This report looks at the following areas:

- The impact of COVID-19 on the fast food market.
- Changes in consumer usage of and expenditure on fast food outlets.
- Ethical issues that fast food outlets must pay attention to.
- Consumer behaviours relating to fast food, including fast food occasions.

Fast food takeaway habits built during the pandemic look set to stick in the next 12 months as most fast food consumers plan to order about the same amount or more takeaways compared to the last 12 months, especially when it comes to ordering takeaways for home delivery (81%), from drive-throughs (80%), in-person (80%) and for collection (77%). This suggests that the legacy of the pandemic will see consumers continue to access a greater range of takeaway and home delivery options than they did before.

Many are still cautious about dining out, and therefore the percentage of Britons spending more on dining out compared to before the pandemic continues to be in single-digit percentages, whilst 22% of Britons are spending more on takeaways/home delivery as of 22–29 July 2021.

As full-time workers (89%) were more likely than non-workers (66%) to have eaten in or ordered takeaway from a fast food outlet in the last 12 months, the impact of further job losses will result in more polarised consumer behaviour as consumers losing their jobs will be restricted by tighter budgets when it comes to things like eating at fast food outlets.

The heightened awareness of the importance of in-person experiences with family and friends bodes well for fast food outlets as three fifths of fast food consumers enjoy catching up with friends/family over a fast food meal, and therefore operators should tap into consumers’ desire for a treat with a sense of occasion, including shareable feasts as seen in KFC’s range of ‘For Sharing’ meals.

“The pandemic has changed the way consumers consume fast food. Instead of relying solely on spontaneous visits from consumers seeking a convenient meal solution while they are on the move, fast food operators are now meeting consumer demand for a fast food treat with a sense of occasion.”

– Trish Caddy, Senior Foodservice Analyst

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