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**A STUDY ON THE PERCEPTION OF CUSTOMERS FOR REMEDIAL ACTION IN QSR TO SUSTAIN IN THE HOSPITALITY SECTOR POST COVID-19 IN PUNE REGION**

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**Abstract:**

The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic has got the whole hospitality sector to a pause; this has tremendously impacted the country's economy. The sector is shouldering heavy overheads hence a small recess can also lead to total shutdown if not been provided with financial support and sector friendly policies. QSR are been permitted to commence their operation during the unlocking process but they are facing resistance for survival due to the fear in the mind of customers about socializing, lack of trust, backlog debt, high overheads, staffing issues, unfriendly government policies, lack of training and certification from competent authorities. The revival of QSR majorly depends on the most important stakeholder that is customers. Customers have become more digital literate and expect more of automated processes apart for the hygiene and safety. So QSR outlets need to follow all new normal norms and need to design technological strategies that will attract customers. The researcher tends to study and analyse their perception of customers about QSR post COVID-19. This will lead to identifying the significant factors that influences their decision patterns, further resulting in finding strategies and remedial actions. Application of the remedial actions will help many of QSR owners to stand up, rise like a phoenix and will sustain their business in a longer term.

**Keywords:** Customer perception, Remedial action, Sustain, COVID19, QSR.

**Introduction**

Corona virus (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus. This new virus and disease were unknown before the outbreak began in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. COVID-19 is now a pandemic affecting many countries globally. Corona viruses are a large family of viruses which may cause illness in animals or humans. In humans, several corona viruses are known to cause respiratory infections ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). The most recently discovered corona virus causes corona virus disease known as COVID-19. The disease spreads primarily from person to person through small droplets from nose or mouth, which are expelled when a person with COVID-19 coughs, sneezes, or speaks. People infected with this disease will experience mild to moderate respiratory sickness and recuperate without any other different treatment. This virus is more likely to develop seriousness in old age people and people with medical problems like diabetes, respiratory disease, cancer, cardiovascular disease.

The coronavirus had largest impact on the hospitality industry. The Covid 19 affect globally as most of the governments declared lock down due to which many hotels and QSR outlets were close down to prevent the spread of corona virus. Many of the QSR outlets were shut down due to effect of corona virus from mid-March till July end. During this period many of the employees working in QSR outlets left to their home. After unlocking lockdown, many of the employees still not returned from their native place yet due to transport and fear of corona virus problem. In some areas of India, Trains, buses are not started yet and even few started, the response is very less. Some state government laid few policies to enter in a state to avoid spreading of coronavirus. In this pandemic situation many of the QSR owners paid full or part salary to their employees to retain them after unlock.

The QSR outlet owners who have taken shop on rent faced a lot of problem during this pandemic situation; as most of them even don't have money to pay rent for the month due to the lockdown. Change in shop owner behaviour is seen as few shop owner waived off rent for a one or two. few had reduced rent for certain period till the effect of coronavirus slow down, whereas few shop owner had not waived off any month rent and asked to pay full rent for given period.

Nobody even imagine a day when hotel will be closed down for a day, a week, or a month. Most of us have experienced this shut down during this pandemic situation. After few days of lockdown, the procedure of unlocking is started in many regions of India. At the beginning, government has given permission to open shop for certain period of time and provides parcel services only. It was very difficult time for the QSR outlet owners as their business came down to 10-30% of earlier sale. The government of Maharashtra gave permission to open QSR in Pune city for public from 5<sup>th</sup> Oct 2020 with new normal norms.

Before pandemic, the customers were not thinking risk associated with the food, now customer must consider health risk linked with eating food outside. So there is a need of QSR operators to work on risk which associated with food through concentrating on factors like social distancing, cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting and personal protection equipment.

### **Objective**

1. To study the impact of Covid 19 on the QSR and hospitality sector.
2. To find out and analyze the changes in customer expectation due to Covid 19.
3. To identify and propose possible remedial action to ensure sustainability of QSR post covid 19 with reference to customer expectation.

### **Research Methodology**

#### **Primary Data**

A quantitative research approach is aimed with a well-designed close ended questionnaire made of a combination of dichotomous, MCQ (one response and multiple response), rating likert scale and an open ended questions which seeks suggestions from the customers of QSR outlets in Pune area. The questionnaire is circulated by random sampling method among the sample size of 150 in Pune area through Google forms-digital survey app medium out of which 112 respondents submitted the dually filled questionnaire.

#### **Secondary Data:**

The secondary data is collected from referring books, magazines, internet websites, research journal etc.

#### **Review of literature**

IBEF (Sept2020) mentioned that Tourism and hospitality sector has evolved as a key player in the growth of service sector, it has contributed with 39 million jobs in India which is 8.1% of total employment of the country and 6.8% of the country's GDP.

Dugon Gursoy, Christina Chi (July 2020) wrote that the stratagems to curb COVID19 curve gave rise to communal lockdown, social distancing, travel and movement restrictions and fear in consumers that compelled shut down of QSR business and apparently downfall of demand for QSR food also. Unlocking of economy has begun but the crisis is so deep that it is profoundly influencing the business operate substantially.

Bruce Reinstein (April 2020) stated that how coronavirus will affect the food industry through three dimensions, that is, consumers, operators and manufacturers. The impact of coronavirus on consumer can be seen in increased use of delivery, food safety as first priority, expanded sanitization behaviors,

minimal touch pick up option like curbside pickup, self-ordering by using digital pads, improved packaging. Operators have to introduce strict sanitization practices for food handling, front and back of sanitization. Manufacturer will need to do investment in modern food technology.

Danny Klein (May 2020) mentioned that due to the covid 19 home cooked meals are greatest competition for QSR as people started cooking food during pandemic period due to the compulsion of safe food.

Richard Layugan (Jul 2020) stated that hospitality has undergone a massive blow and sudden decline in the sales resulting to a full stop. Some QSR dared to remain open for take aways and delivery as a good Samaritans for anybody hungry or helplessly in need of food like highways eateries with a hope for normalcy. Developing codes and safety regulations within the confines of the law , post pandemic is a challenging task. It should ensure the protection of the safety, health and welfare of the customers and staff of QSR. Since the business is totally customer comfort oriented, wait and see, will see philosophy will risk the whole operation. QSR needs to be redesigned for social distance compliance. It need to adopt self-diagnostic doors, app based ordering, contact less service, digital payment modules and many more to develop trust in the minds of the customers.

Market wire (Sept 2020) published that QSR market needs to undergo various dimensional investigation, different stakeholder inclinations, study of different partners like financial consultants, suppliers, SWOT examination and Media partners.

Scott Gorny, Executive Client Partner (2020) quoted that QSR proprietors need to control what they are needed to accomplish and operate contrarily moving ahead. They need to strategize by deploying few of his staff for delivering orders instead of relying on third party as it will be more economical. They will also experience more control and influence better customer satisfaction.

MIQ Better Connected Marketing Magazine (Oct 2020) published that in a survey it was analyzed that the whole world is at a scramble to define the word New Normal. Many hospitality outlets are struggling to keep their nostrils above the water, the restaurant foot traffic has almost dropped to bottom on the contrary online order, delivery and parcel services have boomed. It was been observed that many new customers were seen ordering through digital means(63%), taking 1.7X time for selecting their option and 31% more time per session. Huge rise in ordering was seen at the weekends. Young customers preferred take-out or curbside pickup while senior citizens and family with small kids went for ordering in. Wait time has increased and people are also selecting on the basis of less crowded outlets. Home cooking has become a big competitor for QSR as housewives have more relaxed time for cooking and trying new varieties.

**Kelly Hensel, Mary Ellen Kuhn (May 2020) in their article wrote that many restaurants to suspend or layoff employees to reduce the overhead. They also had to redesign their menus and change their strategies to attract varied kind of customers.**

Shreerang Godbole (August 23, 2020) observed that the Customers behaviour has changed a lot post Covid lockdown they have become more choosy and defensive with thinking twice before ordering more. Their routine has disturbed, step out of home is not a choice by a life altering choice nowadays. The customer needs and desire have differed and need a paramount to understand them. The best way to research is to ask yourself that why customer should visit our outlet.

FOSTAC (Mar 2020) in its training manual forwarded following remedies for QSR and Hospitality sector from hygiene and safety post COVID19 era.

- Areas should be cleaned with soap & water, followed by disinfectant or freshly prepared 1% hypochlorite solution or equivalent
- Clean Equipment, containers, utensils, crockery, cutlery etc. thoroughly with soap and hot water (60C).

- Clean High touch points like handrail, handle, tables, chair, Menu cards, Tissue paper stand, public counters twice daily by mopping with a cloth soaked in 1% of sodium hypochlorite.
- Install Hand sanitizer at the entry point of every QSR outlet.
- Clean toilets & washroom with water & detergent followed by disinfection-twice a day.
- Conduct awareness training for the staff about the symptoms, how it spread, personnel hygiene, social distancing, wearing mask, safe food handling.
- Encourage co-worker/employee/colleague – to come forward to inform/declare if they are experienced any symptoms.
- Assurance of assistance – Financial, loss of job, pay, job protection-specially low income group
- Screening of all personnel entering in premises for any fever/Temp, Fatigue, Cough ( Dry/wet), Shortness of breath/breathing difficulties
- Social distancing - People can catch COVID-19 if they breathe in these droplets from a person infected with the virus. This is why it is important to maintain at least (1 meter) distance from others.
- Only 3-4 people can work in an area of 10 ft
- Limit number of people entering to QSR outlet.
- Prohibit sharing of common things like crockery, cutlery, glassware, table accompaniments etc.

## Research Methodology

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### Secondary Data:

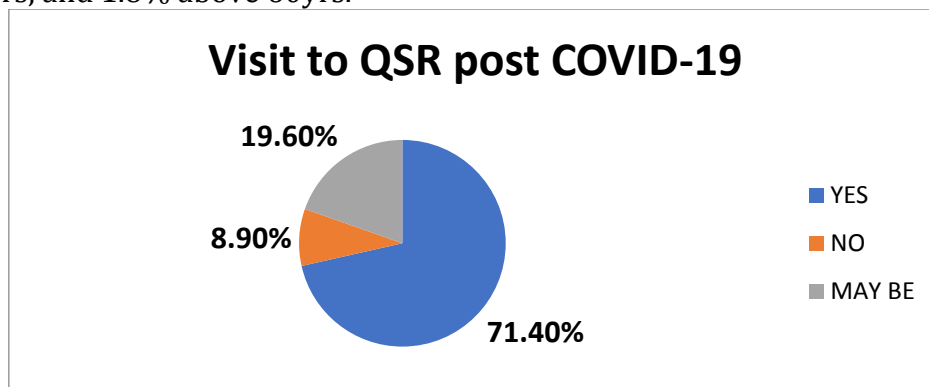
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### Data analysis and Interpretation:

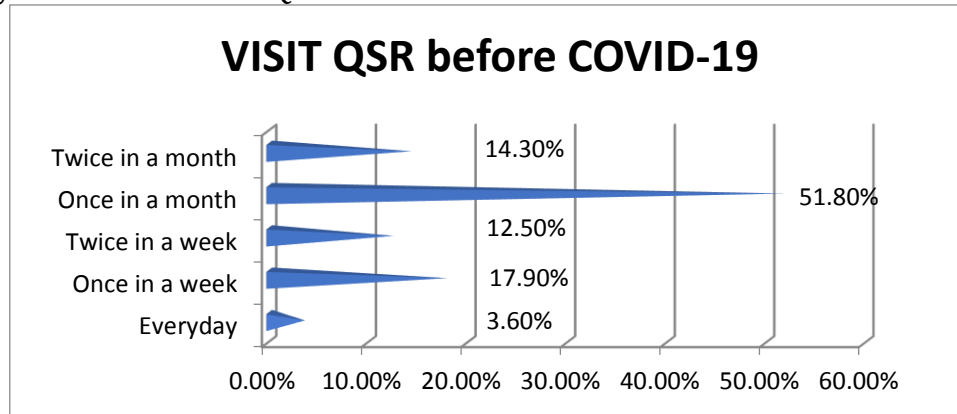
The analysis was done from the data collected from the response submitted by 112 respondents with demography as follows:

Sex: Male: 66.1% and Female: 33.9%

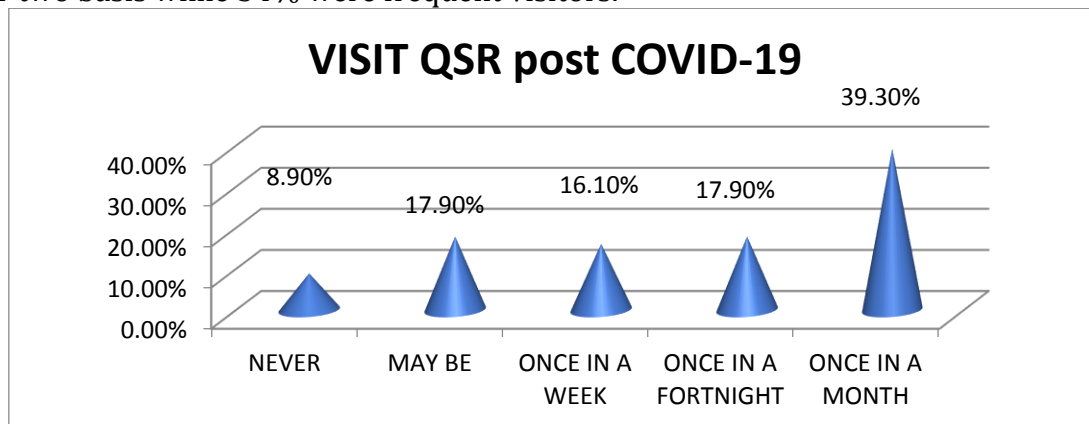
Age: 5.4% below 20, 8.9% between 20-30, 33.9% between 30-40yrs, 32.9% between 40-50yrs, 7.1% between 50-60yrs, and 1.8% above 60yrs.



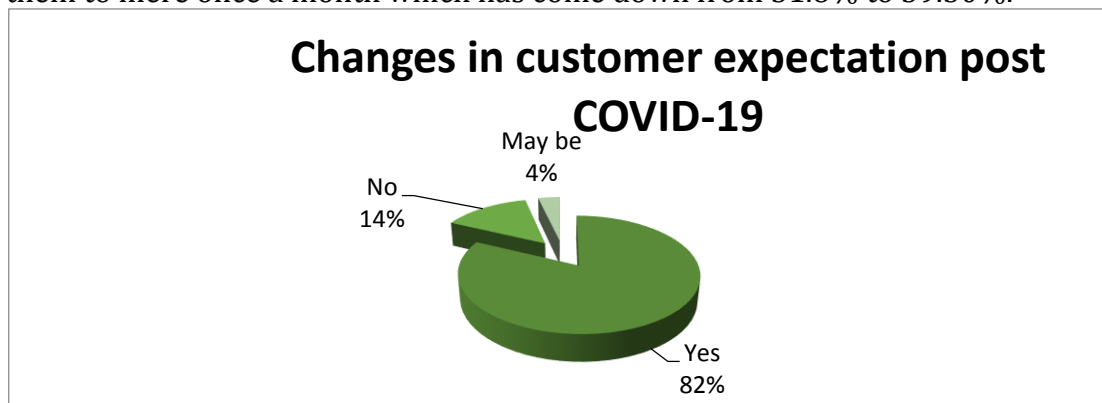
The survey pointed out that QSR customers are really fed-up due to lockdown and household food , they are urging for tasty fast food as 71% sample showed willingness to visit QSR post COVID-19 and almost 28.50% sample showed concern about their decision to visit QSR as they were not confident about the safety and trust towards QSR outlets.



Before COVID-19 it was a flourishing period for QSR due to mouth-watering appetizing, hot and quickly available nature of the food. There were very few expectations of the customers from the QSR owners with respect to safety, hygiene and sanitization. 66% of customers used to visit QSR on a monthly or two basis while 34% were frequent visitors.

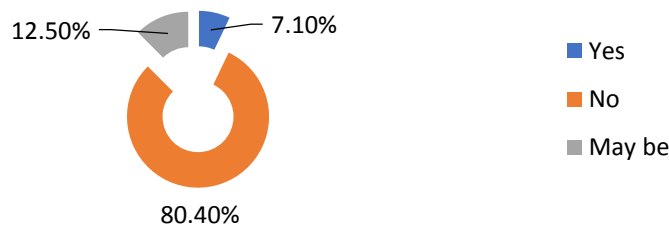


The figures above in the Bar chart reflect the concern of the customers visiting QSR post COVID-19 as 26 % respondents are very much hesitant about visiting QSR outlet, while almost major chunk has restricted them to mere once a month which has come down from 51.8% to 39.30%.



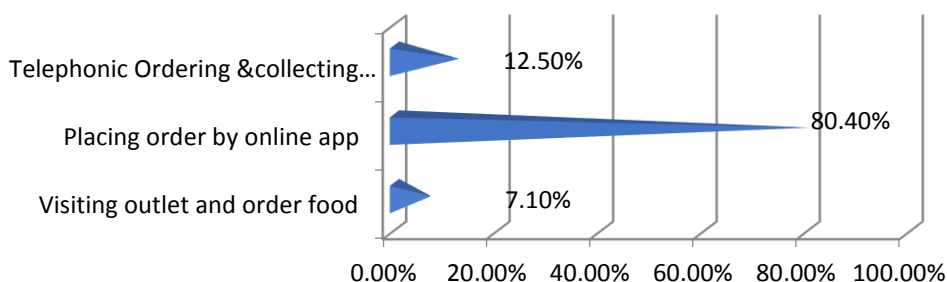
COVID-19 has made a drastic impact on the customer expectations; they have become more concerned and are bothered about issues like contagious nature of Corona Virus, safety and trust of the QSR vendor.

### Visiting crowded QSR post COVID-19



The above statistics clearly states that QSR owners should take special efforts that their outlet need not be crowded, social distancing should be religiously followed or else they will unknowingly loose many customers.

### MODE TO PLACE ORDER POST COVID-19



The figures clearly reflects that online apps like Swiggy, Uber Eats, Zomato etc. are the most preferred modes as customers wish to avoid to go outside and risk themselves or they have turned lazy due to lockdown hangover hence the QSR owner need to be tie-up with these digital platforms to boost start their business.

### General findings from the survey about customers’ expectations and preferences are as follows:

The survey highlighted use of disposables is preferred with majority over use of washable crockery. The customers are very much demanding about a foot operated sanitizers at the entrance, they expect control of the traffic in the QSR outlet with proper social distancing maintained. Digital payment is the most preferred mode of payment especially touch less instruments for example mobile app payments like Paytm, Amazon Pay etc. Parcel orders should be accompanied with small sanitizer sachet. Staff should be well trained for COVID-19 proof preparation and serving of food. QSR should bear compliance certification from competent authority to reopen the outlet.

It is very important that the QSR owners should understand the above factors and preferences of the post COVID-19 customers and plan, implement remedial measures that will take all possible care of the of the customer preferences and expectation to ensure smooth revival and sustainability in this hardest period of the lifetime.

### Conclusion

COVID-19 is like a nightmare which is nearing to set down, but its huge impact on the QSR has raised the question for existence. The main stakeholder of QSR business, that is, customers are deeply traumatized. Hence taking care of them is of paramount importance for the sustainability of the

business. Customers trust has to be gained through remedial measures ensuring new normal like foot operated sanitizers at the entrance, social distancing footmark stickers indicating the standing positions between two customers, trained and certified food handlers, QSR should be all possible digital mode enabled for payments, environmental friendly disposables should be used for washable dishware and crockery. A wonderful social gesture like providing hand sanitizer sachet in the takeaway parcels will be very innovative and impressive. An aggressive digital marketing is very much required to showcase all the efforts of the QSR owners to gain trust of the customer is equally important. COVID-19 is a difficult phase for the mankind but it is bound to pass away soon and all will be back to normal.

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