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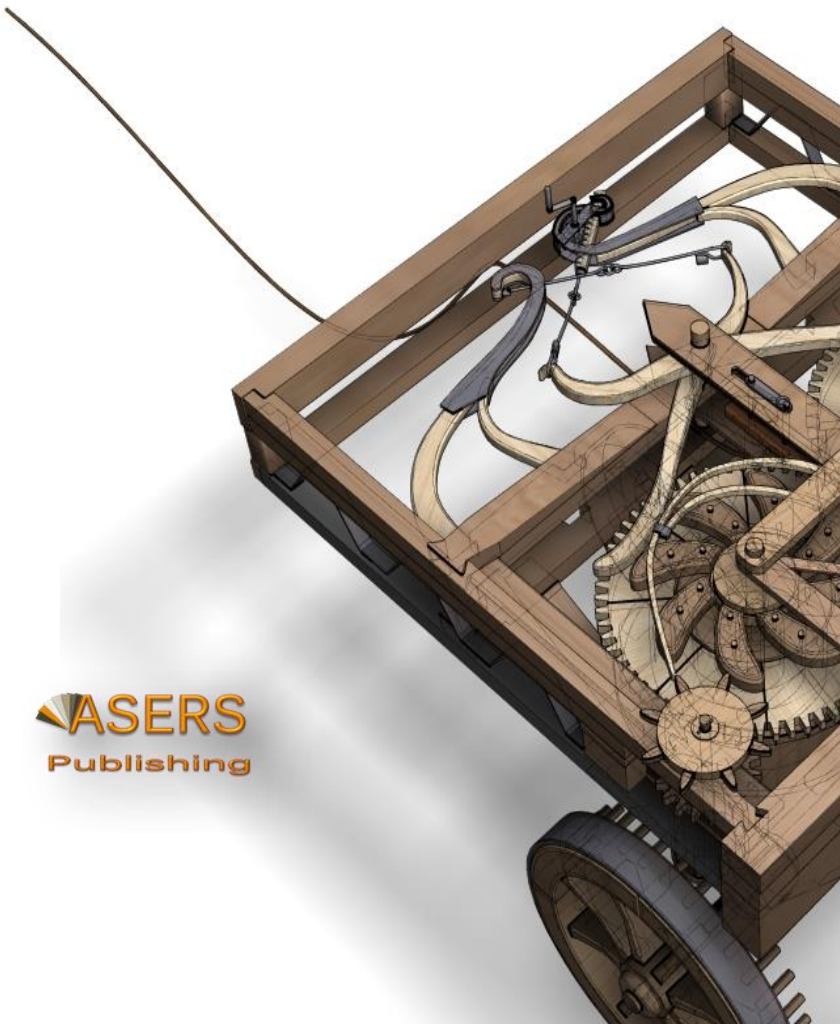

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Journal of Environmental Management and Tourism is an interdisciplinary research journal, aimed to publish articles and original research papers that should contribute to the development of both experimental and theoretical nature in the field of Environmental Management and Tourism Sciences.

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Authors are encouraged to submit high quality, original works that discuss the latest developments in environmental management research and application with the certain scope to share experiences and research findings and to stimulate more ideas and useful insights regarding current best-practices and future directions in environmental management.

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A Critical Review of COVID-19 Pandemic Outbreak in the Restaurant Industry

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Abstract:

Food Service Industry (FSI) was one of the hardest hit during the outbreak of COVID-19 as they were shutdown to control the spread of the virus across society. The COVID-19 pandemic almost nullified the organized and unorganized restaurant business across the country. Dining out is one of the most popular social activities in a metropolitan city like Coimbatore (popularly known as Manchester of South India), the city has branches of popular restaurant chains from across the globe. Measures such as lockdown, social distancing, and dine-in restrictions adopted by the government to slow down the spread of the virus, have imparted huge loss to the FSI that has in turn severely affected the livelihood of millions of restaurant workers in the country with Coimbatore being no exception. In this background, the authors have studied the case of impact of COVID-19 on restaurants with special reference to Coimbatore. Primary data from restaurants were used for this study. The findings based on the data provide a significant contribution to the FSI, and identify the factors that need to be tapped to frame a strategy to increase the sales volume in upcoming pandemic-like situations. Also, the authors have suggested following the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) instructed by the government even after the pandemic.

Keywords*:* food service industry; COVID-19; global economy; risk factors; hospitality business.

JEL Classification: Q18; L83; Z32.

Introduction

The Food Service Industry is diverse encompassing fast food outlets, self-service cafeterias, motorway service stations, restaurants, bistros, cafés, ethnic restaurants of all styles, hotels of all classes, and motels. Players in the business describe FSI as being in the midst of a perfect storm because of its tremendous growth in the worldwide market. The restaurant and food industry is part of the hotel industry and plays an important role in the tourism industry. FSI is a part of the lodging and tourist industry, although it has its distinct qualities. Restaurants, takeaways, and even contract catering are more dynamic, changing, and fashion-prone than hotels or tourist destinations. The FSI's principal objective is to regulate the sale of food and beverages provided in the paper, plastic, or other disposable containers for immediate consumption inside, outside, or away from a structure, as well as enterprises that provide food delivery for quick consumption. The term 'restaurant' refers to a wide range of establishments and culinary techniques. Apart from the basic function of the human condition, which is to eat, visiting a restaurant is, and always has been, much more than fulfilling (Almeida *et al.* 2015; Santich 2005). Dining at a restaurant has always been a social experience and an occasion to meet old friends, with food presented on the table, and to even be entertained by a small musical ensemble. However, FSI is vulnerable and delicate to natural hazards such as the COVID-19 pandemic and any resultant economic shock (Kalaivani and Girija 2018).

1. Research Background

India is known for its diverse cuisines, which play an important role in the social structure, way of life, and culture. Dining with family, relatives, and friends is an excellent method to become more acquainted with one's culture. Ever since urbanization, FSI has identified its place in metropolitan cities (Vig and Agarwal 2021). India is the second-most populous country in the world. Career-driven individuals of the country with global exposure, more disposable income, and diverse eating habits prefer dining out to have exceptional experiences when compared to the previous generation. Gastronomic lovers are now willing to afford convenience, experience, and ambiance. Recent research studies have also shown that there has been an increasing trend among the Indians to taste various dishes of a different region. This has also led to an increase in regional and international delicacies in FSI.

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the global economy severely. According to MacDonald *et al.* 2020, domestic consumption of food services at restaurants make up, on average, almost 4 percent of GDP in G20 economies, with a minimum of about 2 percent in Mexico. This explains a strident decline in the activity in FSI and its significant negative effects on all countries. FSI contributes to the employment sector significantly. Accommodation and FSI jointly contribute about 5 percent of workers, on average, among G20 countries. An intense decline in visits to restaurants has been marked between March and May 2020. Table reservation in FSI has almost nullified (99 percent) worldwide during the peak lockdowns and had only recovered, on average, to about 60 percent of their 2019 bookings by the end of June, as lockdowns eased. However, with a partially compensating effect, FSI was never completely closed. Despite strict social distancing policies being in place, restaurants were permitted to operate takeaways and own delivery services.

A nationwide lockdown due to COVID-19 has impacted India's foodservice industry negatively. The Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Association of India (FHRAI), estimated that 70 percent of the overall hospitality establishments in the country have shut down in the absence of support from the government which led to a significant crisis in India. During the curfew, only essential services were allowed to operate. Restaurants closed their operations completely during the first phase of lockdown, to curb the virus' spread in the country. But once the curfew was lifted, FSI could not commence the dine-in services right away, and only takeaway orders were allowed from the premises. Government officers relaxed the limitations after 6 months, by permitting a dine-in facility at premises with reduced capacities and maintaining social distancing norms. After the reopening, the recovery has been very gradual.

Coimbatore is a city with a pleasing climate and industries like textiles, electric motors, pumps, automobile spares, iron steel, and aluminum costing from the major exports that attract all kinds of tourists towards the destination. The city is also known for its educational institutions with a great reputation. With a high per-capita income of consumers, high standard of living, and changes in the lifestyle of people, more and more consumers flock to various restaurants to achieve social gatherings. The high expenditure level of the locals enables them to have an active food culture (weekend dining, get-together, etc.) has ultimately led to the growth of restaurants that serve regional and international delicacies with numerous cuisine options for dining. Coimbatore district being the second hardest pandemic hit by the pandemic in Tamil Nadu, after Chennai, faced an economic crisis that caused financial imbalances and risks, especially over the business of FSI. The key issue considered for the present study is the change of consumption pattern with business restrictions like weekend lockdown, time restrictions during weekdays, restricted dine-in facility, and social distancing norms posed by the government. Thus, the current study was undertaken to explore the behavioral and consumption pattern, sales pattern, and volume of famous organized chain restaurants from the city during a pandemic and post-pandemic situation.

2. Review of Literature

This section highlights the scenario of the restaurant business, the behavioral changes of customers during and post COVID-19 by various authors and organizations related to the hospitality industry.

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 as a pandemic on 11 March2020. Severson and Bellany (2020), stated that a major crisis has struck the hospitality business, including the accommodation sector, food service, and bars. It is believed that half of the restaurants will not survive, therefore making a strategy to maintain consumer demand is critical (Sigala 2020). Statistica (2020) predicted that COVID-19 caused 100.08 million employment losses in the travel and tourism industry worldwide. The recent novel coronavirus generated global anxiety in the first half of January 2020 and by the end of December 2020,the virus had infected millions of people globally. The restaurant industry appears particularly vulnerable to a long crisis. Bartik *et al.* (2020) identified that FSI seems specifically vulnerable to a long crisis. According to their study restaurateurs believed that they had a 72 percent chance of survival if the crisis lasts for a month, 30 percent if it lasts for four months, and only 15 percent if the crisis lasts for six months. This indicated that unorganized sectors can easily fall due to significant crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Internal (poor management, poor service, and low-quality products) or external (economic, political, and health issues) crises in FSI can be solved with corrective measures but the industry does not have control over the business environment and must rely on government support and measures to overcome the crisis (Parsa *et al.* 2011; Jung S. and Jang S. 2019). According to the studies of Jung S and Jang S (2019) and Wang Y(2009), at times of crisis or post-crisis, competitiveness among market players increases as demand decreases.

The foodservice industry is exposed to health crises such as pandemics as there are immense interactions and gatherings among family, friends, and relatives (Yang *et al.* 2020). This vulnerability of FSI is likely to result from behavioral changes in response to the crises. COVID -19 pandemic has significantly altered the day-to-day life activities and introduced a 'new normal' that forced socioeconomic and behavioral changes in the absence of medical facilities, treatment, and vaccinations (Baum and Hai 2020). While practicing the 'new normal, people had an increasing tendency towards avoiding the dine-in services, thereby avoiding physical contact with people as the walk-in customers are worried and concerned with safety issues throughout the food consumption process (Pressman *et al.* 2020). The foodservice industry called for a touchless service, which is believed to refrain spread of infections significantly. One of the distinctive behavioral changes among the customers during the COVID-19 pandemic is to prevent social gatherings which are considered to be crucial in flattening the infection curve (CDC, 2020) and also suggested by Food Safety Authorities (FSA) to maintain a distance of at least six feet in foodservice outlets. Thus, such precautionary practices limited the operational capacity of restaurants thereby resulting in an evident decrease in revenue generation. The foodservice industry has witnessed a remarkable turn down in consumer footfall, as the home dining trend increased amid the pandemic's fear. According to the rating agency Credit Rating Information Services of India Limited (CRISIL), the pandemic has caused a 50 to 70 percent fall in revenue generated during the fiscal year in the Indian FSI. The governments also recommended maintaining distance by reducing the seating capacity during dine-in services at restaurants (Kim and Lee 2020). Large employee team, visited by domestic and international travelers, cross-contamination, and the possibility of multiple pathogen delivery through surfaces, cutlery, crockery, and food are the factors that make the FSI susceptible to health crises (Leung and Lam 2004). Lockdown and business shutdown orders from the government are other few reasons for the economic devastation of the restaurant business during this pandemic. These severe restrictions led to the immediate closure of businesses, thereby leading to the loss of businesses worth billions of dollars around the world (Kim *et al.* 2021). FSI succeeds in people's gatherings and outings. This industry was the hardest hit, as the physical distancing method was implemented as one of the imperative measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and flatten the curve (Mehrotra 2020). Moreover, customers did not visit immediately after the reopening of restaurants (Gursoy and Chi 2020). The FSI faced major uncertainties in demand as the consumer avoided gathering in public places and were increasingly concerned about hygiene and safety (Ozili and Arun 2020). As the consumers preferred to stay away from public places, dine-in restaurants were reliant on home deliveries, and takeaway orders which led to the closure of restaurants and unemployment around the world (Song *et al.* 2020). It has also impacted other associated industries like dairy, horticulture, food processing, logistics, and delivery partners.

The key challenges encountered by FSI, according to Zeb *et al.* (2021), include a large drop in sales, substantial layoffs, neutralized economic activity, and no support from the government. According to interviewees, adequate sanitization, modifications in the seating area, changes in menus, and introducing fresh business concepts are the primary improvements required in existing businesses to encourage customers to return. The study significantly contributes to the food service industry by guiding them and suggesting a way forward to them on managing pandemic-like situations. In June 2020, the Government of India commenced the operations with certain Standard Operating Procedures (SOP). According to the standard operating procedures, employees in the facility must wear a proper face mask, hand gloves, and frequent sanitization and physical distancing is a must. Also, the customers were instructed to wear masks all the time while no customer was allowed to enter the premises without wearing a mask or having a fever. Also, only take away and home delivery was allowed until10 August 2020. This situation led to a rapid shutdown of restaurants, small hotels, and stalls of street food vendors.

From the above section of the review of literature, it was found that many studies have reviewed the impact of COVID-19 on FSI. With this research gap, the present study has analyzed the real scenario of sales trend, pattern, and performance of restaurants from Coimbatore city during COVID and post COVID in 2020 and 2021.

3. Methodology

Secondary data from April 2020 to October 2021 was collected from the branch of an organized restaurant chain in Coimbatore city with an undertaking of not disclosing the name of the restaurant. Secondary data collected from this restaurant includes methods of selling, type of orders, average bill values, and cost incurred by the restaurant in the city during the study period. The findings of the study are based on a branch of restaurant that is recognized as an organized business sector and is located in heart of the city. Findings may differ within an unorganized restaurant chain outlet and location of the restaurant. Also, the study has not disclosed the name of the restaurant, since it will be an advantage for a competitor to understand the sales strategy of the restaurant.

4. Results

Table 1 displays the sales volume of the restaurant in percentage in comparison with the period during COVID in the year 2019 and post-COVID during 2021. It was identified that the sales volume has declined in April 2020 showing a value of minus 62.2 percent and minus 64.5 percent in July 2020 which were during the initial phases of lockdown in the country. During the same months of the next calendar year (CY), the restaurant has seen a rise in sales volume showing a value of 94.2 percent and 111.3 percent in April and July 2021, respectively. During 2020, high sales volume was performed by aggregators, followed by own delivery and takeaways whereas in 2021, dine-in sales were higher followed by aggregators, take away, and own delivery.

The percentage of sales through an aggregator was high during COVID lockdown months (especially in April and July) since the movement of people was highly restricted. On the other hand, during post-COVID months when dine-in service was open, the sales volume had increased, except in May and June 2021, when the lockdown was implemented in the city. The reason for the same is that post-COVID, people wanted to have a social gathering with family and friends. Also, during 2020 and 2021, aggregators' performance was significant in bringing up the sales volume of the restaurant.

Table 1. Comparison of Sales Volume Performed by the Outlet during COVID and Post COVID in the City

Calendar Year CY 2020	Apr '20	May '20	Jun '20	July '20	Aug '20	Sep '20	Oct '20	Nov '20	Dec '20	
Sales	-62.20%	-56.40%	-49.80%	-64.50%	-42.70%	-5.80%	-10.30%	29.70%	-8.30%	
Dine - In	-0.30%	-0.40%	26.40%	24.30%	29.90%	35.60%	46.70%	47.00%	52.10%	
Take Away	20.90%	46.00%	33.00%	21.10%	21.70%	19.90%	15.50%	20.50%	16.80%	
Own Delivery	36.00%	15.10%	11.80%	10.10%	8.70%	9.00%	6.90%	7.00%	5.40%	
Aggregator Sale	43.40%	39.30%	28.80%	44.60%	39.60%	35.40%	31.00%	25.60%	25.70%	
Calendar Year CY 2021	Jan '21	Feb '21	Mar '21	Apr '21	May '21	Jun '21	Jul '21	Aug '21	Sep '21	Oct '21
Sales	-3.10%	-0.30%	57.90%	94.20%	-7.80%	-20.30%	111.30%	19.30%	-18.60%	1.70%
Dine - In	55.20%	57.20%	55.60%	47.20%	-0.20%	0.00%	46.40%	56.20%	50.70%	67.10%
Take Away	14.70%	14.20%	13.30%	16.90%	15.80%	22.30%	12.80%	14.30%	12.30%	8.10%
Own Delivery	6.00%	5.10%	5.80%	5.70%	22.10%	18.30%	9.40%	4.00%	8.00%	3.70%
Aggregator Sale	24.20%	23.50%	25.30%	30.20%	62.30%	59.50%	31.50%	25.40%	29.00%	21.10%

Source: Primary data

From table 2, it is inferred that the Earnings before Interest, Taxes, Depreciation, and Amortization (EBITDA) were high during September and October 2020. In August, EBITDA was 28.3 percent of since relaxations were given by the government during particular months in 2020 whereas in 2021, the highest performance was in January and the performance declined as there was an increase in restrictions due to an increase in COVID cases within the city.

Table 2. Comparison Chart of Earnings before Interest, Taxes, Depreciation, and Amortization (EBITDA) for 2020-2021

CY 2020	Apr'20	May'20	Jun'20	Jul'20	Aug'20	Sep'20	Oct'20	Nov'20	Dec'20	
Store EBITDA	12.9%	14.0%	20.4%	13.8%	28.3%	30.6%	31.0%	29.3%	27.0%	
CY 2021	Jan'21	Feb'21	Mar'21	Apr'21	May'21	Jun'21	Jul'21	Aug'21	Sep'21	Oct'21
Store EBITDA	33.1%	23.5%	27.3%	14.9%	10.9%	20.2%	29.9%	25.2%	22.1%	23.9%

Source: Primary data

A comparison chart of Time slot sales performed by the restaurant during 2020 and 2021 was displayed in table 3. It is inferred from the table that, the sales volume during lunch was higher when compared to dinner during both 2020 and 2021 since time restrictions for the movement of people after 17 hours were implemented in the city during peak COVID and post-COVID months.

Table 3. Comparison Chart of Time slot Sales for 2020-21

CY 2020	Apr'20	May'20	Jun'20	Jul'20	Aug'20	Sep'20	Oct'20	Nov'20	Dec'20	
Lunch	78.2%	78.8%	74.0%	71.3%	76.7%	76.5%	77.0%	75.0%	76.6%	
Dinner	21.8%	21.2%	26.0%	28.7%	23.3%	23.5%	23.0%	25.0%	23.4%	
CY 2021	Jan'21	Feb'21	Mar'21	Apr'21	May'21	Jun'21	Jul'21	Aug'21	Sep'21	Oct'21
Lunch	77.1%	74.5%	74.8%	77.7%	79.9%	79.3%	84.6%	84.9%	82.8%	81.2%
Dinner	22.9%	25.5%	25.2%	22.3%	20.1%	20.7%	15.4%	15.1%	17.2%	18.8%

Source: Primary data

Table 4 displays the product-wise sales performance during 2020 and 2021. Mutton Biriyani is the favorite dish of Coimbatoreans scored the highest-selling dish, varying from 27.3 percent to 37 percent in 2020 and 26 percent to 29.1 percent in 2021. The second highest-selling dish from the restaurant was chicken biriyani followed by other biriyani varieties like (vegetable, mushroom, Fish, Prawn, etc) and other dishes from the restaurant.

Table 4. Product-wise Sales Performance by the Restaurant during Calendar Year 2020-21

CY 2020	Apr'20	May'20	Jun'20	Jul'20	Aug'20	Sep'20	Oct'20	Nov'20	Dec'20	
Mutton Biriyani	31.1%	37.0%	33.8%	29.9%	30.5%	30.0%	27.3%	29.6%	29.8%	
Chicken Biriyani	33.2%	26.8%	21.2%	23.3%	24.0%	22.4%	20.5%	21.6%	21.7%	
Other Biriyani varieties	5.7%	5.9%	7.4%	7.6%	7.1%	7.5%	8.9%	8.8%	7.2%	
Other Dishes	25.2%	25.5%	34.1%	35.6%	35.1%	37.0%	40.8%	37.4%	39.0%	
Container Charges	4.8%	4.7%	3.5%	3.6%	3.4%	3.1%	2.6%	2.6%	2.3%	
CY 2021	Jan'21	Feb'21	Mar' 21	Apr'21	May'21	Jun'21	Jul'21	Aug'21	Sep'21	Oct'21
Mutton Biriyani	29.1%	28.4%	26.9%	27.0%	26.5%	26.9%	26.8%	26.8%	26.0%	26.6%
Chicken Biriyani	21.2%	20.7%	20.8%	21.8%	28.2%	31.2%	27.1%	24.2%	25.1%	23.6%
Other Biriyani varieties	8.2%	8.0%	7.9%	7.8%	6.1%	5.8%	8.5%	8.0%	7.7%	8.2%
Other Dishes	39.3%	40.8%	42.3%	40.9%	34.2%	31.3%	35.0%	38.9%	38.8%	39.9%
Container Charges	2.2%	2.1%	2.2%	2.6%	4.9%	4.9%	2.6%	2.1%	2.4%	1.6%

Source: Primary data

From table 5 it can be observed that the sales performance on Sunday was higher when compared to other days of the week in 2020 and 2021.This is because Sunday is a holiday for most organizations and customers also get time to spend with their families and friends in a social gathering. Wednesday was the second highest-selling during 2020 and Saturday was the second highest-selling day during 2021.In 2020 and 2021, Monday and Tuesday were the lowest selling days as they are the commencing days of the week and customers may not find time to spend at the restaurant with family and friends.

Table 5. Day-wise Sales Performance by the Restaurant during the Calendar Year 2020-21

CY 2020	Apr'20	May'20	Jun'20	Jul'20	Aug'20	Sep'20	Oct'20	Nov'20	Dec'20	
Monday	8.8%	12.6%	11.5%	11.5%	16.2%	10.3%	9.9%	11.4%	7.8%	
Tuesday	10.9%	11.4%	12.2%	13.0%	11.5%	12.5%	9.4%	8.3%	10.5%	
Wednesday	15.0%	11.1%	12.3%	22.9%	17.5%	18.3%	13.2%	12.0%	15.1%	
Thursday	14.5%	9.9%	10.6%	14.1%	14.5%	9.7%	12.5%	9.8%	13.6%	
Friday	12.0%	13.1%	10.5%	18.1%	12.5%	9.7%	14.2%	10.6%	14.2%	
Saturday	12.0%	12.5%	13.5%	20.4%	27.9%	14.4%	18.0%	19.1%	14.0%	
Sunday	26.9%	29.4%	29.6%	0.0%	0.0%	25.0%	22.8%	28.8%	24.8%	
CY 2021	Jan'21	Feb'21	Mar'21	Apr'21	May'21	Jun'21	Jul'21	Aug'21	Sep'21	Oct'21
Monday	7.6%	9.3%	11.4%	8.8%	9.8%	7.8%	8.2%	13.9%	9.8%	8.6%
Tuesday	9.4%	9.0%	11.8%	10.8%	8.7%	11.7%	9.2%	15.1%	9.6%	10.3%
Wednesday	10.4%	13.5%	15.4%	12.4%	12.2%	17.5%	13.6%	14.0%	18.0%	9.3%
Thursday	9.9%	10.3%	8.8%	13.9%	9.6%	9.6%	11.6%	11.8%	17.1%	10.5%
Friday	16.6%	10.0%	9.9%	14.4%	12.8%	11.2%	10.9%	12.2%	12.8%	12.1%
Saturday	17.7%	17.8%	15.3%	15.0%	17.5%	13.6%	19.7%	23.1%	15.7%	19.8%
Sunday	28.3%	30.0%	27.4%	24.7%	29.3%	28.6%	26.9%	9.9%	17.0%	29.5%

Source: Primary data

5. Suggestions

The food-service industry was very badly hit during the COVID-19 pandemic even though it is a fundamental requirement for human life. Customers generally wanted to spend their time with family and friends in places like restaurants with good ambiance, food quality, quantity, taste, reasonable cost, and hospitality of employees. But after the pandemic, customers have become conscious regarding hygiene and safety during the entire foodservice delivery process starting from preparation to the billing of services provided by restaurants. Ministry of family and health welfare suggested SOP be followed to contain the spread of the virus through the restaurant industry which includes social distancing, sanitizing, washing hands-on at regular intervals, wearing a mask, etc., when the government of India lifted the curfew in states where the infection rate decreased. Apart from SOP, restaurants can adopt the help of technology, where customers can complete the whole process from menu order to payment of services using their mobile phones (contactless menu order, servicing and billing procedures using drones, covered food service, or robot service)which may help the restaurant to bring their customers back for the dine-in facility without lack of confidence in safety and hygiene at restaurants. This may also help in improving dinner time slot sales at the restaurant. When compared with the second half of the week, the first half of the week shows low performance in sales. To increase the sales volume in the first half of a week, more offers on dishes (5+1 offers, prize offers, offers on billing values, vouchers with offers that motivate them to revisit) may be provided, that may motivate customers to engage themselves in social gathering during weekdays, rather than weekends.

6. Future Scope for Study

The findings of the present study were focused on an organized restaurant chain located in the heart of the city. Hence future researchers can focus on the effect of COVID on unorganized restaurant chains, different restaurant types (continental, multi-cuisine, traditional cuisine, etc.), locality of the restaurant (urban, suburban, outskirts, town, etc.), or cities from different parts of India.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that FSI was hit badly during the COVID-19 pandemic but restaurants tried their level best to run the business and achieve success with trending initiatives to reach out to customers. It has become essential to operating the restaurants with SOPs which has become the new normal as customers fear getting infected from sources like the restaurant industry. Hence, the study has highlighted some factors that contribute to the sales performance during COVID and post COVID months. The present study may also help the restaurant organizations to frame strategies based on the suggestions provided to manage the sales performance in the hospitality sector in adverse pandemic-like situations.

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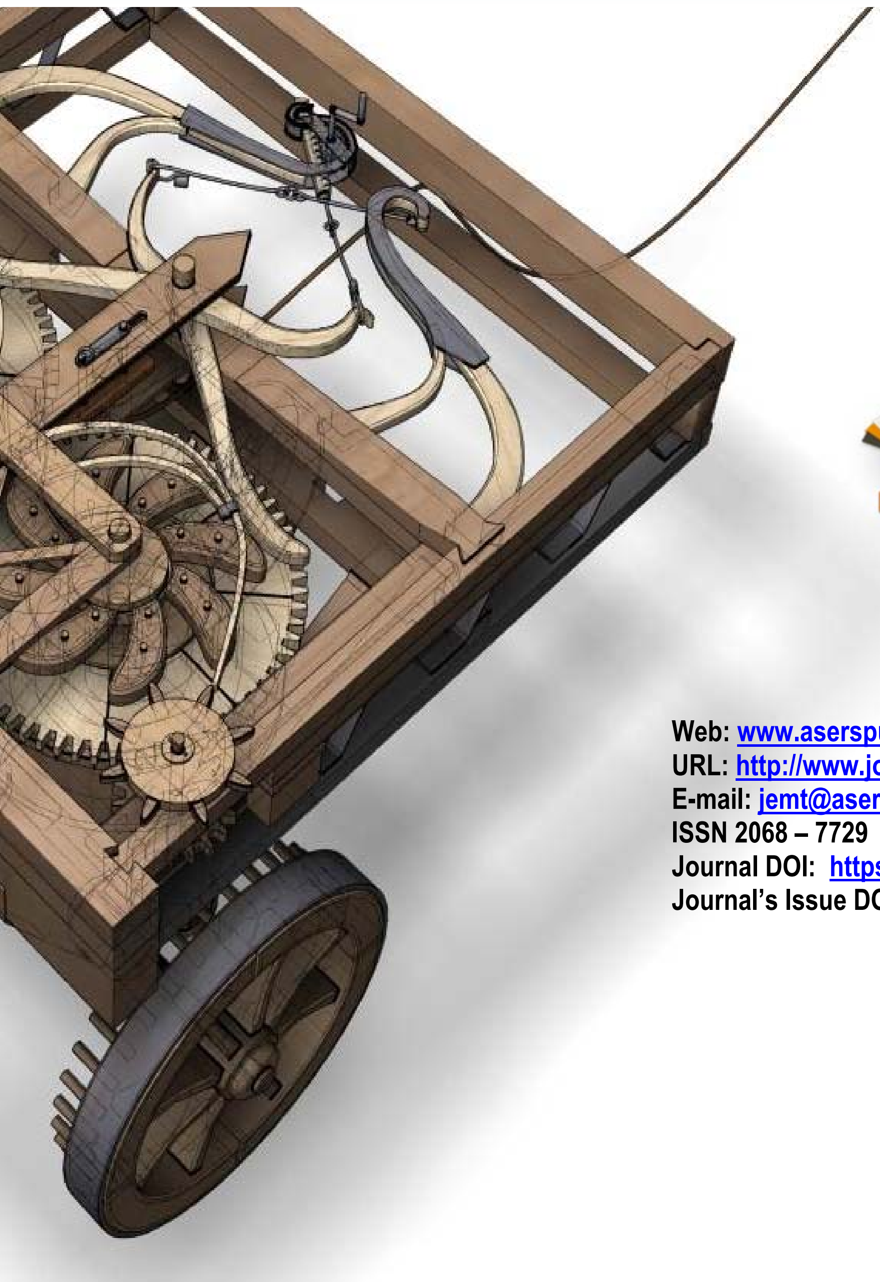

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