

The Concept Of Home Cooks And Its Entrepreneurial Business Potential During And Post COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract:

Home cooks concept has got a large impetus in recent times and is fast emerging as a trend in India. Insufficient funds, place constraint and cautious approach to invest in a formal culinary business set up has led to people thinking of a home-based business option. This concept is being used by many small entrepreneurs to start their business. When the world dealt with phasing lockdown due to the current pandemic; it took a severe toll on the hospitality and travel industry. However, as it is human nature to re-invent the way we see ourselves when put against a challenge of this magnitude the good outcome is seen in the form of a surge in home cooks starting a new venture due to multiple reasons. Most home cooks have turned their home cooking business into a profitable one. Due the pandemic, some people lost their professional jobs, but found respite in the cooking skills they had. This led them to explore turning their hobby to a home cooking business. A lot of housewives, supply traditionally cooked food to patrons which is not available in the restaurants in terms of authenticity and local delicacies. Preparing these has fetched niche home cooks to earn a good amount of money. Five star hotels also order food from home cooks for their guests who have special dietary needs. Many hotels offer certain local dishes made by home cooks on their buffets and menus leading to the demand of expert home cooks. Home cooking can be seen as a sustainable form of business as one would cook only according to orders to begin with. Cooking from home gives one the flexibility of working hours, the amount of order to be taken, the supply and marketing of food, and menu designing. Home cooks have the choice to design own recipes, product line and change the menu and make customized orders. The creativity is immense and the choice to innovate is as per the comfort of the home cook. Home cooks have great potential in terms of business. There is a big market or an area of business which can fill the gap between what is available in the market and it is to be seen whether it really fulfils the gap in demand. Home cooking has a good response as people prefer eating a home-cooked meal as it is nutritional, a smaller number of spices are used, oil is controlled and food is cooked in smaller quantities as compared to the restaurants. Overall, the food is easier on the palate and one can eat every day without any attached health issues.

Today's lifestyle is fast-paced where everyone is busy running to work especially in metro cities. People look for such home cooks who can supply the food on regular basis. Not only is the food of good quality also it is healthy. Innovation is seen in supply of home cooked meals for example food is sold for weight loss is specially cooked for a weight loss package. Home cooks are producing innovative foods so the customers have variety and choose tasty diet food which will help them lose weight.

The researchers undertook this study on home cooks as it is a growing business idea and one can easily start supplying food from home with minimal investment and easily procured licenses etc. Home cooking business saw growth during and post COVID-19 pandemic as people could not order food from restaurants as they were non functional during the lockdown.

Introduction

Traditionally food used to be cooked in the kitchen of a home. The concept of restaurants and diners came much later in the end of 18th century. Before that the food used to be cooked at home and by the ladies of

the house. People from richer families had cooks to prepare food in palaces with many people living in them. Food has always been an integral part of the human life. In 1765, a French chef by the name of A. Boulanger established a business selling soups.

(Robinson, Segal, Ph.D., and R. Segal, M.A. Last updated: June 2020) Cooking food is an intensive task for most people. It involves lot of physical hard work. To escape this work eating out is the most preferred option by most people. Eating convenience or processed food has its detrimental effect on one's mood and health. Convenience food contains additives, injected hormones, high amounts of sugar, salt and unhealthy fat which results in increase of calories which leave one addicted and dependent on this food. This kind of food could leave one bloated, depressed and anxious throughout the day. Restaurants serve food which is recommended to have once in a while but if had daily one could have a health problem. Restaurants serve portions which are more than acceptable dietary guidelines and this induces one to eat more which affects one physically through increase in weight, blood pressure and risk of lifestyle disease like diabetes.

Home cooked food is free from too much spice and oil and unlike restaurants one cooks food for oneself. When we cook for ourselves, one can ensure that we and our family eat fresh, wholesome meals. Cooking and eating that food at home has several advantages like it improves our health, increases our immunity, ensures safety and hygiene while cooking. Eating home cooked food also helps us emotionally as we associate it to happy memories. Cooking at home doesn't have to be complicated as the methods we use are fairly easy to master. It is important to cook by retaining all the vital minerals and vitamins. It also means to replace all shelf processed food with plenty of vegetables and sources of protein. Simple meals can be cooked in no time and they turn out the tastiest.

But the truth is in today's lifestyle that one leads, one may not have time to cook food at home hence the concept of home cooks emerged. It is prepared by people who prepare home cooked food keeping all the healthy aspects in mind. It is cooked in a small scale as compared to the restaurants chefs hence the food is not over cooked and the nutritional factor is retained. This kind of food can be consumed in regular basis. The concept of home tiffin service came into picture. The popularity of food prepared at home is increased considerably due to the fact that restaurant food is repetitive in taste. The concept of home cooks is an emerging and growing trend.

Food cooked at home has many health benefits. Preparing healthy meals at home can support your immune system and reduce the risk of illnesses such as heart disease, cancer, high blood pressure, and diabetes. It can give you more energy, improve how you sleep at night, and help you better manage health problems. For women, cooking healthy food can help reduce symptoms of PMS and menopause, and boost fertility. If one is on a special diet or trying to lose weight, preparing meals for oneself gives one more control over ingredients and portion sizes, enabling one to better control weight or cope with food allergies. Home cooks can customize your food as per your need. By practicing safe food handling while you cook at home, you're less likely to contract a food borne illness. Cooking at home can sharpen your mind, stabilize cognitive decline. Having home cooked food has a great ability to bring families together. Children can participate and use their energy which helps them to grow into healthy, confident adults.

The literature on this study suggests that people find home cooking therapeutic and gives them a sense of empowerment. One could get creative, experiment and enjoy the process immensely. Cooking also provides a hobby that people take seriously and could turn it in their profession. People from all over the world long to taste India's famous regional dishes and they crave for home-style authentic food. Through cooking the world connects finding a deeper connection and appreciation towards the other's culture, lifestyle and traditions. The food concept is so universal that this market is a growing one. Between all types of cuisines and friendly approach towards the customer, home cooks are selling their wares on social media and online delivery platforms. The era of digitalization has helped this home cook trend in more than one way.

Objectives of the study

- 1) To understand the concept of home cooks.
- 2) To understand entrepreneurial business potential of home cooks during and post COVID-19 pandemic.

Hypothesis of the study

H₁ – Quality, standard and consistency of the product is the main factor influencing the customers during pandemic to order food.

H₂ – Home cooking is easier way to start a venture in COVID-19 times.

Need of the study

This study aims to understand the business prospects of home chefs and whether an intense interest in cooking can be turned into a business. It will help the researchers to understand how one can promote their business and what customers look for when they order food from home cooks especially during and post COVID-19. The study also explores the sustainability of home cooking business and whether a home cook can pursue this as a full time profession.

Literature Review

(Shrivastava, 15 October 2020) COVID-19 pandemic gave rise to many home chefs in India. Six months into the lockdown, after the initial success with servicing orders from friends and family, home chefs are establishing themselves as small businesses. The Yummy Idea, a platform to discover home chefs, has seen more than 1500 registered home chefs in five months. Another dedicated website Food Cloud said over 1000 licensed home chefs have registered since April. Some of the chefs are doing business of Rs 2 lakh and more a month from within their homes. Foody Buddy and Home Foodi, also help in the discovery of home chefs. Ghost Kitchens said it is collaborating with these women entrepreneurs to launch professional delivery brands. Their plan is to enroll home chefs from different cities, and help them with brand building, technology, standard operating procedures (SOP) capital, etc. They are applying for Food Safety and Standards Authority of India or FSSAI licenses, opening up small commercial kitchens, advertising locally, taking orders from Instagram and Whastapp, accepting online payments, and using logistics services like Dunzo or Swiggy.

While experts don't see home chefs as a threat to traditional food businesses, they are an emerging sector in their own right. "There is a lot of room in the food business in India, with lower overhead costs, the unit economics, along with the growing awareness in consumers with respect to health and hygiene, this business will grow much faster in the coming years. Dedicated aggregators catering to this market are looking to expand fast as well.

There has been a sudden spike in home chef business since March 2020 due to lockdown caused by COVID 19 pandemic. As home cooked food are hygienic and safe for consumption. Due to this there have emerged several companies to promote home cook business and home chefs. However, selling food without registration or license may incur a fine of 5 lakh rupees and imprisonment of up to 6 months according to FSSAI. A license is compulsory if your sales is above 12 lakh per year and just a registration would do if the sales is below that amount. Business owners have to go to FSSAI website to register. It is important that an establishment supplies food under the guidance of FSSAI rules and regulations especially during the COVID-19 times as hygiene is the topmost priority.

(Fernandes, 12 November 2020)

Then there are other professionals who pursued baking as a passion got into baking healthy sweets. These found a market as not many people were offering this type of customization. One home cook makes sweets which does not contain artificial flavours. Due to the pandemic, people were not visiting their

friends so they were sending Diwali hampers. The trend in gifting hampers shot up and people prefer home chefs due to hygienic reasons.

Chennai-based Girija Venkatachalam has been serving sweet and savoury snacks and sending hampers to the customers.

(Sequeira, 25 August 2020) With families shuttered at home and mothers fed up with cooking options like these seemed welcome. WhatsApp groups and social media platforms are buzzing with menus, take-away options and home chefs sharing their passion for food. With time at hand, the pandemic has prompted many to test the entrepreneurial waters by blending passion and business to make meals. Many people took up cooking as they were passionate about cooking food, they started cooking food for their family and friends first then when the demand increased, they took it up professionally.

(Lesonsky, 14 May 2001) Home based business has better survival rate. It is good to start a startup which is home based. The investment is minimalistic and it has more chances of survival. In some countries you can't prepare food for public consumption from home. In that case one has to look for commercial kitchen in their area. One has to have insurance for home cooked food in-case someone gets sick eating your food. If you are supplying food to elders on regular basis like a tiffin service, you need to interview your customers thoroughly. Need to know about any food allergies they might have or anything else. If you give good service and product to your customers then the word of mouth will spread and your business will grow.

(Kashyaap, 24 December 2019) Founded in 2017, Mumbai-based startup Curryful delivers wholesome, home cooked food prepared by creative home chefs. They have over 60 home chefs tied up with them. The platform is building India's primary source of daily home food and delivers wholesome, home-cooked food prepared by creative home chefs. Prepared with good ingredients and no preservatives, these meals can be instantly ordered and are freshly prepared and delivered in 40 minutes. More importantly, women in India are at home due to societal reasons and the single-most commonality among all of them is that they cook, with a majority of them dishing up far better fare than the average restaurant on online platforms. Once the home chef is identified, the startup evaluates samples of their best dishes, checks their kitchens for hygiene standards, and then facilitates their FSSAI registration. Once confirmed, the home chef is trained in the order preparation process, quantity and packaging standards, hygiene, pricing, using customer feedback, and they are handheld till they're successfully launched on the platform. The meals are priced between Rs 200 and Rs 250. Home cooks make dishes unique to their culture and cuisine, which restaurants don't carry either because they don't have specialized chefs or those items don't generate an optimal turnover; for example, Assamese Til Chicken, Chettinad Biryani, Phogle ka Dhokla, LittiChokha, etc.

(Das, 20 February 2018) Food delivery apps have been a boom for home chefs in India. Today home chefs are growing industry. Students, tourists look for home cooked authentic regional Indian meal which you don't commonly get in restaurants. India's rapidly growing food technology space has given boom to the home chefs in India. It is a great idea to be a home chef as it is empowering. One can have control over inventing something new in the kitchen. And, home-style authentic food is what they want. It could be a gastronomically pleasing route to a deeper connection worldwide. Hence, the food market grows. Between sumptuous food and friendly banter, home cooks are socializing on social media and online delivery platforms. Digital space has contributed in growing their business.

(Colaco, 19 November 2020) According to the FDA, the procedure for applying for the licenses is quite simple. "There are two basic approvals under Food Safety and Standards Act – a license and a registration certificate, the difference is in terms of turnover. If the annual turnover is below 12 lakh, the Food Business Operator (FBO) needs to obtain a registration certificate. If it's above 12 lakh, they have to

procure a license. The procedure for both is very simple and it has to be done online, with reasonable fees. The FDA and the central body – Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) – are carrying out awareness at all levels. They have made an advisory which shows how one can apply for the license online, which are the documents required, what are the fees, among other things. As per the Schedule IV of the FSSAI, all FBO have to maintain hygiene and sanitary requirements.

(Kapadia, 10 November 2020) The pandemic gave rise to many home chefs this year. There are multiple reasons behind this. One that many people lost their jobs hence cooking from home could give them some income. Many people are working from they would like to cook something in the kitchen. And there are people getting bored sitting at home, some lost their jobs and this could be a good way to earn some money. Factors like the perception of the customer that the food was fresher and safer as it was being cooked in home kitchens. It is also easier to customize orders for older people living alone with dietary restrictions. With no “help” allowed the home chefs were the only way for the elderly to have “home cooked food”. Argha Sen is a Hong Kong based culinary experience creator collaborated with Pritha Sen to curate “The Gorme Feast” recently and this event was a nice way to showcase some of the finest home chefs in the city. Argha Sen shared that about 40% of their orders were from Non-Resident Indians for their parents and loved ones.

Research Methodology

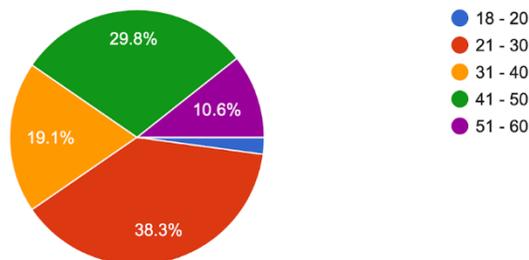
Sample: Primary Data was collected from all the home cooks/ respondents with the help of structured questionnaire.

The researchers have used selective and specific sampling method. The questionnaire was shared with 55 home cooks / respondents of Pune and Mumbai City for their experience on the said topic. 47 responses were received and recorded. The researchers were able to analyze the following data collected from both cities from selected respondents.

All the respondents who answered the questionnaire of home cooks were the people who supply food from home and have seen a boom in their business due to COVID-19 restrictions on restaurants. House help and maids not able to come home and cook food for people who had employed them. Secondary data was collected and information was collected through research articles, print articles, articles through the internet for this study.

Data Interpretation

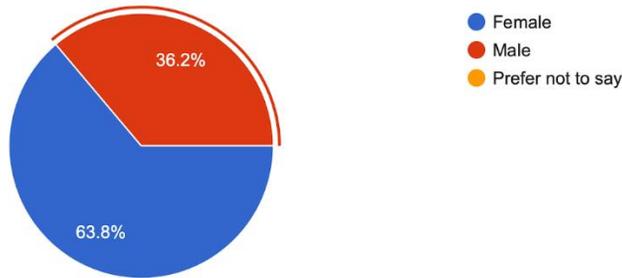
AGE :
47 responses



Demographic profile of respondents is elaborated by a pie diagram. Out of all the responses received for this study, 38.3% respondents were between the age group of 21-30 years. 29.8% were between the age

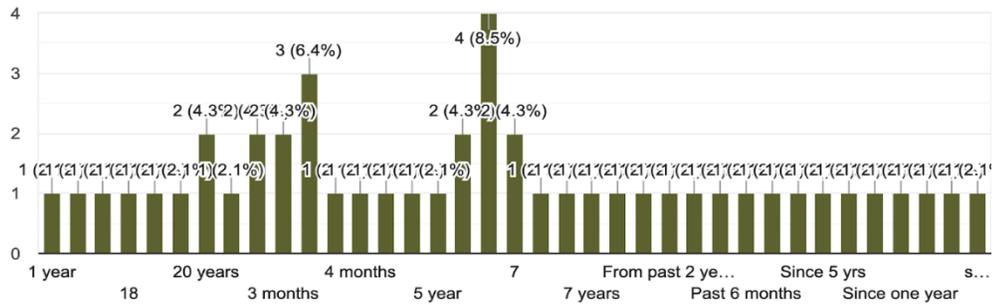
group 41 – 50 years. 19.1% were between 31-40 years. 10.6% were between 51-60 years. Few respondents were in the 18-20 years category.

GENDER
 47 responses



From all the responses received more responses were from female respondents at 63.8 % and 36.2% were male respondents.

1. How long are you into home cooking?
 47 responses

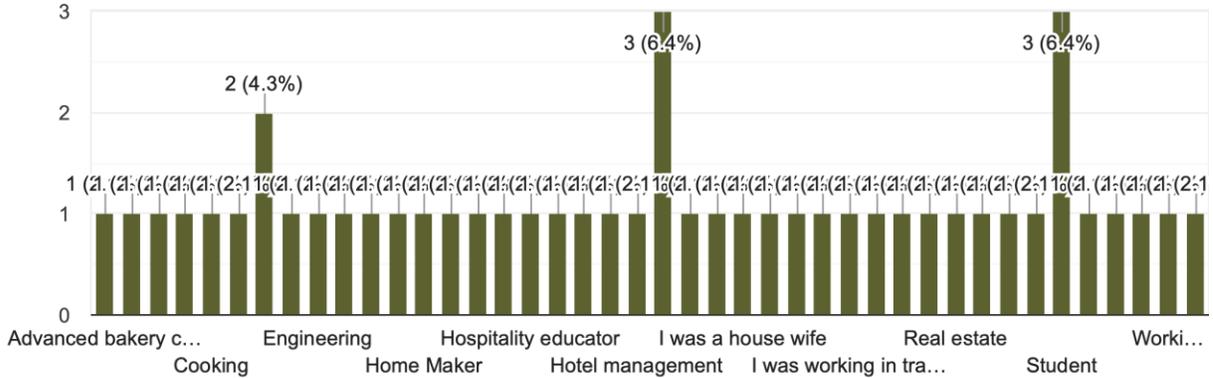


From this data, the researchers gathered that respondents were in home cooking business in different time spans. Some respondents have been in this business for a span of last twenty years and there are respondents started the business as recently as four months. The lockdown and COVID-19 pandemic

prompted respondents get into home cooking business due to different reasons.

2. What profession were you in , before taking up home cooking full time?

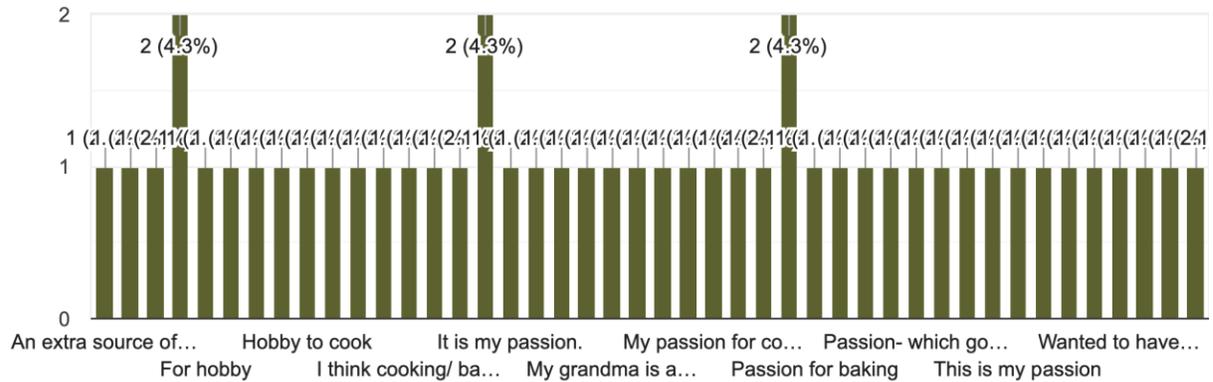
47 responses



Many of respondents were in varied occupations before taking up home cooking. Home makers with a passion to cook are part of this group. Some respondents are from engineering background. The survey reveals that most took up this business as they were passionate about it.

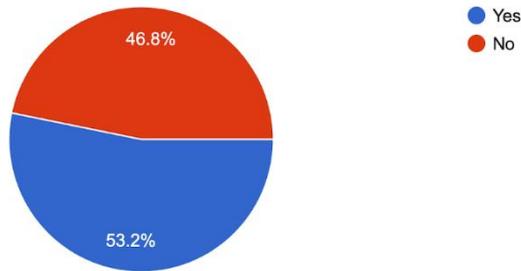
3. Your reason / motivation to take up home cooking?

47 responses



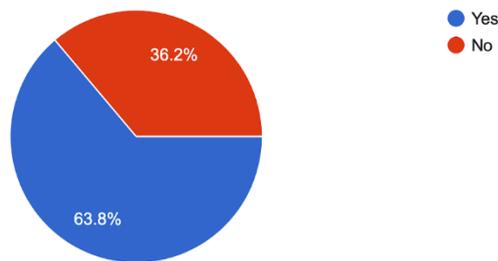
From this data the researchers could gather the information that respondents took up home cooking for different reasons. Some pursued cooking as a hobby; others were passionate enough about home cooking to start a business and some wanted to earn extra money.

4. Do you have a professional cookery/ baking education before you became a home cook?
47 responses



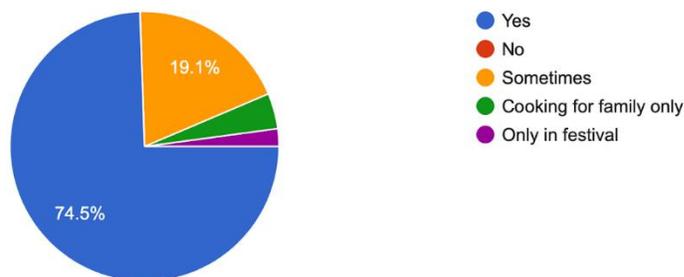
Out of 47 respondents 22 people (46.8%) said they do not have professional cookery/baking education and 25 home cooks (53.2%) said they have been trained in cookery and baking.

5. Do you think the income you earn from home cooking is substantial to sustain your venture?
47 responses



Out of 47 respondents 17 people (36.2%) said the income earned is not substantial to sustain the venture as the orders were sporadic especially in COVID -19 scenario but the rest 30 people (63.8%) said the income earned is substantial. The majority said that the income is substantial to sustain the venture.

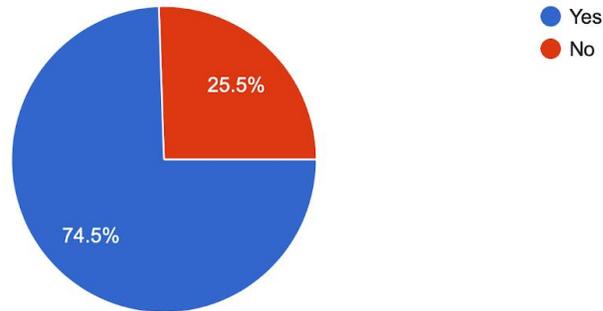
6. Do you get regular orders from regular customers?
47 responses



Out of 47 respondents, 35 respondents (74.5%) said that they get orders from regular customers. 1 person (2.1%) said that they get orders only during festivals. 2 people (4.3%) said that they only prepare orders for families. 9 people (9.1%) said that they get orders from regular customers on occasional basis.

7. Do you market your products on social media?

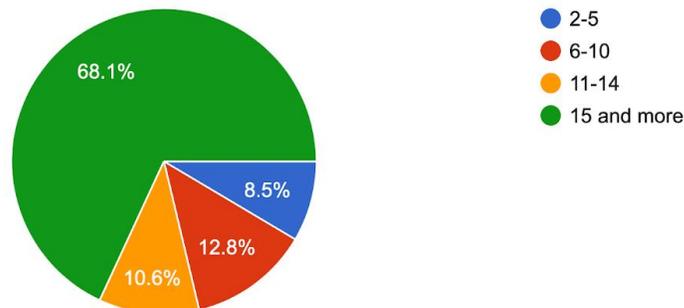
47 responses



Out of 47 respondents, 12 people (25.5%) said they don't market their products on social media. Majority of the respondents, 35 out of the 47 respondents (74.5%) said that they do market their products on social media and that is how their business has flourished.

8. What is the maximum number of guests you can cater to from home?

47 responses



Out of 47 respondents, 32 home cooks (68.1%) said they can cater to around 15 and more people at one time. 4 home cooks (8.5%) said that they can cater between 2-5 people. 6 home cooks (12.8%) said they can cater to around 6-10 people. 5 people (10.6%) said they can cater to around 11 – 14. From the data the researchers analyze that home cooks in this study are comfortable accepting orders for 15 people or more than.

9. Do you plan to take your home business on a large scale?

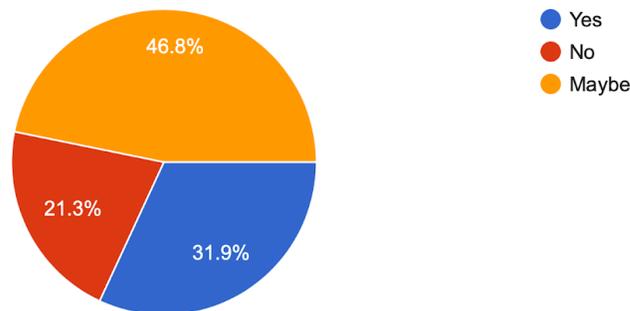
47 responses



Out of 47 respondents, 27 people (57.4%) agreed that they want to take their home business on large scale. 16(34%) respondents are contemplating about the same but are not sure when. One home cook said (2.1%) have already moved their home kitchen in a commercial space 2 years back however the business model remains the same. And 1 person (2.1%) said unsure about the future growth of his home cooking business.

10. Would you like to branch out into writing a book, create Youtube videos for recipes or be a food blogger?

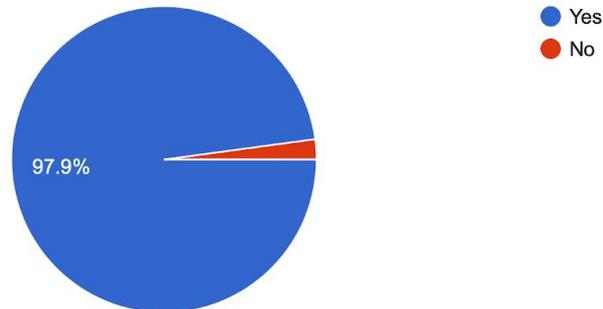
47 responses



Out of 47 respondents, 22 home cooks (46.8%) answered saying they would consider the options mentioned in the question asked. 15 home cooks (31.9%) agreed they would venture into food blogging, writing a book or start a YouTube channel and 10 home cooks (21.3%) disagreed with the same.

11. Do you innovate and use your creativity to widen your product range?

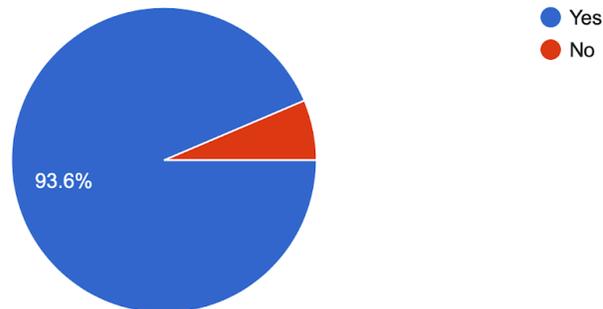
47 responses



Out of 47 respondents, 46 people (97.9%) agree that they will innovate and use creativity to widen their product range and 1 home cook (2.1%) disagreed to the same. Majority of the respondents like to innovate and use creativity to make their product likeable.

12. Do you think home cooking is an easier way to start a venture with minimal investment?

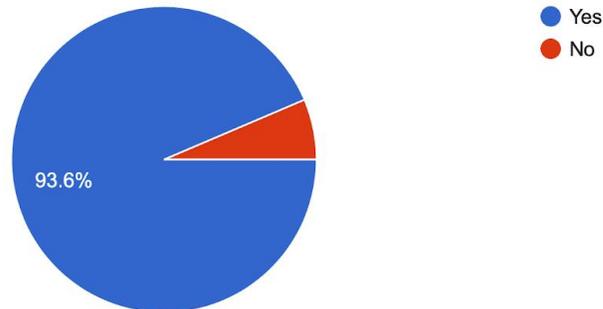
47 responses



Out of 47 respondents, 44 home cooks (93.6%) agreed to the fact that home cooking is an easier way to start a cooking venture with minimal investment and 3 home cooks (6.4%) disagreed.

13. Do you customize your product based on customer demand?

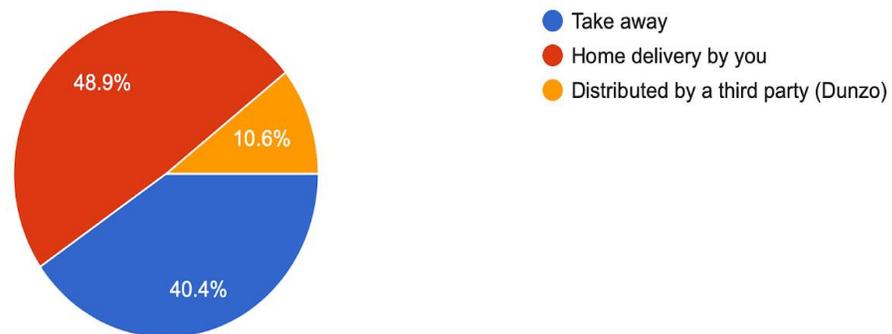
47 responses



Out of 47 respondents, 44 home cooks (93.6%) agreed that, they do customize the product based on customer demand and the remaining 3(6.4%) home cooks disagreed and said they do not customize the product.

14. What is your mode of delivery of your products to customers?

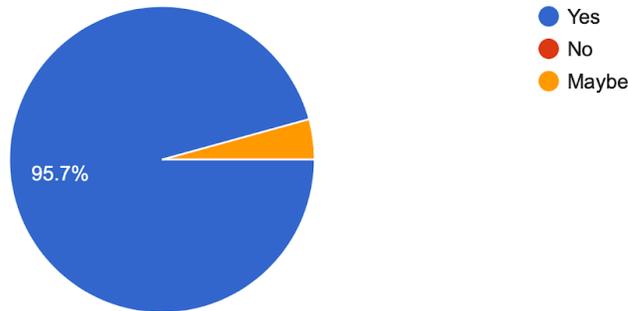
47 responses



With the help of this data, the researchers noted that 23 home cooks (48.9%) said they home deliver to customers themselves. 19 home cooks (40.4%) said customers pick up the parcels/takeaway. And the rest 5 people (10.6%) said they used third party delivery service such as Dunzo, Swiggy etc.

15. Does word of mouth play an important role in your business /expansion?

47 responses



After analyzing this data the researchers gathered that 45 respondents (95.7%) out of 47 respondents agreed that word of mouth plays an important role in their business. Majority of the home cooks said that word of mouth and good referrals from customers got them extra business.

15. What was the effect of COVID-19 pandemic on your business ?

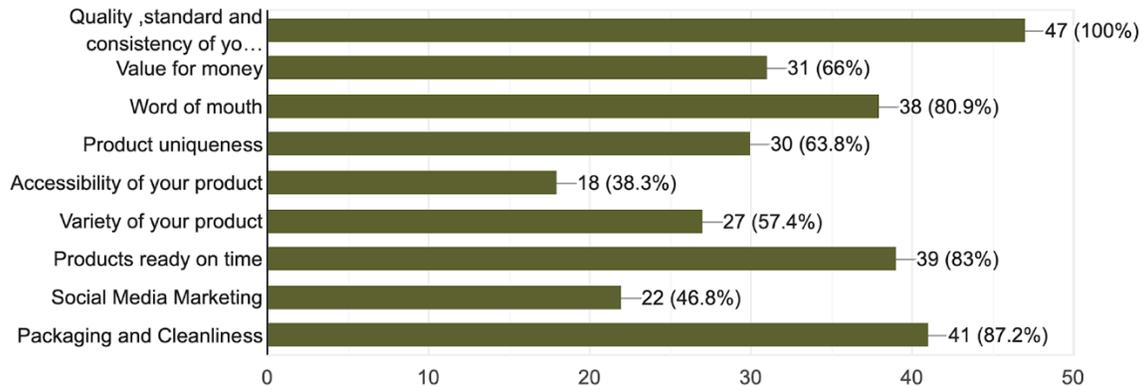
47 responses



Few respondents said that the business was low due to the lockdown and orders were few. However, there were some home cooks who started their business during COVID-19 pandemic and provided home meals to many customers as eateries and restaurants were closed due to the lockdown.

Factors you consider important for your venture of home cooking

47 responses



From the above data it is apparent, that maximum home cooks or rather everyone, out of 47 respondents all home cooks (100%) think quality, standard and consistency of their product/s play the most important role in their home cooking venture. 41 respondents (87.2%) think packaging and cleanliness come next in line of importance related to home cooking business especially in COVID-19 pandemic. Focus is on food handling and sanitation and customers expect that level of care from home cooks. 39 people answering the survey (83%) think product that is the food should be ready on time and is equally important for the success of the home cooking business. 45 home cooks (80.9%) are of the opinion that word of mouth is important for their business. 31 respondents (66%) think the value that they give their customers in exchange for money is crucial as customers will only pay if they get value as they perceive it. 30 home cooks (63.8%) think product uniqueness is important and the sole reason why their products sell. 27 people (57.4%) think the success of the venture is in the customization and the variety they offer in the product line. 22 people (46.8%) think social media marketing is crucial in today's time and it has helped their business to be visible to customers. 18 respondents feel that (38.3%) accessibility to their product is important and if it is easily available customers buy it more frequently.

Hypothesis Testing

H₀ - Quality, standard and consistency of the product is not the main factor influencing the customers during pandemic to order food.

H₁ – Quality, standard and consistency of the product is the main factor influencing the customers during pandemic to order food.

The statistical tool used for testing this hypothesis is one way ANOVA. This test has been utilized to determine whether Quality, standard and consistency of the product is the main factor influencing the customers during pandemic to order food. The results of which are as follows –

Summary of Data						
	<i>Treatments</i>					
	1	2	3	4	5	Total
N	47	47	47	47	47	235
$\sum X$	211	119	116	116	119	681
Mean	4.4894	2.5319	2.4681	2.4681	2.5319	2.898
$\sum X^2$	981	355	362	362	355	2415
Std.Dev.	0.8565	1.0805	1.2828	1.2828	1.0805	1.3737
Result Details						
<i>Source</i>		<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>		
Between-treatments		148.9957	4	37.2489	$F = 29.28444$	
Within-treatments		292.5532	230	1.272		
Total		441.5489	234			

The f-ratio value is 29.28444. The p-value is $< .00001$. The result is significant at $p < .05$ that is $0.00001 < 0.05$. So the alternate hypothesis (H_1) is accepted and null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected. Further it can be concluded that quality, standard and consistency of the product is the main factor influencing the customers during pandemic to order food.

H_0 - Home cooking is not an easier way to start a venture in COVID-19 times.

H_2 – Home cooking is an easier way to start a venture in COVID-19 times.

The statistical tool used for testing this hypothesis is T-test. This test compares whether home cooking is an easier way to start a venture in COVID-19 times. The results of which are as follows –

Difference Scores Calculations

Treatment 1

N1: 47

$df1 = N - 1 = 47 - 1 = 46$

M1: 1.89

SS1: 16.47

$s21 = SS1/(N - 1) = 16.47/(47-1) = 0.36$

Treatment 2

N2: 47

$df2 = N - 1 = 47 - 1 = 46$

M2: 4.26

SS2: 84.94

$s22 = SS2/(N - 1) = 84.94/(47-1) = 1.85$

T-value Calculation

$s2p = ((df1/(df1 + df2)) * s21) + ((df2/(df2 + df2)) * s22) = ((46/92) * 0.36) + ((46/92) * 1.85) = 1.1$

$s2M1 = s2p/N1 = 1.1/47 = 0.02$

$s2M2 = s2p/N2 = 1.1/47 = 0.02$

$t = (M1 - M2)/\sqrt{(s2M1 + s2M2)} = -2.36/\sqrt{0.05} = -10.9$

The t-value is -10.90498. The p-value is $< .00001$. The result is significant at $p < .05$ which is $0.00001 < 0.05$. Hence the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected and alternate hypothesis (H_2) is accepted. It can be further concluded that **home cooking is an easier way to start a venture in COVID-19 times.**

Findings and Observations

Most people interviewed ventured into the home cooking business because they were passionate about cooking. It should be noted that the home cooks can exercise the freedom to be very creative and innovative with food as this innovation helps them to increase and diversify their product line. The authenticity of their products is also the reason they get plenty of orders as traditional food has to be made by a specific method using authentic ingredients which are used by the home cooks.

Twenty five home cooks have received professional education in cooking or baking before starting their business. It is worthy to note that around twenty two home cooks are without any professional education in this field. It can be concluded that if one has the passion for cooking or baking, one can self-learn and innovate and start a business from home initially. A lot of people got into the cooking business during lockdown as they lost their jobs due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior to the cooking business these home cooks held jobs in the corporate field. The common ground that all these respondents shared was their passion to cook and serve. People think home cooking is a sustainable income business if done well. They make enough money to sustain and make a living out of it. Once the business is popular and has takers, the home cooks start getting repeat orders

Catering to the number of people is also important which decided whether can you take party orders, how many orders per day can you cater too. The researchers asked this question, around 86.1% people said that they can cater to more than 15 people at a time which is a good number considering that there is a limited resources when one is cooking at home. There is a space constraint to operate the venture from home, but due to the rising costs home cooks use their kitchen space with all the equipment.

93.6% people think home cooking is an easier way to start cooking business. It also gives them the flexibility to customize their products as per customer demand. 93.6% people customize their products to suit customer demand. People tend to deliver their food by themselves. 48.9% people do home delivery by themselves. 40.4% people ask the customers to collect their food. And around 10.6% people have tie-ups with third party delivery service such as Dunzo and Swiggy to deliver their food. This shows that home cooks prefer delivering their food by themselves or they ask the customers to collect it.

Word of mouth plays an important role in home cooking business. The survey tells the researchers that 95.7% people think that word of mouth plays an important role in their business. COVID-19 had mild effect on the home cooking business. People orders less as compared to before. Some people started their business during COVID-19. Factors which are important in the home cooking venture are firstly quality, standard and consistency is the most important aspect of home cooking business. 100% people agree that it is important. Second most important aspect is the packaging and cleanliness. Around 87.2% people agree that packaging and cleanliness is important. Third important aspect is that the product should be ready on said time and around 83% people agree with it. Word of mouth is important aspect of business as 80.9% people agree with it. Then comes product uniqueness, 63.8% people think this is an important aspect of business. 38.3% people think that accessibility of the product is important. 57.4% people think that variety of the product is important. Finally, 46.8% people think that social media marketing is important aspect of business.

Limitations:

- This study is limited to the concept of home cooks and whether they can start an entrepreneurial venture from the same.
- This research was conducted within the geographical boundries of Pune and Mumbai cities. No psychological aspects have been studied about people becoming home cooks.

Suggestions:

1. Setting up a target market: It is important that the home cook must be aware of the target customers they cater to. Once that awareness is there it is easy to plan offerings as per the target market needs, customize the offerings, procure raw material and decide the menu. Finding one's own niche is also an important part of the process.
2. Legalities: These depend upon the location/country from where the home cook operates. Local legalities around food hygiene and quality must be followed to avoid any problems later. It would be necessary to get couple of relevant licenses and permissions required to prepare and sell your food.
3. Regular customer database: It would be in the interest of the home cook to maintain a focus on the repeat customers. It would help to plan the production, minimize wastage, cook just the correct portions and maintain a steady cash flow.
4. Quality product and service: This is of paramount important as one negative review or comment or word of mouth can kill the home cooking business. Quality of product also translates into the value of the product and the customer should feel he/she receives that value when he/she buys the product.
5. Timeliness and efficient delivery: If home cooks offer delivery services, they have to either be through a trusted delivery partner or if the home cook is self delivering the food it must be done on time as promised ,without delay and in good packaging. Sloppy and late delivery will result in customers shying away.
6. Create a robust website and a professional image: A website created professionally should include photographs of food that is prepared by the home cook. It would be a good idea to mention what one offers different from the competition available. Distinguishing oneself from what others offer can be done by being a specialist or a niche home cook who produces sugar free food products. Along with a professional looking website, the home cook can keep brochures and business cards handy. This helps to develop faith in the business of the home cook. Hiring a professional would get the best result in creating a website and marketing material. These may seem unnecessary expenses but investing the money for this purpose will definitely help in the long run.

A home cook can also write out recipes for interested publications and website to promote one's own business. Food blogging is also a way the home cooks can earn money from affiliate marketing and advertising.

7. Consciously create awareness of your venture: Use social media handles actively, online presence is a must in today's day and age. Word of mouth is powerful but it takes a long time to spread. Today's customers need to know what one is offering to buy it in the first place. Once a customer buys a product and is satisfied it will result in repeat purchase behavior beneficial for any business. Offline it would be a good idea to donate your products and services to community activities. Such activities create a potential space for the home cook to be noticed and get newer business.
8. Encourage your loyal customers: A home cook will have satisfied customers who can be requested to write out testimonials on the website created by the home cook. This adds weight age to the home cook's credentials. To promote the business further discounts can be given to loyal customers who give referrals.
9. Right Pricing: Pricing can be the difference between failure and success of a home cook's business. It would be smart to spend time to research similar products and determine the costs to be incurred before settling on prices .One has to consider the time required to prepare the product along with the cost of ingredients as time is money. Never undersell for your own sake or oversell to a customer as this will alienate them totally. Underselling may get a home cook customers but not a reasonable profit. A market pricing should be taken into consideration while fixing own prices leaving out a margin in case of fluctuation of prices due to any unforeseen events.
10. Buying in bulk: This may seem as locking of capital initially when orders may be less but it would be wise to spend more on bulk buying by planning ahead and buying common items in more quantity to save more money eventually. Planning the menu in advance would be a good way to buy only what is required and discourage buying based on appeal or on sale which will result in wastage. While doing this it is advisable to look at expiry of food based raw material.
11. Use seasonal and local produce: Take advantage of what is available and being harvested as it may not be available after a certain time frame. Optimize and create recipes around this possibility.
12. Growth and Product Development: A lot of product ideas come from customers but may not always fructify but this encourages customer engagement. Customer feedback is crucial for a business and this talk from customers can be refined and used for product development of diversification of existent products.

Conclusion of the Study

Home cooking business saw a boom during COVID-19 pandemic. As many restaurants, were not functional, people were dependent on home cooked meals. Many saw a potential in home cooking business and started the venture during and post the pandemic. Customers started ordering food from home cooks as they thought the food was safe to consume and hygienically prepared. This passion or hobby can take the shape of a successful entrepreneurial venture if dealt with rightly.

Home cooking seems to be a trend which may follow in years to come. As the pandemic struck, home cooking has been viewed as a long term opportunity and a profitable sustainable business. Though COVID -19 affected everyone, it seems to be a boom for home cooks not only for a short term income but in a long run as well.

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ANNEXURE

Questionnaire for Home Cooks

1. Name
2. Name of your venture
3. Age
 - 18 – 20
 - 21 – 30
 - 31 – 40
 - 41 – 50
 - 51 – 60
4. Gender
 - Male
 - Female
 - Prefer not to say
5. How long are you into home cooking?
6. What profession were you in, before taking up home cooking full time?
7. Your reason / motivation to take up home cooking?
8. Do you have a professional cookery/ baking education before you became a home cook?
9. Do you think the income you earn from home cooking is substantial to sustain your venture?
10. Do you get regular orders from regular customers?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Sometimes
11. Do you market your products on social media?
 - Yes
 - No
12. What is the maximum number of guests you can cater to from home?
 - 2-5
 - 6-10
 - 11-14
 - 15 and more
13. Do you plan to take your home business on a large scale?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Maybe
14. Would you like to branch out into writing a book, create YouTube videos for recipes or be a food blogger?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Maybe
15. Do you innovate and use your creativity to widen your product range?
 - Yes
 - No
16. Do you think home cooking is a easier way to start a venture with minimal investment?
 - Yes

- No
- 17. Do you customize your product based on customer demand?
 - Yes
 - No
- 18. What is your mode of delivery of your products to customers?
 - Take away
 - Home delivery by you
 - Distributed by a third party (Dunzo)
- 19. Does word of mouth play an important role in your business /expansion?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Maybe
- 20. What was the effect of COVID-19 pandemic on your business?
- 21. Factors you consider important for your venture of home cooking
 - Quality, standard and consistency of your product/s
 - Value for money
 - Word of mouth
 - Product uniqueness
 - Accessibility of your product
 - Variety of your product
 - Products ready on time
 - Social Media Marketing
 - Packaging and Cleanliness