

“To Study the Effect of COVID-19 on customer retention practices implemented at Indian Speciality restaurant in Pune City”.

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Abstract

The purpose of the study to find the effect of COVID-19 on customer retention practices on Indian speciality restaurant in Pune City. The pandemic of COVID-19 hit the restaurant industry majorly. To sustain in the market it is very difficult. To retain the customer every restaurant has their own retention strategies which were implemented effectively before the pandemic. Post pandemic it is the tough task for the restaurant industry to bring back the customer at door step. For which every restaurant need to implement the customer retention practices effectively.

Key Words : COVID-19. Customer Retention, Customer Satisfaction, Customer-centric, Pandemic, Service quality.

Introduction:

Indian speciality restaurants from Pune city are keen to meet the ever-increasing demand from the second largest city of the state of Maharashtra and ninth populous city of the nation. Pune has a mixed culture of food where we can see the huge impact of Indian food on food lovers. There are many stand alone and chain restaurants in the Indian speciality segment in and around the city.

Several studies have been conducted over many years on Customer retention in the hospitality industry. Firstly, these studies are conducted to observe and understand the customer retention practices in Indian Specialty Restaurants from Pune city in and post- pandemic. Next, it talks about the effects that are caused by this epidemic turned pandemic on these customer retention practices at the restaurants from and around the city.

The restaurant industry in Pune and all over the world has seen one of its worst patches in history. As per *Indianexpress.com* Maharashtra government declared the outspread of infectious disease on 13th of March 2020 and since then Indian speciality restaurants of the state and the city, in particular, are facing many serious challenges to retain their customers as well as to generate the revenue. According to *Hindustan Times* (e-paper) out of 8500 restaurants associated with Pune Hoteliers associations in Pune city only 2000 restaurants were opened in the first unlock phase and many were unfortunate and had to be closed permanently. There are several reasons behind the permanent closure of eateries which include being unable to pay the rent, staff salary and maintenance cost of the restaurant. In such times, one key point that was highlighted is the service quality to retain long time customers. Famous Outlets like Roopali and Vaishali which serve as the best examples for their quality of food and service that they deliver for decades also decided to not open the eatery in first unlock. All around the world, retaining customers is a big challenge for any kind of business and moreover during the lockdown and unlock phase it has been an extremely critical task for hoteliers to retain their customers to keep their business alive.

This study is going to reveal customer retention practice, which was in use before the pandemic and during the unlock phase. Research is also going to prove that many changes took place in the use of these practices in terms of their way to use and will also focus on highlighting whether any practices are discontinued or new practices have been added into it. It also contributes to the learning of effective ways of customer retention.

It is proved by many researchers on several platforms that retaining customers is easier and affordable than finding new customers. The positive word about the organization has a huge impact on how that affects the business. The later part of the research explains the methodology used to get the data and along with it, findings and analysis where all the questions are answered from various hotel

representatives from and around the city and same have been explained thoroughly. Whereas the final part of the study talks about the conclusion and references of various papers, online journals, e-papers, interviews etc.

As per the Eriksson and Vaghult (read in Martey, 2014) customer retention is at the centre to the expansion of business development and it depends on satisfaction. It is very clear that if a customer is not satisfied for the amount that he spends any restaurant then it is very difficult to say that he will choose the same restaurant despite bad experience and eventually it is not very healthy for the business development. According to Pyne (read in Martey 2014) Customer Retention interpret that the ratio at the beginning and the customer who remains at the end period. In addition to this customer retention for a longer period is possible only when the organization is taking efforts by using different practices or methods. Natraj (2010) says that regular clients show's that degree of satisfaction, purchasing behavior is just one part of loyalty as it may demonstrate circumstances other than customer satisfaction. Satuss et al (read in Alketbi 2020) defined Customer Retention as *"the customer liking identification, commitment, trust, willingness to recommend, and repurchase intentions, with the first four being emotional -cognitive retention construct, and the last two being behavioral intention."* It could also be defined in other words as *"a commitment to continue to do business or exchange with a particular company on an ongoing basis"* by Zineldin (read in Alketbi 2020)

To conduct the research there are twelve practices identified and used in Indian speciality restaurant in Pune city. Those practices are as follow:

- a) Building a customer database- This is one the most common practice followed in many restaurants and it allows reaching a maximum number of people and also loosed customers. This database plays an important role to reach existing customers during the launch of a new product or while promoting the new offer.
- b) Tracking customer complaint-Tracking customer complaint on time makes the customer feel valued and it also helps to improve the service and product quality. By tracking customer complaint on time it helps to retain the customer and by doing so it will help to spread the positive mouth publicity about the organization.
- c) Face to face interaction- There is much organization who believes that direct interaction with the guest helps to understand the need of the customer. This practice resolves the issue immediately therefore it is also one of the vital customer retention practices.
- d) Loyalty program- It is one of the important tools which can attract customers to redeem their points or to generate more points by visiting a restaurant repeatedly. There are many stand-alone and chain restaurant who utilize loyalty program at their places.
- e) Phone/Email/SMS Marketing- This is one of the fastest and affordable ways to reach at a maximum number of customers at one time. It is a very handy tool to make customers aware of the offers, to resolve issues, to introduce a new product, services etc.
- f) Using social media- In today's tech-savvy world hotel industry is also very keen to use new technology. Social media has a huge impact on today's generation. It is very easy to reach to potential customers.
- g) Restaurants website- It is used to promote the business and customers can easily approach the website.
- h) Menu engineering- Menu is not only just a list of dishes to serve at the restaurant but also it is a crucial tool to generate the business. This systematic approach helps the hotelier to understand the Inventory, Wastage, Profit and Loss, Food cost, fast-moving dishes, slow-moving dishes and dishes which can be promoted to move into another category to increase the profit. Finally, it also calculates the contribution margin for every item from the menu.

There are some more practices like Comment card tracking, Employee training, corporate tie- up and a focus to improve the service quality. Organizations that use these types of services go with the plan strategy and tries to improve their customer satisfaction in every quarter, eventually, it helps to achieve customer retention.

Objectives

1. To study the effect of COVID-19 on customer retention practices.

2. To study the new customer retention practices implemented by Indian speciality restaurant in Pune City.

Hypothesis

H1- COVID 19 has affected customer retention practices followed by Indian speciality restaurant in Pune city.

H2 - Indian speciality restaurant have adopted the customer retention practices to tackle the COVID 19.

Literature review

According to the paper titled “Customer Retention in Fast food industry” by Uman Ali Warraich, Nawaz Ahmad , Faisal Kadeer Qureshi (2013) published in IJMS, in today's competitive market the main intention of promotion and marketing strategies to make more profits and develop the brand value in the market. Customer satisfaction, retention, quality of service is very important things on which organisations are concentrating which influence them more. This includes small, large scale organisation and non-profit service providers as well. It is very difficult to measure and access service productivity and quality because of its intangible nature of service. Benefits of improved quality service are both for the restaurant and its customers. Service is the main part of restaurant success in which customers are also involved. It increases with interaction with customers during the service.

According to the paper titled “Factors Affecting Customers’ Satisfaction in Jordan’s Restaurants Industry and How Loyalty and Retention Are Achieved” by Huda H. Dulaim Bshara M. Qalanzi(2020)published in ResearchGate, continuous demand in the surrounding market and huge competition has forced the hotel and restaurant industry to explore the new trends and opportunities to strengthen the brand loyalty and customer retention which help the increase the market share and brand value. Customer retention is very important to every organisation but the key to the success of customer retention is to retain the existing

customer. Because retaining the new customer is an expensive affair as you have to spend a lot of money on promotion and marketing. Loyal customers are very important as they reduce the managers’ efforts to do the additional promotions because loyal customers spread the positive word of mouth which help to retain the customer.

According to the paper titled “Customer retention practices of small, medium and large hotels In South Africa: An exploratory study” by D. J. Petzer, T.F.J. Steyn and P.G. Mostert (2009) published in African Journal of Marketing Management, majority of the hotels used the electronic database system with the guest history system. Guest those who visit the hotel come only for the business purpose and very rarely for the leisure purpose. Hotels consider all the activities related to customer retention management especially relationship marketing is very important. Hotel management should customize the relationships with individual customer as well as a group of people. Also, maintain the guest database of guest preference their choices and details.

According to the paper titled “Is Customer Retention Beneficial for Customers: A Conceptual Background” by Muhammad Turki Alshurideh (2016) published in Journal of Research in Marketing, the aim of the customer retention is to benefiting customer as well as the service provider. To retain the customer need to reduce the transaction cost also need to improve the economic and non-economic benefit.

According to the paper titled “A Model of Customer Satisfaction and Retention for Hotels” by Janet Sim, Brenda Mak, David Jones (2008) published in Journal of Quality Assurance in Hospitality & Tourism; by improving the customer satisfaction hotel retains their customers. Customer satisfaction can be put in the operation in terms of hotel ambience and hospitality this can add positive customer satisfaction and customer retention. Hospitality and ambience are the two main indicators of customer satisfaction.

According to the paper titled “The Effects of Coupon Promotion on Customer Retention” by Aia Jean Taguinod(2016) published in Johnson & Wales University ScholarsArchive@JWU, to run the restaurant successfully there are several factors needs to consider and one of them is to get the

customer back to the restaurant. Restaurants need to provide quality food and service which makes them return to the restaurant. Restaurateurs and marketers are creatively implementing new promotional strategies to stimulate the interest of customers. Selecting an ethnic restaurant could be divided into different categories. Culture oriented those who are looking for the exotic dining experience. Also, there are people managerial or professionals and those who have a higher income. Advertising and marketing strategies urge customers to purchase. The main aim of advertising and marketing is to provide information about the product and services provided by restaurants and to increase sales and revenue.

According to the paper titled “The Effect of Service and Food Quality on Customer Satisfaction and Hence Customer Retention” by Ahmad A (2015) published in Asian Social Science, service quality and food quality a positive impact on the customer satisfaction. Even service quality has a positive influence on customer satisfaction. Food quality plays a vital role in customer satisfaction. The intention of re-purchase and word-of-mouth indicated that customer satisfaction is a key driver to increase customer retention. Service quality can be assessed by comparing the expectation of customers against their perception of the actual service experience.

According to the paper titled “Customer retention – CRM application” by Sam Nataraj (2010) published in Issues in Information Systems, customer relationship management strategies provide the advantage for the organisation to retain the customer. Their evidence shows that it helps in the organisational financial wellbeing. It helps to understand how and why the customers are satisfied with the organisation. CRM help customers to get more knowledge and information about the organisation. CRM retention programs must include the customer-centric program which helps to identify the profitable customers while forecasting the satisfaction and loyalty. This is beneficial for the hotels and customers as well and it facilitates the effective use of staff and technical resources to meet customers need and satisfy them.

According to the paper titled “The Relationship between Customer Retention and Customer Loyalty in the Restaurant Industry in Ghana” by Edward Markwei Martey published in International Journal of Research (IJR), customer relationship managers can find out what customer required, their expectation depending upon that it is easier to serve and solve the complaint on time and fulfil customers' needs. Customer retention is the main focal point in creating a relationship that leads to loyalty. Customer retention is important for most of the restaurant because the cost of obtaining a new customer is higher than the cost of maintaining a relationship with the old customer. Staff politeness, adequate and timely information, handling customer complaint, best prices of drink and food, better service can influence customer satisfaction.

Research Methodology

Total 33 restaurant representatives from the Indian Speciality Restaurant participated in the survey. The questionnaire filled by all 33 restaurant representative/owner.

Questionnaire -: Primary data collected through a set questionnaire. A structured questionnaire consisting of multiple-choice questionnaires was developed to record the effect of COVID 19 on customer retention practices implemented at Indian Speciality restaurant in Pune city.

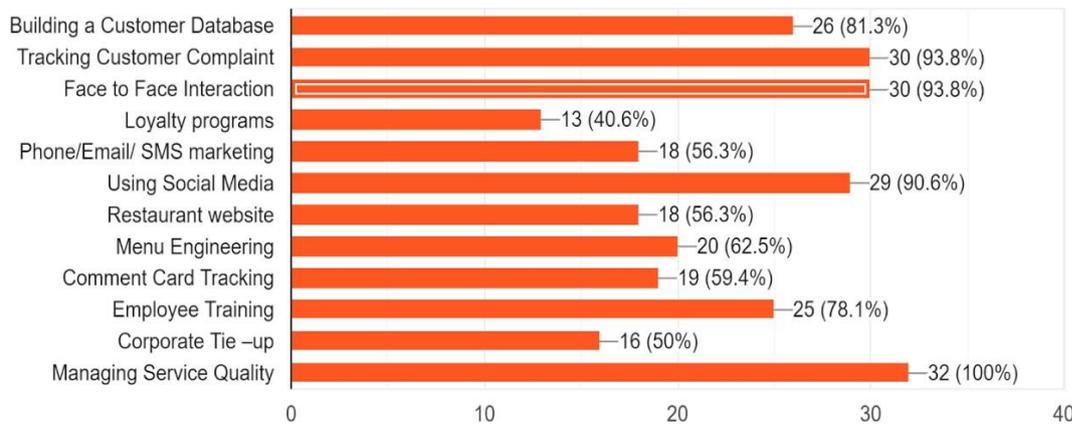
Data analysis and findings

From Indian speciality restaurant, 33 responses were gathered from the restaurant representative. Following interpretation is of the same collected responses converted into bar diagram for easier understanding.

Which customer retention practices do you follow from the list given below?

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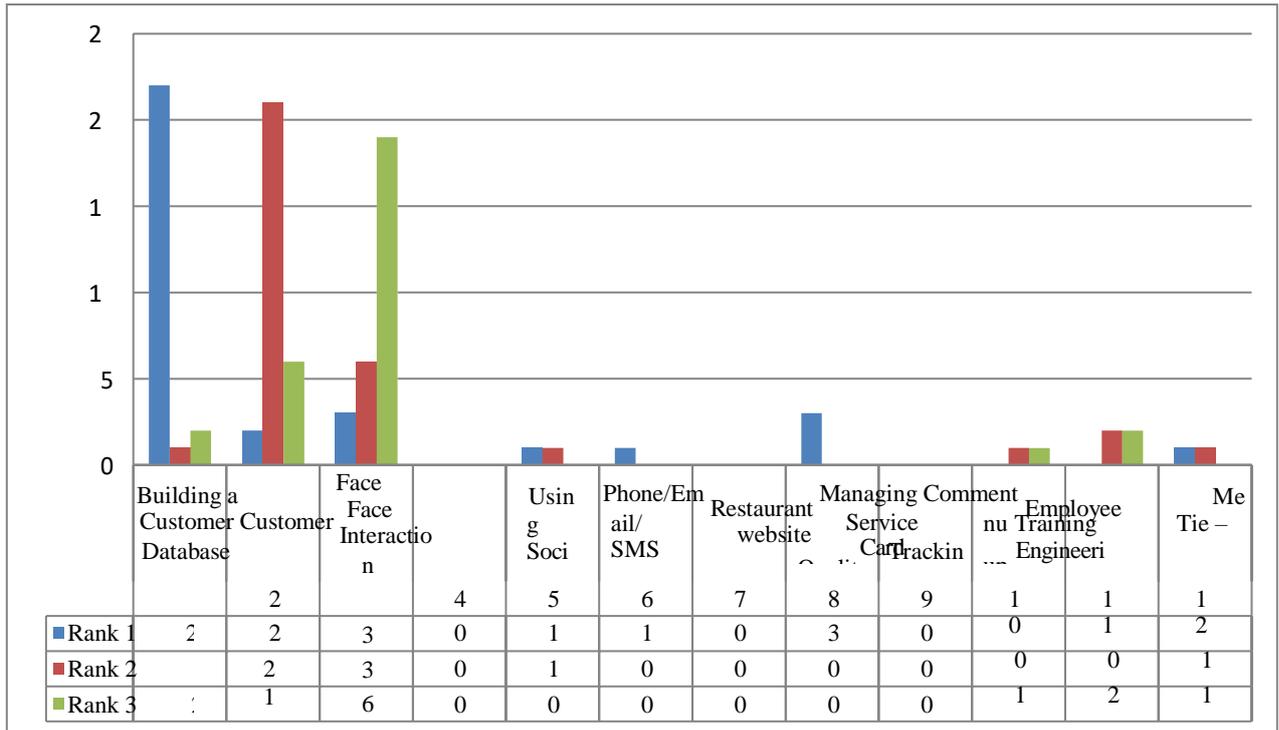
32 responses



Data given in the bar graph indicate that 100% restaurant representative says that they follow the managing service quality practices in the restaurant. Providing a good service and maintain it consistently is very important to retain the customer. Tracking a customer complaint and giving the proper solution to the customer is mandatory also on the arrival first interaction with the customer is very important as well as between the service face to face interaction very important which help the restaurant to retrain the customers that's why 93.8% of restaurant representative are still believe and follow these practices regularly. Social media is the easiest medium to reach the customers' doorstep through Facebook, Instagram, Youtube and many more. That's why 90.6% of representatives use the social media tool for customer retention. 81.3% representative built their customer database which they use the database to send all offers and promotional activities on the customers mobile number or E-mail id which help them to attract. This particular database can be used to invite the guest on their birthday, anniversary to make their day special. 78.1% of representatives believe in employee training because employees are the face of the organisation. To get a good outcome from the employees they need proper training which helps them to improve their skills and knowledge as well as to achieve organisational goals. 62.5% representative follows the menu engineering as a customer retention practice. 56.3% representative follows Phone/email/ SMS marketing & restaurant website practices for customer retention. 59.4% are using comment card tracking practices for retention. 40.6% still uses loyalty program for customer retention.

Which of the following customer retention practices has more impact on customer retention?

It has been observed from the data collected that there are three practices which have more impact on customer retention. Data collected from total 33 representatives of Indian speciality restaurant out of which 22 representatives say that building customer data-base has more impact on the customer retention because the restaurant can collect the guest data at the time of telephonic inquiry and table booking as well as at the time of dining. With help of these data, a restaurant can reach to the customer and it will help them retain the customer. Out of 33 representatives, 21 says tracking customer complaint is very useful to practice because you can interact with the customer personally to solve their complaint which leads to customer satisfaction.



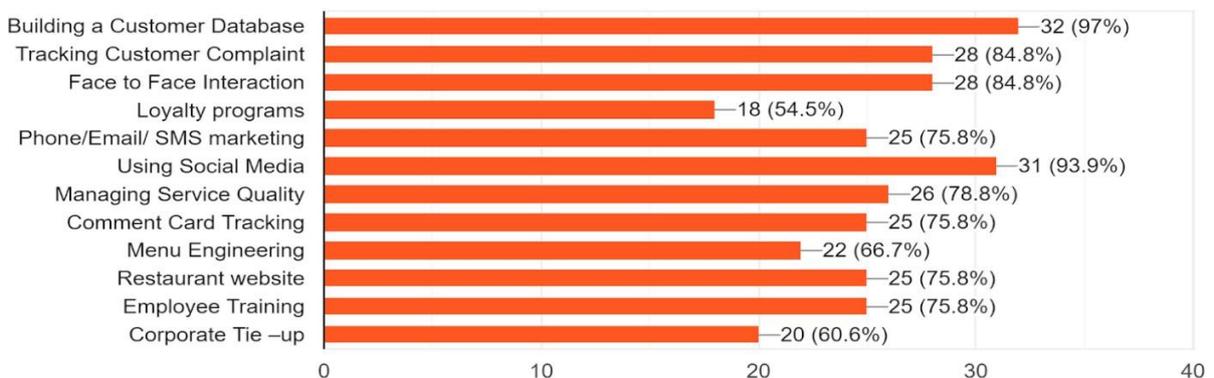
19 representatives say that face to face interaction is the best practice as it increases the personal interaction. It helps to build a good relationship and repo with the customer. These are the tree practices have more impact on customer retention out of 12 practices. But as per the observation loyalty programs, restaurant web site and comment card tracking are the least important for the customer retention. There are remaining practices like using social media, phone /email/ SMS marketing, managing service quality, employee training, corporate tie-up, menu engineering has very less impact on customer retention and is less preferred practices for customer retention.

Which of the following customer retention practices your organisation has continued after the lockdown?

From the data, it has been observed that 97 % of restaurant continued maintaining their customer database. Due to the pandemic restaurant industry was shut for almost 6 month, it is very difficult to gather a new customer database. Utilization of the old database is the best way to reach to the customer.

Which of the following customer retention practices your organisation has continued after the lockdown ?

33 responses



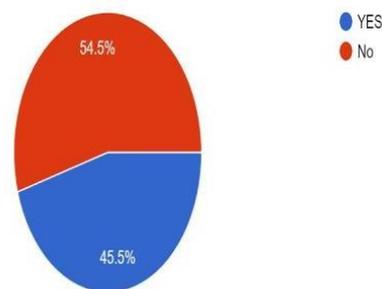
Most of the speciality restaurant started the home delivery service, this customer data help them to introduce the new service to the customer. Social media plays a vital role in this pandemic. After the unlock period it was a difficult task to retain the customer but social media like Facebook, Instagram, Zomato and, any more social media platform help the restaurant to retain their customer. To promote the new offers and promotional activity social media is the best medium. That is why before the pandemic there were 90.36% restaurants using social media as a customer retention practice which was increased to 93.9%.

Even after the unlock period, 84.8% of restaurant representative prefer to continue with the tracking customer complaint and face to face interaction practices since they can have a personal interaction with the customers which help them to increase the customer retention. After the lockdown maintaining the service quality is the biggest challenge in front of representative due to the limited availability of the skilled staff still 78.8% representative are going to prefer the maintaining service quality as their customer retention practices. 75.8 % restaurant is implementing phone/Email/ SMS marketing, comment card tracking, restaurant website, employee training practices post lockdown. 66.7% says that they will continue with menu engineering practices post lockdown. 60.6% corporate tie-up and 54.5% loyalty program

Apart from the above practices do you implement any new practices after UNLOCK phase?

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33 responses



It has been observed from the data collected that 45.5% representative says that apart from the regular practices they have started implementing new customer retention practices after Unlock period, in the other hand 54.5% say that they didn't implement new retention practices after Unlock phase.

Results and Discussions:

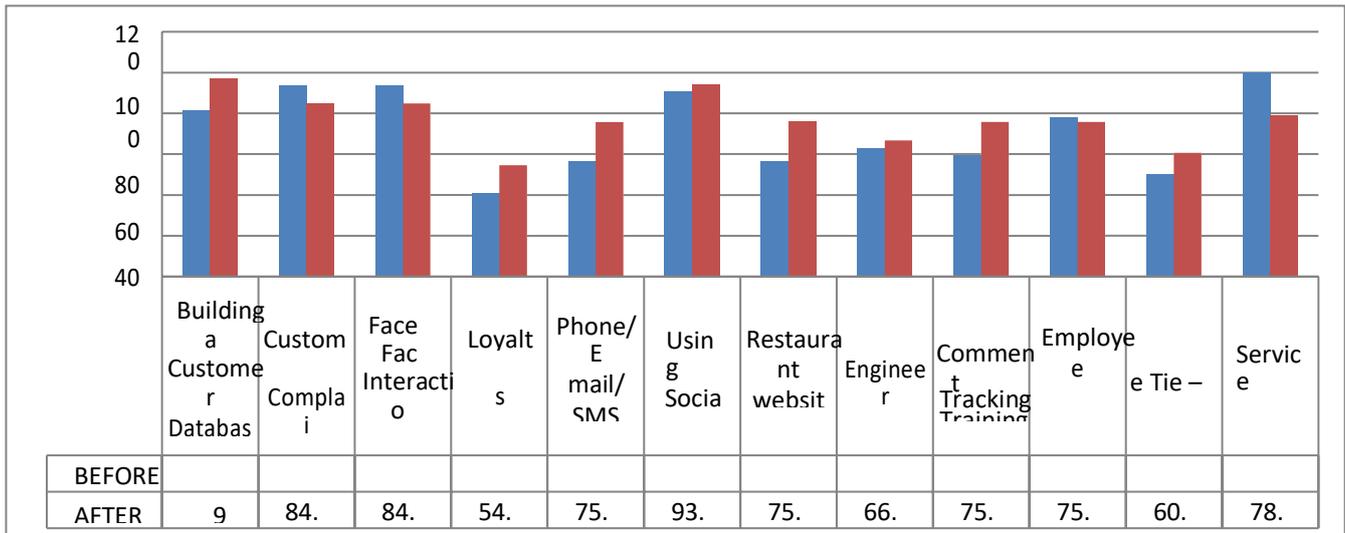
Hypothesis -:

H₀- COVID 19 no effect on customer retention practices followed by Indian speciality restaurant in Pune City.

H₁ -COVID 19 has affected customer retention practices followed by Indian speciality restaurant in Pune city.

To find out the COVID 19 has affected the customer retention practices followed by Indian speciality restaurant in Pune city following question has been asked which of the following customer retention practices your organisation has continued after the lockdown.

As per the responses gathered from the restaurant representative maximum representative said that customer retention practices didn't affect due to COVID -19 in addition to existing practices representative have started using additional practices as well for the customer retention. It has been observed from the data collected that intensity of using customer retention practices has been increased due to fear of losing the customer and to show the presence in the market. Therefore a customer retention practice has been affected due to COVID 19. Therefore null (H₀) hypothesis has been rejected and alternate (H₁) hypothesis has been accepted.



H0- Indian speciality restaurant has not adopted the customer retention practices to tackle the COVID 19.

H1- Indian speciality restaurant has adopted new customer retention practices to tackle the COVID 19.

To find out new customer retention practices adopted by Indian speciality restaurant to tackle the COVID 19 following question has been asked, Apart from the above practices do you implement any new practices after UNLOCK phase? As per the responses gathered from the representative few said that they are going to start the contactless home delivery, take away service, hygiene and sanitation practices. Few representatives are still working on the implementation of new practices to tackle the COVID 19. Therefore null hypothesis (H0) is rejected and alternative (H1) hypothesis is accepted

Suggestion -:

Depending on the findings the researchers have made some suggestions which will be helpful for the employers of the speciality restaurant.

It can be seen that with proper implementation of customer retention practices can help restaurant representative to retain the customer. Maintaining the customer database is helpful for the restaurant representative to personal interaction. It can be used to invite the guest on a special occasion. Also, the restaurant can promote their new offers and promotion by sending the message the collected data. It helps the customer to gather more knowledge and information about the company. With help of customer care executive by calling customer personally restaurant can invite the customer and promote the brand.

Tracking the customer complaint is a very important aspect as it leads to customer satisfaction. Customer usually prefers social media platform to express their experience about the service quality and food quality. It is necessary to track the complaint if the customer has it. Quick response to the customer complaint will help to retain the customer. During solving the customer complaint restaurant may offer some discount or the package to retain the customer. Due to which restaurant representative can fulfil the demands of the customer and satisfy them. The customer-centric approach will help generate maximum revenue and sustain the market.

Every customer needs personal attention while dining in the restaurant. The customer comes to the restaurant not only to have food but to explore and experience the service and ambience as well. Restaurant representative needs to concentrate on the face to face interaction with the guest. An employee is the first main key person who comes in the contact with the customer that's why they should get the proper customer handling training. Face to face interaction help restaurant to know the needs and demands of the customers. With this interaction, it will be easier to fulfil the same while a customer is dining at the restaurant. Also, it will help the restaurant to collect the review of the food and service as soon as possible and it will give a chance to solve the customer complaint then and there if it has. A satisfied customer may spread the word of mouth about their experience due to the

personalised service and the quality food.

This current pandemic situation demands restaurant representatives to think out of the box. New hygiene and sanitation practices need to implement which can create confidence in the customers to come back to the restaurant. Restaurant representative is adopting the new practices like contactless food packing, home delivery, new discount offer; corporate tie-up can be useful to retain the customers.

Limitation-:

Following are the limitations of this research paper

1. The research paper does not consider the psychological effect of COVID-19 on the customers.
2. The study has been carried out in Pune.
3. No financial data has been studied for this research.
4. Data has been collected only from the speciality restaurant within the Pune city.

Conclusion -:

COVID 19 drew the major impact on each very industry around the world. Every industry is struggling to cope up in this situation. The hospitality industry is suffering a lot in this pandemic due to its customer-centric nature. The whole industry is depending upon the customer. Due to the social distancing norm and insecurity between the customers, it is difficult to retain the customer. Restaurant representatives need to take more initiative to retain customers. Retention practices which are used by restaurant representative are giving good result due which they lead to more customer retention.

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Annexure: Questionnaire

“To Study the Effect of COVID-19 on customer retention practices implemented at Indian Speciality restaurant in Pune City”.

Questionnaire for the restaurant representative:-

1. Name Of the Owner/ representative?
2. Name of the restaurant?
3. Which customer retention practices do you follow form the list given below?
 - a) Building a Customer Database
 - b) Tracking Customer Complaint
 - c) Face to Face Interaction
 - d) Loyalty programs
 - e) Phone/Email/ SMS marketing
 - f) Using Social Media
 - g) Restaurant website
 - h) Menu Engineering
 - i) Comment Card Tracking
 - j) Employee Training
 - k) Corporate Tie –up
 - l) Service Quality
4. Which of the following customer retention practices has more impact on customer retention? (please rank them accordingly 1st is most important and 12th is the least important

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Building a Customer Database												
Tracking Customer Complaint												
Face to Face Interaction												
Loyalty programs												
Phone/Email/ SMS marketing												
Using Social Media												

Restaurant website													
Menu Engineering													
Comment Card Tracking													
Employee Training													
Corporate Tie –up													
Service Quality													

5. Which of the following customer retention practices your organisation has continued after the lockdown?

Building a Customer Database	
Tracking Customer Complaint	
Face to Face Interaction	
Loyalty programs	
Phone/Email/ SMS marketing	
Using Social Media	
Restaurant website	
Menu Engineering	
Comment Card Tracking	
Employee Training	
Corporate Tie –up	
Service Quality	

6. Apart from above practices do you implement any new practices unlock phase?

- a) Yes
- b) No

7. What are the new customer retention practices implemented at your organisation after UNLOCK phase?
