Selection of QSRs on the basis of Customers' Marital Status: A Study of Gurugram City

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ABSTRACT

In India people were used to have food in restaurants occasionally, but now the trend is changing and eating in restaurants has become a common phenomenon. The study is based on one of the emerging segments in Indian food service industry i.e. Quick Service Restaurants (QSRs) with the purpose understanding of Indian QSR customers' preferences for choosing and visiting a particular QSR considering their marital status. Three categories namely, unmarried; married; and married (with children) have been used to carry out the study. To serve the purpose, 100 respondents visiting QSRs in Gurugram city were surveyed using a self-administered questionnaire. Descriptive statistical techniques like frequencies and Friedman rank test were used to evaluate the data. This paper examines how attributes of QSR drive the customers to choose a particular QSR over the others. Reasonable prices are the most important factor for unmarried respondents while choosing a QSR. Married and married (with children) respondents preferred QSRs with well-mannered employees.

Keywords- QSR; QSR attributes; marital status

Paper type- Research Paper

Introduction

The restaurant industry is one of key contributors in economies of many Asian countries including India (Voon, 2012). India is a food-loving country, however earlier Indians had never been habitual of eating out. But the picture is now heading towards a humongous change. Restaurant industry in India has grown rapidly over a decade. In the year 2017, Indian restaurant sector was valued at US $ 52 Billion (INR 3,37,500 Crores) and is projected to grow to US $ 85 Billion (INR 5,52,000 Crores) by the year 2022 (Jashnani, 2018). Annual growth rate of Indian restaurant sector has been 8 percent since 2013 and is estimated to be 9 percent in 2019 as reported by FICCI-PWC (2018).

Restaurant is a place where one can buy and eat a meal or a business establishment that offers fine dining with a wide selection of foods and beverages, along with table service (Srivastava, 2015). A number of segments have been evolved in Indian restaurant industry which includes cafe; quick service restaurants (QSRs); casual dining restaurants (CDRs) etc. QSRs have emerged as a dominating segment over the past few years. Domino's, McDonalds, Pizza Hut, KFC etc are some of the brands in QSRs. However, there is large number of local brands also which offer quick food services.

The report by FICCI-PWC (2018) says that 41 percent of population eating outside prefer QSRs, 36 percent prefer CDRs and remaining 23 percent prefer any other segment like a cafe. The report also reveals that main reason of people having food in QSRs with family and friends is to relax, de-stress and socialise. It is important for QSRs to understand the reasons why people eat out. Schafer et al. (1999) have studied that many people who do not have time to prepare meals at home, find QSRs convenient. Working people go to a QSR that can provide them food within given time and budget.

Changing lifestyle, rapid urbanisation, working couples are the factors responsible for growth of QSR industry in India. Customers' evaluation of QSR attributes, while making choice of QSR, is critical to the QSRs which are aimed at improving their service quality in accordance to the preferences of customers (Jain and Gupta, 2004). Liu and Tse (2018) have stated that a restaurateur needs to understand the probable attributes that are considered by customers while selecting a QSR and how does performance of QSR in relation to these attributes influence the decision making process for QSR and customer satisfaction. A QSR failing to understand how a customer prioritise the QSR attributes and choose a particular QSR would see a declining number of customers and sales revenue. So management must be constantly aware of what customers want and address the deficiency of their establishment accordingly.

There are a variety of attributes customers consider while eating out in QSR like skilled and trained employees; attractive ambience; social environment; food quality; convenient location; reasonable prices; prompt services; well-mannered employees etc.

Choices of customers are affected by the behaviour of employees towards them like their gesture to welcome customers, smiling and saying thank you etc. A well-mannered employee can influence customers in such a way that makes them visit to a particular QSR again.

When a customer goes to a QSR, he doesn't want to wait for too long, so, services should be provided promptly. Especially the unmarried customers remain in haste and do prefer the restaurants which provide quick services. Prices play a crucial role in choice making. One of the most important attribute of a QSR is reasonable prices. If standardised quality of food is provided at reasonable prices in a QSR, customers will surely be the frequent visitors to QSR. It is a very important attribute to be considered by customers that a QSR should be situated at a place where they can reach conveniently; otherwise they will go somewhere else which they find to be convenient.

Other customers present in a QSR also create an environment for a customer; social environment. Some customers may find the social environment to be delightful and some may not. Customers finding the social environment to be delightful would come again.

Environment of QSRs needs to be attractive like displays, sitting arrangements with proper spacing, attractive lightings, pleasant music etc. In this attribute is not present in a QSR customers would not like to visit again. Skilled and trained employees know very well which work is to be done by whom and they are perfectly coordinated. They are also trained enough to use latest technology so that they can handle the critical issues like void transactions and thus help solving the problems being faced by customers .

Savoca and Miller (2001) found that preferences of customers towards these QSR attributes get affected by the marital status of customers. Unmarried customers can make their choices liberally without getting affected by anyone else. Whereas, choices of married customers are based on choices of their family like i.e.

spouse; children. Married customers having children have to consider factors like hygiene and standardised quality etc. (Umberson, 1992).

There is an increasing competition in the QSR industry providing customer with more alternatives to choose from. Every day, new entrants offering differentiated food products are entering into the picture making the competition quite stiff (Voon, 2012). To face severe competition and assure its existence, a QSR is in need of achieving and maintaining higher standards of various QSR attributes (Voon, 2012). For this purpose, it is important to understand the needs of customers and identify the key attributes that play a crucial role in attracting customers (Srivastava, 2015).

Review of Literature

Making QSR choices is a dynamic process (Boveet al., 2002). Over a period of time attitude of customers have changed. While eating outside, customers not only expect food quality but also want QSRs to understand their requirements (Sudhagar and Rajendran, 2017). Moreover, Sudhagar and Rajendran (2017) stated customers are no longer ready to ignore the attributes of QSRs. In a study, Srivastava (2015) explained people go to QSRs to quench their hunger and a desire for food. In this process they always expect to derive pleasure and be satisfied. Hence, a customer attempts to make a wiser choice. This makes it necessary for service providers to be vigilant to better understand the choices of customers.

Plausible reasons for eating food in QSRs are busier lifestyle; working women; people staying alone and more disposable income (Srivastava, 2015). Due to increasing employment of women outside home and extensive changes in lifestyle, use of QSR food is growing. Customers are becoming more demanding and their needs are diverse (Stevens et al., 1995).

Marital status of a customer also plays an important role in influencing diverse needs and he makes QSR choices accordingly (Stack and Eshleman, 1998). Srivastava (2015) has stated that customer may be an unmarried person who independently takes decisions. On the other hand, if a customer is a married person, he would be required to conside spouse's choice. Thirdly, there are customers having children, they have to consider their families' choices also before taking a decision to visit any QSR (Srivastava, 2015). Family strongly affects behaviour of customers while choosing a QSR (Williams and Umberson, 2004).

Sharing a common household and living together for a long time makes it possible that choices of a family tend to converge. Such effect can be evidenced by situations in which one partner adopts weight loss diet and there is a spin off effect that changes the diet of other partner (Savoca and Miller, 2001). Although such convergence of choices does not occur always, but choices are definitely affected in different ways by marital status of customers (Falk et al., 2000).

Since 1980s, structure of Indian families has undergone tremendous changes such as decreased family size, increased number of women working outside (Beaty and Talpade, 1994). Although all these changes have a major effect on choice making process of the families yet there have been a very few studies to this respect. Diener et al. (2000) found that unmarried people are independent and have a strong self-concept which makes them more curious and exploring whereas married people along with ones having children express fear and anxiety in exploring choices available in market. Customers having children have to consider their children's choices also while making a choice and they seek assurance of quality too (Nelson, 1978).

In other words, it can be said that customer decision making varies on the basis of marital status (Holt-Lunstadet al., 2008). Married and unmarried persons have their own criteria of choosing a particular QSR which depicts existence of difference in their attitudes and behaviour in reality (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2008).Married people maintain a long relationship with a particular QSR as compared to the unmarried ones (Guenzi and Pelloni, 2004). They repeatedly visit the same QSR as they are attracted by service quality and the social environment of that QSR (Butcher et al., 2002). On the contrary, unmarried customers seek reasonable prices. All the studies discussed above have clearly stated that there is a strong effect of marital status of customers on their choices of QSRs.

Number of studies have been conducted giving considerable attention to food and families yet studies examining marital status and QSR choices are found to be negligible. Choices of customers on the basis of marital status have not been studied so far. This study would fulfil this gap also as the main focus of this study would be on marital status-based preferences of customers while making the choices of QSRs.

Objective of the study

The objective of this study is to understand the preferences of Indian customers, on the basis of their marital status, to choose a particular QSR over the others available in market. To fulfil the purpose, marital status of customers and attributes of QSR have been used as a framework. By identifying customers' preferences, QSRs operating in India, would be able to understand what are the attributes customers consider while making a choice.

Methodology

This study is basically exploratory cum descriptive in nature. In order to have an understanding of understanding the attributes of QSRs that seem to be important for customers while making a choice, discussions with area experts, practitioners and academicians were carried initially. Moreover, some customers who frequently visited QSRs were also interviewed.

Based on review of literature and interviewing with experts and customers a self-administered questionnaire was developed. After rigorous discussions the attributes that were finalised to be included in questionnaire were well-mannered employees; prompt services; reasonable prices; convenient loacation; social environment; attractive and charismatic ambience; and skilled and trained employees. Respondents were asked how frequently they visit a QSR. Then they were asked to rank various QSR attributes they consider to be important while choosing a particular QSR.

Questionnaires were filled up by a total of 100 respondents belonging to Gurugram city in Haryana. This city was selected because QSR industry is emerging rapidly in the city and the number of working people is very large. Convenient cum judgmental sampling technique has been used in order to select the respondents in the said city. 52 of the total sample size were male respondents and 48 were female respondents. A general profile of respondents has been given in Table-1.

Collected data was fed in SPSS for analysis. Separate analyses were done for all the three categories of respondents on the basis of their marital status; unmarried, married and married (with children). Data was tabulated and analysed in terms of frequencies to derive results. Then, Friedman rank test was applied to calculate mean rank in order to understand the preferences of respondents while choosing any QSR.

Table-1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demographic variables	Category	Frequency
Gender	Male	52
	Female	48
Age(in years)	18-25	23
	26-35	49
	36 and above	28
Education	Diploma holder	4
	Graduation	57
	Post-Graduation	26
	Professional	13
Marital Status	Unmarried	27
	Married	48
	Married (with children)	25
Total		**100**

Source: Primary data

As shown inTable-1, respondents having age above 18 years were included. 23 out of total 100 respondents were between the age of 18 to 25 years. 49 respondents were aged between 26to 35 years representing a major proportion of the total number of respondents. Remaining 28 respondents were of the age of 36 years or more. All the respondents were educated enough to respond to the questions asked. 4 respondents were diploma holders; 57 respondents were found to be graduate. 26 respondents had educational qualification of post-graduation and 13 respondents held a professional degree. Regarding marital status, 27 respondents were unmarried; 48 respondents were married and 25 respondents were married and had children. It is clearly shown that majority of respondents were found to be married.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The data has been analysed through cross tabulation; frequency distribution and Friedman rank test. Most appropriate probable results have been drawn using these techniques. Results are being presented in the form of tables and interpretation of the results has been done in this section.

Table-2: Marital status-based analysis of frequency of visits to QSR

Marital Status	Twice a month	Once a month	Occasionally	Total
Unmarried	14(51.85)	6(22.22)	7(25.93)	27(100)
Married	26(54.17)	10(20.83)	12(25)	48(100)
Married(with children)	11(44)	6(24)	8(32)	25(100)
Total	43	22	27	100

Note: Numbers in parentheses denote rank-wise percentage

Source: Primary data

Table no. 2 shows the frequency of visits to QSRs by the respondents. It is clear from the table that in the category of unmarried respondents, more than half of the respondents (51.85 percent) visit QSRs at least twice a month. Around one-fourth of unmarried respondents (25.93 percent) visit the QSRs occasionally. There were six respondents (22.22 percent) who visit the QSRs once a month.

54.17 percent of married respondents were also found to visit QSRs at least twice a month. 25 percent of married respondents (n = 12) preferred to visit the QSRs occasionally. Remaining 20.83 percent (n = 10) respondents who were married informed that they visit the QSRs once a month.

Taking into consideration the respondents who had children, it was found that 44 percent of respondents visited the QSRs twice a month. 32 percent of married (with children) respondents occasionally visit the QSRs. Little less than a quarter (24 percent) married (with children) respondents prefer to go to QSRs once a month. For all the three categories it was found that irrespective of their marital status, most of the respondents paid a visit to QSRs at least twice a month.

After analysing the frequency of visits to QSRs, preferences of all the three categories of customers towards the attributes of a QSR were evaluated. In order to understand the importance given to various QSR attributes, while choosing a particular QSR, the respondents were asked to rank the various attributes. To evaluate the data, Friedman rank test was applied to calculate mean values of ranks given by customers to the attributes of a QSR as shown in Table-3. The following null hypotheses were formulated to apply the test.

H_{01}: There is no significant difference in the mean ranks of the QSR attributes among unmarried respondents.

H_{02}: There is no significant difference in the mean ranks of the QSR attributes among married respondents.

H_{03}: There is no significant difference in the mean ranks of the QSR attributes among married (with children) respondents.

Table-3: Mean ranks (Friedman rank test) of all three categories of respondents' preferences towards the attributes of QSR

Attributes	Unmarried	Married	Married (with children)
Well-mannered employees	3.85	3.17	3.36
Prompt services	4.85	3.96	4.28
Reasonable prices	3.41	3.77	4.08
Convenient location	3.89	4.35	4.36
Social environment	5.30	5.58	5.56
Attractive and charismatic ambience	5.30	6.35	5.76
Assurance of quality	4.22	4.08	3.92
Skilled and trained employees	5.19	4.73	4.68
Chi-Square (X^2) value	17.667*	59.694*	19.267*
df (degree of freedom)	7	7	7

Note: * denotes that χ^2 is significant at 0.01 level
Source: Primary data

Mean ranks using Friedman rank test for all the three categories of respondents are shown in Table-3. Friedman rank test has revealed their chi-square (χ^2) values which are found to be significant at 0.01 level. It is clear from Table 3 that there is a significant difference between mean ranks of QSR attributes' among unmarried respondents as the test statistic chi-square (χ^2) value is 17.667 and df are 7 which is significant at 0.01 level. Hence, H_{01} is rejected on this ground thereby indicating that there is significant difference in the importance given by the unmarried respondents to the QSR attributes.

Mean ranks of QSR attributes' preferences among married respondents came out to be significant with chi-square (χ^2) value = 59.694 and df = 7. It means that H_{02} also gets rejected which indicates a significant difference in the importance given by the married respondents to QSR attributes. Lastly, in case of married (with children) respondents, Friedman test revealed significant chi-square (χ^2) value = 19.267 and df = 7. This is indicating significant difference in mean ranks of preferences of married (with children) respondents. Hence, H_{03} also gets rejected indicating that there is significant difference in the importance given by married (with children) respondents to QSR attributes.

Hence, it is concluded that for all three categories, importance given to various attributes of QSR by respondents is found to be significant. Further, these mean ranks have been simplified in Table 4 for a comparison between preferences of respondents belonging to three different categories on the basis of marital status.

Table-4: Comparison of ranks given by all three categories of respondents

Attributes	Unmarried	Married	Married (with children)
Well-mannered employees	2	1	1
Prompt services	5	3	4
Reasonable prices	1	2	3
Convenient location	3	5	5
Social environment	7	7	7
Attractive & charismatic ambience	8	8	8
Assurance of quality	4	4	2
Skilled & trained employees	6	6	6

Note: Primary data

Table-4 shows that unmarried respondents choose a particular QSR considering reasonable prices to be the most important attribute. To the contrary, their least preferred attribute is attractive and charismatic ambience. Unmarried respondents have mentioned that their second preference is well mannered employees followed by convenient location, assurance of quality, prompt services, skilled & trained employees and social environment.

Married respondents have considered well-mannered employees as the most important attribute, which is followed by other attributes; reasonable prices, prompt services, assurance of quality, convenient location, skilled & trained employees, social environment and attractive & charismatic ambience. It means they have considered the attractive & charismatic ambience as their least preferred attribute for the QSR.

Married (with children) respondents' first preference is well mannered employees which is similar to that of married respondents. Secondly, they have considered assurance of quality as they have to be extra cautious about their children's health and make choices accordingly. Reasonable prices come at third place for married (with children) respondents, which is followed by prompt services, convenient location, skilled & trained employees, social environment and attractive & charismatic ambience.

It is observed that choices of unmarried respondents are quite different from the married and married (with children) respondents. Unmarried ones consider prices first whereas, respondents of other two categories prefer well-mannered employees, which comes on second place for unmarried respondents. On the contrary, married respondents' second preference is reasonable prices which is third preference for married (with children) respondents. Married (with children) respondents have given their second preference to the assurance of quality which is considered on fourth by the other two categories of respondents. Married and married (with children) respondents' fifth preference is convenient location whereas, that of unmarried respondents is prompt services.

For the remaining three attributes, preferences of all three categories' respondents were found to be similar, which have been least preferred by all respondents. To conclude, it can be said that unmarried respondents

have different opinions on majority of attributes. On the other hand, preferences of married and married (with children) respondents tend to be similar on four attributes and distinct on the other four attributes.

Conclusion

This study has examined the preferences of customers towards various attributes of QSRs on the basis of their marital status. An attempt was made to understand the preferences of customers while making a choice of a QSR from a number of alternatives available in the market. As everybody has their opinions and different views, attributes affecting the QSR choices of customers are also different for different customers. Study provides an idea about the preferences of attributes as marital status of customers changes.

It would be worth mentioning that there are some limitations to study. This study is restricted to QSR industry and that too in Gurugram city only. Study has found relative differences in the choice making of customers having different marital status. Preferences of customers vary in relation to their marital status to a larger extent.

Findings of the study would surely help the researchers who have interest in studying the QSR industry in India. Similarly, it would be helpful to managers too for providing improved services to the customers based on their requirements. It would also be considerable that the attributes getting lower ranks do not imply that they are not required in QSR at all rather they are just having less importance as compared to others.

Suggestions/Managerial Implications

Based on findings, this study proposes some recommendations to the QSRs operating in India. Research has indicated that there is a criterion of selecting a QSR on the basis of which customers make choices. QSRs should keep this criterion in mind while determining their competitive strategy and design the products accordingly. Management must be aware of their weaknesses and try to remove these so that customers can choose QSR over the others operating in market.

As findings of study revealed that unmarried respondents have given highest preference to reasonable prices and secondly they prefer well-mannered employees. While, the attribute well-mannered employees have obtained first priority by married and married (with children) respondents. Second priority of married respondents is reasonable prices. On the other hand, married (with children) respondents have considered assurance of quality as their second preference. People in India are price sensitive and QSR industry is no exception to it. QSRs will have to find ways to keep their prices competitive in comparison to that of other QSRs. QSR owners need to keep a regular watch on pricing and promotional strategies adopted by competitors.

Preferences of all the customers give implications that managers should have a regular check on behaviour of employees towards customers. For this, a proper training should also be provided to employees on how to greet customers, paying attention to their orders and queries, saying thank you etc. Managers are required to check the quality of products, whether it is up to the expectations of customers or not and whether it is being provided on reasonable prices or not. If customers would not get quality food at reasonable prices they would feel unsatisfied and would definitely switch to other options available in market. Enhancing the value in terms of price and maintaining delight of customers should also be taken into consideration by QSR to sustain and be competitive in dynamic QSR industry.

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