

The Increasing Dine-out Trend: Investigation from Karachiites

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the increasing preference of people in regard to dining out more in the recent years as compared with eating at home. The trend of dining out is often not to fulfil hunger instead it is more often because of socializing and just for the sake of trying out new places. The present study further elaborates the impact and consequences of the increased dining out on the changing lifestyle of people. Particularly in Pakistan, the trend of dining out is increasing and is being taken as a leisure trip or a social gathering, which is very different than as it was perceived once when eating out was restricted to occasions and celebrations. This trend is multi-faceted as it is not restricted to a particular segment or class that is being affected by the change in dining out trends. The focus in this study has been on exploring how the trend is increasing amongst the youth as well as a family event, and more importantly, how it is significant despite the increase varies in different social classes. This paper also emphasizes on literature that includes the various strategies used by restaurateurs to encourage increasing dine out behaviour. For primary data collection, a questionnaire, containing both open-ended and close-ended questions, was floated and responses of consumers belonging to different areas of Karachi were recorded. The findings of the study highlighted that male customers are more significant contributors to the dine out trend than that of the female customers.

Keywords: *Dine out, preferences, trend, socializing*

INTRODUCTION

The strong smell, piercing through the nostrils of pedestrians, often halt them along the road and attract them to join the roadside fiesta or just the road sideboard of Pizza Hut or McDonalds just tempt enough to stop by at the nearest roadside restaurant or a fast food stand or even a hotel. The scenes of sizzling and bursting hot skew grills on coal fire makes the city folk more ravenous, who find the low priced items no less sumptuous than dining out at some luxurious food outlet. In addition, the thought of luxurious buffet high priced restaurant just instigates even nonexistent desire to dine out.

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“We live to eat or eat to live?” This has been a debate for long. The changing dynamics throughout the world has changed the shape of this question as eating has become more of a social commitment or a social pleasure due to increasing dining out opportunities. McDonaldization and Impulse buying are two prominent concepts, which need to be addressed when talking about the increasing, dine out trends. Starting off with Impulse buying of food is when you randomly think and plan on eating out and you end up dining out with family, friends or even alone. McDonaldization is the term invented by Ritzer (1993) to describe a sociological phenomenon that is happening in our society. He describes it as the process by which a society takes on the characteristics of a fast-food restaurant. McDonaldization is a reconceptualization of rationalization or moving from traditional to rational modes of thought and scientific management. Where Weber (1921/1968) used the model of the bureaucracy to represent the direction of this changing society, Ritzer sees the fast-food restaurant as having become a more representative contemporary paradigm. This concept just does not restrict to fast food outlets, as in our situation we can relate it to the general dine out trend whether to the fast food outlets or traditional Mughlai food restaurants the essence of the talk remains that eating habits are changing and the dine out trends are increasing from traditional to rational modes of thought. Fast-food outlets and restaurants dominate the foodservice landscape.

The core of our study is that the changing dines out trends indicate two things:

- Dine out trend is increasing in Pakistan and is being taken as a leisure trip or a social gathering, which is very different than as it was perceived once when eating out was restricted to occasions and celebrations.
- Secondly, the trend is multi-faceted as it is not only restricted to a particular segment or class which is being affected by the change in eating out trends. The focus of our study will be how the trend is increasing amongst the youth as well as a family event, and more importantly how its significance despite the increase varies in different social classes.

Another aspect of this study will be what attempts are being made by the food sector marketers to make this increase happen. Despite the world economic situations and poor job market in Pakistan food industry is perhaps one of the only sectors, which has somewhat remain unaffected by the external environment.

Largely the reasons behind this increasing trend can say to be the drive or taste developed in the society. Restaurateurs recognizing the food, cloth and shelter essential needs, cultural and societal needs all over Pakistan have been concerned and have improved standards as per time to maintain and sustain clientele. Thus as external factors play none or minor effect on eating out habits of a society restaurateurs have gone beyond the food factor and have started emphasizing on the internal environment which keeps customers coming back. This statement stays valid for whether you link it to 7 star or 5-star hotels/ restaurants or roadside dhabas (little shops providing an open and airy environment to costumes to sit) or even the food streets. It is a fact that a restaurant is probably the only internal environment that puts to test all the five human senses. The results can be most fascinating or most frustrating depending on the Food and the interior design. Sometimes the food is fine but it does not taste so good because of poor lighting or bad interior design (Rubina, 2009). The same is not true vice versa; unfortunately, the nicely designed interior of a restaurant may be comforting but does not cover up for poor food.

However, frankly, apart from the sense of taste and smell that is normally taken care of by the chef and his team, whose delicious food and meticulous display and presentation of food can give you a visual and a mouthwatering experience, it is the role played by the interior designer who can really win your heart by good environmental design. It is the entire experience that leaves a more lasting impression and you crave for more (Smith, 1983).

The tactile senses come into play as soon as you enter into a restaurant. You can feel the different textures and finishes of various materials used in an Interior without actually touching them. The mental game of contrasts between glossy and rough surfaces can be exciting. Although the music on its own has a profound effect on the human body, it is believed that good background music while dining can be really soothing and adds tremendously to the experience.

While carefully, selected music takes good care of our hearing sense but at the same time, it can have a good effect on the human appetite. No wonder live bands or background music is an integral part of almost all trendy eating-places. In fact, live bands can double the pleasure of dining out and have become a part of our lifestyle. Therefore, the total engagement of all the senses completes the experience. Overall, it is the 'visual sense' that takes command and ties the experience together in the mind. It is the interaction between the eyes and the brain that really "cooks up" everything inside and you get all the right kind of stimuli. With all the right ingredients and combinations, the experience can be ecstatic.

One may dare to say that we as a society are lacking in all forms of essential excitement and entertainment in life but have become, over a period, self-sufficient in at least one aspect of fulfilment i.e. gastronomic excitement. In addition, we all know that "eating out" is a family affair, an occasion to meet, eat and have a nice time. With the result, the city is riddled with all sorts of eating places full of style and different themes.

Today we see restaurants doing roaring business that show flexibility in seating and which rearranges its seating to cater for a large family gathering instantly. A careful layout and well-designed restaurant adds tremendously to the quality food and thus becomes an experience that you would want to make it a habit and part of your lifestyle. Developing this visual sense in the restaurants is one of the most important tactics, which restaurateurs have adapted very well in Pakistan. Perhaps it's another reason why the dine out trend does not decrease to a great extent and even the takeaway system which is very popular worldwide is not usually the first preference of majorities when eating out as we mentioned before that it's the gathering, ambience and environment people go for more than the food itself. In short, gone are the days when consumers are content with treating themselves to something special every once in a while. In today's instant society we want it all, and we want it right now and in terms of eating out, that means visiting a restaurant as a regular treat not just for a specific celebration such as a birthday or anniversary.

According to a consumer, research carried out by Navigator research as mentioned by Food Standards Agency news (2008) the nature of choice when eating out was relatively complex. People's decisions were based on a number of interlinking factors, the importance of which varied depending on the eating out occasionally. The principal drivers were the price; location and time available; perceived food hygiene; atmosphere and ambience with brand names often-influencing people's perceptions of one or more of these factors.

- Price –Affordability of a consumer differs and there exists a limit to one's disposable income allocated for food expenditure. However, price relies on the context in which meal occasion is drafted for. It acts as barriers to the experimental instinct of people.
- Location and the time available – remarkable variable since dining out needs adjustment with a list of scheduled activities. Travelling can also be restricted to nearby locations since time constraints attached. More often attractive places failed to gain attention due to the time required for such visit.
- Perceived food hygiene – Expectedly, any suspicion related to Hygiene could be a discredit for any entity.
- Outlet atmosphere and ambience –Predominant since the consumer comfort is associated with this factor and every eating out situation demands it. Full nest families observed even to tradeoff ambience against the flaws conspicuous of food offers.
- Brand – May have a profound influence on consumer decision-making since brand acts as a guarantee or a signal for the presence of many factors that are discussed above.

Healthy eating out was also a consideration although to a lesser degree. Eating out is easier and less time consuming, but it can become very expensive and unhealthy. Although a home cooked meal takes a great amount of time, the long-term benefits far outweigh the short-term benefits of fast food dining.

The data collected in our study has based its focus on karachiites since Karachi, as the city of Pakistan represents people from diverse cultural and racial backgrounds. As an economic hub of Pakistan people from all over, Pakistan comes and lives there to earn their living.

The discussion of dining out in Karachi could never be completed without incorporating some famous food points/ centres in Karachi. These are boundless but we will take only a few most famous ones in our discussion such as food streets of Burns Road, Boat Basin, Clifton B1 II, Phase VIII, Muhammad Ali Society, Rashid Minhas Road, Tariq Road, Super Highway, etc.

“Burns Road” is a term whenever used by Pakistanis signifies a blend of uncontrollable hunger and never-ending love for delicious food. Every day hundreds of visitors were found to be satisfying their hunger by visiting this food street. The food items starting from famous Haleem to chilled cold drinks are all aspiring to person's senses. Not only traditional Desi food items are available to enrich menu but the more modern and newer fast food items are also found. People come out to dine with their family, friend and relatives and gaining calorie-rich food experiences.

Another food street that remains at the fingertips of the citizen of Karachi is Boat Basin.” Boat basin” as the name echoes is near Clifton, an area near the Arabian Sea in Karachi. The thrilling whether with the sea breeze, high blowing winds and a stimulating smell of varying varieties of food are all characteristics of board basin. With these two big food streets, there are other small food junctions such as those located in Clifton B1 II, Phase VIII, Muhammad Ali Society, Rashid Minhas Road, Tariq Road, Super Highway, etc. Clifton BI II is well known for its attraction of fast food consumers or majorly Chinese food lovers.

Mohammad Ali society and Rashid Minhas road are also one of the oldest attractions for foodies. The locals of Karachi want to have food in the midst of any activity such as while shopping or while travelling short or for a long interval of time. The food marketers and seller

recognizing this fact have placed their shops in the busy shopping spots for people or within high traffic travelling regions. Food junctions of Tariq road and superhighways are an extension to these efforts.

Problem Statement

Due to a ubiquitous trend towards an increase in the number of hotels, restaurants, fast food outlets and coffee shops being introduced at an increasing rate, the phenomenon of dining out is pacing up as well and is received increased attention in academic as well as general research. The increasing dine-out trends in our society, the reasons and its impact on different segments and social classes of our society.

Objective of the Study

The objective of the study is to examine the various factors that influence the change in dines out trends and the various marketing strategies used by marketers to make the change happen. The various objectives include:

- Identifying the increase and its causes
- Identifying marketers efforts for causing an increase in the trend
- Impact of this trend on consumers
- Significance of the trend for consumers belonging to various segments and social classes

LITERATURE REVIEW

Eating-out is a normal habit when observed among the majority of people. Janet and Hsieh (2006) have conducted a research-taking native of Taiwan as a target population & basing its sample on convenience sampling. Results have been extracted from 272 responses since response rate was 77.7%. Taiwanese were found not only frequent visitors to dining outlets rather street vendors are also on their list of normal visits. The results of the study highlighted “self-identity” behind a leisure motive of dining out in night markets. The differing offerings at night markets with visiting frequency of at least once a month, accompanied by colleagues and friends & likelihood of ordering Local delight as the desired food are also among major findings (Marshall & Bell, 2003).

Sukalakamala and Boyce (2007) conducted a study on the USA as a Multicultural society. The focus of the study was built around discovering consumer insight related to their acceptance, expectations & perception of original Thai dine out. Data was collected from restaurants that were a buffet, table service or fast food. Respondents indicated that almost 92% of them are somewhat familiar with the Thai food and amongst that 98 % have already tried it. Respondents were enthusiastic about trying new varieties of cuisines, especially ethnic ones. They would prefer the ingredient of the food mentioned to them rather mere foreign name & most of them (60%) were attracted towards taste if compared with authentic cooking (Park, 2004).

As per Carter (2005) study, over a decade the percentage of people preferring restaurants for dining out has increased fourfold in southeast Queensland, Brisbane (Australia). The footpaths are covered by public eat outs thus reinventing the city. People are no more found in their kitchens rather relaxing; having dinners & breakfast; socializing with neighbours or spending

time by talking on phones with their friends but the astonishing fact behind all these Activities is that: all these enjoyments are done on footpaths in the food establishment developed therein.

Spencer (2009) as a knowledge consultant on food has stated various reasons forming consumers' eat out attraction. Amongst these reasons are: eating out in celebration of special occasion; spending time with family; completing an entertainment night etc. since this article was written during the times of recession; therefore, Spencer mentioned that consumers foods choices are affected by Limited income available to them at their disposal.

Petterson and Fjellstrom (2007) made a passive observation of almost a year for four Swedish restaurants. Amongst these two of the restaurant are Burger restaurant and the other ones are classified as departmental store restaurants. These observations were conducted to explore the functions of these restaurants towards customers of varying family size or ages. The findings of the study identified that Restaurant can be viewed as an entity with numerous facilities, not only menu rather its room or environment are taken as a convenient aspect by consumers. The patterns of friendliness and Familiarity that originate from each restaurant can be taken to have a comprehensive understanding of its service to families.

Andersson and Mossberg (2004) discuss dining as an experience having its roots spreading in multiple dimensions. Their paper explores the consumer likely hood to make payment for six restaurant service aspects: fine cuisine, good company food, service, restaurant interior & other customers A comparison is established between what accounts for an ideal restaurant for customers and what is their current experience with the restaurant. Major findings of the study highlighted: psychological needs commands the Launch Situations whereas, social needs prevails at evening restaurants (Sukalakamala & Boyce, 2007).

Wood (1992) examines the relationships between gender and dining out. The study argues that there are demonstrable continuities between food consumption in the home and in the arena of public dining. At the heart of the food system in Britain, the major role is played by women as family "carers". Women sustain a dietary culture that is seen as health-giving. Despite this, they are often excluded in a variety of ways from the enjoyment of food and, in the context of the commercial provision of food, are marginalized as consumers. Explores these issues in the context of a theoretical discourse on food-culture relationships and market data on food consumption outside the home, concluding that, however effective nutrition education may be, advances in healthy eating provision by commercial hospitality organizations are antithetical to the principal of hedonism which underpins such provision.

Christine Sun and Morrison (2007) studied the continuing and rapid growth of the mature population in Taiwan has forced the restaurant industry to prepare for substantial social and demographic changes. This study used a telephone survey to elicit attributes important to the restaurant patronage behaviours of consumers aged 65 and older who lived independently. The variables examined include a battery of demographic and health-related variables, a series of motivation attributes, restaurant selection criteria, and measures of consumer's restaurant patronage behaviours. Two distinctive segments were identified frequent and convenience restaurant patrons, and occasional and family restaurant patrons (Zdrowski, 1996). The results of this study of mature consumer's restaurant patronage behaviour have several implications for this increasingly important and prominent segment of the restaurant consumer marketplace.

METHODOLOGY

Primary Data

Primary data was collected via questionnaire having both open-ended and close-ended questions from the customers go to hotels, restaurants, and dhabas.

Sample Size & Sampling Techniques

A survey of 50 respondents located in various areas in Karachi provided the database for this study. The sample was selected from convenience sampling. Respondents were made to fill out questionnaires in various restaurants, malls and at one University. Respondents were surveyed based on their age, frequency of visits etc.

RESULTS & DISCUSSIONS

The following figure for the household (family) size indicates that a majority of our sample consists of more than 10 family members. This makes us mark the point that whenever these people dine out they are in a big group and relating such people to the number of times they dine out it shows that they dine out twice or thrice a week with families and friends.

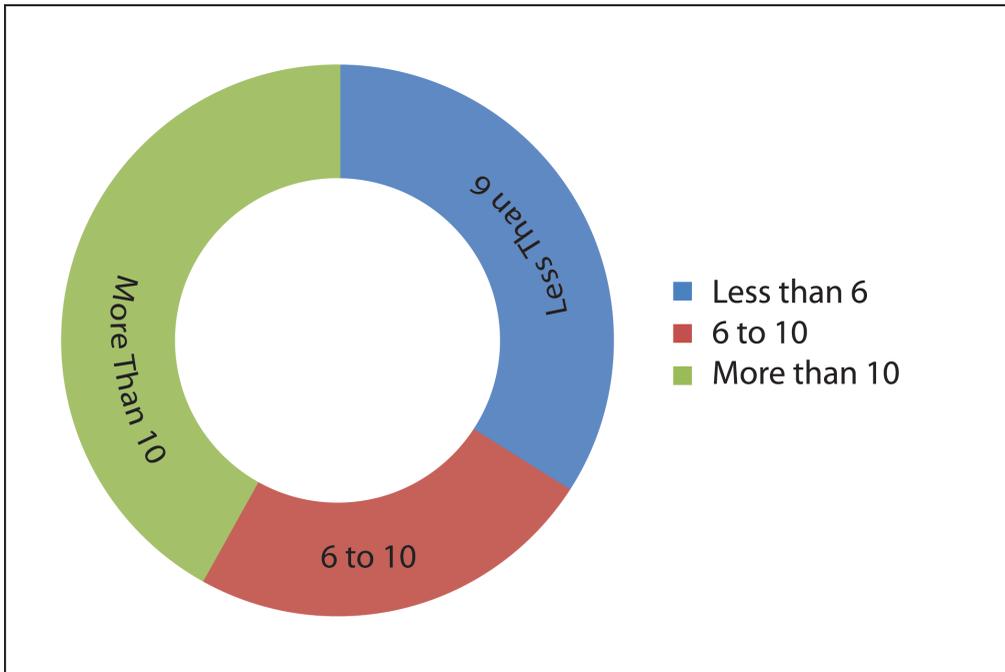


Figure 1: (Family Size)

Figure 2 indicates a clear inclination towards dining out as compared to eating at home which leads to the point that when given a choice people prefer dining out as compared to eating at home. Relating this finding to the rest of the survey results show that people who in majority prefer eating out instead of eating at home do so for socializing and just for fun.

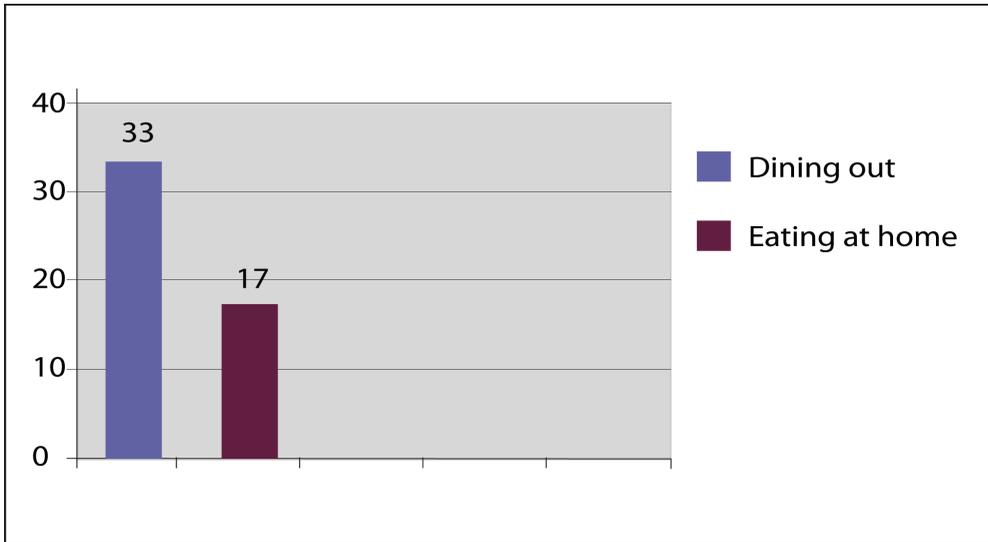


Figure 2: (Preference for Din Out)

According to figure 3, it can be seen that that 22 out of 50 people representing 44% population dines out for the main reason for socializing. When was it inquired with an open-ended question that either dining out been there in their lives for socializing? majority of them replied and admitted that with the increasing number of eating out places and restaurants the need to dine out for socializing has increased. around 10 – 15 years ago in middle-level income and lower-middle-income level groups the frequency of eating was comparatively much lower and the motive of dining out was mainly on occasions or to celebrate. For the purpose of socializing at that, time people preferred to visit each other at their homes and have homemade dinners even if get-togethers were to be arranged.

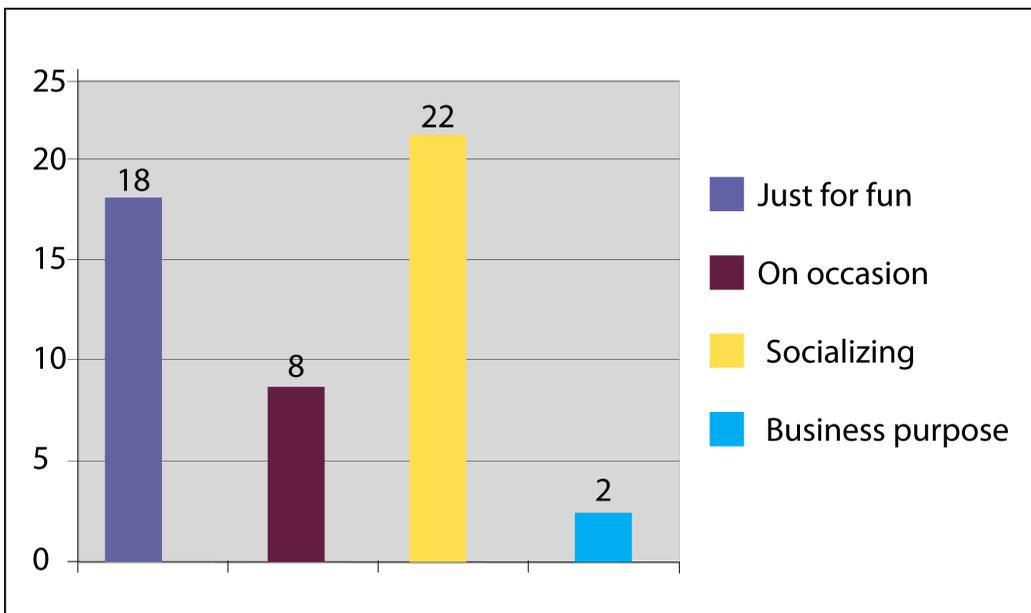


Figure 3: (Major Reasons for Dine Out)

Analysis of the bar chart given above concludes that almost somewhere around 65% respondents said that their dining out habit has increased in the past few years as compared to as it used to be earlier. When inquired personally we got to know the same fact that as more new places are opening up everywhere due to the proximity factor and convenience factor people have started to dine out more frequently.

Another thing which was brought to our notice by the majority of respondents belonging to the middle income and lower-middle-income group was that; as entertainment and socializing venues are limited and are usually not safe because of the security conditions in the country eating out has become more of a social event rather than being a necessity of eating. Another

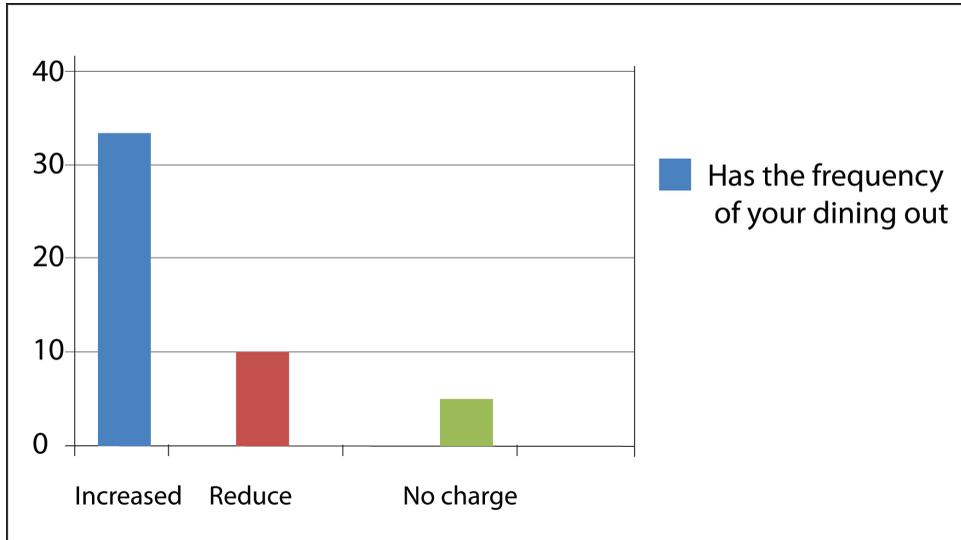


Figure 4: (Change in the Frequency of Dine Out)

important finding of our research indicates males are more likely to dine out more as compared to women and the trend is more towards families going out for dinners or people going out with friends for meals.

CONCLUSION

The present study concludes that although dining out is not an alien concept for Pakistani population but in the recent years, the frequency of households dining out is increasing at a fast pace. Our survey was relevant to our 50 sampling target audience because subconsciously people have made dining out an essential part of their lifestyle particularly their social lives. This does not mean that people dine out at top-notch places only as it seems to associate with the socializing word rather than people just prefer to eat out for a change and to enjoy which is equally available at food streets and roadside restaurants. This is mainly because people feel that entertainment opportunities are limited and at time unsecured in our country thus dining out has become a leisure trip now. When inquired people commented that, the advent of more and more new places opening up in the neighbourhood has affected the frequency of dining out largely.

Recommendation

It is imperative that restaurateurs take into account many may be account for and can be dealt in detail as an extended research. Furthermore, preference-based dining out trends in terms of food type available at a certain place can also be researched upon giving an idea that which type of food do people prefer to eat on what occasions and how frequently.

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