

# A STUDY ON SHIFT IN CONSUMER MINDSET AMONGST RESTAURANT-GOERS IN MUMBAI WITH THE RISE OF NEW MEDIA

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## Abstract

The paper aims to provide a closer look at the shift in consumer behaviour amongst restaurant-goers in Mumbai and how consumption of information through various mediums of information influence their decisions of eating out or ordering in. The study attempts to understand where the restaurant-goers are consuming their information from, what apps/ mediums of information. It throws light on the shift of mainstream media to social media and traces the evolution of consumer behaviour amongst restaurant-goers. It also takes into consideration factors that are important to a restaurant-goer when making the selection of a restaurant to dine-at or order from. The study also incorporates views from restaurant-owners to provide a holistic understanding of the subject at hand.

**Keywords:** Consumer behaviour, restaurants, restaurant-goers, social media, influencing factors, discovery, new media,

## INTRODUCTION

Eating out/ restaurants in India isn't a recent phenomenon. Some of India's earliest restaurants were products of the Mughal era. Works by authors like Bernier, historian Stephen Blake documents the existence of coffee houses that sold food and beverage and served as a meeting spot for poets, intellectuals to interact with each other. This, right there, was the beginning of a cafe culture where food & beverage were enablers of social & cultural interaction.

The cafe culture/ coworking that we see growing popular among the youth was similar to the qahwakhana culture of old Delhi. Soon enough markets in cities like Lahore, Hyderabad, Lucknow had entire streets dedicated to full joints consisting of small restaurants, and shops with famous chefs specializing in one dish.

Even during the British era, a lot of businesses came up in larger cities that sold cheap, filling meals to people who had moved from villages to cities to work for their colonial masters. However, another evolution was happening alongside. With colonialism, India saw a more upscale dining experience with expensive crockery, waiters in uniforms, formal service and European inspired dishes, what we call 'continental' food today.

For the Indians at the time, caste-based restaurants started coming up where they were different foods and kitchens for the Hindus and Muslims. In the south, vegetarian Brahmin Udipi hotels started coming up to cater to students and officers.

Post partition, much changed. Foods escaped religious identities. Eating out became a trend with new-moneyed people. In 1970's and after, restaurants began opening in hotels like the Taj under the leadership and direction of Camelia Punjabi.

In the 1980's and 1990's, the country saw a growing restaurant culture serving food across cuisines. Post globalisation, India saw the entry of McDonald's, the American fast food joint.

As Indians started travelling abroad for work or leisure, they became increasingly more exposed to flavours and different kinds of global food. Eating out in the 1990's was an occasional thing to celebrate something.

From what eating used to be, it has dramatically changed in this century. More and more young people wanted to go to a cafe/ restaurant to socialize, to experience a different kind of atmosphere. Customers that are millennials and Gen Z are now expecting more than simply good food out of restaurants. According to a survey by Deloitte in 2017 called *Through guests eyes | Serving up a great restaurant customer experience*, restaurant goers today are looking to be engaged, empowered, heard, delighted and known by restaurants.

In times like these, it has become increasingly challenging for restaurants to provide that overall experience. Each customer is influenced in their own right. Social media has empowered consumers by giving them a platform to share their feedback/ opinion. This means that the brand is not the only one with a voice.

Earlier, before social media was such an integrated part of our lives, people would consume information about products/ businesses through traditional mediums like newspapers, magazines, radio and television. As technology progressed, we moved our information consumption habits online. We start discovering things via

social media because it provides a much bigger platform by opening up a world of information for us. From that day on, till date, most of our lifestyle related consumption choices are largely based on the information we consume on social media.

With respect to dining, all brands have a social media presence to communicate with their customers because that's where most of their consumers are attentively listening & engaging.

Apart from social media, apps like Zomato, Swiggy, Dine Out have provided great visibility to restaurants by being apps that people almost instantly open when they are looking to dine-out or order-in from a restaurant. Apps like these and social media have made the competition a lot more intense for restaurant brands because of the limited attention span of consumers.

Hence, the paper seeks to understand where the customers are consuming information from and which mediums specifically and to see if restaurant owners are making best use of new media to effectively communicate with their customers. Most importantly, how these factors affect consumer choices amongst restaurant-goers in Mumbai.

A restaurant's brand is no longer only about food. If it ever was. Quality food is a basic expectation—the ultimate table stakes—and it is only one of many components that drives guest experience, and ultimately, customers' decisions about where to eat and how much they're willing to pay. In fact, modern dining starts and ends far beyond the physical experience, as mobile apps drive everything from ordering, tracking, delivery, and pick-up to instant photo posts and opinion-sharing. This shift puts the guest squarely in the driver's seat. And that means the ability to deliver consistently engaging, memorable experiences that drive a connection to the brand at every touchpoint is more critical than ever. (Through guests' eyes | Serving up a great restaurant customer experience - Report by Deloitte)

*The Consumer Decision Model (also known as the Engel-Blackwell-Miniard Model)* was originally developed in 1968 by Engel, Kollat, and Blackwell. The model is structured around a seven point decision process: need recognition followed by a search of information both internally and externally, the evaluation of alternatives, purchase, post purchase reflection and finally, divestment. These decisions are influenced by two main factors. Firstly stimuli is received and processed by the consumer in conjunction with memories of previous experiences, and secondly, external variables in the form of either environmental influences or individual. The environmental influences identified include: Culture; social class; personal influence; family and situation. While the individual influences include: Consumer resource; motivation and involvement; knowledge; attitudes; personality; values and lifestyle (Blackwell, Miniard et al. 2001).

This model provides a great base to understand the reasoning behind a consumer's decision making. There is not one single factor but many that influence his/ her decision making. From word-of-mouth reviews, cost of meal, location and much more, a restaurant-goer's decision is not a simple one.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The objectives of the research are to examine the influence of new media on the choice of restaurant customers will choose to dine at and to understand the use of new media by restaurant owners to communicate with their target audience.

The method used for this study is a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods of research. A survey would be conducted with 40 people who frequently dine-in at premium casual restaurants in Mumbai above the age of 22 of the genders both male and female.

## FINDINGS AND OBSERVATIONS

In this section, the data collected through the survey was thoroughly examined as a means to understand the impact of new media on consumer behaviour amongst restaurant-goers in Mumbai.

A total of 40 people were part of the survey. People selected to fill the survey are frequent diners who either order-in or dine out.

The survey consisted of 12 questions in total from which 10 were objective questions and 2 were open-ended questions.

Data was analysed using Microsoft Excel and represented using simple bar diagrams. A combination of demographics and consumer choices are also shown using diagrams to establish a correlation between age, gender and consumption habits.

The age of respondents for this particular survey was between 20 to 40 years where 27.5% of respondents are between the ages of 20 - 25 years. 35 % of respondents are between the ages of 25 - 30 years. 15 % of respondents are between the ages 30 - 35 years and the rest 22.5% of respondents are between the ages 35 - 40 years. 42.5% respondents are female i.e. 17 out of the total 40. The remaining 57.5% are male i.e. 23 out of 40.

When we studied their consumption habits, results revealed that a majority, 40%, of respondents eat out/ order in about 5-10 a month. This is followed by 22.5% of respondents eating out/ ordering in over 15 times a month. Third, we have 20% of respondents who eat out/ order 10-15 times a month and the rest 17.5% order in/ eat out 1-5 meals a month.

Subsequently, we study their spending habits. Most people, 45% of the respondents spend between INR 1000-1500 per meal when they eat out/ order in. Second to that, 37.5% respondents said they spend upto INR 1000 per meal. 15% of respondents said they spend between INR 1500-2000 per meal and surprisingly only 1 person, i.e 2.5% of respondents said they spend an average of above INR 2000 on per meal.

As we delved deeper into what factors influence the decisions of restaurant-goers while choosing a restaurant to eat at/ order from. They were asked to pick 3 factors from service quality, price, recommendation from friends, product quality, location, atmosphere and cleanliness. When the results came in, product quality, location of the restaurant and service quality (in that order) were ranked the highest or were given most importance when choosing the restaurant. Atmosphere, cleanliness and recommendations from friends ranked the lowest.

Majority of respondents (36.8%) said they discover restaurants via conversation with friends, family or colleagues indicating that word of mouth is a very powerful medium to share information. Second closest to word of mouth is social media (28.7%) that consists of applications like Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, etc.

At 5.7%, email newsletters & online articles were among the least popular mediums of discovery for respondents followed by newspapers, magazines and radio at 3.4%.

Though not typically media outlets, food apps were among the top 3 discovery platforms with over 24.1% of people selecting the options. Zomato, Swiggy, Scootsy, Dine Out are few of the popular food apps used by diners in the city. While most of them are delivery apps, a few of them offer the option of making reservations, ordering-in food, posting reviews and lots more.

For the respondents that chose social media as one of the options in the question above, this question studies what are the most popular apps that help in discovering restaurants. Zomato, Swiggy, Dine Out might not be social media apps but there exists a thriving community culture within these apps where experts post reviews, interact with an audience. These are very influential when someone is deciding where to eat and what to eat.

We can see in the table above a list of apps with frequencies alongside. Instagram at 33.8% followed closely by Zomato at 29.9% were the most popular when it came to restaurant discoveries. Facebook, Snapchat and Google Maps were among the lowest here.

A follow up to the previous couple of questions, here, one is able to study the source of information about restaurants on social media. Whether it is through a friend's profile, an advertisement, a blog or a random discovery, these are the various sources through which consumers find out about restaurants.

Most respondents discovered places to eat/ order from through a friend's profile. It made up 30.6% of the inputs received followed by blogs and influencer profiles at 27.8% and random discovery was a close third at 25%.

At 15.3%, advertisements were far behind when it came to discovering restaurants. Only 11 out of 40 respondents selected advertisements. Of all the respondents, only 20% of them actually followed restaurants on social media.

## CONCLUSION

From all the data gathered, we see some striking trends when it comes to how restaurant-goers are consuming information. Newspapers, magazines and radio might be more credible sources of information but they are definitely not mediums affecting consumer choices. Even with social media, Facebook, Snapchat, Google maps that restaurant owners spend so much time building are not apps where consumers are getting their information.

Instagram is definitely the most popular medium followed by apps like Zomato. But even then, people are not actively following restaurants they frequently eat at/ order from. This should make restaurant-owners reassess their marketing & communication strategies to mediums that their consumers are more frequently visiting. People are more interested in seeing communication about the product than anything else. For marketers and communication experts, the strategy should be more focused towards engaging with micro-influencers and community voices. These are influencers that have a very strong voice and influence and people view them as more credible than their more popular counterparts.

Spending on ads depends on the objective. For visibility, ads are great but not enough to convert business. Another key observation was that people are heavily influenced by how their friends think of a restaurant. Word-of-mouth plays a vital role in determining whether a restaurant-goer will pick a certain restaurant or not. To conclude, it is very important that restaurant owners are communicating effectively using the right mediums to engage with their audience.

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