



PERCEPTION OF COVID-19 IN FOOD INDUSTRY AMONG FOOD HANDLERS: PRESENT CRISIS AND CHALLENGES AHEAD

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ABSTRACT

Background: Being a pandemic, coronavirus (COVID-19) has led to the nationwide crisis and is no exception, the food Industries have fallen drastically and declined then the times of SARS and EBOLA outbreak. The food industry provides food and drink to the customers beyond that it satisfies and rejuvenates the human need and builds social relationships. Hence it is necessary to study its crisis and threats during and after the pandemic. **Objectives:** To obtain information regarding the present scenario/crisis in the restaurants and to collect data regarding customer preferences and to assess the impact anticipated in the food industry after pandemic. **Methodology:** A Voluntary survey was conducted among fifty three food handlers working in restaurants/hotels, Chennai. A questionnaire was structured and mailed to the participants of the study. Telephonic interview was carried out for some of the participants. **Results:** Ninety-eight percent of the respondents have said that social dining has been affected due to this covid-19 pandemic. Majority (94%) of the food handlers needs a bail out (financial assistance) for smooth functioning, to protect million of jobs in hospitality industry and to rescue dependants of the sector. Eighty eight percent of the food handlers have agreed the statement of using artificial intelligence in the food industries during the pandemic minimizes the risk of transmission of the virus and the reason was virus may need human host for survival and the robots can be sterilized easily to reduce the rate of transmission. **Conclusion:** After pandemic food handlers emphasize about the major threats in the food industry are less manpower, wastage of stored stocks, and maintenance defect in the equipment.

Keywords: COVID 19, Food industry, Artificial Intelligence, Food Handlers, Crisis

INTRODUCTION

Corona virus (COVID-19) is an illness caused by a virus that can spread from person to person. COVID-19 symptoms can range from mild (or no symptoms) to severe illness. Older adults and people of any age who have serious medical conditions may be at higher risk for more severe illness (1). Being a pandemic, corona virus has led to worldwide crisis and its effects and financial crisis in hospitality industries are more adverse than those of SARS, 2008. No exception that entities such as cafés, restaurants and small family businesses are also affected and susceptible to crisis. They are more vulnerable due to the changes in the supply chain and also demand reduces drastically (2). Not only is the food industry facing hardship, whole of travel and tourism sectors will face difficulties after pandemic (3). The biggest challenge after pandemic will be engaging full capacity of human resources in the

work. Since utilizing employees in customer related activities in the food service process and also the food handlers should be willing to work are unreliable (4).

METHODOLOGY

A Voluntary survey was conducted among fifty three food handlers working in restaurants/hotels, Chennai. A questionnaire was structured and mailed to the participants of the study. Telephonic interview was carried out for some of the participants. Collected data was coded and analyzed in MS office.

Study Period:

The study was conducted in the period of April 2020 to May 2020 at the time of pandemic.

Aims/Objectives of the study:

1. To obtain information regarding the present scenario/crisis in the restaurants.
2. To collect data regarding customer preferences in the restaurants
3. To assess the impact anticipated in the food industry after pandemic.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table: 1 Percentage Distribution of Culture of Social Dining Among Customers

Social Dining	Number	Percent
Yes	52	98
No	01	2
If Yes, to which %	Number	Percent
10 -20%	01	02
20 -30%	09	17
50%	05	12
60 -70%	06	10
Above 80%	31	59

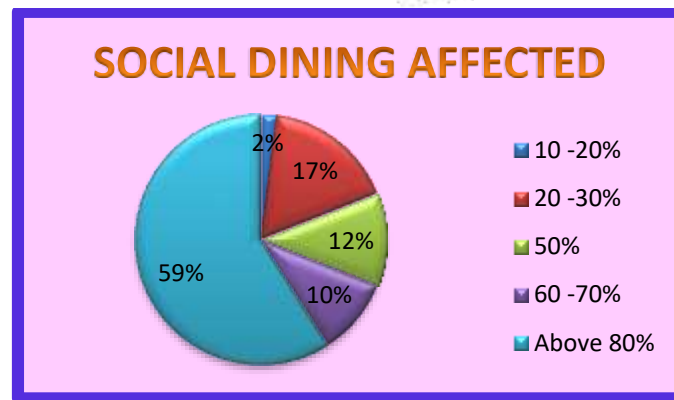


Figure 1: Percentage distribution of social dining got reduced due to pandemic

From the table1, it has been inferred that Ninety-eight percent of the respondents have said that social dining has been affected due to this covid-19 pandemic. Figure 1 shows that among them Twelve percent of the food

handlers have said that culture of eating out was affected to 50%, other ten percent of the food handlers said social dining got affected between 60-70% and majority (fifty-nine percent) of the food handlers said above 80%.

Due to pandemic, food service is one of the industries which got affected. National Restaurant Association of India estimated around Rs 4, 23,865 Crores in India and employing more than 7, 00,000 people. One of the best emerging trends in India was social dining, where tables in restaurants and bars are shared attempted to create bonds between strangers over food and drink (5)

According to NRAI, the revenue loss will be predicted to fall by fifty percent. (10) At an all-India level, in the third week of March 2020, the hotels sector witnessed more than 65% decline in occupancy levels as compared to the previous year,(6)

Table: 2 Percentage Distribution of Impact in food industry after pandemic

Impact in future	Number	Percent
Moderate impact	03	6
Major impact	50	94
How long it will take to recover	Number	Percent
6 months	19	36
12 months	22	42
More than a year	12	22

Table 2 summarizes that, majority of the food handlers (Ninety four percent) have a thought that, the food industry will have major impact due to covid-19 pandemic situation. Thirty percent of the food handlers anticipate that food industries may need six months to recover from this covid-19 pandemic, other forty-two percent of the food handlers said 12 months to recover from this pandemic.

The hotel industry may experience major impacts such as unemployment, revenue loss in hotels, bars, restaurants, and shortage of raw materials due to nationwide lockdown. (7) Indian Hotel Company and Hotel Association of India estimates that it will take a long time for tourism and travel demand to come back to its normal levels, a conservative estimate is that it could take anywhere from 6 to 9 months to recover fully, once the outbreak is effectively contained. (8)

Table: 3 Percentage Distribution of hotel industry need Bail out (financial support) for a 12-month corporate tax, to travel, tourism, and hospitality sector

Bail out – Financial Support	Number	Percent
Yes	50	94
No	03	06

Table 3 reveals that, Majority (94%) of the food handlers needs a bail out (financial assistance) for smooth functioning, to protect million of jobs in hospitality industry and to rescue dependants of the sector.

The Federation of Associations in Indian Tourism and Hospitality (FAITH), requested for a twelve months' moratorium on EMIs of principle and interest payments on loans and working capital from financial institutions

besides a doubling of working capital limits on interest free and collateral free terms. This is to prevent businesses from going bankrupt. (9)

Table: 4 Percentage Distribution of food and beverage revenue which is affected due to this pandemic

F&B revenue Affected	Number	Percent
Agree	53	100
Disagree	0	0

From the table 4, it has been observed that, entire population (100%) of the food handlers have agreed to the fact that key for food and beverage revenue - banquets and Outdoor catering are affected drastically due to this covid-19 pandemic.

Food and beverage service are the highest revenue generating outlet which comprises of banquet bookings such as wedding events, parties, conferences and outdoor catering. Due to covid-19 pandemic and nationwide lockdown most of the weddings and events has been postponed and cancelled due to this covid-19 pandemic. Nearly 45-80% of the weddings getting postponed or cancelled (10)

Table: 5 Percentage Distribution of Customer preference for cold cuts or meat on Pandemic

Preference for cold cuts	Number	Percent
Less preference	27	51
High Demand	02	4
Remain unchanged	24	45

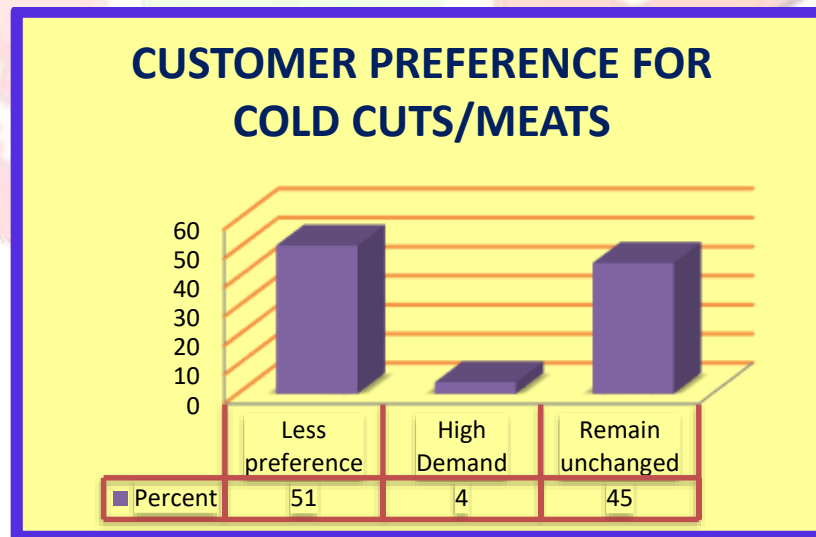


Figure2. Percentage Distribution of Customer Preference for Cold Cuts/Meats

As shown in the figure 2 that, Majority (51%) of the food handlers said that customer preference towards meats and cold cuts are less, other forty-five percent preference for cold cuts and meat is remaining unchanged at the time of Corona outbreak.

According to WHO, the animal source of the covid-19 has not identified yet. But, the consumption of raw or undercooked animal products should be avoided. Raw meat, milk or animal organs should be handled with care, to avoid cross-contamination with uncooked foods, as per good food safety practices (11).

Table 6: Percentage distribution of Usage of artificial intelligence in the food industry during the pandemic minimizes the risk of transmission of the virus

Artificial Intelligence	Number	Percent
Agree	47	88
Disagree	06	12

Table 6 summarizes that , Majority (88%) of the food handlers have agreed the statement of using artificial intelligence in the food industries during the pandemic minimizes the risk of transmission of the virus and the reason was virus may need human host for survival and the robots can be sterilized easily to reduce the rate of transmission. The other twelve percent of the food handlers were against the statement because they discussed that it may reduce the man power and leads to unemployment in the food industry.

Robots aren't susceptible to the virus, so they are being deployed to complete many tasks such as cleaning and sterilizing and delivering food and medicine to reduce the amount of human-to-human contact. UVD robots from Blue Ocean Robotics use ultraviolet light to autonomously kill bacteria and viruses. In China, Pudu Technology deployed its robots that are typically used in the catering industry to more than 40 hospitals around the country. (12)

CONCLUSION:

The results revealed that food Industries have fallen drastically due to Covid 19 pandemic declined than the times of SARS and EBOLA outbreak as per the information shared by food handlers. Removing buffet lines, moving to Ala carte, and providing online delivery to the customers during pandemic minimizes the risk of social transmission. After pandemic food handlers emphasize the major threats in the food industry are less manpower, wastage of stored stocks, and maintenance defect in the equipment. To increase the demand of the customers and to improve their ranking between other outlets, the food industry is in thought to offer attractive discounts and combos after the pandemic.

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