awareness of the dangers of these foods.

1 INTRODUCTION

The major changes of food system and eating environments over the past years have been driven by agricultural policies; technological advances, and economic, social, and lifestyle changes. More processed and convenience foods are available and reachable throughout the day in larger ration sizes and at low prices. Most of the meals are eaten away from home because parents are working longer hours, so the family meals are fewer now [1]. The school food also is different from before: High-calorie, low nutrition foods are available in the schools [2]. Over the past 30 years, the food marketing is focused on children [3]. There is an increasing in the income and racial/ethnic inequalities in access to healthy foods in the urban areas because of increasing the fast food restaurants against the decreasing of the grocery shops in the urban areas [4, 5]. Collectively, these environmental changes have influenced the way consumer eat and are believed to have played a significant role in the current obesity epidemic [1, 3]. Individual behaviour can make healthy choices only in a supportive environment with reachable and affordable healthy food choices [6].

The good news is that consumers around the world are trying to control their health. About 49% of global respondents in Nielsen's Global Health & Wellness Survey consider themselves overweight, and a similar percentage 50% is trying to lose weight. Moreover, they're doing that by making more healthful food choices. Manufacturers are making more healthy foods by reformulating products to remove or reduce the sugar, cholesterol, trans and saturated fat and sodium content of food. They're moving away from artificial ingredients to more desirable attributes like fibre and protein [7].

In Saudi Arabia, the phenomenon of leading a better lifestyle and acquisition a better sense of wellbeing continued to spread over the review period, in both packaged food and beverages[30]. This was obvious due to supermarkets and hypermarkets either announcing new products lines or expanding their product lines to contain condensed fat and low calorie products. In packaged food this was noticeable in dairy, such as milk, cheese and ice cream, while in beverages, manufacturers intended to build an image of being "all natural, 100% pure and vitamin-fortified"[31]. This was particularly obvious in juice, while sports drinks and carbonates successful because of increasing awareness by government that aimed to reduce the growing obesity rate, and rising penetration of the internet and satellite TV, which allowed Saudis to teach themselves on keeping good health and filling the desire for a healthier quality of life. The high incomes is considered as an

important factor to the increasing popularity of health and wellness, which allow the majority of younger to middle-aged consumers in Saudi Arabia to buy healthier food, and sign up with diet centers. Therefore, this study aims to determine the Healthy food trends and Saudi consumers.

2 METHODOLOGY

This study used descriptive analytical approach which is based on the study of the phenomenon, as it is in reality, and contributes to describe it accurately as it illustrates its characteristics through information gathering, analysis and interpretation, and then apply the results in the light[20]. This approach features that it does not stop at the end of information gathering about certain phenomenon classifying and organizing it in order to investigate different aspects of the phenomenon, but it goes to reach conclusions contribute to the understanding of reality through the analysis of the phenomenon, interpretation, and then reaching meaningful generalizations which make the study increase the credit of knowledge on the phenomenon, and contribute to the development and reality of phenomenon destination and improve it.

2.1 Method of data collection

This study targeted random sampling with more concern to youth consumers by distributing the survey via social media by well-known people and by distributing the link on online groups. Selecting popular people on social media was given diverse response, and using online groups will make it a well representative sample of the population of KSA. Whatsapp application was used because it is the most popular app in Saudi.

2.2 Tool of the study

The questionnaire was the study tool prepared by the researcher with the help of experts and specialists, it included two parts; the first represents the participants' personal information as sex and age, while the second part includes (8) multiple choice questions about buying fast foods

2.3 Statistical methods:

The statistical analysis program (SPSS v.22) was used in the study in data entry and analysis, with the use of necessary statistical methods to achieve the objectives of the study.

3 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The study population includes all Saudi citizens who live in Jeddah city. A random sample of 251 persons was selected, and answered the electronic questionnaire through social media. Table 1 shows their properties according to their personal information. Majority of the participants are female with 79.3% and male only 20.72%. The participants dominate the age group of 21 to 25 years old by 38.65%, follow by 18 to 20 years old by 32.27%. There are 21.51% of the participants are form age group of 21.51% and minority 1.59% and 1.2% for age group of 40 to 49 years old and 50 to 59 years old respectively.

Table 1: The participant’s personal data

Characteristics	Items	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	52	20.72
	Female	199	79.28
Age group	18 - 20	81	32.27
	21 - 25	97	38.65
	26 - 30	54	21.51
	31 - 39	12	4.78
	40 - 49	4	1.59
	50 - 59	3	1.20

Figure 1 shows majority of the participants about 89% consumes fast food and 11% of them do not. Figure 2 shows 43% and 39% of the participants buy fast food monthly and weekly respectively. There are 7% of the participant buy fast food daily and 11% of them do not buy fast food.

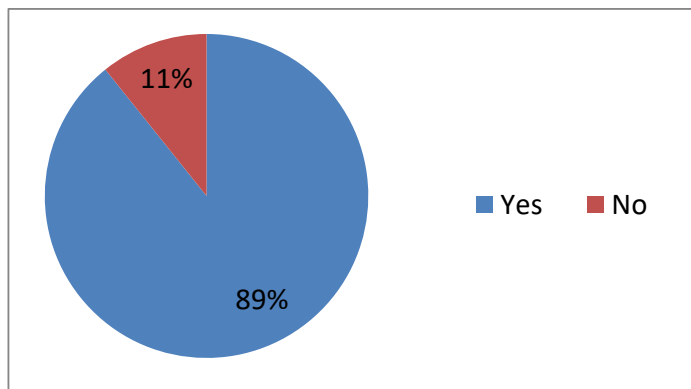


Figure 1: Fast food consumer

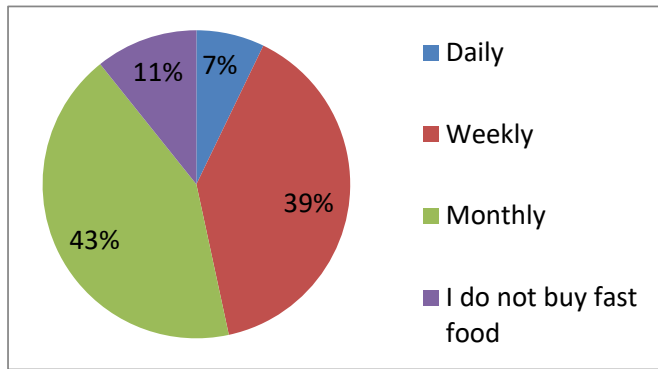


Figure 2: The regularity of buying fast food

Figure 3 shows that 55% of the participants realize they know 1 to 3 persons are doing effort to stop buying from fast food restaurant. There are 18% of the participants know more than 4 persons are doing effort to stop buying from fast food restaurant. Also, there are 27% of the participants know no one are doing effort to stop buying from fast food restaurant.

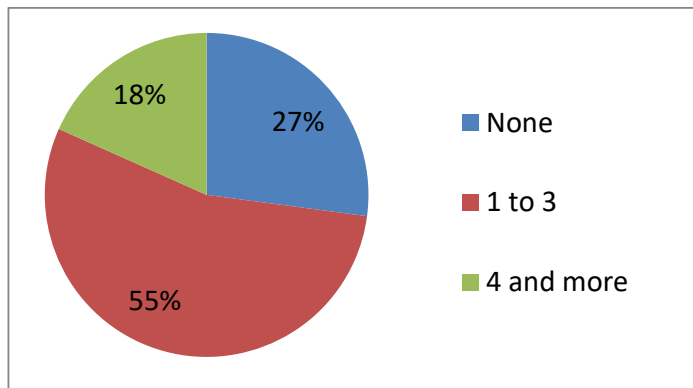


Figure 3: Numbers of persons you know they are doing effort to stop buying from fast food restaurant

Figure 4 shows majority of participants about 51% know 1 to 3 people are stop buying fast food because of health reasons, or just to be fit and 9% know more than 4 people. While, there are 40% of the participant know no one have stop buying fast food because of health reasons, or just to be fit.

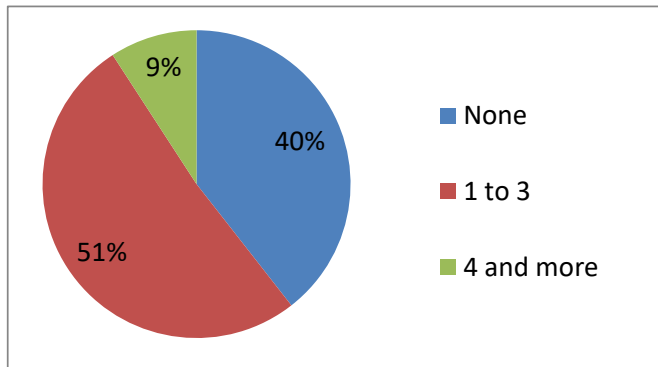


Figure 4: Numbers of persons you know they are stop buying fast food because of health reasons, or just to be fit

Figure 5 shows about 55% of the participants expected increasing the demand on fast foods in KSA in the future, while 44.6% of them expected the opposite. Figure 6 shows that about 88% of the participants encourage their friends to be committed to healthy foods and only 12% of the participants will encourage their friends to be committed to fast food.

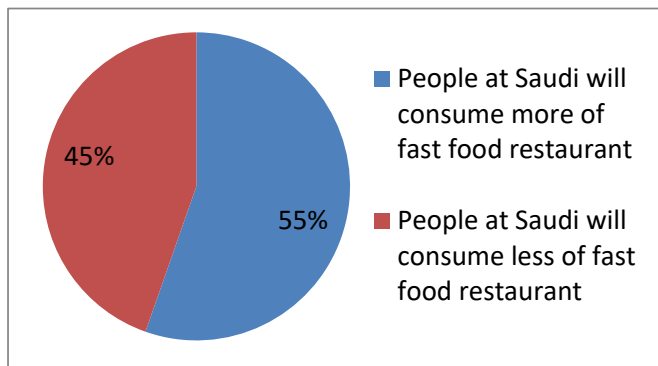


Figure 5: The expectations about the future of consuming fast foods

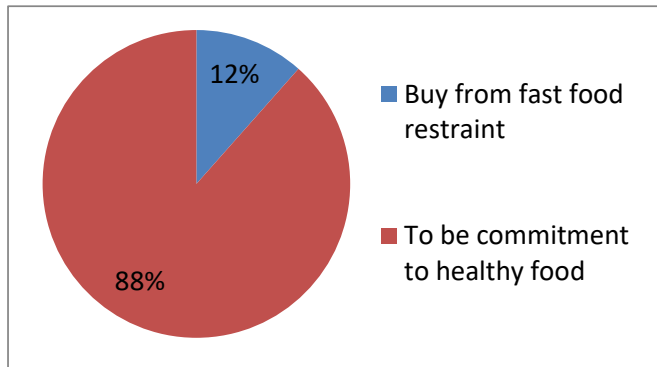


Figure 6: Encourage their friends to buy fast foods or healthy foods

Figure 7 shows that about 60% of the participants expect decreasing the demand on fast unhealthy food consumption in case the existence of restaurants offer more healthy options, and 32% of them expect that most people will stop buying fast unhealthy food when there is a healthy alternative, while about 8% of the participants expect a continuation of the community purchase of fast food restaurants in the same quantity.

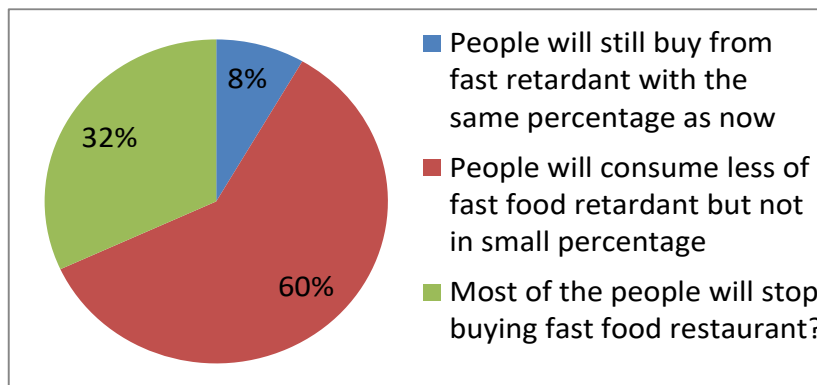


Figure 7: The expectation of the future of fast food consumption in the presence of restaurants offer more healthy options

Figure 8 shows about 38% of participants believe that the motivation that drives people to buy fast food is taste (They love its taste), about 36% of them believe that the motive behind buying fast food that it is fast, about 20% of them believe that the motive behind buying fast food is the unknowing of its dangers, and about 6% of

them believe that the motive behind buying fast food is there is no healthy alternatives provided.

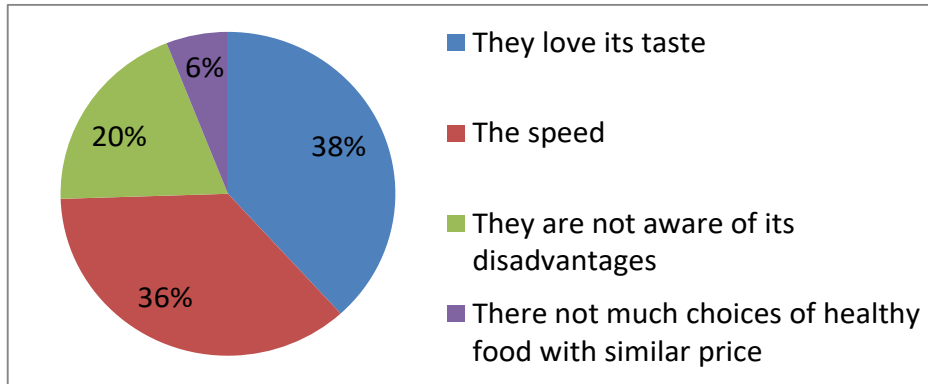


Figure 8: The motivation behind buying fast food

Today foods are not intended to only satisfy hunger and to provide necessary nutrients for humans but also to prevent nutrition-related diseases and improve physical and mental well-being of the consumers [8, 9]. Recent research shows that healthiness is a major quality dimension when consumers evaluate food products, and healthy eating has become a major topic in the public discourse on food and drink [10]. Hence this study aimed to study the Healthy food trends and Saudi consumers.

Regarding demographic data the majority of the participants were female and the most of participants ranged in age between 18-30 years old. According to the survey results there was high prevalence of fast foods among the participants 89.2 % of them reported that they eat fast foods. These findings are consistent with the findings by ALFaris et al. [11], that 95.4% of adolescent and young adult Saudi girls eat restaurant fast food. And Abdullah et al. [12], reported that Fast food consumption was higher for mostly young Malays. While 39.4% of the participants reported that they eat it weakly, this considered a sizable proportion. This results less than Alfawaz [13] results who found that 75% of female college students in Saudi Arabia consumed fast foods 1–2 times weekly, this difference in results is due to the difference in the targeted groups at the two studies, as well as the access is fast food among university students easier especially because they spend a long time at the university during the day.

There are about 7.2% of the participants in this study are consumed fast foods daily. This finding similar Al-Hazzaa et al. [14], found that 6% of Saudi adolescent girls consumed fast foods daily. Despite the high prevalence of fast-food consumption, but that there is a desire among the community to stop consumption indicating their awareness of the dangers of these foods. Whereas in this study more

than half of participants know from one to three persons who know and are making an effort to stop buying from fast-food restaurants.

In Saudi Arabia, there has been a steady increase in food-poisoning accidents associated with fast food restaurants, especially in the warmer climate during the summer months. Meat and chicken were reported as the main items to cause these accidents [15, 16]. Several studies reported that food handlers in restaurants often had a lack of knowledge and no training regarding food hygiene and safety [17, 18]. That suggests a need for education training courses targeting food handlers to increase their awareness regarding safe food-handling practices [19]. At the present study about half of participants know (1-3) people have stopped buying fast food for health reasons. Evidence indicates that frequent food intake contributes to insulin resistance and weight gain, pathways central to both type 2 diabetes mellitus and cardiovascular risk [20]. Fast-food consumption was also linked with higher intake of cholesterol and sodium, and lower intake of fiber, vitamin A, vitamin C, vitamin D, vitamin K, copper and magnesium [21].

There is remarkably a trend toward healthy food, where most of the participants in this study urge their friends to buy healthy food. Healthier food products have entered the global markets with force in the past years and rapidly gained market share [10]. As well as the importance of and need for developing interventions aiming at increasing consumers' sustainable healthy eating behaviour through influencing their attitudes, self-efficacy and knowledge about the topic has been highlighted [22]. It important to making recommended healthy foods, such as fruit and vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat dairy products [23]. Available to consumers has been suggested as key to improving diet quality [24, 25].

Expect the majority of participants increased consumption of fast food in the presence of restaurants offer more healthy options. This reflects the desire of the community and their quest for a healthy food. The most common reasons for people trend towards fast food were its taste followed the speed. Also ALFaris et al. [11] reported that Saudi girls eat fast food primarily for enjoying the delicious taste, followed by convenience. This may explain that dietary patterns today have more energy dense foods such as fast food and sugar-sweetened beverages at the expense of nutrient-dense foods such as fruits and vegetables, especially among adolescents and young adults [26, 27]. American college students were choosing to eat fast food for limited time, followed by enjoyment of the taste [28]. In a national representative sample of Americans, a study revealed that taste is the most important influence on food choices [29].

4 CONCLUSION

Despite the high prevalence of fast-food consumption, there was a desire among the community to stop consumption, indicating their awareness of the dangers of

these foods. In addition, there is remarkably a trend toward healthy food. While the most common reasons for people crave for fast food were its taste followed by the speed. There are expectations to increase the popularity of fast food available in the event of more healthy restaurants for fast food.

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