



AgEcon SEARCH
RESEARCH IN AGRICULTURAL & APPLIED ECONOMICS

The World's Largest Open Access Agricultural & Applied Economics Digital Library

This document is discoverable and free to researchers across the globe due to the work of AgEcon Search.

Help ensure our sustainability.

Give to AgEcon Search

AgEcon Search

<http://ageconsearch.umn.edu>

aesearch@umn.edu

*Papers downloaded from **AgEcon Search** may be used for non-commercial purposes and personal study only. No other use, including posting to another Internet site, is permitted without permission from the copyright owner (not AgEcon Search), or as allowed under the provisions of Fair Use, U.S. Copyright Act, Title 17 U.S.C.*

Perceptions and Readiness of Foodservice Establishments at the Onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Metro Manila and Region IV-A, Philippines

Von Ryan M. Ebron¹, Irma U. Danao², Marie Faye R. Nguyen-Orca³, Anna Teresa O. Orillo⁴, and Joyce P. Parco⁵

ABSTRACT

The study evaluated the perceptions and readiness of food business operators about COVID-19 through an online survey with respondents from Metro Manila and Region IV-A. Generally, they are knowledgeable about COVID-19 and its transmission, as reflected in their scores. The same is true about their attitude towards “new normal” practices. Years of operation, asset size, and continued operations and delivery services showed significant positive correlation with attitude scores. The resilience of some food business operators may be attributed to having more resources that enabled them to carry the added costs of what the new normal foodservice practices entailed. New normal practices include the implementation of health and safety protocols, shifting business models to online systems, food delivery services, dine-in by reservation, and menu innovations. Food business operators amenable to change and to innovate are more likely to keep afloat during a pandemic.

Keywords: *COVID-19, food safety, foodservice, new normal*

Introduction

The foodservice industry has always been dynamic and improving — continuously setting and following trends to satisfy consumer demands. A restaurant’s propensity to adapt is instrumental to its survival. Beyond physiological needs such as hunger and thirst, people tend to look for a restaurant experience that suits their taste (Andersson and Mossberg 2004). Nowadays, consumers select restaurants that satisfy their choices through experiential socialization (Wardono, Hibino, and Koyama 2012). This makes management of these establishments more complex as they need to consider not only food but the entire experience, which scopes the interior, service, and image, among others.

Many businesses have been affected by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, which may also have disrupted the restaurant industry globally (Bartik et al. 2020). Being a public health

concern, the added extra layer of safety has compounded the already tough food safety culture. Adding COVID-19 to the equation makes it even more daunting to restaurant owners in their current operations as consumers are restricted in their movement and, as much as possible, avoid outside contact. Even in the post-COVID scenario,

Author’s Information

¹Assistant Professor, Institute of Human Nutrition and Food (IHNF), College of Human Ecology (CHE), University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB), vmebron@up.edu.ph

²Assistant Professor, IHNF, CHE, UPLB iudanao@up.edu.ph

³Assistant Professor, IHNF, CHE, UPLB mrnguyenorca@up.edu.ph

⁴Assistant Professor, IHNF, CHE, UPLB aoorillo@up.edu.ph

⁵Assistant Professor, IHNF, CHE, UPLB jpparco1@up.edu.ph



projections are seen not to fare well as people will still avoid going to restaurants even after the virus disappears (WHO 2020).

The Philippine food and beverage (F&B) industry, which was estimated to have accumulated PHP 600 billion worth of revenues in the year 2019 (Nuestro 2020), is not exempted from the effect of the pandemic. When the authorities started the lockdown in March 2020, the whole of Luzon was affected. It was extended until May 16, 2020, when the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF-EID) issued their re-opening guidelines. For almost two months, the F&B industry incurred a loss from their potential sales of about PHP 100 billion. On top of that, they incurred continued operating expenses and were forced to lay off employees, totaling about 61,000 to 1 million, as estimated by the National Economic Development Authority (NEDA) (NEDA 2020). NEDA also cited that the implementation of Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) over Luzon in a month could result in a loss of about PHP 1.1 trillion, equivalent to 1.5-5.3 % of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

During the quarantine period, restaurants quickly shifted their service to take-out and delivery, with some even changing their menu to accommodate such (Nuestro 2020). The foodservice industry managers were undoubtedly adapting and finding ways to operate their businesses in the new normal where emerging behaviors, situations, and public health standards take effect (IATF-EID 2020). Metro Manila and Region IV-A were two of the regions with the most COVID-19 cases having 56% and 15% of the total cases in the country, respectively, as of September 1, 2020 (World Health Organization 2020). The former also had the highest rate of new cases. As expected, these regions had stricter community quarantine classifications for the longest time. Incidentally, most establishments in the accommodation and foodservice activities sector can be found in these regions (Philippine Statistics Authority 2020).

The Philippines' lockdown has been among the fiercest and longest-lasting in the world since it imposed the lockdown on March 16, 2020 (Economist 2020). Through the community quarantine, the movement within, into, or out of the area of quarantine of individuals, large groups of people, or communities was restricted to reduce the likelihood of transmission (IATF-EID 2020). The Philippine government has implemented various degrees of lockdowns, corresponding to various operational capacities of food establishments. Restaurants, particularly those with dine-in services, adjust their operations depending on the type of community quarantine they have in their areas, namely: Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ), Modified ECQ (MECQ), General Community Quarantine (GCQ), and Modified GCQ (MGCQ), arranged from the most stringent to the least stringent, respectively.

With the improving situation in the country, IATF-EID has implemented guidelines in preparation for the gradual reopening of the dine-in food industry, which is shown in Table 1. Under the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) Memorandum Circular (MC) No. 20-39, dine-in capacity increased by 67% for areas under GCQ and 50% under MGCQ. As reiterated, the opening, however, is subject to strict compliance with social distancing protocols and some additional control measures such as but not limited to registration for contact tracing, thermal scanning prior to entry, decline entry of customers, suppliers, and workers exhibiting symptoms, chairs distanced at least one meter on all sides, and no face mask no entry policy (DTI 2020).

Table 1. IATF-EID restaurant operational capacity guidelines in preparation for the gradual re-opening of the dine-in food industry

	Community Quarantine			
	MGCQ	GCQ	MECQ	ECQ
May 16, 2020	50	30	0**	0***
June 15, 2020*	75	50	0**	0***

* with consistent compliance rate of 90-100%

** delivery and take-out only

*** as ancillary to establishments with granted Certificate of Authority to operate by the DOT

The foodservice industry is definitely entering uncharted territory, and there is no other way to outlast this pandemic but to change. Tougher challenges remain after lifting quarantine and hard decisions must be made because as long as there are social interaction and people are confined in closed spaces, foodservice operations should be redesigned with innovations to minimize human interaction (Jai 2020).

This study aimed to: (1) describe the readiness of food business owners and managers for change by evaluating their perceptions of and attitudes towards this new normal foodservice model with respect to health and safety-related protocols currently in place throughout the country; (2) identify the foodservice practices in the new normal; and (3) recognize the views of food business managers to facilitate a better understanding of their needs and the gaps that need to be filled to support them in this trying time. The study explored on how the food businesses adapted during the pandemic and whether there are correlations between restaurant profiles and the business owners' and managers' COVID-19 knowledge and attitudes toward the new normal.

Framework

The study assessed whether there is a correlation between the demographics and restaurant profile and its business owners' or managers' knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions of the new normal. It also assessed whether the business owners' and managers' knowledge about COVID-19 directly affects their attitudes and perceptions of adapting to the new normal practices. Specifically, it attempted to answer the questions: (1) does the type of restaurant service affect their knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions of the new normal? and (2) do years in operation and asset size make them more flexible to change and willing to take risks?

To attain the objectives of this study, the data collection tool is summarized in Figure 1. This covers the restaurant profile and food business owners' and managers' knowledge, attitude, and perceptions of the new normal. Discussions were categorized into sections, namely, respondent's personal information, assessment of knowledge, attitude, and perception of the respondents and its relationship between the respondent's socio- demographic profile and the restaurant's profile (i.e., number of years in operation, asset size, plans to offer delivery service in the new normal scenario) in addressing challenges in the new normal.

In the knowledge bucket, there are nine (9) questions about the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) virus focusing on its transmission, contagion, and risks of COVID-19 included. The study attempted to answer if the type of restaurant service affect the respondent's knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions of the new normal. To assess the respondent's attitude, 15 questions about food safety, social distancing, cleaning and disinfection, and employee and customer health were included. In determining perception, the respondents were asked on their measures to address the demand of the consumers in the new normal as well as the challenges they encountered. In this section, the study attempted to know if the respondents become more flexible to change and risk takers based on the number of operating years and asset size of their respective restaurants.

Lastly, the relationships between knowledge and attitude, knowledge and perception, and attitude and perceptions are measured to determine if specific attributes are positively or negatively related to each other. All of these led to answering how owners and food businesses faced the pandemic and viewed the new normal.

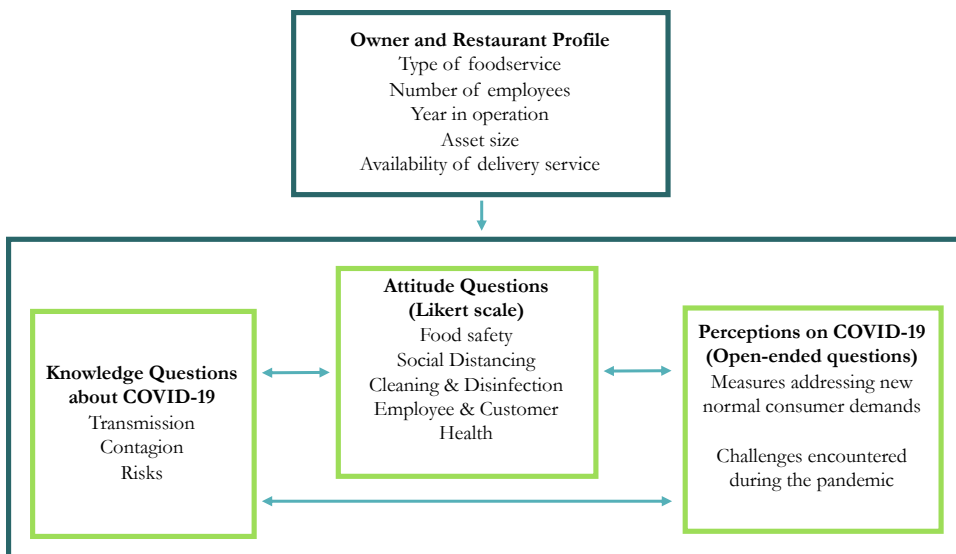


Figure 1. Knowledge, attitude, and perceptions of foodservice owners and managers on COVID-19 and the new normal foodservice model

Methodology

Metro Manila and Region IV-A have 2,230 (40.3%) and 658 (11.9%) food establishments, respectively (Philippine Statistics Authority 2020). The sample size was calculated using OpenEpi 3 (<http://openepi.com/>) following parameters such as hypothesized frequency (50%), absolute precision (10%), and confidence level (90%). As a result, a total of 81 food establishments were identified, with a target of 28 restaurants from Region IV-A and 53 restaurants from Metro Manila. Selected restaurants for interview should have the following criteria: (1) offers dine-in; and (2) have on-going operations before the COVID-19 lockdown. A total of 386 survey invitations were sent, and the study got a 21% response rate.

The online survey was conducted from June 3, 2020 to July 31, 2020 using Google Forms sent to their respective e-mail addresses. As summarized in Figure 1, the questionnaire contained items to identify the knowledge, attitude, and perceptions of the food business owners and managers in the new normal foodservice model. Respondents were asked for their consent following the ethical principles set in the Declaration of Helsinki (The World Medical Association, Inc. 2020). The frequencies were based on multiple answers of the respondents. Thematic analysis was done using NVivo® version 11. Descriptive statistics and Spearman's correlation coefficients were generated using IBM SPSS® 20.0.

Results and Discussion

Restaurant Profile

Table 2 presents the demographic profile of the surveyed food establishments' owners, managers, and operators. It was made clear in the survey's introduction that the respondents must have the appropriate authority and decision-making roles before participating in the study. The mean age of the respondents was 37.21, and both genders were represented almost equally. Almost half (49%) of the restaurants belonged to the casual dining and fast casual segments. In terms of asset size, many (48.1%) had an asset size of less than PHP 3,000,000, with only a few (6.2%) having more than PHP 100,000,000. A great majority (74%) of them offered delivery service. When asked if they would provide delivery services in the new normal scenario, two-thirds (62%) of the respondents indicated they would utilize third-party delivery services

Table 2. Demographic profile of the foodservice establishments

Characteristics	Number of respondents (n=81)
Gender of owner/operator	
Male	43
Female	38
Type of restaurant	
Fast Food	6
Fast Casual	15
Coffee shop/Snack shop	14
Family Style	11
Buffet Style	3
Casual Dining	25
Fine Dining	7
Asset size	
below PHP 3,000,000	39
PHP 3,000,001 to PHP 15,000,000	28
PHP 15,000,001 to PHP100,000,000	9
above PHP 100,000,000	5
Has existing delivery service	
Yes	60
No	21
Delivery service offered/to be offered	
No	4
In house delivery service	21
Third party delivery service	51
Undecided	5

Knowledge of and Attitude Towards the New Normal

In terms of knowledge about COVID-19, Figure 2 illustrates the percentage of the correct and incorrect responses of the food business owners and managers. All respondents answered correctly that the virus could be transmitted through respiratory droplets. Almost all (99%) were mindful of the higher risk among the vulnerable sector, including the older population and those with comorbidities.

Generally, the respondents were aware of COVID-19 symptoms. Almost all (98.8%) were aware of the common symptoms of the virus, such as fever, cough, tiredness, and loss of taste and smell. However, many (40.7%) cited that it is difficult to determine whether experienced symptoms are related to COVID-19. In terms of transmission, all of them knew that it is transmitted through droplets, from person to person, and that even those with no signs of disease can infect others. Few (19.8%) had misconceptions about touch and contact points. Though not that relevant to their operations, a few (11%) got incorrect answers on the technical term for what causes COVID-19. With this information, owners need to be

knowledgeable especially on determining COVID-19 symptoms and the effects of surface transmission which are indeed relevant in restaurant operations.

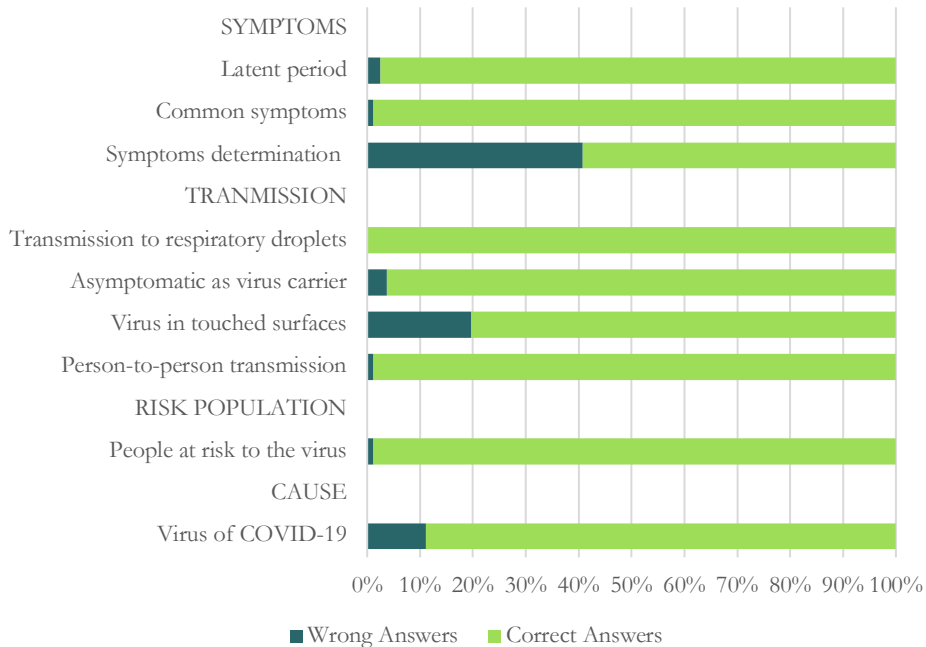


Figure 2. Responses to the knowledge questions about COVID-19

Fifteen (15) questions about food safety, cleaning and disinfection, employee and customer health, and social distancing were asked to the respondents. Figure 3 shows that respondents had a positive attitude towards the implementation of social distancing in their establishment. Almost all (82%) strongly agreed that social distancing of at least 6 feet is the best practice. Most of them also (91%) believed that dining areas should also be redesigned for social distance, and almost all (95%) agreed that social distancing could be encouraged by placing floor markings and signages. Moreover, three-fourths (75%) of the respondents agreed that a call-in reservation is a must if ever they offer dine-in service. Lastly, the majority (51%) of the respondents agreed that placing orders in the trunk of customers' vehicles who opt for pick-up can be done as a way to practice social distancing. This may be attributed to our customary way of receiving goods by hand, whether it be face-to-face or via delivery service, to verify the correctness of goods ordered.

Protecting the health of customers and employees seemed to be one of the priorities of the respondents, as all of them agreed that employee temperature check and health screening must be done every day. Also, wearing of personal protective equipment (PPE) such as a 3-ply face mask, hairnet, and gloves is a must. Most of them (78%) believed that all food handlers must attend food safety training. A few (22%) of the respondents who came from various types of foodservice establishments (cafés, fast casual, casual, family style, buffet, and fine dining) did not know how important food safety training is.

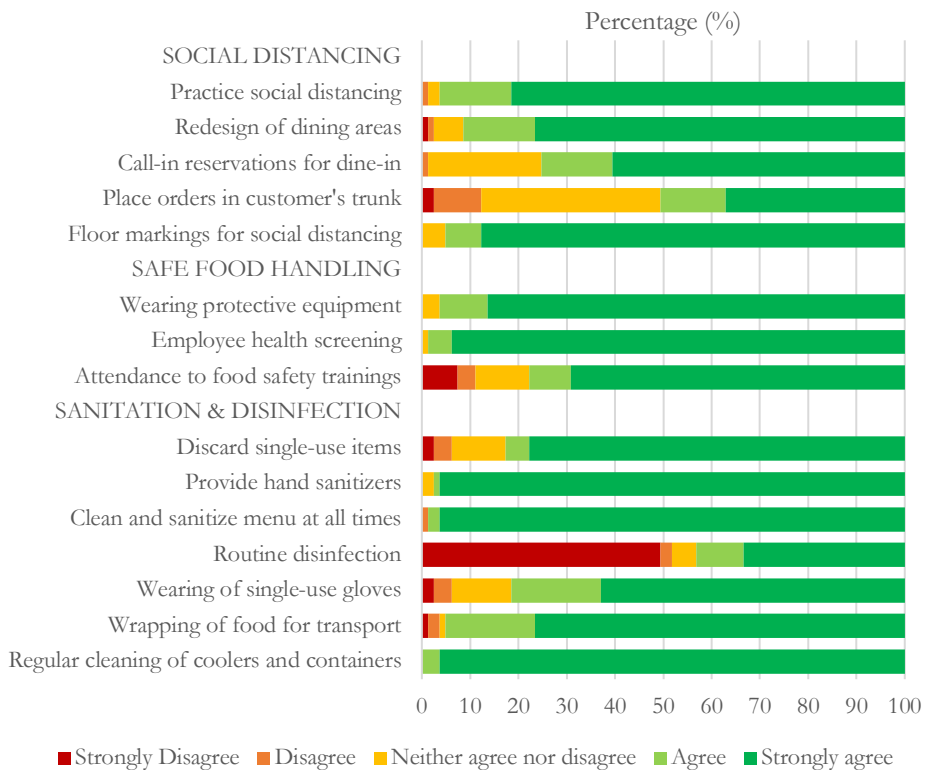


Figure 3. Responses about their attitude toward the new normal foodservice practices

In terms of cleaning and disinfection, restaurant managers showed diverse responses. Almost all respondents (99%) agreed that coolers and containers used for delivery must be cleaned regularly and that menus should be cleaned and sanitized after every use. In addition, they believed that hand sanitizers must be provided for both staff and customers. However, only a few respondents (43%) agreed that routine disinfection of frequently touched surfaces must be practiced. The examples of frequently touched surfaces given were light switches, telephones, door handles and knobs, faucets, keyboards, touch screens, tables, chairs, countertops, toilets, and even gas pumps. The lack of openness to such practice may be attributed to its effect on work efficiency and the additional overhead cost. The attitude towards the practice of routine disinfection of frequently touched surfaces needs to be improved as it is an integral part of preventing the transmission of the virus.

Attitudes of respondents toward food safety were found to be positive as well. Almost all (95%) respondents agreed that foods should be wrapped during transport, and most of them (83%) also agreed that single-use items should be discarded after use. According to van Doremalen *et al.* (2020), the persistence of SARS COV-2 on plastic and steel, 72 and 48 hours, respectively, is longer than the 24 hours on cardboard. Hence, a person may be infected if a touched surface, including food packaging, is contaminated. However, there has been no reported transmission of COVID-19 through food and food packing. Good manufacturing practices are key to avoiding cross contamination and viral transmission. Customers were more concerned about the type of food packaging and delivery services rather than the food's brand, quality, and taste (Yang *et al.* 2021). This can be perceived as food that is safely prepared and handled.

Relationship of Factors Involved in the Shift to the New Normal

Results of the correlations show that those who have been in the foodservice industry for a longer time were more likely to be resilient, as evidenced by the attitude score ($r_s=0.249$; $p<0.05$). This is further supported by the weak, positive, significant correlation between attitude score and their willingness to explore or keep their delivery service ($r_s =0.245$; $p<0.05$). This can be attributed to the developed resiliency of the owners and managers, having been in the industry longer. It is also shown from a study made by Barney (1991) that these experiences define their attitude toward how they react to their environment. A well-resourced organization has a better chance of surviving a crisis (Hecht *et al.* 2019) given the added cost of cleaning and disinfecting, reorganizing work spaces, shifting to skeleton workforce, retraining personnel, and investing in technology and new practices. Having abundant resources is key to keeping food business operations afloat despite the pandemic. By assessing the organization's financial position, foodservice owners and managers can foresee their capacity to adapt to the demands of the pandemic. Their experience in the industry and their means to survive define their attitude towards the new normal. It was also suggested by Barney (1991) that an organization's resources are a source of sustained competitive advantages. Daft (2020) pointed out that these resources enable the organizations to implement strategies that improve its efficiency and effectiveness.

Knowledge scores had a very weak correlation to attitude scores and perceptions of the new normal foodservice practices and vice versa. This may be attributed to the fact that the IATF-EID provided health and safety protocols and that food business operators must strictly follow them in order to operate. Table 3 presents the correlation coefficients of the variables mentioned.

Table 3. Spearman's correlation matrix showing the relationship of restaurant characteristics, knowledge, and attitude scores

	Years in operation	Knowledge score	Attitude score	Will offer delivery	Asset size	Legend
Years in operation	1					Negative
Knowledge score	0.067	1				Very Weak
Attitude score	0.249*	-0.141	1			Weak
Will offer delivery	0.102	-0.156	0.245*	1		Moderate
Asset size	0.278**	0.162	0.137	0.085	1	Strong
						Very Strong

Note: ***, ** significant at 1% and 5%, respectively

Perceived Changes in the New Normal

The respondents were asked about what they think are the new normal changes in the restaurant industry. Almost all expected that the practice of social distancing would continue in the new normal. Also, to almost the same degree, respondents expected that maintaining the safety of the establishment would be done through regular employee health check-ups and disinfection of the whole establishment. Though still common, the degree to which restaurants modify their menu and product forms, i.e., pre-packed, frozen, was lesser compared to other expectations. Figure 4 shows the respondents' impression of the new normal foodservice activities.

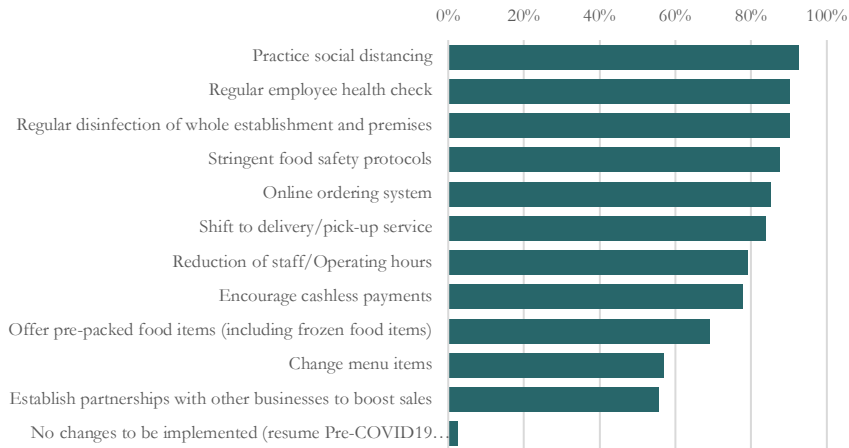


Figure 4. Respondents' impression of the new normal foodservice activities

Table 4 shows the shift of restaurants to offering delivery services. Half (50%) of those already offering delivery services planned to get third-party couriers. Few (21%) of them still planned to offer in-house delivery services. Interestingly, among those that were not offering delivery services, 5% planned to provide in-house delivery service, while a few (12%) planned to utilize third-party delivery.

Table 4. Cross-tabulation of responses indicating the shift to delivery service

Currently delivers	Plan to offer delivery			
	In-house delivery service	Third party delivery service	Undecided	No
Yes	17	41	2	0
No	4	10	3	4

Practices in the New Normal

The respondents were asked about the measures they planned to carry out given the new environment. Word cloud was used as a formative assessment tool to identify common themes or measures from the respondents. It instantly shows keywords as a graphical illustration of their knowledge (DePaolo and Wilkinson 2014). The measures that almost all establishments intended to implement fall into six major categories, namely, compliance with government's health and safety protocols (94%), shifting from dine-in to take away and delivery services (30%), investing in online platforms (17%), menu innovations (17%), and cutting down operational expenses (5%). Sanitation, physical distancing, wearing protective gear, and health checks were subcategories under compliance with health protocols mandated by the national government. The owners/managers also planned on investing in online platforms such as website creation and online transactions in ordering and payment. The use of quick response codes (QR Code) was also mentioned. Selling frozen products, flexibility in menu preparations and serving portions, and maintaining the food quality fell under the menu innovations category. Lastly, to cut down on expenses, respondents planned to negotiate rental fees, reduce manpower, and close down store branches. Figures 5 and 6 illustrate the word cloud generated from the responses.

In Figure 5, food establishments recognized that improving their food deliveries, proper compliance and implementation of health and safety protocols, and efficient operational schedule are key adjustments in order to survive in the new normal. The majority of the challenges experienced by the food establishments were a decrease in sales, as shown

Moving Towards the New Normal

From the foodservice industry perspective, the new normal primarily entails two things: first, the implementation of health and safety protocols such as social distancing, health checks, and regular disinfection; and second, changing some aspects of their business, such as shifting to online systems, delivery or pick-up service, or innovating menus. Almost all of the respondents (98%) realized that change is inevitable amid the temporary closure of public spaces and suspension of public transport.

As the foodservice industry aims to sustain operations amid heightened health risks, compliance with health and safety protocols mandated by the national government is prioritized. Almost all respondents mentioned that they intended to first follow the government health and safety protocols. At the same time, some cited specific health and safety measures such as routine health checks, physical distancing, wearing protective gears such as PPE and face masks, and frequent disinfection and sanitation. On June 2, 2020, the IATF-EID approved the guidelines on the minimum health protocols for dine-in restaurants and fast-food establishments issued by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI). It was also stipulated that these guidelines were to be implemented on top of the DTI-DOLE Interim Guidelines on Workplace Prevention and Control of COVID-19 dated 30 April 2020, as well as the Good Manufacturing Practices in restaurants and fast-food establishments. With the reopening of food establishments, the guidelines aimed to protect food workers from contracting COVID-19, prevent exposure to or transmission of the virus, and strengthen food hygiene and sanitation practices (WHO & FAO 2020). It is crucial for the foodservice industry to strengthen personal hygiene measures to eliminate or reduce the risk of food surfaces and food packaging materials becoming contaminated with the virus from food workers and customers. PPEs, such as masks and gloves, can effectively reduce the spread of viruses and disease, but only if used properly. In addition, it is strongly advised to practice social distancing, promote frequent handwashing, and proper health checks.

Meanwhile, the shift from dine-in to takeaway and delivery services was prompted by the implementation of the ECQ in Metro Manila and Region IV-A, which imposed stringent limitations on the movement and transportation of people and strict regulation of operating industries (IATF-EID 2020). The conversion of dine-in to delivery options was a strategy to sustain operations as delivery services were allowed under the Omnibus Guidelines on the Implementation of Community Quarantine in the Philippines, approved by IATF-EID in April 2020. Foodservice managers maximized the use of technology within weeks of the pandemic. The strict implementation of public health standards and home quarantine, limiting access to essential goods and services, hastened the emergence of contactless transactions. The development of websites for marketing, the use of QR codes, and the use of software applications to expand delivery systems were among the strategies employed to facilitate online transactions. Social media applications such as Facebook and Instagram were also used as inexpensive and convenient online selling platforms. Another way foodservice owners experimented with the new ways of business was through menu offering changes while still utilizing the same raw material inventories and maintaining the quality of food and the business trademark. Menu innovations were included in the pipeline to provide precooked frozen goods and precooked do-it-yourself food kits, which reflect flexibility in their menu line-up. While few (6%) focused on improving their products, others (11%) aimed to reevaluate their value proposition and rethink their strategies amid the impending crisis. To further sustain operations, there were also a few (5%) who intended to work on reducing expenses by negotiating rental fees, limiting manpower, and even closing down branches.

Challenges in the New Normal

Compliance with health and safety protocols was challenging for both managers and customers. Some managers and owners were also aware of more health risks in the workplace. Other challenges related to staffing include enforcement of a skeleton workforce, laying off personnel, resignations, and incumbent reorganization. Adapting to the new normal, where delivery has become vital, has brought logistics, schedules, and related costs challenges. Moreover, disposable packaging materials have been deemed a threat to environmental sustainability. Aside from delivery, online platforms necessitate access to technology. Not all have sufficient access and are open to technology, deterring the adoption of different modes of transaction. It was realized that there is a need to establish better communication with customers to help them understand the new normal conditions. Lack of knowledge and sufficient information on the pandemic remain to be a barrier for some to effective planning, forecasting, and establishment of clear protocols that would guide the foodservice industry.

Nuestro (2020) estimated a potential loss of about PHP 100 billion from the March to April 2020 business closures. This was evident from the survey results as the respondents said that lower sales were the major challenge encountered by the foodservice owners entering this new normal environment. This can be attributed to the reduction in foot traffic of customers following the ECQ guidelines, which limited the operation of malls, time spent outside the home due to curfews, and suspension of public transport. Physical distancing also restricted dine-in patrons and dining of large groups. Consumer behavior was also mentioned as a challenge, particularly their fear of going out and preference for home-cooked meals due to the quarantine. Following the decrease in sales, an increase in expenses was also identified as a challenge for managers attributed to the extra cost of additional supplies for cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting, delivery services, and the costly rental fees. Supply chains were also affected by the pandemic, which in turn affected food costs.

The open-ended questions in the survey also revealed that foodservice business owners and operators seek support in terms of better, clearer, and timely updates with regard to health and safety protocols. They found that the release of such protocols was late and seemed hastily done. Most of them were looking for free government-run trainings to help them adapt to the new foodservice practices.

As the country is now easing economic and social restrictions, many foodservice establishments are slowly returning to their usual operations but with new formats. While some foodservice establishments did not survive the crisis, some were quick to adapt. It can be expected to see a surge of new normal practices in foodservice operations to get consumers to open their wallets post-lockdown. These include stricter sanitation and no-touch protocols, curbside delivery options, menu bundling offerings, and promotion of proprietary products as add-ons for the consumer. For foodservice employees, new sanitation and food handling training and aggressive health and sick-days tracking can be expected.

The government has a significant role to play in providing support to foodservice establishments affected by the pandemic. Several government agencies such as the DTI, Social Security System (SSS), and DOLE provided support through waiving a month's lease (Memorandum Circular No. 20-04: Prescribing the Implementation Guidelines for IATF Resolution No. 12), lower interest loans for its members, and cash support, emergency employment, and livelihood programs. The Department of Agriculture (DA) gave guidelines (Memorandum Circular No. 06, s.2020) to ensure that the food supply chain will continue amidst the pandemic. They also provided a recovery package for loans up to PHP 300, 000 to help micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs). Similarly, DTI allotted PHP 1 billion for their microfinancing program (COVID19 P3-ERF). Aside from this, the Small Business Corporation also gave a one-month moratorium on loan payments to their MSME borrowers (PCW 2021).

Summary and Conclusion

The foodservice industry suffered tremendously when the COVID-19 pandemic struck. It changed the whole dining experience and foodservice in general. Restaurant managers and operators had to wait for the health and safety guidelines from the national government in order to operate. This, along with the imposed ECQ, resulted in a drastic decrease in sales, employee layoffs, and added costs in operations and personnel training to implement new protocols. The perceived lack of government support and ever-changing definitions of community quarantine made it even more difficult. This study explored the perceptions and readiness of foodservice establishments in Metro Manila and Region IV-A regarding COVID-19. Almost all respondents knew about COVID-19 symptoms and how the SARS-CoV2 virus is transmitted. They also had positive attitudes toward implementing safe practices to prevent the spread of disease; however, a few did not recognize the importance of disinfecting frequently touched surfaces. It was evident that restaurants with greater financial resources and longevity in business were more aggressive and more capable of adapting to the new normal. This study showed that in case of another pandemic, foodservice establishments that are amenable to change and able to innovate would be more likely to keep afloat.

Recommendations

Moving forward in this pandemic, foodservice establishment owners must be willing to adjust the way they run their business in order to survive. Strict implementation of health and safety protocols, fully vaccinated employees, and availability of al fresco dining areas may encourage consumers to patronize restaurants. Foodservice employees should undergo new sanitation and food handling training and aggressive health and sick-days tracking. Dine-in by reservation only may be another way to ensure that limited dine-in capacity is adhered to at all times. Boosting food delivery either via in-house delivery or third-party delivery services may be another way to increase sales and stay in business. Other innovations implemented by some business owners to increase sales or reduce expenses include diversifying their menu by offering frozen ready-to-eat products that consumers can easily reheat, offering DIY food kits, or downsizing their operations by only accepting pre-orders. In addition, business owners may apply for a Safety Seal Certificate that indicates that they meet the minimum public health standards; this can be a way to boost consumer confidence in their establishment.

Foodservice business owners and operators identified their need for government support in terms of training about new normal foodservice practices and financial assistance during the pandemic. Several government agencies implemented programs to help business owners during the pandemic (PCW 2021). It is recommended that the dissemination of information regarding these programs be improved so that business owners would be readily aware of existing venues for them to seek support.

The present study reveals topics that may be further explored in future researches. Aside from asset size, a foodservice establishment's financial conditions, like cash flows, liquidity, and returns, may be looked into as they allow businesses to adapt and strategize effectively (Hyoung et al. 2021). The complexity of operating the business in relation to its operation scale, including the number of employees and its financial condition, may also be looked into. The actual level of compliance with existing health protocols, such as investments in masks, PPE, thermometer scanners, and air purification and circulation improvements, may also be measured as this may be a better measure of an establishment's readiness for the new normal.

References

- Andersson, T. D., and L. Mossberg. 2004. "The Dining Experience: Do Restaurants Satisfy Customer Needs?" *Food Service Technology* 4(4): 171-177. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1471-5740.2004.00105.x>.
- Barney J. 1991. "Firm Resources and Sustained Competitive Advantage." *Journal of Management* 17(1):99–120. https://scholar.google.com/scholar_lookup?journal=J.+Manage.&title=Firm+resources+and+sustained+competitive+advantage&author=J.+Barney&volume=17&issue=1&publication_year=1991&pages=99-120&.
- Bartik, A., W. Bartik, M. Bertrand, Z.B. Cullen, E.L. Glaeser, M.L. and C.T. Stanton. 2020. "How are Small Businesses Adjusting to COVID-19? Early Evidence from a Survey." Working Paper No. 26989. National Bureau of Economic Research. <https://www.nber.org/papers/w26989>.
- Daft R. 2020. "Organizational Theory and Design." 13th edition New York: Copyright 2021. Cengage Learning. <https://au.cengage.com/c/isbn/9780357445143/>.
- DePaolo, C. and Wilkinson, K. 2014. "Get Your Head into the Clouds: Using Word Clouds for Analyzing Qualitative Assessment Data." *TechTrends* 58: 38-44. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11528-014-0750-9>.
- Department of Trade and Industry. 2020. "Memorandum Circular No. 20-39, Increasing the Operating Capacity of Dine-In Food Establishments, Amending for the Purpose DTI Memorandum Circular No. 20-37, Series of 2020." DTI. https://dtiwebfiles.s3-ap-southeast1.amazonaws.com/COVID19Resources/COVID-19+Advisories/180720_MC2039.pdf.
- Hecht, A.A., E. Biehl, D.J. Barnett, and R.A Neff. 2019. "Urban Food Supply Chain Resilience for Crises Threatening Food Security: A Qualitative Study." *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics* 119 (2): 211-224. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jand.2018.09.001>
- Hyoung J.S., Jihwan, Y., and Seoki, L. 2021. "Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic: Evidence from the U.S. Restaurant Industry." *International Journal of Hospitality Management* 92 (2021): 102702. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7528845/#bib0020>.
- Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF-EID). 2020. "Omnibus Guidelines on the Implementation of Community Quarantine in the Philippines with Amendments As of June 25, 2020." IATF-EID. <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/downloads/2020/06jun/20200625-omnibus-guidelines-on-the-implementation-of-community-quarantine-in-the-philippines.pdf>.
- Lewnard, J. A., and N.C. Lo. 2020. "Scientific and Ethical Basis for Social-Distancing Interventions Against COVID-19." *The Lancet Infectious Diseases* 20(6): 631-633. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/laninf/article/PIIS1473-3099\(20\)30190-0/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/laninf/article/PIIS1473-3099(20)30190-0/fulltext).
- Lu, J., J. Gu, K. Li, C. Xu, W. Su, Z. Lai, D. Zhou, C. Yu, B. Xu, and Z. Yang. 2020. "COVID-19 Outbreak Associated with air Conditioning in Restaurant, Guangzhou, China." *Emerging Infectious Diseases* 26(7): 1628-2631. https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/eid/article/26/7/20-0764_article.
- National Economic Development Authority (NEDA). 2020. "Addressing the Social and Economic Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic." NEDA. https://www.neda.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/NEDA_Addressing-the-Social-and-Economic-Impact-of-the-COVID-19-Pandemic.pdf.
- Nuestro, E. 2020. "Opinion: The Future of Restaurants in the Philippines and How F&B Industry Can Bounce Back." *Tatler Philippines*.

<https://ph.asiatatler.com/dining/the-future-of-restaurants-in-the-philippines-how-fb-industry-can-bounce-back>.

- Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA). 2020. "2017 Annual Survey of Philippine Business and Industry (ASPBI) - Economy Wide for Establishment with Total Employment of 20 and Over: Preliminary Results." PSA. <https://psa.gov.ph/content/2017-annual-survey-philippine-business-and-industry-aspbi-economy-wide-establishment-total>.
- Philippine Commission on Women (PCW). 2021. "Policies, Programs, and Services of Government Agencies Concerning COVID-19." PCW. <https://pcw.gov.ph/covid-19-programs-and-services/>.
- PwC Philippines. 2020. "Impact of COVID-19 on the Philippine Tourism Industry." PwC. <https://www.pwc.com/ph/en/publications/tourism-pwc-philippines/tourism-covid-19.html>.
- Rubio, J. C. 2019. "Food Service - Hotel Restaurant Institutional. Foreign Agriculture Service." United States Department of Agriculture. Report Number: RP2019-0021. https://apps.fas.usda.gov/newgainapi/api/Report/DownloadReportByFileName?fileName=Food%20Service%20-%20Hotel%20Restaurant%20Institutional_Manila_Philippines_09-30-2019.
- The Economist. 2020. "Four Months and Counting The Philippines' Fierce Lockdown Drags on, Despite Uncertain Benefits." The Economist. <https://www.economist.com/asia/2020/07/11/the-philippines-fierce-lockdown-drags-on-despite-uncertain-benefits>.
- The World Medical Association, Inc. 2020. "WMA Declaration of Helsinki – Ethical Principles for Medical Research Involving Human Subjects." WMA. <https://www.wma.net/policies-post/wma-declaration-of-helsinki-ethical-principles-for-medical-research-involving-human-subjects/>.
- van Doremalen, N., T. Bushmaker, D.H. Morris, M.G. Holbrook, A. Gamble, B.N. Williamson, A. Tamin, J. L. Harcourt, N.J. Thornburg, S.I. Gerber, J.O. Lloyd-Smith, E. de Wit, and V.J. Munster. "Aerosol and Surface Stability of SARS-CoV-2 as Compared with SARS-CoV-1." *New England Journal of Medicine* 382(16): 1564-1567. <https://www.nejm.org/doi/pdf/10.1056/NEJMc2004973?articleTools=true>.
- Wardono, P., H. Hibino, and S. Koyama. 2012. "Effects of Interior Colors, Lighting and Decors on Perceived Sociability, Emotion and Behavior Related to Social Dining." *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 38(2012): 362–372. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877042812008373?via%3Dihub>.
- World Health Organization. 2020. "COVID-19 in the Philippines." Situation Report 5. <https://www.who.int/philippines/internal-publications-detail/covid-19-in-the-philippines-situation-report-51>.
- World Health Organization. 2020. "COVID-19 and Food Safety: Guidance for Food Businesses." Interim Guidance. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/covid-19-and-food-safety-guidance-for-food-businesses>.
- Yang, F. X., Li, X., Lau, V. M. C., and Zhu, V. Z. 2021. "To Survive or to Thrive? China's Luxury Hotel Restaurants Entering O2O Food Delivery Platforms amid the COVID-19 Crisis." *International Journal of Hospitality Management* 94(2021): 102855. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0278431920304072>.