Post-Lockdown Eating-Out: Apprehensions and Expectations

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Abstract   *The Indian restaurant industry is one of the largest service sectors employing 7.3 million people in 2018-19. COVID-19 pandemic has brought industry at a brink of an existential crisis giving rise to a host of unforeseen challenges and roadblocks. COVID pandemic, indicate changes in the eating-out patterns with transformed customer's expectation. All the discussions on the revival of hospitality and tourism post-lockdown are from the supply side. However, there have been few studies that look at the situation from the demand sides.*

This research analysed millennial customers' sentiments towards re-patronising food outlets post-lockdown using a mixed-method approach. The research concludes that only 18.5% of millennials are willing to re-patronise eating at restaurants post lockdown. However, there is a large segment with 51.05% open to home delivery of food and 54.90 % open to take away food. The study has highlighted a significant difference in dining behaviour between generation X and generation Y. It has identified three major demographic segments based on willingness to eat out specifically in the context of the prevailing pandemic. These are daring diner millennials, cautious diner millennials and fearful diner millennials. The Need-risk grid explaining the quadrant shift of eating out activity is a crucial contribution of the study.

Keywords: COVID Pandemic, Millennials, Customers' sentiments, Food Away from Home (FAFH), Eating Out, Restaurants

INTRODUCTION

Population across the world is undergoing a rapid transition in food consumption due to changing lifestyle and socio-economic factors. The good economic conditions, disposable income, hectic lifestyles, working away from home, working mothers, limited time for preparing food and easy availability of eating outlets has fuelled tremendous growth in eating out behaviour. The frequency of this phenomenon has seen a shift from occasional to frequent. The commercialisation of food industry, increased food variety, relaxed, enjoyable environment and massive promotions have encouraged eating out, and it has become an everyday norm of socialising outside home or outing with family (Arora, Chawla & Bansal, 2014). Socialising is the spirit of dining out which has been restricted by COVID bringing the entire food and beverage industry to a halt. The researchers intend to explore and research the readiness of millennial customers, their expectations and changed preferences about reformed protocols at the eating outlets to ensure credibility in dining.

The Research Issues

The unprecedented and unique situation created by COVID gave a rare opportunity to research fraternity wherein dining motivations, apprehensions, fears and expectations of the customer can be examined in the backdrop of the pandemic. The researchers aim to explore the eating behaviour of millennial population concerning restaurants attributes, dining out frequency, the preferred occasion for dining out and preferred foodservice style and also to explore whether demographics play any mediation role.

RQ 1:   What is the dining behaviour of the millennial population and to examine whether any demographic factors mediate the behaviour?

RQ 2:   Is there any change in pre and post lockdown dining behaviour and preferences?

RQ3:   Is millennial dining behaviour identical across generation span or it exhibits segmental differences?

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RQ4: What are the various preferred restaurant attributes of millennials post the opening?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Restaurant and Its Evolution

The origin of the restaurant can be traced to the city of Paris where, taverns, inns and boarding houses of early times offered food and alcoholic beverages. The restaurants were not only limited to Paris. They existed in the thirteenth century in the city of Hangchow which was the largest city of the world at that time, wealthy, luxurious and taverns sold food and drinks, Menus were given to customers with the listed price. Restaurants were serving a certain kind of food (Kiefer, 2002). The pictures depicting kitchen were not very pleasant and showed toilsome labour and brutal hard-work (Akdeniz, 2019). Spang (2007) suggests that the evolution of French Society led to the development of modern restaurants. Increasing demand for food away from home probably led to the creation of modern-day restaurant with individual tables, ordering, dining times and payment by items ordered. The restaurant, therefore, is the result of the economic forces and can't just be seen as the outcome of the French Revolution (Kiefer, 2002). The socio-economic development and growth changed the lives with working parents, changing consumption patterns and paved the way for an increase in the number of people eating out (Mealy, 2018).

Restaurants in India

The restaurant industry in India is divided into four categories- Quick Service Restaurants(QSRs), fine dining restaurants, casual dining and cafes/bars and pubs. It is considered a promising and potential market due to favourable demographics where 50% of the Indian population below 25 years of age and 65% are below 35 years of age. The concept of ghost restaurants, online food delivery, QSR and hyper-local marketing is expected to rise in tier II and Tier III cities (Marwah & Dhanota, 2015). As per a report of FICCI, the share of standalone restaurants in the Indian food industry is expected to grow to 79% with 47% growth in tier II and tier III cities, and they have termed Indian food Industry as the engine for economic growth and employment (Baru & Nangia, 2017).

COVID19 and its Impact

The emergence of this coronavirus has brought no surprise to the public health community as there has been a similar outbreak of the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) coronavirus in the early 2000s as well. SARS was the first real case of a global health emergency when in November 2002, "WHO declared Guangzhou and Hong Kong as high-risk tourist destinations and several areas within China as epidemic zones"(Bartik et al., 2020). A similar scenario emerged in case of novel coronavirus; "WHO declared the 2019-nCoV outbreak to be a global pandemic and public health emergency of international concern on January 30, 2020" (WHO Statement, 2020).

The pandemic has significantly affected the hospitality industry, and it will take quite some time to revive again. The strategies adopted to reduce the COVID-19 curve such as lockdowns, physical distancing, Janta curfews, restrictions on travel and mobility have led to a temporary closure of many hospitality businesses, and there was a significant decline in the demand for businesses that were permitted to operate (Bartik et al., 2020). The restaurants' operations were only confined to take- away and delivery. The fear of the spread of COVID-19 demanded social distancing, which severely affected the restaurant industry during the pandemic (Gössling, Scott & Hall, 2020).

Eating-Out behaviour/ Food Away From Home (FAFH)

Motivation of Eating-out

Eating-out or Food Away From Home (FAHF) is the driving force of the restaurant industry. Eating out was defined as the consumption of foods and beverages anywhere other than in household premises, irrespective of the place of purchase/ preparation preparation (Orfanso, Nasaka, Trichopoulou, Grioni, Boer & Ericcson, 2009). As per socio-demographic characteristics, generations X and Y were noted for eating out as compared to baby boomers. Majority of people had tertiary education and were employed (Fraikue, 2016). Food quality was the most significant factor affecting satisfaction levels in chain units, whereas, in independent units, it was driven by server responsiveness (Young, Clark & Mclmtyre, 2008). Millennials have high spending power, enjoy spending money on eating out and are influenced mainly by electronic word of mouth. Moreover, widely-shared post about restaurant creates attention and social pressure to go there (Tersen, 2017).

Eating-out in India

Food intake habits in India have shifted dramatically due to rises in disposable income per capita, transfers in families to higher-income classes, improvements in the family structure, increased involvement of women in the workforce, changes in lifestyles, increased education and health literacy, increased access to knowledge and digital technology, urbanisation, and more (Rao, Birthal & Joshi (2006); Pingali & Khawaja (2004)). Over the last few

decades, per capita food-away-from-home (FAFH) spending as a share of per capita food consumption expenses has increased significantly. On average, the number of meals served outside the home was 14.6 per household and 3.3 per Indian. (NSSO, 2007). Traditionally, Indian customers tend to eat home-cooked meals. This concept is economically, culturally, and spiritually sponsored, as well as personally, where female members typically prepare food for the whole family (Goyal & Singh, 2007). Owing to a shift in the pattern of food intake and an evolving increase in eating habits, eating out has become part of a busy lifestyle and fashion statement to celebrate special events and appreciate the taste of cultural taste (Jaksa & Crotts, 2006).

Factors Affecting Eating-out Behaviour

Several factors are affecting the eating-out behaviour

Attributes of Restaurant

A study conducted on the customers of Spanish restaurants revealed that the quality of food was the most crucial attribute which was followed by quality of service, cost/ value of meals and then place/ ambience(Soriano, 2002). In another study which examined the relationship between the restaurant satisfaction and place of residence, it was concluded that customer satisfaction with restaurant is affected by regional influence- regional consumption, food taste, economic condition, population density have a negative moderating effect (Zhang, Zhang & Law, 2013). The website data mining revealed that food menu, offering in menu, ambience, and service generate maximum comments and feedback on social media (Bilgihan, Seo & Choi, 2018). The study also shows that customers preferred dim lighting, down-to-earth, rustic and authentic setting. It reveals that though the main aim of the customer is to satisfy the appetite, the dining experiences include gaze and other senses, even before they start tasting food and beverages (Alonso, Duarte & Martin, 2010).

Restaurant Image

Brand image plays a crucial role in consumer behaviour as it affects the perception, sense of value, satisfaction and behavioural intentions (Lemon, Verhoef & Parasuraman, 2009). It is a symbolic thing responsible for recall and associations resulting from the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that people have of a place (Brinberg & Baloglu, 1997). Since service quality is vital to the experience, so the perception of the restaurant directly influences restaurant image (Ruy, Lee, & Kim, 2008). Generating high-quality customer experience is one of the central concepts to creating a loyal customer base and a sustainable competitive advantage(Lemon, Verhoef, & Parasuraman, 2009).In a study involving full-service restaurants that offered full table service in south Jakarta revealed that three aspects of the dining experience, namely- food quality, service quality and physical environment have a positive influence on customer satisfaction; further, customer satisfaction positively influences behavioural intentions (Canny, 2013).

Customer Satisfaction

Some studies have identified factors of dining experience that influence customers' satisfaction. Saad & Conway (2006) identified these factors as including waiting time, quality of service, the responsiveness of employees, menu variety, food prices, food quality, food consistency, the ambience of the facilities, and convenience. Another study suggests that customer loyalty and retention depend on five attributes including service quality, food quality, ambience quality, first and last impression, and comfort level of the restaurant (Kivela, Inbakaran, & Reece, 1999). A study conducted among students in public university finally gave a DINESERV model which suggested that factors affecting customer dining satisfaction depend on food quality, atmosphere, service quality, convenience, price, and value (Kim, Ng & Kim, 2009).

Demographics and Eating-out Behaviour

Repeatedly, studies have shown and proved a significant effect of various demographic factors on eating out behaviour. In one of the studies conducted in a multicultural country, Mauritius revealed that socio-demographic factors had a significant relation to OHMs (out of home meals) with gender, age, socio-economic status based on education and occupation (Mahomoodally, Krige, Subratty & Ramasawmy, 2012). Yet another study conducted among Chinese students showed a high frequency of eating in students, and it is directly proportional to monthly expenses with females outnumbering the males, especially on weekdays. The motivations were a taste, convenience, and opportunity to meet with friends (Hu et al., 2017). A similar study conducted in the UK showed that the trend of meals out and took away meals was highest in young adults aged between 19-29 years (Adams, et al., 2015). In India, a study of fast-food consumption in Mizoram suggested that demographic factors play an important role in eating decisions and younger generations consume more fast food as compared to older people (Lalnunthara & Kumar, 2018).

Millennials

According to demographer David Foot, the Millennials are a cohort born between 1980 and 1995 (Foot and Stoffman,1998). He also refers to them as "Baby Boom Echo," as the Millennials are the children of the Baby Boomers (1946-65). As a cohort, Millennials are said to share a common location in historical time, shaped by the historical events and experiences of that time (Gilleard, 2004). Millennials are grouped as Gen X, born between 1965 and 1980 and are currently between 40-55 years old and Gen Y, born between 1980 and 1994. They are currently

between 24-39 years old. As a result, of the environment in which Millennials grew up during their formation years have influenced their values, attitudes, and behaviour. Millennials follow a contemporary lifestyle and come up with unique and distinct preferences when it comes to their food and beverage experiences. Millennials have been a food trendsetter and have revolutionised the food culture in an extraordinary manner (Chambers, 2010).

Reflection of Post Lockdown Eating Habits

In an extensive survey conducted by Nielson post-lockdown in 74 markets, indicated that consumers in the Chinese Mainland, Hong Kong, South Korea, Malaysia and Vietnam would eat at home more often. The study shows inclination towards takeaway food and home deliveries of food. Almost 80% of consumers said they would be eating healthy even after the epidemic is over(Nielson, 2020). The survey shows that there would be a reprioritisation of eating habits towards home cooking and home eating. The trends are evident and significant, with 86% of people in Chinese Mainland wanting to eat at home post-pandemic, 77% in Hong Kong and 62% in each of Malaysia, Vietnam and South Korea. Besides each of these countries also show a significantly increased inclination towards takeaway/ and food deliveries. Moreover, consumers' increased attention to hygiene and their intention to improve immunity is expected to surge, which will reflect on increased demand that can be met with upgraded materials, innovation, techniques, and equipment(Wahi & Ramanathan, 2020).

METHODOLOGY

The mixed-method has been used, including both qualitative and quantitative methods, and the results were triangulated to make the study robust.The research highlights the nationwide impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the Indian hospitality sector. The researchers have conducted the study pan India to uniformly gather the data from millennials residing in different cities of the country. Customers' sentiments towards re-patronising food outlets post the pandemic was captured using a semi-structured questionnaire administered to a sample of close to 350 respondents during April- May 2020.

For data analysis and interpretation, the research used the mixed-method triangulation. Various statistical tools like Friedman ANOVA, Wilcoxon, EFA were used to derive the conclusions. Researchers triangulated the findings with the opinion of eighteen service providers. The insights were used to develop a Need-Risk grid which is a crucial contribution of this research. The experts discussed their preparedness and suggested various strategies to combat the pandemic.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Profile of Respondents

The demographic data of the millennials were analysed using frequency distribution. Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the respondents as captured in the questionnaire and shows the essential characteristics of the sample population.

Males dominated the sample. However, Generation X and

Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Attribute	N	%		Attribute	N	%
Gender				Millennial generation		
Female	113	32.2		Generation X	158	45.0
Male	238	67.8		Generation Y	193	55.0
Marital status				City type		
Unmarried	106	30.2		Tier I	128	36.5
Married	245	69.8		Tier II	223	63.5
Occupation				Education		
Service (Govt)	25	7.1		Matriculation	4	1.1
Student	12	3.4		Graduate	111	31.6
Unemployed	30	8.5		Professional	89	25.4
Business	40	11.4		Post Graduate	147	41.9
Service (Private)	244	69.5				

Generation Y (the two major segments of millennials) were represented equitably in the sample. 70% of respondents in the sample were married. The sample was 100% literate with 42% postgraduates. The data shows the majority of respondents working with private companies and residing in tier-II cities. Indian cities are classified as X (Tier 1), Y (Tier 2), and Z (Tier 3) categories by the Government of India, based on the population of the city. The data is a good representation of millennial with a significant distribution across all demographics.

Exploratory Analysis of Eating-out Behaviour Among Millennials

Researchers have used the attributes gathered from the literature to explore the eating behaviour of millennials. The respondents were asked to rank the various attributes they look for in a food outlet while selecting them. Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to establish the normality of the data. Data was found to be non-normal. Thus, Friedman's nonparametric test was applied to get the mean ranking of the attributes. Friedman One-way ANOVA measures analysis of variance by ranks. The analysis shows that millennials value food taste, quality, and safety as the essential attribute of the restaurant, followed by ambience and service. The food variety and value for money came in at position three. The additional service, convenience, security factors are not very important as suggested by the findings of the analysis. The entire sample of millennials revealed a great inclination towards eating out with 62% eating out more than once in a month, and 33% eat out more than three times. But generation Y millennials show extra zeal for eating out with 62% having eating out instances more than thrice a month. Hence it would not be wrong to say that within millennials – Generation Y is more enthusiastic and passionate toward eating out.

Mean ranks of various attributes, specifically preferred dining outlet, the preferred occasion for eating out and preferred style of service while eating out was analysed using Friedman ANOVA. The findings show that millennials prefer eating in Fine Dining restaurants, followed by Fast Food outlets. Street food was their last preference. Millennials generally prefer to dine out on special occasions like birthdays/ anniversaries followed by weekend outings. The most preferred style of service is waiter-service, followed by buffet-service. To further judge the sentiments towards patronising food outlets when they reopen, was asked. The data revealed that 81.5% of the millennial population showed resistance and was not willing to go to restaurants. Further probe into these 81.5 % millennials revealed that 59.8 % of them would resume eating out after 3 to 6 months (46.2% millennials would go and resume eating out within 3 to 6 months and 13.6 % would do that post six months). 40.2%

of millennials maintained that they would not resume eating out till some medication is developed or vaccine is invented. Close to 59.8% of millennials can be expected to return to the restaurants within three to six months of opening.

Various cross-tabulation of demographic attributes like age, generation and city helped to categorise the millennials into three types based on demographics and eating behaviour-

Daring Diners - It is dominated by generation Y unmarried millennials who are risk-taking and will resume eating out as soon as restaurants open (18.5%) and generally from Tier-II cities.

Cautious Diners-Of the 81.5% millennials who are not willing to go out and eat, 51.05% were open to home delivery of food, while 54.90 % were open to takeaway food. These are categorised as cautious diners. This trend is dominated by generation X, married millennials, who will play safe, show a restrictive behaviour; however, will prefer home delivery and take away over eating out.

Fearful Diners-Of the 81.5% millennials, 48.95% were not ready for home delivery of food, and 45.10 % were not ready for takeaway food. These are fearful-diners. This segment comprises of married generation X millennials. They exhibit a restrictive behaviour, will not patronise eating out till about six months and will not even go for home delivery or take away till the time there is a vaccine or medication available.

A separate survey was conducted to understand the expectation of general people from the restaurant industry in termsof special measures they expect. The findings suggested that people have the following expectations in order of preference.

The most preferred precautions include hand sanitising stations throughout the restaurants and sanitising the tables and chairs pre and post dining in the presence of the customer; staff wearing masks and gloves, rigorous cleaning and sanitisation protocols deploying the latest techniques; checking temperatures and sanitisation of customers/ Restaurant seating, ensuring social distancing.

Of the 81.5 % millennials who are reluctant, 85.6% of them will not resume eating out even if their family and friend start doing so. Around 14.3% may reconsider their decision based on referrals and recommendations. The analysis shows another positive aspect highlighting comfort towards home delivery and takeaway post lockdown.

Researchers analysed the various apprehensions of millennials (81.5%) who are not willing to go out and eat. The study revealed that fear of COVID (38.1%) and uncertainty about the safety and hygiene (38.4%) at the outlets are the main inhibiting factors constituting 76.5%. Besides these other factors include 'wait and watch approach' where people want to wait and give time for things to settle down (13.9%).
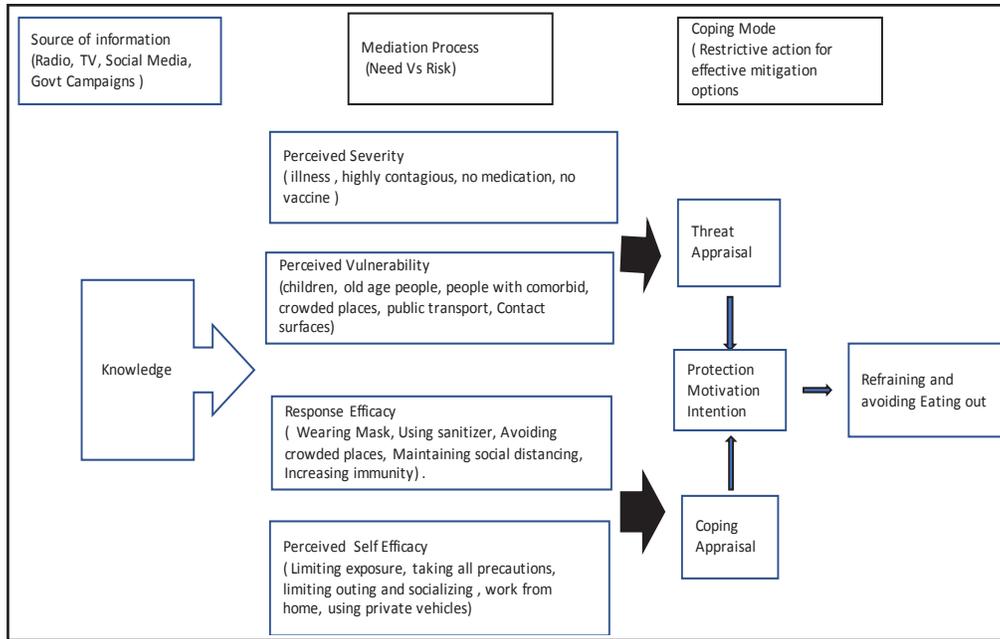
Fig. 1: Protection Motivation Theory Conceptualised in the Context of COVID Pandemic

Another 10% of people have the concern of overcrowding at the restaurants.

Theory/Model Explaining the Restrictive and Fearful Behaviour

The following theory and models very well explain the customer response in times of uncertainty.

Protection Motivation Theory

The high percentage of millennials refraining from eating out can be explained by health-related behavioural model - Protection Motivation Theory (PMT) developed by Rogers in 1975. It says that humans are programmed and motivated to react in a self-protective way towards a perceived health threat by changing behaviour. The objective of PMT is to recognise and assess the danger (Threat Appraisal – hazard assessment and occurrence probability) and then counter this assessment with effective and productive mitigation options(Coping Appraisal – responsive measures + safety measures).

Theoretical Overview of Protection Motivation Theory explaining the restrictive eating out behaviour of millennials amidst Corona pandemic has been illustrated below.

Need-Risk Model

The Need Risk Grid can extend another argument in support of this changed behaviour towards eating out. For a country like India, where home cooking has been a culture, it's getting back to the basics. The following model (Fig. 2) explains

the quadrant shift of the eating-out activity. The placement of eating-out activity bubble was in Quadrant 1 under normal circumstances which specify high need and low risk meaning people were willing to socialise and mingle, enjoy the ambience of the eating outlet with food and service. Presently due to prevailing pandemic situation, it has been displaced to Quadrant 4, which is a High-Risk,Low-Need zone. Need has been lowered as people have been staying indoors for prolonged times working from home and have been enjoying home cooking.
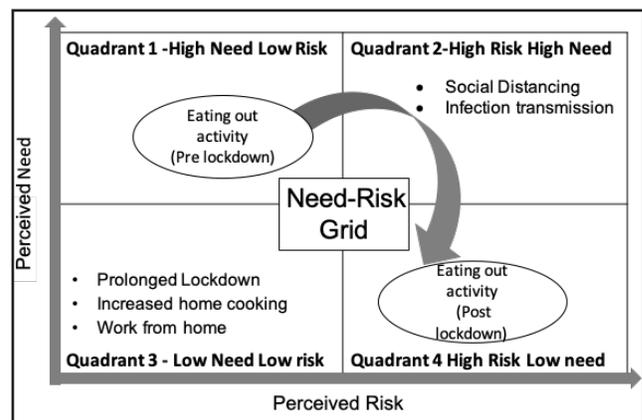

Fig. 2: Need-Risk Grid Showing the Quadrant Shift of Eating Out Behaviour

The motivation and fun of eating out have diffused and lost its charm in the light of risk associated with it. Taking a risk for an activity which is comfortably being taken care in a safe household environment is challenging. The daring millennials, however, may place this activity bubble in

Quadrant 2 under High-Need and High-Risk as they are unmarried and in the initial phase of their career, with most of them working away from home. This move seems to be a pandemic triggered shift and may gradually move back to Quadrant 1 once medication and vaccine are found.

Kübler-Ross Theory

Another theory that can significantly explain this behaviour of millennials towards eating out is Kübler-Ross theory which presents a grief model consisting of five emotions. The pandemic times can be considered similar to grief times. It starts with the very first stage of denial (avoidance, confusion, shock, and fear), the second stage (anger, irritation and anxiety) and third stage (depression). After this fourth stage is of bargaining where a process of acclimatisation, learning from others, sharing stories and in the end comes the final stage of acceptance. Daring diner millennials appear to be currently in stage five of acceptance, where they have accepted the existence of COVID, are preparing for the new normal and are willing to go out and dine once the restaurants reopen. The cautious diner millennials seem to be in the bargaining stage where they are acclimatising, and the fearful diner millennials are still in the depression stage where they feel helpless and sceptical.

Daring Millennials- Presenting Hope for Sustaining the Industry

Daring millennials are mostly Generation Y unmarried millennials who are risk-taking and will resume eating out as soon as restaurants open (18.5%) and generally from Tier-II cities. Further, the study analysed the willingness of millennials to go out to eat. It was found that there is a significant difference in willingness within millennials. Generation Y has 21.7 % of people who are willing to go to the restaurant as compared to 14.5 % in generation X. The marital status also affects willingness as unmarried millennials are more willing to eat out once restaurants open with 32% as compared married millennials, who are just 12 %. Other factors like occupation, city of residence, and education level do not have any significant effect. However, among the millennials not willing to eat post lockdown, married millennials outnumber unmarried showing the reverse trend of willing millennials. A large chunk of daring millennials, around 64%come from tier-II cities.

Daring Millennials who showed a willingness to eat out as soon as restaurants open up were asked the same set of questions, to see if their eating behaviour would change post-lockdown.

Table 2: Dining Preferences of Daring Millennials Using Friedman Test for Ranks

Attribute	Pre-COVID Mean Rank	Post-COVID Mean Rank
Preferred eating outlet		
Fine dining restaurant	1.92	2.00
Fast-food outlet	2.26	2.03
Café and bar	2.55	2.45
Food from street hawkers	3.26	3.52
Wilcoxon p value	0.00	
Preferred eating out occasion		
Weekend outings	2.02	2.03
Birthdays, anniversaries, promotion and success celebrations	2.43	2.02
Family and friend gathering	2.72	2.69
Just for no reason / JLT	2.83	3.26
Wilcoxon p value	0.00	
Preferred service style		
Service by the waiter	1.49	1.74
Buffet service	2.43	2.32
Take away	2.88	2.83
Self-service / Tray-service	3.20	3.11
Wilcoxon p value	-0.30	

The Friedman Test was done to arrive at mean ranks for a preferred outlet, occasion and service. The mean ranks under routine and post lockdown situation were analysed using the Wilcoxon test where the null hypothesis was that the two populations have the same distribution with the same median. The rank mean of one group is compared to the overall rank mean to determine a test statistic. All three cases have p-values ≤ 0.05, indicating that there is not enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis. Hence it indicates that millennial eating behaviour will not undergo any significant change after reopening of eating outlets concerning the choice of outlet, eating out occasion and preferred service style. With generation Y millennials, millennials of Tier-II cities (64%) outnumber the millennials of tier I city (35%). This result opens up a new dimension of study that can be undertaken in future regarding the impact of city category on eating behaviour.

Table 3: Precautions Taken by Millennials While Eating-out

Precaution	N	%
Wearing mask and gloves	39	60.0
Carrying hand sanitiser	10	15.4
Pre-booking your table at the restaurant	10	15.4
Wearing protective clothing	6	9.2

Table 3 suggests that the daring millennials would prefer wearing a mask and gloves while venturing out to eat. The daring millennials were asked to rate statements related to dining behaviour on a five-point Likert scale to know the factors affecting the choice of a dining-out post the reopening. The values KMO (0.521) and Bartlett's Test (254.28) with a significance level of 0.0 adequacy indicate the robustness. EFA was conducted to extract dining factors of consequence post-COVID.

Table 4: Preferred Restaurant Attributes for Daring Dinners (Millennials)- EFA

	Item	Variability	α
Factor 1	*Good Food and Safe Environment*		0.744
A11	I would be willing to try new restaurant setups with contact-less service, disposable menus, disposable cutlery, special service tools and digital interfaces.	2.28	
A6	I will go to a restaurant which has good food quality and which ensures food safety norms.	6.39	
A7	I will prefer outlets that offer nutritional menus and special diets.	5.31	
Factor 2	Convenience and Ambience		0.785
A5	I will prefer a restaurant with convenience of location, parking and accessibility.	8.76	
A3	I will look for convenient booking options.	14.57	
A2	I will prefer going to a restaurant with great ambience and service.	17.22	
Factor 3	Social / Digital Footprint		0.522
A12	I prefer to check social media reviews, and ratings for hygiene practices, COVID precautions before choosing my outlet.	1.71	
A13	I would follow the referrals from my family and friends.	1.21	
Factor 4	COVID Safe Service		0.578
A8	I will go for outlets offering cashless payment options.	5.09	
A10	I would go to a restaurant where the server is wearing protective clothing, minimum food handling, and hygiene is followed.	3.30	
Factor 5	High Priced Chain Restaurant		
A9	I will go to highly-priced restaurants or restaurants associated with hotel chains	3.70	

The range of means values of variables was relatively small, and the spread for many variables was close to 1 or more. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), based on the principal component method of extraction, was used to extract Eigenvalues more significant than 1. EFA helped in reducing variables into five factors. Authors excluded the cases list-wise for treating the missing values. Correlation matrix for 13 items did not return any coefficient more than 0.7, so they included all the 13 items in the factor analysis. Initially, they examined the factorability of 13 items. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.521. Bartlett's test of sphericity (test of at least one significant correlation between 2 of the items studied) was also significant ($\chi2 = 254.288$, $p < .05$). Given these overall indicators, a 13-factor solution explaining 70.98% of total variance appeared most intelligible. Researchers excluded the two factors with loading less than 0.5. Thus, 11 variables distributed over five factors appeared to be the most acceptable solution. Four factors had more than one variable, while one factor had only one variable. Cronbach's alpha for each of the four factors was more than 0.5.

The EFA suggests that the daring diner millennials who are willing to eat out will look for five attributes in the restaurant, and this will affect their choice of outlet. These factors are 1) Good food and safe environment; 2) Convenience and ambience; 3) Social and digital footprint; 4) COVID safe service, and 5) High priced chain restaurant.

Hence, we can conveniently conclude that daring millennials would prefer good food backed by appropriate food safety measures. They would also be willing to go to places which have a safe environment with demonstrative precautionary measures like contactless service, disposable menus, disposable cutlery, special service tools and digital interfaces. They would also look for special nutritional menus. Food quality has always remained the top attribute while selecting the restaurant, but the safety and hygiene were always taken for granted. Guests never really used to bother much about hygiene, but with COVID times they want to see demonstrable measures for hygiene and sanitisation. Though the food was and is still the main attraction,it is at best, a qualifying factor (Chowdhary & Prakash, 2005). Hygiene and sanitation always existed, but COVID has made them essential, and the customer now wants to be assured of the same. They are likely to be vantage factors (Chowdhary & Prakash, 2005).

The convenience and ambience have emerged as a second factor that daring millennials feel is important. Patrons will consider convenience in terms of booking, parking, and accessibility as minimising contact and waiting time. Good reviews on the safe environment, positive comments about the precautions will be encouraging for the millennials and will affect their decision to choose an outlet. Millennials will prefer highly-priced restaurants, especially in the hotel chain as it is perceptually associated with high safety and hygiene.

A high price is often associated with better quality and better hygiene standards.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study was conducted in June 2020 when the fear level of people was high, and so only 18.5 % of the millennials were willing to go out and eat, and this percentage would have consequently increased over the months. Due to a smaller number of millennials willing to eat out the sample size was small (65) and this has affected the factor analysis as the Cronbach alpha scores of factors 3 and 4 are slightly less than 0.6.

CONCLUSION

The research has a positive futuristic outlook.Only18.5 % millennials willing to re-patronise eating at restaurants presents a grim situation. Still, there lies a tremendous scope within this restrictive fearful segment with 51.05% open to home delivery of food and 54.90 % open to take away food. They are ready to re-patronise outside food in the form of home delivery and take away. The outside food is not a concern, but the safe consumption of food in a safe environment is a challenge. The industry will have to diversify, innovate and strengthen the food delivery and takeaway options to sustain. The generation Y millennials (18.5%) are ready to eat out and exhibit no change in preferred outlets, preferred eating out occasion and preferred service style. They would give necessary survival support to the industry. The changed behaviour exhibited during pandemic towards eating out is rational and backed by Protection Motivation theory leading to changed guest behaviour and the quadrant shift model, which has changed the placement of eating out on Need-Risk Grid. So, we can say a dual force seems to be playing-one, the health behaviour impacting the customer response, and two the temporary placement shifts of eating-out activity on need Risk Grid. Besides this Kubler Ross Theory also explain the reaction of people and point towards acceptance and growth phase.

The study has highlighted the dining behaviour of millennials and concluded that dining behaviour is not the same across the millennial generation span. There is a significant difference between generation X and generation Y. The study has been able to identify three major demographic segments based on willingness to eat out specifically in the context of the prevailing pandemic. These are daring diner millennials, cautious diner millennials and fearful diner millennials. The millennial dining behaviour does not exhibit any significant change pre- and post-lockdown; however, specific attributes which always played behind the scenes have taken pivotal place – hygiene and sanitation. Good quality food has and will always remain the top attractions, but after lockdown, the guests will consider it along with safety and cautionary measures. The essential attributes have not changed, but they all would be re-patronised in the background of the pandemic. The digital footprint will drive the promotions, and eating outlets will have to make it impactful, sending the right message. It would not be wrong to say COVID times are the trying times for eating outlets motivating them to make their business models more resilient and diversified, revamping the hygiene and safety measures and increasing digital footprint. The main focus should be to target generation Y millennials and fulfil their expectations as they present promise to sustain through this unprecedented phase.

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