

# Business Model Redesign for Dine-in Services Using Consumer Values Post COVID-19

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## Abstract

The growing working class and rising incomes of Indian urban consumers have significantly increased the consumption of outside food. The Indian restaurant industry was growing substantially before COVID-19 hit the country. The pandemic affected businesses nationwide, and the restaurant industry was no exception. To rebuild their businesses, restaurant owners need to redesign their business models. This paper suggested a customer-centric business modeling view of the restaurant industry. Some fundamental consumer values can anchor restaurants to redesign their business models based on customer preferences. This exploratory study identified consumer values and analyzed their importance from a diner's perspective.

**Keywords :** Business models, consumer values, dine-in experience, post-COVID world

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India is a vast country composed of people from various cultures, traditions, and lifestyles. Food has always been an integral part of the Indian way of life. The cuisines of India are rich in variety, taste, and ethnic diversity. Many food items in Indian cuisines have continued to be popular for centuries. Eating food outside the home has been a long cherished practice in India. Indians celebrate special events such as birthdays, anniversaries, or work promotions by dining in restaurants. However, many consumers who enjoy outside food do not need a special occasion to go out and eat. Eating out is often seen as a means of human bonding. However, a population of restaurant-goers in India also enjoys dining alone.

The consumption of restaurant-cooked food has increased in India in the past few years (NRAI, 2019). The national average frequency of people consuming restaurant-cooked food, including dining-in, grabbing a takeaway food packet, or getting the food delivered at home is 6.6 times a month. (NRAI, 2019). The food service industry in India stood at ₹ 4 Trillion in 2019 and was likely to touch ₹ 6 Trillion by 2022–2023 before the COVID pandemic hit the country like the rest of the world. Increasing disposable incomes and decreasing cooking time have increased the demand for outside food. The Indian restaurant industry employed 7.3 million people in 2018–2019.

A sizeable chunk of the food service sector in India is disorganized. The organized sector comprised only 35% of the food service industry and contributed ₹ 1.8 trillion in taxes in 2018–2019 (BS Web Team, 2019).

Traditionally, most global food service sector studies were conducted from a restaurant owner/manager's perspective. However, there has been a recent interest in researching customers' points of view and restaurant meals (Jensen & Hansen, 2007). Several consumer factors influence a diner's decision to eat at a particular restaurant. Global

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studies on consumer values on restaurant meals in the food service sector have brought a fresh perspective for building a consumer-centric business model for dine-in restaurants. This article identifies some consumer values that influence the consumer's decision to dine in a particular restaurant and studies the impact each consumer value generates. This study also considers the impact of the COVID pandemic on India's food service sector and how consumer values have changed post COVID. The location of this research was the Delhi National Capital Region of India.

## Restaurants in Delhi NCR

The National Capital Region residents (NCR) lead the other metropolitan cities in dining outside their homes. On average, the residents of Delhi dine out six times a month. They prefer local cuisines (BS Web Team, 2019). The dine-out places in Delhi include specialty restaurants, street kiosks or food carts, cafes or bistros, food courts, Ice-cream parlors, bakeries, and sweet shops.

↳ **Specialty Restaurants** : These dine-in outlets specialize in a specific food category or menu segment. Some restaurants focus on vegetarian cuisine, some on seafood, and others on non-vegetarian cuisine. Specialty food restaurants also cater to specific ethnic cuisines. Due to India's ample food diversity, the country offers many ethnic regional cuisines (Jain, Rakhi, & Bagler, 2015). Almost every Indian state has a unique food ethnicity. In Delhi NCR, North Indian foods include rice, lentils, vegetable curries, chickpea curry ('Chole'), and cottage cheese cubes ('Paneer'). 'Chapattis', 'Parathas', 'Pooris', and 'tandoori' bread, such as 'Naan' are popular. Ethnic foods from other states such as Gujarat, Punjab, Rajasthan, Bihar, Maharashtra, and West Bengal, are prevalent in the NCR. South Indian specialty foods such as 'Dosai', 'Idli', 'Sambhar', 'Medhu Vada', and 'Upma' are popular worldwide, and NCR is no exception. Besides Indian ethnic foods, NCR consumers also enjoy relishing international cuisines such as Chinese, Italian, Thai, and Continental. Of late, there has been a growing interest in healthy foods too.

↳ **Street Food** : Street food or food carts are eat-out places that serve meals and snacks to consumers. The street carts provide quick and affordable food service to consumers. The popular food carts on Delhi streets are fast food trucks, snack carts, lunch points, and fruit juice carts.

↳ **Cafes or Bistros** : A café or a bistro is a small eatery that serves light food. The most popular cafes in NCR are coffee shops, cakes and bakeries, and pizza junctions. Some traditional Indian sweet shops selling Indian confectionary have expanded their operations to include dine-in services.

↳ **Ice-cream Parlors** : Ice-cream parlors and western dessert shops have also gained prominence in the NCR. These parlors are usually flocked by the young crowd.

↳ **Food Courts** : Food courts have become commonplace with the advent of multinational companies and mall culture in the NCR. A food court comprises several eateries serving specialty food in a common area. Consumers can choose from any eatery and eat them in the common eating area or get the food packed and carry it away.

We will focus only on the specialty restaurants in New Delhi/NCR region for this study. Consumers from all age groups eat out; however, most are youth and working professionals.

## What is a Consumer Centric Business Model

The markets are changing. Traditionally, firms developed their business models based on the availability of resources (Moormann & Palvölgyi, 2013). However, with shifting trends in consumer behavior, purchase patterns, and the emergence of online e-commerce platforms, it becomes critical to incorporate consumer needs as a starting point to build business models.

Although there is no standardized definition of a 'Business Model,' most research around business modeling and business model design has been done in silos (Zott, Amit, & Massa, 2011). However, despite the lack of cumulative progress in research on this subject, some themes have emerged and gained widespread acceptance. Business models are a new entity for analysis centered on a focal firm that seeks to create and capture value (Zott, Amit, & Massa, 2011). Business models are related to the aspects of innovation and technology management.

The concept of 'value' has also been a central aspect of business models. 'Value' can also be translated as 'Customer Value.' Customer value provides more significant customer advantages to a business (Woodruff, 1997). The user-centric design seeks to realize customer value by identifying and addressing customer needs. The core concept of user-centric design is empathy.

To understand customer needs effectively, businesses need to develop new customer services (Edvardsson & Olsson, 1996). This paper attempts to understand the 'Consumer Values' and their relevance in developing business models in service restaurants.

## What is Consumer Value

One of the best-known works related to consumer values is Holbrook's Consumer Value – A Framework of Research. Holbrook defined *consumer value* as an interactive relativistic preference experience (Holbrook, 1998). Holbrook also explained the *dimensions of the marketplace*. The dimensions of the market space represents those characteristics, attributes, or features of brands in the product class that provide consumer value. Holbrook defined eight consumer values in his research framework – efficiency, excellence, status, esteem, play, aesthetics, ethics, and spirituality. Efficiency can be seen as an extrinsic consumer value that results from consuming a product or an experience to achieve a self-oriented goal. When seen as a success parameter, efficiency is measured as a ratio of output to inputs or an O/I ratio. However, Holbrook maintained that efficiency is best articulated to consumers as a convenience. In the O/I proportion, time becomes the denominator, and the numerator is the concerned input.

Excellence is an extrinsic consumer value related to satisfaction and the consumer's reactionary appreciation of a product or service. The user admires an object or an experience for its capability to perform some function or meet some objective (Holbrook, 1998). Holbrook closely connected excellence as a general phenomenon and quality as a particular instance of customer satisfaction.

Status as a consumer value relates to an individual's consumption behaviors to receive a favorable response from another entity (Holbrook, 1998). Individuals consume a product, service, or experience to show others that they are thriving. Status can be described as an indicator of success for an individual's perception of society.

Aesthetic as a consumer value pertains to appreciating a consumptive experience relished purely for one's own sake. Beauty is an aesthetic value. Holbrook defined *aesthetic* as an intrinsic value. Aesthetic provides internal sensory gratification rather than serving any other practical purpose. As consumers, we appreciate the aesthetic of a product, service, or experience without worrying about other people's judgments about us. The perception of beauty is personal and can differ from person to person.

Ethics is another-oriented aspect. The pursuit of ethics embroils doing something for the sake of others. Ethics is a general term that includes the pursuit of justice, morality, and virtue in its topology. In his stellar works *Morality and the Market and Ethics in Marketing*, Smith (2016) scrutinized *ethics* as a consumer value. He identified and distinguished the motivations behind consumption behaviors around morality and ethics. Smith delineated the contrary notions of consumption behaviors based purely on altruistic reasons and those marked by less humane and more extrinsically driven factors.

Esteem, spirituality, and play are other values in the consumption experience, as defined by Holbrook. Together, these values form the eight-celled typologies of consumer value.

This consumer value framework can be used in the context of dining experiences (Jensen & Hansen, 2007) built a case for *consumer values* in a service context, specifically the restaurant meal experience (Jensen & Hansen, 2007). Their findings were coded at A and B levels. The five top-level consumer values were harmony, acknowledgement, excellence, emotional stimulation, and circumstance value followed by 13 B-level or sub-consumer values. However,

the meal and dining preferences may vary for different countries and cultures. For this study, we explored consumer values specific to dining experiences in India's National Capital Region (Delhi NCR).

## **Impact of the Pandemic on the Restaurant Industry**

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the dine-in restaurant industry worldwide. In the United States, 97% of the restaurants faced closure and, even after re-opening, these faced a significant profitability crisis. A similar crisis was witnessed in other countries, such as Portugal and Germany (Madeira et al., 2021; Neise et al., 2021). It was predicted that the COVID crisis might result in the loss of thousands of jobs, cost cuts, and the permanent closure of businesses in several countries.

Like other developing economies, India has also been severely affected by the COVID-19 crisis. The larger organizations were crunched with cash-flow challenges and the smaller companies had to cease their operations (Anusha, 2021). The nationwide lockdowns hit tourism, hospitality, and aviation sectors. Dine-in restaurants were closed and were re-opened with limited capacity. Even the food delivery business was affected by the lockdowns. Surveys indicate that people preferred cooking at home rather than ordering food from outside (Statista, 2020). By May 2020, consumer sentiment had dropped significantly.

Keeping the impact of the pandemic in mind, we decided to explore changing consumer values that influence the decision of restaurant-goers to visit a dine-in restaurant. The objectives of this paper were as follows:

- (1) To explore consumer values in the restaurant industry from a customer point of view
- (2) To realize the impact of changing consumer values because of the COVID pandemic

## **Methodology**

The research approach to writing this paper is qualitative, and a significant amount of primary research went into it due to its exploratory nature. We developed an outline of consumer value dimensions broadly based on Holbrook's Framework of Consumer Values and the case of consumer values built in the context of meal experiences by Jensen and Hansen (2007). We used the findings from these consumer value frameworks to examine their relevance in the Indian dining context and evaluate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on consumers' dining preferences.

With a broad understanding of consumer values based on the context of dine-in experiences, we moved to the second step of our research – the in-person interviews.

We conducted eight semi-structured interviews in the Focus Group style. However, because of the COVID pandemic and the participants' conflicting schedules, each participant was interviewed separately, either in-person or over telephone, in compliance with all physical distancing and COVID safety norms. The period of research was from December 2021 to March 2022.

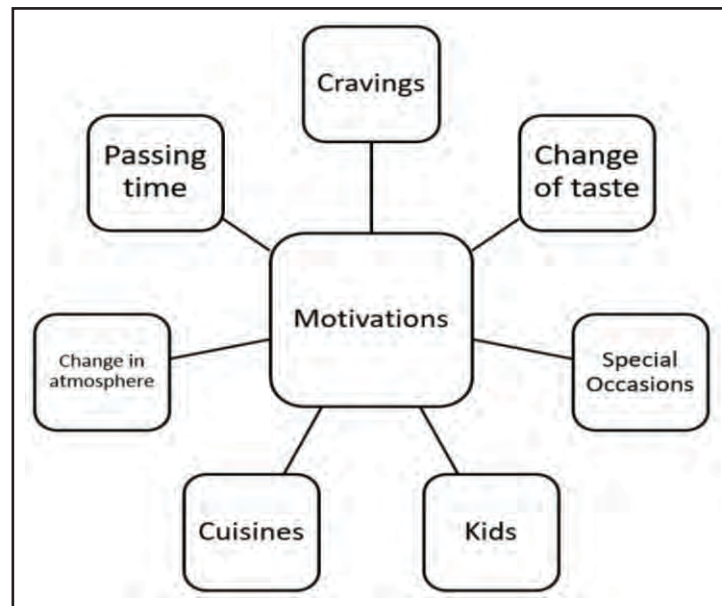
All participants have been residents of India's National Capital Region (NCR) for a significant period. They formed a diverse group representing four men and four women. They belonged to diverse families and professional backgrounds and fell into age groups ranging from 24 to 69. All the participants were working professionals with independent income and were financially secure when interviewed.

Each interview ranged from 30–45 minutes where the participants spoke freely about their dining preferences. The interviews also considered the consumers' changing dining preferences because the prevailing pandemic has impacted the restaurant industry.

All the participants were either bilingual or trilingual and were proficient in English. However, the interview script was in Hindi and/or English to put things in context. Notes were made meticulously during each interview, and the transcript for each interview was generated based on notes.

The transcribed notes were decoded and reorganized in consumer value dimensions. The results were derived from the treatment of these notes.





**Fig. 1. Motivating Factors for Dining Out**

## Results

The results from the analysis were made based on the data collected from the focus group interviews. The respondents freely spoke about their motivations to step out of their home's comfort and dine out. In the results section, we also present the motivating factors for dining out that we gathered from the participants in Fig. 1.

Our conversations identified five major consumer value dimensions in an Indian dine-in experience context. The consumer values are quality, customer service, ambience, ethics, status, and convenience.

↳ **Quality:** In this research, food quality emerged as a critical factor driving consumers to dine in a restaurant. Quality of food can be subject to various interpretations (Clark & Wood, 1998). The term *quality* was perceived differently by the interviewees. Table 1 shows the perceived values of food quality among the consumers of Delhi NCR.

The taste of the food was the most prominent attribute of food quality. Besides taste, other attributes were freshness of food, digestibility, hygienic preparation, variety, presentation, nutrition value, and spice levels. The interviews also revealed that even though people prefer taste, they do not want to fall sick after consuming restaurant food.

↳ **Customer Service :** Like food quality, service is also essential in choosing a dining experience. The most critical service components were serving time, seating time, and the restaurant staff's courteousness.

↳ **Ambience :** Restaurant ambience was also a driver in choosing dining experiences. Our results reflected that the perception of aesthetics was beyond the beauty factor. Attributes such as seating arrangements, spaciousness, serenity, and cleanliness also contributed to the restaurant ambience. Other attributes that attract consumers to dine-in restaurants are civility of dining audience and spaced out gentry.

↳ **Ethics :** Traits like honesty, fair pricing, charity, and dining hygiene emerged as parameters of ethics. To our surprise, restaurants in Delhi NCR are not considered inherently honest and ethical. The size of portions proportionate to price was an important determinant of honesty. Restaurant diners from Delhi NCR were also keen to help the restaurants that did charity. However, the respondents also stated that they were unaware of any restaurant in Delhi NCR that did charity.

↳ **Convenience** : Convenience surfaced as an essential consumer value in the open-ended interviews. Since Delhi NCR is a densely populated agglomeration, people expect to reach restaurants conveniently. Road traffic discourages consumers from travelling to restaurants not in their vicinity. The diners also look for restaurants in less congested areas and provide accessible parking. Senior citizens look for a restaurant at the ground level or a restaurant located in a building with an elevator because they want to avoid climbing up the stairs.

↳ **Status** : Status was interpreted as the pride of going to a specific restaurant and the willingness to talk about it. Our results revealed that status was the least preferred consumer value among the six values from this research. Delhi NCR's consumer does not consider visiting an elite or an upscale restaurant as an element of pride. Most consumers would not proactively bring up their restaurant experiences in their conversations. However, they would talk about them and recommend if the issue arises in a conversation. However, if a restaurant is associated with a specific community or is member-only, there is pride in visiting it. One participant made an observation. *'We take pride in going to our members only restaurant because we have inherited this privilege from our associations.'*

We have compiled the consumer values in Table 1.

## Redefining Consumer Values during COVID-19

COVID-19 has severely affected the Indian restaurant Industry, not just in business but also in consumer expectations. A salient point of this research was to review the changing consumer sentiment because of the global pandemic. Our results indicate that consumers have become very conscious about dining out and expect them to follow safety protocols and maintain high hygiene standards.

The results revealed that the most popular consumer value among the five was food quality, followed by service, convenience, ambiance, ethics, and status, being the last in a Pre-COVID world. However, in a Post-COVID world, restaurant hygiene has become a critical decision-making factor.

**Table 1. Consumer Values and Their Characteristics**

Consumer Values		
Food Quality	Service	Ambience
Taste	Low Serving and Seating times	Decorated
Edibility	Courteousness	Calm
Freshness	Customer Management Skills	Conversational Value
Hot		Space for Movement
Variety		Seat Arrangement
Presentation		Civilized company
Digestibility		Cleanliness
Healthy/Nutrition		Art
Spice Levels		Music
Status	Ethic	Convenience
Pride	Charity	Ease of reaching
Prestige	Price	Ease of vehicle parking
	Fairness in serving portions	Facilities for seniors and differently abled
	Cleanliness as an ethical trait	

## Limitations

This qualitative study has been conducted from the consumers' perspective of dine-in services to understand the most critical consumer values that impact the restaurant industry. The authors do not claim that the sample represents the views of the entire country. India is a very diverse country, and this study has been made solely from the perspective of customers from the National Capital Region. The consumer preferences of restaurant-goers from other parts of the country might be very different. However, this study does set the exploratory grounds for further research on this topic.

## Conclusion

This research analyzes consumer values for designing a customer-centric dine-in business model. An entrepreneur needs external factors and an internal environment to advance his/her enterprise (Dipu, 2019). The study attempts to cover both aspects from a dine-in services point of view. There have been similar researches that have explored consumer values among restaurant customers. However, this research is unique because it brings forth consumer values as an anchor to design business models. This study also suggests that consumer values can be crucial in scaling and pivoting business models.

## Recommendations

The study identifies the challenges and the changing preferences of consumers in a post-COVID pandemic world. One of the more important criteria for the consumers is food quality in terms of taste, hygiene and freshness. The quality of food can be maintained in food delivery as well. The restaurateurs should know that food delivery services can be a substantial alternative for consumers. Therefore, dine-in businesses should design their business models to accommodate food delivery or advance their models to compete with food delivery models. The restaurants can also consider opening cloud kitchens based on their service menu. Cloud kitchens will help them expand their reach in remote areas through food delivery services.

Based on the study findings, restaurateurs must pay attention to health and hygiene in restaurants. Customers, specifically those residing in the Delhi NCR region, tend to become much more conscious about the hygiene factor in the dine-in experience. They are not willing to compromise on their health. Taste coupled with freshness and hygiene makes a winning combination. The consumers in NCR are not too concerned about the nutritional value of the food served in restaurants because they depend on home-cooked food for nutrition. The dine-out experience is seen as a break from the normal. However, restaurant-goers are not willing to trade off the hygiene factor.

Customer service was another significant consumer value that was important to the customer. Consumers expect low seating and short waiting time besides the professionalism and courteousness of the server. Outstanding customer service results in higher customer satisfaction and repeated customers, which is crucial for any dine-in restaurant to survive and flourish. Besides excellent service, the restaurant-goers in Delhi NCR also expect the restaurants to establish a line of two-way communication where the restaurant listens to customers' complaints and grievances and provides them with a quick resolution of their concerns. Restaurants must go beyond providing basic satisfaction and must delight their customers.

## Scope for Future Studies

This research was exploratory research based on qualitative data collected through interviews. There are not many studies conducted on dine-in experiences using data from India. This study provides a framework for consumer values that can be validated through quantitative studies. Each consumer value described in this paper can offer avenues for new research. India is a highly diverse country offering a plethora of ethnic cuisines. The behaviors and mindsets of Indian people differ significantly when it comes to dining experiences in different parts of the country. Therefore, the researchers can also study similar patterns for dine-in restaurants in other parts of the country. Similar studies on

restaurant enterprises will enrich entrepreneurship literature and provide significant insights for restaurateurs to improvise on their business models consistently.

## Authors' Contribution

This paper, in its entirety has been authored by Arvind Deshmukh, Dr. Neelam Saxena, and Dr. Poonam Sinha. The authors have conducted all the activities such as conducting the interviews, analyzing, and interpreting the information and developing the output.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors certify that they have no affiliations with any organization with financial or non-financial interests in the subject matter discussed in the manuscript.

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