Restauranteur Lockdown Blues: Impact of the COVID-19 Lockdown on the Restaurant Industry in Lucknow, India

Sukriti Ojha[1] and Kah Ying Choo[2]

[1]City Montessori School, Lucknow, India
[2]Athena Education, Gurugram, India
DOI: https://doi.org/10.47611/jsrhs.v10i2.1446

ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has plunged the Indian restaurant industry into its worst crisis. This research study is a case study analysis on the impact of the COVID-19 lockdown on the restaurant industry in Lucknow, India. Data was gathered through an online survey of Indian respondents residing in Lucknow regarding the changes in their usage of restaurant services (actual and anticipated) before and after the lockdown. Variables compared included: frequency levels of dining out, food delivery, and monthly expenditure on outside food. In addition, the relative importance of three factors- the decline in coronavirus-related deaths, the easing of social distancing measures, and the lifting of mask requirements- on the dining out frequency was analysed. Based on the results, the three variables compared showed statistically significant declines. However, in the case of the three factors influencing dining out frequency, it was discovered that while the decline in deaths did have a statistically significant impact on dining out frequency, none of the factors were considerably important. Taking the results into account, it becomes imperative that restaurants enforce safety guidelines strictly and promote their actions efficiently. Innovative ideas like incorporating bento box services and immunity-boosting dishes may enable restaurants to survive through the crisis.

Introduction

A fusion of cultures and cuisines has been prevalent in India since time immemorial (Sen, 2004). Building on the richness of its diverse regional cuisines, the culinary sector has continued to evolve by producing delectable concoctions that testify to its spirit of creativity and openness to outside influences (Meraki Kitchen, 2019). What has been a major contributor to advances in the Indian restaurant market has been the "symbiotic growth between the food industry and the middle class" (Jaganmohan, 2020, para. 1). The burgeoning middle class entertaining "dreams of upward mobility" emerged in recent decades due to the expansion in employment opportunities and an increase in India's working population (Seshayee, n.d., para. 2). This middle class, with lifestyle changes characterised by a decline in home cooking and the expansion of the palate towards different types of cuisines, has, in turn, generated the consumer demand that has propelled the growth of the various service sectors, especially the restaurant industry. The advent in the number of nuclear families along with increased urbanization has also significantly influenced the growth of the restaurant food culture (AIMS Institutes, 2020). As widespread travel took place across India, the call for home like food resulted in the proliferation of many restaurants in different cities around India (AIMS Institutes, 2020).
Therefore, it is little wonder that the restaurant industry contributes to about 30% of the consumption basket in India (Malhotra, 2019). It is also the largest industry in the service sector, making up 3% of India's Gross Domestic Product (SMERGERS, 2020). With an annual growth rate of 10%, the industry was expected to increase by INR500 billion in 2021 (Maggo, 2020). Furthermore, it also provides employment to more than 7.3 million employees (SMERGERS, 2020).

However, in early 2020, the COVID-19 crisis erupted. A communicable respiratory disease that can spread rapidly from person to person through contact with the droplets expelled from the nose or mouth of an infected person

(World Health Organization, 2020), it was declared a pandemic — an epidemic of global proportions, as of March 11th by the World Health Organization (2020). As of 7th August, 2020, the total number of cases worldwide stands close to twenty million, with seven hundred thousand deaths (John Hopkins University & Medicine, 2020).

India has also been devastated by COVID-19. As of August 1st, 2020, the total number of coronavirus infections has reached close to 1.7 million, with the death toll rising to about 36,000 (Express Web Desk, 2020). In response to the dire situation, the Indian government initiated a nationwide lockdown on March 24th, which was followed by a series of extensions and then a gradual easing of lockdown conditions (ET Online, 2020).

These lockdown measures have dealt a massive blow to the restaurant industry in India. The National Restaurant Authority of India (NRAI) predicted an overall loss of about INR800 billion by end-May (Deol, 2020). As 90 per cent of the restaurants operate on lease, the recovery of the rent during these unprecedented times seems close to impossible. At the time of the reporting, the NRAI also estimated that almost 50 per cent Indian restaurants would close down by end-May (Deol, 2020). Moreover, the various restrictions have also led to a reduction in the workforce, since the inherent nature of the restaurant industry does not enable employees to work from home (Roose, 2020)

Even with the easing of the lockdown that allows for the reopening of restaurants, the recovery journey for the restaurant industry under conditions associated with the "new normal" will still be fraught with changes. The first and foremost challenge that restaurants face with the easing of the COVID-19 lockdown is related to the drop in patrons. According to Sanjeevi (2020), restaurants located in malls will face the biggest setback with a decreased number of people visiting the malls.

Second, restaurants have to deal with the financial ramifications of abiding by the Standard Operating Protocols (SOP) (Khan, 2020). They include:

- Encouragement of takeaways in place of dine-ins;
- Thermal screening of the staff responsible for home deliveries;
- Entry to only "asymptomatic staff and patrons", and
- Mandatory placement of hand sanitisers at the entrance among other guidelines (Express Web Desk, 2020, para. 4).

The implementation of these measures would only worsen the financial situation of the chains that are already in rental debt. While these SOPs certainly cater to patrons who are now seeking a higher quality of hygiene standards, restaurants will simultaneously have to bear the onus of incorporating "online consumer awareness exercises" to make the diners aware of the precautions and measures being taken to ensure a safe experience (Mehrotra, 2020, para. 6). The incorporation of these guidelines would also lead to an increase in prices due to the extra expenditure of the restaurants, which would lead to a decrease in clientele, mainly because of a depreciation in the consumers' spending capacity (Bisaria, 2020). Given that the restaurant industry had been fuelled by the young work force's consumption habits based on its growing disposable income in recent years (Prabhavathi et al., 2014), the COVID-19 pandemic's plunge of many into joblessness and countries into economic crises (Nicola et al., 2020) would disrupt this trend ("Restaurant Businesses Hit by COVID-19", 2020).

To date, the exploration of the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the restaurant industry in India has been confined to large metropolitan cities. Moreover, the implementation of the measures has also differed considerably state by state in India, with its impact differing as well. Therefore, a study on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the restaurant industry in the city of Lucknow, the state capital of Uttar Pradesh, where I am a resident, would provide a fascinating case study analysis of the pandemic's overall impact through the lens of one city.

As a city that is known for its bona fide food culture, Lucknow has, in recent years, witnessed shifts in customer demand, primarily owing to the profound impact of the social media on the millennials and also a simultaneous growth in spending power ("The Changing Restaurant Trends", n. d.). The impetus was provided by the emergence of multi-national companies that looked to open up their centres in the city with the help of the local workforce. With the inflow

of income and resources, this young talent redefined their lifestyles that included an expansion in outside dining ("The Changing Restaurant Trends", n. d.). The growing demand of the consumers brought a wave of new "restaurant formats" in the city ("The Changing Restaurant Trends", n. d., para. 1). The spurt in the trends was speculated to be an adoption from the metropolitan cities, where the "exploration of tastes and cuisines" had become more prevalent ("The Changing Restaurant Trends", n. d., para. 14).

However, the restaurant industry in Lucknow has now been hard hit by the uncertainties triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic. Its prospects look dim with the tally of cases in the state standing at about 11,000 as of 7th of August, with an average infection rate of 27 per hour (Chauhan, 2020). The government's imposition of a two-day lockdown during the weekends has not helped matters. It encompasses restrictions on movement of individuals including a closure of all the public places in the entire state and the designation of various areas as containment zones (FE ONLINE, 2020), where the "restriction on movement is the most severe with only the supply of basic needs and services allowed" (Express News Service, 2020, para. 4). A majority of the 60–70 percent restaurants that opened after the approval of the government are planning to close down again due to the "poor customer footfall and high rentals", and the low dependability on only takeaways (IANS, 2020, para. 8).

To contribute to the discourse, this research study sought to address the impact of the restaurant industry in Lucknow by examining how COVID-19 had transformed overall dining patterns of its residents. In addition, their concerns in dining out would also be examined. The results of this research study would be further situated within the larger context of the prevalent discussion about the ever-evolving situation of the restaurant industry in Lucknow. It is thus hoped that the research study could contain answers that could help all stakeholders — policymakers, restaurateurs, and consumers — to know how to keep the restaurant industry and the beautiful age-old tradition of communing over good food with family and friends alive.

Description of the Research Study

Research Aim & Research Approach

This case study analysis sought to examine the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the restaurant industry in Lucknow, India, by evaluating the changes in the residents' actual and anticipated usage of the restaurant services before and after the COVID-19 lockdown. A case study is "an empirical enquiry" that aims to analyse "a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context" (Yin, 2009, p. 13) in order to identify and explore the impact of the factors influencing the trajectory of the phenomenon (Gray, 2014). This research approach is thus highly appropriate for a research study that sought to examine the impact of factors shaping the impact of COVID-19 on the restaurant industry in a real-life situation.

For the purposes of this study, a quantitative approach was adopted to determine the changes in the respondents' self-reported ratings of actual and anticipated usage of restaurant services per month and their monthly expenditure on outside food before and after the COVID-19 lockdown and the anticipated corresponding rates after easing of the lockdown.

More specifically, the hypotheses that encompass the specific variables, which were compared are presented below:

1. **Null Hypothesis**: There is no difference between the actual and anticipated mean frequency of dining out per month before and after the COVID-19 lockdown.
   Alternative Hypothesis: There is a difference between the actual and anticipated mean frequency of dining out per month before and after the COVID-19 lockdown.

2. **Null Hypothesis**: There is no difference between the actual and anticipated mean frequency of food deliveries per month before and after the COVID-19 lockdown.

Alternative Hypothesis: There is a difference between the actual and anticipated mean frequency of food deliveries per month before and after the COVID-19 lockdown.

3. **Null Hypothesis**: There is no difference between the actual and anticipated mean amount of food spending per month before and after the COVID-19 lockdown.
   Alternative Hypothesis: There is a difference between the actual and anticipated mean amount of food spending per month before and after the COVID-19 lockdown.

In addition, a comparison was made between the relative importance of three factors — the easing of both the needs to wear masks and maintain social distancing, as well as a decline in coronavirus-related deaths — on the respondents' anticipated dining out frequency in the post-COVID-19 lockdown context. The hypothesis is as follows:

4. **Null Hypothesis:** There are no differences between the mean ratings of the importance of the factors on the impact on the respondents' dining out frequency after the COVID-19 lockdown.
   Alternative Hypothesis: There are mean differences between the mean ratings of the importance of the factors on the impact on the respondents' dining out frequency after the COVID-19 lockdown.

Finally, the discussion of the quantitative results will also be situated within current discourse on the impact of COVID-19 lockdown on India in general, Lucknow, as well as the restaurant industry in India and Lucknow, to provide a rich and complex portrait of the challenging situation.

Data Collection
An online survey was conducted by means of a Google form to gather data on Lucknow respondents' usage of the restaurant industry's services before and after the COVID-19 lockdown (see Appendix A). The participation invitation letter was sent via WhatsApp invitation to potential respondents (see Appendix B). It described the aim of the research study and guaranteed their anonymity and the confidentiality of the data. After one week, responses from 134 respondents were gathered.

Data Analysis
Descriptive statistics were used to present the changes in the actual and anticipated mean frequency levels of dining out and the ordering of outside food deliveries, as well as the monthly expenditure on outside food before and after the COVID-19 lockdown. Next, three paired t-tests were run to determine whether the changes in the aforementioned factors before and after the lockdown were statistically significant or not with each variable. A one-way ANOVA was also run to ascertain the relative importance of the three factors — the easing of the mask-wearing and social distancing requirements, along with the decline in coronavirus-related deaths — on the dining out frequency of the respondents in the post-lockdown context.

Results and Discussion

In this section, all the results from the statistical analyses, as outlined in the "Description of Research Study" section, are presented and examined in detail. The effects of COVID-19 on the Lucknow respondents' actual and anticipated usage of restaurant services are evaluated and discussed. Finally, the result pertaining to the factors that would be most pivotal in influencing respondents' willingness to dine out is also presented and discussed. The presentation of the data will also be situated within the context of existing literature on changes in the Indian respondents' usage of restaurant services as a result of COVID-19.

Descriptive statistics on dining out show that the mean monthly frequency of dining out before the lockdown (M = 3.42, SD = 4.73), as compared to the mean monthly frequency after the lockdown (M =1.43, SD = 5.56), decreased by 1.99 (see Table 1). While the mean before the lockdown is between 3 and 4, the mean dropped by 58% to below 1.5 in the post-COVID lockdown.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics on the Monthly Dining Out Frequency Pre- and Post-COVID-19 Lockdown

Dine Out (Pre)		Dine out (Post)	
Mean	3.428571429	Mean	1.436090226
Standard Error	0.410791671	Standard Error	0.482474042
Median	2	Median	0
Mode	2	Mode	0
Standard Deviation	4.737480654	Standard Deviation	5.564162089

To determine whether the change in the mean monthly dining out frequency is statistically significant, a paired sample t-test was run. Table 2 shows that the difference in the dining out frequency is statistically significant, t(264) = 3.14 (higher than the critical value of 1.97), p<.01(two-tailed), which is less than .05.

Table 2
Paired T-Tests on the Monthly Dining Out Frequency Pre- and Post-COVID-19 Lockdown.

	Dine Out (pre)	Dine out (post)
Mean	3.42857142	1.436090226
Variance	22.4437229	30.95989975
Observations	133	133
Pooled Variance	26.701811	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	

df	264	
t Stat	3.14437760	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.00092729	
t Critical one-tail	1.65064591	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.00185459	
t Critical two-tail	1.96899049	

A closer examination of the distribution of the ratings of the respondents indicates that prior to the lockdown, 49% of the respondents dined out 2–4 times per month. In contrast, with the easing of the lockdown, 64% of the respondents stated that they would not dine out at all, with just 22% of the respondents anticipating that they would dine out once or twice a month.

Situating the respondents' dining out frequency within the larger context of the post-lockdown situation in India, one can see how the figures confirm the real-life situation. According to Vishal (2020), the impetus for restaurants to be ever more mindful of heightened hygiene standards and the use of "quality ingredients" sourced in a proper way, costs of restaurants are likely to go up. In the midst of economic hardships, consumers are also likely to cut back on their discretionary expenditure by dining out less frequently (Vishal, 2020, para. 11). Furthermore, most people tend to dine out either on the weekends, or in the evenings during weekdays. However, due to the restrictions on movement after 9 p.m., along with the complete two-day lockdown on the weekends in the entire state of Uttar Pradesh due to the rising number of COVID-19 cases (Misra & Wadhwa, 2020), the decline in the dining out frequency is not surprising.

Next, the impact of the COVID-19 lockdown on the frequency of outside food deliveries was evaluated. The mean rating of the food delivery frequency before the lockdown ($M = 2.97$, $SD = 3.78$) decreased by 1.91 after the lockdown ($M = 1.06$, $SD = 1.66$). While the pre-COVID 19 lockdown mean is nearly "3", the post-COVID-19 lockdown fell drastically to just slightly above "1" — a huge drop of 64%.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics on Food Delivery Frequency Pre- and Post-COVID-19 Lockdown

Delivery frequency (Pre)		*Delivery frequency Post)*	
Mean	2.977443609	Mean	1.060150376
Standard Error	0.327842594	Standard Error	0.14429194

Median	2	Median	0
Mode	0	Mode	0
Standard Deviation	3.780865232	Standard Deviation	1.664055827

To determine whether the change in the mean food delivery frequency before and after the COVID-19 lockdown is statistically significant, a paired sample t-test was run. Table 4 shows that the difference in the food delivery frequency is statistically significant, $t(264)=5.35$ (higher than the critical value of 1.97), $p<.01$ (two-tailed), which is less than .05.

Table 4
Paired Sample T-Test on Food Delivery Frequency Pre- and Post- COVID-19 Lockdown.

	Delivery frequency (Pre)	*Delivery frequency (Post)*
Mean	2.977443609	1.060150376
Variance	14.2949419	2.769081795
Observations	133	133
Pooled Variance	8.532011848	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	264	
t Stat	5.352709044	
P(T<=t) one-tail	9.41433E-08	
t Critical one-tail	1.65064591	
P(T<=t) two-tail	1.88287E-07	

t Critical two-tail	1.968990497	

What the results show is that a decline in dining out frequency had not been replaced by an increase in the use of food delivery services. Based on the assessment of the raw data of the respondents pertaining to their food delivery habits, 47% pointed out that they ordered food 2–5 times a month before the lockdown. However, after the lockdown, 53% of the respondents did not wish to order food, whereas only 32% were willing to order delivery once or twice a month.

Thus, one can see that the coronavirus pandemic has also dealt a serious blow to food deliveries. Despite the fact that the post-lockdown period has caused most food chains to shift to food delivery options, reports suggest that this new adaptation might not be sufficient to sustain the businesses for long. The food delivery sector has suffered a decline of about 70% as well. Even cloud kitchens that were at the soaring heights of success prior to the pandemic are already looking for ways to sell off their companies. Although delivery services may have more of a stable base than dine-out facilities, it may still take at least another year before owners can expect the same output as before (Bisaria, 2020). As Kumar (2020) explained, more and more customers are likely to be sceptical about the hygiene and sanitation measures afforded to the delivery person and his/her high risk of exposure to the virus.

Another contributing factor with people being stuck at home is the renewal of interest in home cooking. The social media is buzzing with people exchanging recipes, cooking ideas, and images of the meals they had prepared (Vishal, 2020). This could also be contributing to the lack of increase in food deliveries.

Based on the aforementioned results, it is little wonder that the mean rating of the monthly expenditure on food before the lockdown (*M* = INR5088.51, *SD* = INR740.71) also decreased after the lockdown (*M* = INR965.97, *SD* = INR160.67). Nonetheless, the massive drop of INR4122.54 is still quite remarkable at approximately 81%.

Table 5
Descriptive Statistics on the Monthly Expenditure on Food Pre- and Post-COVID-19 Lockdown

Outside Food Spending (Pre)		Outside Food Spending (Post)	
Mean	5088.51879	Mean	965.97744
Standard Error	740.7199386	Standard Error	160.6763609
Median	2000	Median	100
Mode	5000	Mode	0
Standard Deviation	8542.3990	Standard Deviation	1853.0101

To determine whether the change in the mean monthly expenditure on food before and after the COVID-19 lockdown is statistically significant, a paired sample t-test was run. Table 6 shows that the difference in the monthly expenditure on food is statistically significant, $t(264) = 5.43$ (higher than the critical value of 1.96), $p<.01$ (two-tailed), which is less than .05.

Table 6
Paired Sample T-Test on Outside Food Spending Pre- and Post-COVID-19 Lockdown

	Outside Food Spending (Pre)	*Outside Food Spending (Post)*
Mean	5088.518797	965.9774436
Variance	72972581.65	3433646.765
Observations	133	133
Pooled Variance	38203114.21	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	264	
t Stat	5.439092692	
P(T<=t) one-tail	6.10398E-08	
t Critical one-tail	1.65064591	
P(T<=t) two-tail	1.2208E-07	
t Critical two-tail	1.968990497	

It was seen that while about 39% of the respondents had an average monthly expenditure of INR3,000–INR15,000 per month, about 77% of them would now choose to spend only INR0–INR1,000 per month on outside food.

The research study also sought to assess the influence of the factors on the respondents' dining out frequency. Based on the new rules that have been imposed since the lifting of the lockdown, the most important of which are social distancing and mask wearing, we included them in seeking the respondents' perceptions of the prospective easing of these rules in influencing their dining out frequency. In addition, we also considered a decline in the number of coronavirus-related deaths as a factor by asking the respondents to rate its importance in determining their dining out frequency.

Descriptive statistics show that the impact of the decline in deaths is the highest ($M = 2.33$, $SD = 1.26$), followed by social distancing ($M = 1.92$, $SD = 1.30$) and mask wearing ($M = 1.88$, $SD = 1.24$) (see Table 7). Furthermore, to determine whether the differences in the mean ratings are significant or not, a one-way ANOVA was run.

Table 8 shows that the ANOVA is statistically significant, $F(2, 396) = 4.99$ (higher than the F critical value), $p<.01$ (two-tailed), which is less than 0.5.

Table 7

Descriptive Statistics on Importance of Three Factors — Mask Wearing, Social Distancing, and Decline in Corona-virus-Related Deaths — on Dining Out Frequency

	Mask	Distancing	Deaths declining
Mean	1.88721804	1.92481	2.33082706
Standard Error	0.107613	0.112767	0.10974493
Median	1	1	2
Mode	1	1	1
Standard Deviation	1.24105365	1.30049	1.26564036

Table 8

ANOVA on Importance of Three Factors — Mask Wearing, Social Distancing, and Decline in COVID-19-related Deaths — on Dining Out Frequency

Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance		
Mask	133	251	1.8871	1.540214172		
Distancing	133	256	1.9241	1.691273639		
Deaths declining	133	310	2.3302	1.601845523		
ANOVA						
Source of Variation	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*P-value*	*F crit*

Between Groups	16.0952381	2	8.047619	4.995073892	0.007204086	3.01850966
Within Groups	638	396	1.611111			
Total	654.095238	398				

Although the decline in COVID-19-related deaths had the highest mean rating, all the mean ratings were on the low side, just slightly above or below "2". In addition, the differences between the mean ratings were also low. This thus implies that the respondents did not consider any of the aforementioned three factors to be particularly important in influencing their dining out frequency. Specifically, the respondents did not believe that the easing of the rules — not having to wear masks or maintaining social distancing — would be persuasive enough for them to want to dine out. Therefore, other factors in determining the change in dining out frequency could have been considered.

A close examination of the ratings of the respondents reveals the overall lack of interest of the respondents in dining out with regards to these three factors (see Figures 1–3). For a start, the respondents who gave ratings of "4" or "5" do not constitute sizable proportions in all categories: declining coronavirus-related deaths (19.8%), easing of social distancing (16.6%), and easing of mask wearing (13%). Conversely, the proportions of respondents who gave ratings of "1" or "2" were far greater by comparison: declining coronavirus-related deaths (59.5%), easing of social distancing (72.8%), and easing of mask wearing (71.8%). Ultimately, what thrust the declining coronavirus-related deaths factor above the other two factors is that the proportion of respondents rating this factor "1" is 35.1%, compared to slightly over 57% for other two other factors. The respondents' ratings for coronavirus-related deaths factor were then spread across higher ratings, with 44.6% rating it a "2" or "3".
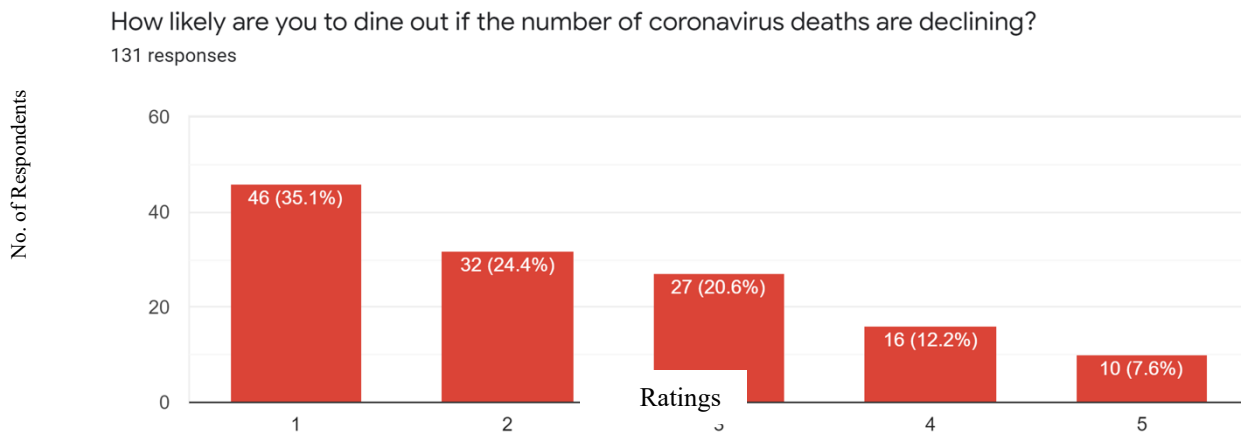

How likely are you to dine out if the number of coronavirus deaths are declining?
131 responses

Fig-
ure 1. Ratings regarding importance of declining coronavirus-related deaths on dining out frequency.

How likely are you to dine out if you don't have to observe social distancing?
132 responses
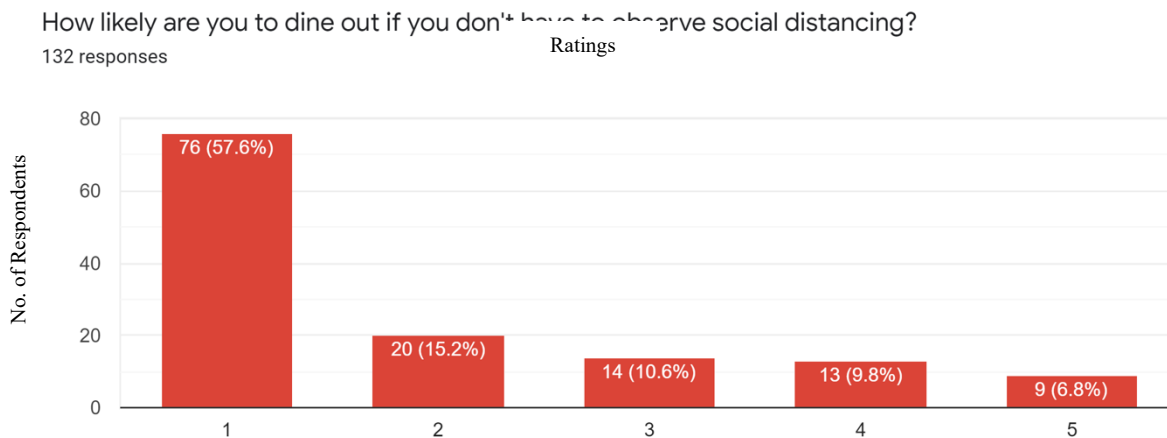
Figure 2. Ratings regarding easing of social distancing on dining out frequency.

How likely are you to dine out if you don't have to wear masks outside?
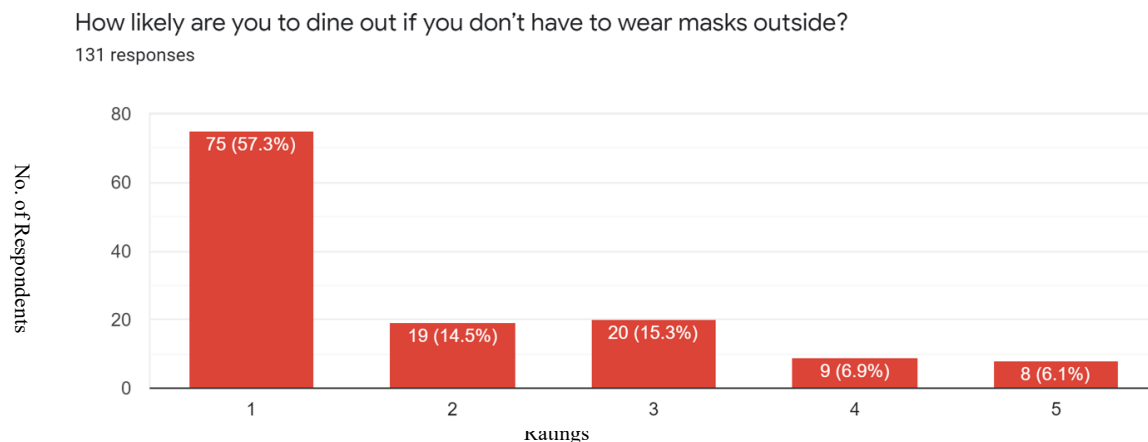131 responses

Figure 3. Ratings regarding easing of mask wearing requirement on dining out frequency.

These results make sense within the context of the actual circumstances surrounding Lucknow at the time of this survey, which was in early July 2020 when there was a sharp spike in COVID-19 cases in Lucknow. At that time, Lucknow had about 2,500 active patients — the highest number of active cases in the entire state. According to Pandey (2020), about 1600 of the 2500 active cases had "surfaced", with merely 15 days, prior to when the article was written. It had led to the government's policy of instituting containment zones all over the city, whereby individual movement was minimised to the farthest extent possible (Pandey, 2020, para. 2). In fact, the COVID-19 crisis has continued unabated in Lucknow. On the 7th of August, Lucknow saw the largest spike in the cases and fatalities in the entire state. There were 707 new cases with 13 deaths taking the total tally of deaths to 138, with approximately 11,000 cases (Express News Service, 2020).

Given these new realities, it is little wonder that the respondents did not consider any lightening of lockdown measures, such as not having to wear masks or maintain social distancing, to have any appeal, based on the deterioration of the situation. Certainly, amidst the spike in cases, they would also have found it hard to entertain the idea of a decline in COVID-19-related deaths. The risk of catching COVID-19 deaths was just way too high.

Conclusion

The aim of the research study was to conduct a case study analysis of the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the restaurant industry by evaluating the pre- and post-COVID-19 usage of restaurant services of Indian respondents in Lucknow. The results show that both the mean dining out and delivery frequency levels declined substantially after COVID-19 lockdown compared to the pre-COVID-19 figures. As the changes in the mean ratings are shown to be statistically significant, the null hypotheses can be rejected. At the same time, the monthly expenditure on outside food also showed a substantial statistically significant drop from before the COVID-19 lockdown. Therefore, the null hypothesis can be rejected in this case as well. These results certainly accord with the real-life situation. Despite the easing of the lockdown, with the authorised re-opening of restaurants, the continuous prevalence of the COVID-19 pandemic throughout India and Lucknow has understandably generated tremendous fear and uncertainty among people (Bisaria, 2020). It would seem that the respondents were extremely uncomfortable with accessing outside sources for their meals, which does not bode well for the restaurant industry.

Finally, in comparing the mean ratings of the three factors that could impact the respondents' willingness to dine out, the study showed that the decline in the coronavirus deaths was considered to be more important than the easing of the measures of mask-wearing and social distancing on the respondents' willingness to dine out. The One-Way ANOVA shows that the null hypothesis can be rejected. Nonetheless, none of the three factors had a particularly high mean rating. Out of a possible rating of 5, the mean rating of the top factor — a decline in coronavirus deaths — was just 2.33. Therefore, other factors that might have had a greater influence on the respondents' willingness to dine out should be identified in future studies.

It is important to point out that, at the time of the formulation of the survey, it was perceived that the easing of lockdown measures or the positive news about a decline in coronavirus-related deaths could have been enticements for the respondents to consider dining out. However, almost two months down the road, during this stage of the writing, the COVID-19 crisis had worsened significantly to illuminate the vast gulf between the hopefulness underlying the assumptions of the survey questions and the ensuing reality.

These results certainly confirm the adverse impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the restaurant industry — both the dining out and the delivery of outside food frequency levels plunged. It is likely that the decline in the anticipated post-COVID-19 lockdown patterns can be attributed to concerns with safety and hygiene. Amidst the rules imposed on the restaurants, consumers are likely to become even more particular about their dining out decisions and experiences. According to Vishal (2020), sanitation and hygiene are likely to become the top priority for "price sensitive customers" who may be more conscious than ever of the added costs of their dining experiences (para. 11). Concomitantly, they would also expect their food to be prepared safely by well-equipped staff who would take stringent care of their safety and security (Vishal, 2020).

Therefore, it would be critical for restaurants to keep their business afloat by putting safety and hygiene as the top priority (DeFranco, 2020). Outlets can change their "floor plan" to minimise the number of tables to increase the space between guests (DeFranco, 2020, para. 13). Time-to-time disinfection of the tables, utensils and the floor must also be instituted. The placement of sanitisers on the tables, along with the offering of face shields and masks, can further enhance the impression of the provision of a safe dining experience (DeFranco, 2020). All in all, customers need to feel safe to dine at the restaurants without being distracted by safety and sanitations concerns.

Just as significantly, restaurants should also embark on a concerted attempt to communicate the adaptations they are undertaking to their consumers. This can be done affordably and effectively through social networking and various other social media platforms. It is imperative that they make "caution a part of their brands" and put these "efforts" into the right words on their websites, etc. Consumers would thus be made to feel that the restaurants are just as particular about their safety as they are (DeFranco, 2020, para. 11).

Besides bolstering the safety of the dining environment, restaurants can consider concocting and marketing dishes to attract the health-conscious (Shahri, 2020). By introducing plant-derived food or dishes with ingredients that

can help in building immunity, restaurants may be effective in gaining the attention of a new and regular clientele in this constantly changing scenario.

Another thing that was prevalent back in the days prior to COVID-19, and which may prove to be profitable in the present situation, is the drive-through facility. Since consumers are reluctant to dine out and also expressed their hesitation at ordering food delivery, restaurants with the space could consider setting up a drive-through as an alternative platform. Outlets can also appeal to people by offering coupons dedicated to the celebration of special occasions like birthdays, anniversaries, and festivals, times when people are likely to want to dine out or purchase large orders of outside food.

Although the results show that delivery frequency dipped significantly, which also accords with the literature, delivery still seems to be the next most feasible option to most chains that hope to provide a complete "food experience, sans the ambience" (Goyal, 2020, para. 17). Now that the lockdown has begun to ease and people are moving out and going to offices, they are once again left with no time to cook, and with the stigma around distancing and hygiene eating on their canteen visits, a very clever way to attract such a population could be by providing tiffin delivery options (Kamble et al., 2018). Restaurants can reach out to multinational companies and other firms with a large number of employees to provide a selection of quality tiffin lunches at low cost in the office. For instance, they can take a leaf out of the marketing strategy "book" of restaurants at five-star hotels like Grand Hyatt in Singapore. Its selection of 17 bentos featuring cuisines from all over the world at a price of SGD10 (Teng, 2020), which can be pre-booked up to a certain time and packaged for collection within designated hours, provides a good idea for adoption and modification ("Grand Hyatt $10 Bento Takeaway", 2020). While customers are expected to pick up these orders themselves in Singapore, restaurants in India could be delivering the orders, which could be particularly worthwhile in the case of large mass orders.

So long as a treatment or vaccine remains unavailable to the populace at large, the pandemic's foothold will remain in the months ahead. As the results have shown how the respondents' anticipated dining out frequency would still decline with the easing of the lockdown, it is imperative that restaurants find creative and safe ways to ensure that they can provide a pleasant, but yet, reassuring dining experience for their customers. Of course, at the same time, their business model for the new normal must still enable them to keep their businesses afloat. As restaurant owners weigh the costs of closing temporarily and wait till the storm subside, or try out some of the ideas suggested here, such as immunity-boosting dishes and the tiffin delivery services, it is imperative that they act swiftly to rise to the challenge of this unpredictable situation.

Acknowledgments

References

AIMS Institutes. (2020). *Rise of the restaurant industry in India. https://theaims.ac.in/resources/rise-of-the-restaurant-industry-in-india.html*

Bisaria, R. (2020, May 22). Coronavirus impact: What the future holds for battered restaurant industry. *Business Today.* https://www.businesstoday.in/current/economy-politics/coronavirus-impact-what-the-future-holds-for-battered-restaurant-industry/story/404694.html

Chauhan,V. S. (2020, August 7). 664 new COVID cases in Lucknow: Daily count crosses 500-mark thrice in three days. *The Times Of India.* https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/lucknow/664-new-covid-cases-daily-count-crosses-500-mark-thrice-in-7-days/articleshow/77403283.cms

DeFranco, L. (2020, March 13). *How restaurants can minimise the impact of COVID-19.* Seven Rooms. https://sevenrooms.com/en/blog/restaurants-minimize-covid-19/

Deol, T. (2020, June 13). *India returns to action in unlock 1.0- with fever guns, new habits and longing for the old.* The Print. https://theprint.in/opinion/newsmaker-of-the-week/india-returns-to-action-in-unlock-1-0-with-fever-guns-new-habits-and-longing-for-the-old/440766/

ET Online. (2020, March 25). India will be under complete lockdown for 21 days: Narendra Modi. *The Economic Times.* https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/india-will-be-under-complete-lockdown-starting-midnight-narendra-modi/articleshow/74796908.cms

Express News Service. (2020, August 8). Record rise in fatalities, Lucknow hits a new high. *The Indian Express.* *https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/lucknow/record-rise-in-fatalities-lucknow-hits-a-new-high-6545251/*

Express Web Desk. (2020, June 4). Unlock 1.0: Centre issues SOPs for religious places, malls, restaurants and offices. *The Indian Expres*s. https://indianexpress.com/article/india/lockdown-5-unlock-1-health-ministry-releases-new-sops-for-religious-places-restaurants-offices-malls-6442959/

Express Web Desk. (2020, August 1). Coronavirus live updates. *The Indian Express.* https://indianexpress.com/article/india/live-coronavirus-india-latest-news-updates-lockdown-unlock-3-guidelines-covid-19-vaccine-tracker-corona-cases-today-news-bihar-delhi-6531608/

FE ONLINE. (2020, July 24). Uttar Pradesh lockdown updates: Weekend lockdown to be enforced; Check rules, what is open, what is not. *Financial Express.* https://www.financialexpress.com/lifestyle/health/lockdown-in-up-lucknow-uttar-pradesh-lockdown-news-extension/2029293/

Goyal, S. (2020, May 7). *Future shock: 25 food trends post COVID-19.* Brand Equity. *https://brandequity.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/marketing/future-shock-25-food-trends-post-covid-19/75590741*

Grand Hyatt $10 bento takeaway – The $10 burger is the best. (n. d.). The Ordinary Patrons. https://ordinarypatrons.com/2020/05/22/grand-hyatt-10-bento-takeaway-review/

Gray, D. E. (Ed.). (2014). *Doing research in the real world* (3rd ed). Sage.
IANS. (2020, July 21). COVID-19 lockdown impact: With limited customers, UP restaurants to shut down again. *National Herald.* https://www.nationalheraldindia.com/national/covid-19-lockdown-impact-with-limited-customers-up-restaurants-to-shut-down-again

Jaganmohan, M. (2020, June 26). *Restaurant Industry in India-statistics and facts.* Statista. https://www.statista.com/topics/6593/restaurant-industry-in-india/

John Hopkins University & Medicine, Coronavirus Resource Center. (2020, August 7). *COVID-19 in the USA.* https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/

Kamble, J., Ghorpade, P., Bhangale, Y., & Kanere, K. (2018). Tiffin services application and live tracking. *International Research Journal of Engineering and Technology,* 5(3), 2842-2844. https://www.irjet.net/archives/V5/i3/IRJET-V5I3653.pdf

Khan, T. (2020, June 8). *Unlock 1.0|Complete list of what will reopen and what will remain closed from today.* Jagran English. https://english.jagran.com/india/as-india-enters-unlock-10-know-what-will-open-and-what-remain-closed-across-country-from-june8-10012683

Kumar, K.S. (2020, May 18). *India's food delivery firms hit by COVID-19.* Asia Times. https://asiatimes.com/2020/05/indias-food-delivery-firms-hit-by-covid-19/

Maggo, K. (2019, August 6). *The state of restaurant business of India*. Limetray. https://limetray.com/blog/restaurant-business-in-india/

Malhotra, R. (2019, May 31). *Growth trends in the Indian restaurant industry.* Hospitality Biz India. http://www.hospitalitybizindia.com/detailNews.aspx?aid=30462&sid=42

Mehrotra, A. (2020, April 15). Indian restaurant industry will never be the same. *Economic Times*. https://cio.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/corporate-news/the-indian-restaurant-industry-will-never-be-the-same/75157663

Meraki Kitchen. (2019, October 10). *Evolution of fusion food in India*. Medium. https://medium.com/@meraakikitchen/evolution-of-fusion-food-in-india-46dd0aba3e76

Misra, S. M., & Wadhwa, A. (2020, June 8). #Unlock1.0: Restaurants unsure about reopening. *The Times of India.* https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/lucknow/unlock1-0-restaurants-unsure-about-reopening/articleshow/76254967.cms

Nicola, M., Alsafi, Z., Sohrabi, C., Kerwan, A., Al-Jabir, A., Iosifidis, C., Agha, M., & Agha, R. (2020). The socio-economic implications of the coronavirus (COVID-19): A review. *International Journal of Surgery,* 78, 185-193. https://doi.org/10.1016%2Fj.ijsu.2020.04.018

Pandey, A. (2020, July 20). Parts of Lucknow in lockdown, 8-fold rise in COVID cases in a month. *The Times of India*. https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/coronavirus-large-parts-of-lucknow-made-containment-zones-for-a-week-amid-covid-spike-2265701

Pravabathi, Y., Kishore, N. T. K., & Kumar, M. R. (2014). Problems and changing needs of consumers in fast food industry: The Indian perspective. *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications*, 4(2), 1–4. http://www.ijsrp.org/research-paper-0214/ijsrp-p26115.pdf

Restaurant businesses hit by COVID-19, face a long road to recovery. (2020, May 14). The Hindu Business Line. https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/economy/restaurant-businesses-hit-by-covid-19-face-a-long-road-to-recovery/article31580788.ece#

Roose, K. (2020, March 10). Sorry but working from home is overrated. *The New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/10/technology/working-from-home.html*

Sanjeevi, S. (2020, April 20). *Post COVID-19 scenarios for restaurants.* ReTales. https://retail.economictimes.indiatimes.com/re-tales/post-covid-19-scenario-for-restaurants/4178

Sen, T. C. (2004). *Food culture in India.* Greenwood Publishing Group.

Seshayee, H. (n. d.). India's middle class. *Americas Quarterly.* https://www.americasquarterly.org/indias-middle-class/

Shahri, P. (2020, May 14). *Five food trends that will define 'new normal' post COVID -19.* NDTV FOOD. https://food.ndtv.com/food-drinks/coronavirus-5-food-trends-that-will-define-new-normal-post-covid-19-epidemic-2228621

SMERGERS. (2020). *Indian restaurant industry.* https://www.smergers.com/industry-watch/indian-restaurant-in-dustry/

Teng, M. (2020, June 4). *Grand Hyatt offers $10 takeaway meals — Laksa, biryani & burgers included.* Today. https://www.todayonline.com/8days/eatanddrink/newsandopening/grand-hyatt-offers-10-takeaway-meals-laksa-bi-ryani-burgers-included

The changing restaurant trends in Lucknow. (n. d). The Restaurant Times. https://www.posist.com/restaurant-times/features/changing-restaurant-trends-lucknow.html

Vishal, A. (2020, March 29). How coronavirus could affect restaurants and the culture of eating out in India. *The Economic Times.* https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/services/hotels-/-restaurants/how-the-coronavirus-pandemic-could-affect-restaurants-and-the-culture-of-eating-out-in-india/articleshow/74867157.cms?from=mdr

World Health Organization. (2020b, March 11). *WHO director general's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19-11 March 2020. https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---11-march-2020*

World Health Organization. (2020a, April 17). *Q&A on coronavirus.* https://www.who.int/emergencies/dis-eases/novel-coronavirus-2019/question-and-answers-hub/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses

Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods.* Sage.