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SOCIO–ECONOMICS OF COVID-19 IN INDIA

EDITOR

Dr. Pooja Kansra



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Socio- Economics of Covid- 19 in India

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PREFACE

Coronavirus illness (COVID-19) is an infectious disease and designated as “Public Health Emergency”. According to World Health Organization (WHO) a mix of social distancing, contact tracing, testing and isolation is essential to curtail the impact of coronavirus. However, social distancing was recognized as the utmost preventive measure to safeguard the masses from the adverse consequences worldwide. But, it includes hidden costs such as job loss, loss of livelihood, uncertainty, fear of infection, fear of sudden death of the family members and themselves. The current pandemic has affected social interactions as well the economic activities in the world.

As an academician, it is my responsibility towards my society and hence I tried to come up with an edited book “Socio-Economics of COVID-19 in India” with contributions from different authors from different corners of the country on a wide range of ideas and knowledge. On the whole the present book provides a comprehensive understanding of the various socio-economic aspects of COVID-19 such as digital education, e-commerce, intangible cost, agriculture sector, Omni channels, hostel industry, MSMEs, migrant labor and gender aspects. The diverse bunch of chapters on the above themes tried to investigate various issues conceptually as well as empirically. I hope readers will appreciate this endeavor and further advance the spirit of systematic enquiry to not only interpret what is happening, but also suggest ways and means to take the fruits of development to the masses. Written in an accessible style, this book will be useful for the policy makers, students, teachers and related institutions.

I hope the present volume will result in some meaningful contribution to the society and economy as a whole.

I would like to acknowledge the support I received from my contributors, reviewers, publisher, and well-wishers.

I hope you enjoy reading the book and we wish you success.

Editor
Dr. Pooja Kansra

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PRAGMATIC STUDY OF INDIAN HOTELS DURING COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

At the onset of COVID 19 crisis, the hotel industry has been struggling between staying afloat and protecting their workforce. With the complete lockdown of borders within the country and states, the recent outbreak has severely impacted one of the most crucial sectors worldwide; “the hospitality and tourism industry”. The second wave has already hit the country and the government has re-issued guidelines to follow requesting states to use lockdown as a last resort. As the lifestyle of people is becoming more insular and reserved, this paper aims to study policies adopted by hotels in India for survival, and aid in identifying the roadmap to recovery. The preliminary objective of this study in hospitality literature is to assess the impending question on how hotels survived and how hotels can thrive post the ‘19 Pandemic towards a promising future. Furthermore this paper also discusses various initiatives undertaken and additional measures adopted by different departments of Indian hotels during the adversities of this widespread virus.

Keywords: COVID-19, Hotels in India, Hotel policies, Survival strategy

1. INTRODUCTION

Hotels, Travel and Tourism are the biggest casualty of COVID- 19 Pandemic. The reduced traffic to hotels has lead to a drop in occupancy percentage and new reservations with an increase in cancellations on both leisure and corporate ends. Alongside the increasing transmission and rapid spread of COVID-19, hoteliers around the country are facing an arguable decision of whether they should abandon development and acquisition of new projects or whether they should proceed forward. Hospitality scholars need to find solutions to keep up in the business by facing challenges which were not known before (Gursoy D., 2020). It has been observed that numerous takeaway outlets and online delivery platforms flourished during this pandemic. The belief is to deliver food and other essentials to customer doorsteps in order to minimize the spread of the infection. Food delivery, Laundry services, Creation of Bio Bubbles, Isolation centers, were some quick initiatives adopted by hotels to keep the cash flow alive. While we evaluate the challenges, it is equally important to spare some thought on future recommendations that will help reboot hotels. The undesirable consequences faced by the industry is undeniably challenging for even the most experienced hoteliers, which is why this study illustrates managerial insights and recommendations to redefine the ‘way forward’ of hotels and experiences in a new hotelier world.

Hotel Operations are based on a high degree of interaction between guests and workers. Interactions that take place in this industry are between: Guest – Guest, Guest – Staff, and Staff – Staff. Hence it is important that strict measures are in place to minimize the spread of the virus. On contrary, the fear of this pandemic has put hotel frontline workers in jeopardy, as they and their families are at a very high risk of getting infected. Hence health, safety and hygiene have become the prime priority in this industry. According to (Awan M et al, 2020), the practice of disinfecting and sanitizing in regular intervals will be the new normal in the hotel industry which will make the customer feel safe.

I. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In early 2020, after a December 2019 outbreak in China, the World Health Organization (WHO) identified SARS-CoV-2 as a new type of corona virus and declared COVID 19 to be a pandemic on March 11, 2020, one of seven types of corona virus, including the ones that cause severe diseases like sudden acute respiratory syndrome (SARS)

and Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS). The World Health Organization mentioned that COVID-19 will infect the respiration system in humans, making it more severe for people who already have medical issues like diabetes, cancer, cardiovascular diseases and chronic respiratory diseases (WHO, 2019). Physical distancing and use of a mask would reduce the chances of getting infected by this virus. Experts have stated that the typical range of new infections generated by one infected person is over five times as compared to the seasonal flu and thus the coronavirus irruption has influenced the normal functioning of an individual to the entire globe as at present (Ranasinghe et al., 2020).

For many, the hospitality industry holds a certain sophistication and glamour. This is partly due to the image most hotels project, choose and refine to the public. Indian hotels have diversified from being exclusive deluxe accommodations to serving the middle and low budget markets and have thus evolved to be innovative, competitive and extremely guest focused thereby successfully establishing their place in global markets.

All over the world, hotels in the past have come to a standstill in many unfavorable circumstances like terror attacks, global economic crisis, the great recession, natural disasters etc. According to a study conducted on major challenges faced by hotel industry globally, the industry is dealing with vast set of major challenges like economy influx, labor shortage, retaining quality personnel, rising technological demand, providing and maintaining absolute cleanliness and hygiene, providing and maintaining exceptional guest service standards, sustainability and increasing competition (Nain A., 2018). The COVID-19 has however stroked the industry with alarming issues like financial crunch, unemployment, pandemic duration, fear among tourist, zero tourism due to lockdown etc. Consequences of which were to force labour into unpaid vacations (furlough) and postpone office and system maintenance (Lai & Wong, 2020). This in turn spiked the unemployment rate across the country and affected spending power of many.

Hospitals in the country experienced overflows and lack of quarantine spaces. Opting hotels to be an ideal facility for quarantine was a smart business decision as it suffered huge financial losses during the pandemic (Roseberg, M. A. S. 2020). Hotels were converted into isolation centers to quarantine people who might have been infected by the virus. This step was necessary to flatten the curve and slowing down the spread of the virus. A Hotel is meant to offer comfort and hospitality to its guest during their stay, however serving as a quarantine cell, created despair among guests and hotel employees.

The Bio Secure bubble also called as Bubble or hub city was a concept created for Sportsmen who were playing the Indian Super League (Football League) that ended on 13th March 2021. The players and staff involved in operations were restricted within the bubble, with strict protocols to follow thereby prohibiting the spread of the infection.

There was fear among the staff and continuous job layoffs made employees join other industries (Stergiou, D. P., & Farmaki, A., 2021) resulting in loss of skillful manpower. To have a control over the situation and to come together and fight this pandemic, the G20 summit 2020 was held virtually (Wikipedia, 2020). A strong message delivered through the summit was:

1. Need to work together in a coordinated way to create safe destinations that would allow an adequate recovery in tourism worldwide.
2. Aim to repair the damage and prepare a better future for the next generation.
3. Providing sanitary protection, safe health and responsible reopening of hotels to public.
4. Increased focus on health, safety and social distancing guidance which travelers will need and expect.

Incorporating Crisis Management as a part of curriculum for students of Hospitality management would be beneficial (J Im, et al 2021). As students are the future workforces, and should be familiarized with the challenges the industry faced during the pandemic. According to a study conducted by (Kim S et al, 2021) Robots would be preferred over Humans in the hotel industry considering the pandemic situation. Consumers have a positive attitude towards robot- staffed (vs human- staffed) hotels, which was however not so preferred before the pandemic. Technology is becoming more prominent in the tourism industry, and this may be convenient but the lack of human touch will create a different scenario in the hospitality industry. Hotels have

been using many technological tools, e.g. Smart restaurant, an application developed in order to provide easy interaction between customers through advanced wireless technology (Jakhete & Mankar, 2015). There has been a considerable amount of digital and intelligent transformation, market reshuffle, due to the impact of COVID-19 (Hao, F., Xiao, Q., & Chon, K. 2020). The management should consider such technology based approaches in order to minimize service disruptions that would affect customer loyalty (Jiang, Y., & Wen, J. 2020).

I. Initiatives of Indian Hotels During Covid-19 Pandemic

The most significant outcome of this crisis is that tourism business is fragile in nature and therefore there is a need to have contingencies in place for such unpredictable events (Kumar, V. 2020). The solution is to use Business model innovation (BMI) in order to recover from this crisis. As per findings by (Breier, M et al, 2021) application of BMI during and after any crisis secures higher level of liquidity and creates new revenue streams, with an important role of loyal customers. Interestingly, many hotel brands in India have successfully adapted their business models launching many such initiatives to survive the pandemic and to cater to the needs of guest, employees and society. Following are various initiatives undertaken by Indian hotel brands that helped them fight the pandemic and are a perfect example of innovation and ability to adapt to situations. Despite the initiatives listed in Table 1, hotels should also prepare promotional plans to attract customers once travel restrictions are relaxed. According to (Lai & Wong, 2020) offering special discounts on future guest stays will help increase cash flow and speed up the crisis recovery.

Table 1. Initiatives of Indian Hotels during COVID-19 Pandemic as per norms laid by WHO

Sr. No	Name of Hotel	Initiatives	Description of Program
1	The Leela Palaces, Hotels & Resorts	<i>'Suraksha'</i> in partnership with Bureau Veritas India.	To deliver a safe environment for guests and associates across all hotels by elevating hygiene procedures and sanitization.
		<i>'Leela dharma'</i>	Provided 'Care Packages' to more than 200 underprivileged families thereby working towards the betterment of society and welfare of local community during COVID-19 crisis.
2	The Residency Group of Hotels	<i>ResiSafe'</i>	A Docket that communicates the Safety and Hygiene Standards implemented by the hotel.
3	Lemon Tree Hotels	<i>Rest Assured'</i> initiative in partnership with Diversey	An initiative showcasing the company's commitment towards creating an environment focused on health, hygiene, safety and wellbeing of all guests and employees.
4	Club Mahindra Holidays	<i>'Travel with Confidence'</i> in partnership with Bureau Veritas India.	Offering highest standards of safety and hygiene to its members and guests with a hassle-free and 'SafeStay' Club Mahindra experiences.
5	Apeejay Surrendra Park Hotels	<i>#THEParkHeartofHope</i>	A solicitous initiative offering support by providing essential groceries, medicines, food, and other emergency requirements to surrounding neighborhoods especially senior citizens.
6	The Indian Hotels Company Limited	<i>Qmin</i>	A Food Delivery Mobile-App, offering choicest dishes from signature restaurants at the comfort of one's home.
		<i>I-ZEST</i>	IHCL's new zero touch digital transformation that allows guests to interact and engage with IHCL hotels by minimizing the physical touch, but maximizing the quality of service.
		<i>#TravelForIndia</i>	A drive designed to encourage responsible travel and convey solidarity for the Indian hospitality and tourism industry
7	ITC Hotels	<i>WeAssure'</i>	The company's commitment towards Hygiene, Health and a safe environment for guests and employees.
		<i>LAVANDERIA'</i>	Responsible Laundry Experiences with In-house dry cleaning and laundry services made available to the public
		<i>Safe Car'</i>	An initiative to re-assure customers of safety and hygiene protocols.
8	Lords Hotels & Resorts	<i>Karona Safe Rahona Safe'</i>	The Initiative aims to provide comfortable and safe experience thereby ensuring safety guests and employees
9	Fortune Park Hotels Ltd.	<i>'Safe Stays at Fortune Hotels'</i>	A safety and hygiene program for guests and associates that revolves around a safety and hygiene protocol from pre-arrival to check-out.

II. Additional Measures Adopted by Hotel Departments Due to COVID-19

The authors have highlighted some significant changes and several new measures adopted to control spread of the infection. Considering Health, Hygiene and Safety as the top most priority, each department made suitable changes as part of their SOPs. Various measures adopted by core and non-core departments within the hotels across India are as follows:

FRONT OFFICE

1. 'Namaste' the new standard for welcoming guests
2. Safe distancing between reception seating
3. Protective screens at the front desk between guest and staff
4. Familiarizing guests with respective 'Hotel Mobile App'
5. App-based Check-in and Checkouts
6. Contact-less or digital payments
7. Automated guest room keys
8. Mandatory filling of guest health declaration form
9. Advanced guest reservation system
10. Escorting and baggage delivery following safety and health protocols
11. Mandatory wearing of face shield and gloves for all front office employees.

FOOD AND BEVERAGE SERVICE

1. Optimizing restaurant spaces with reduced covers
2. Safe distancing F&B services.
3. Smart restaurant pricing, E- Menu cards with digital payments
4. Usage of disposable and edible cutlery
5. Replacing open buffet breakfast, lunch and dinner to A la' Carte
6. Glass protection for buffet banquets with server to assist
7. Safe packaging and zero touch food delivery
8. Frequent hand washing and sanitization
9. Mandatory wearing of face shield and gloves for all Food and Beverage employees.

HOUSEKEEPING/ ACCOMMODATIONS

1. Extreme precautions to be taken while servicing occupied rooms.
2. Deep cleaning of departure rooms
3. Allocation of rooms to new arrivals post 72 hours of previous guest departure
4. Stringent sanitization of room amenities and surfaces
5. Handling fresh and soiled linen as per new guidelines
6. Hotel public areas including entrance lobbies, corridors, handrails, telephones, elevators, door handles etc thoroughly sanitized depending on frequency of touch
7. Stringent use of PPE (Personal Protective Equipments) such as gloves, masks etc by all housekeeping attendants.

FOOD PRODUCTION / KITCHEN

1. Mandatory adoption of Food hygiene and safety programs with certification from (FSSAI)
2. Ensuring all food handlers undergo training as per authorized standards
3. Increased frequency of hand washing and sanitization
4. Adhere to HACCP norms for food safety management
5. Segregation of garbage at source and safe disposal of garbage
6. Strong focus on health nutrients and organic sourced resources
7. Sanitization of supplies, raw materials, equipments etc prior to usage
8. Stringent use of PPE (Personal Protective Equipments) - gloves, chef caps, masks etc

SALES AND MARKETING

1. Demonstrate transparency in the steps taken by hotel to ensure guest safety through advertisements on social media and booking portals
2. Offering Valuable & Safe stay Experience packages with flexible re-booking and cancellation policy
3. Maximize marketing efforts focusing on hotel brand awareness

HUMAN RESOURCE

1. Enforced prevention and hygiene training programs for all team members and staff.
2. COVID health insurance policy and other health benefits made available to hotel workers and employees.
3. Workforce reduction with Salary and pay cut

PURCHASE / STORES

1. Restricted entry to vendors and suppliers
2. Focus on procuring local produce and resources
3. Materials received by vendors placed under UV light for 48 to 72 hours and later issued to user department
4. Perishables received are sanitized first and then issued to user department

FINANCE / ACCOUNTS DEPARTMENT

1. Rationalizing costs and expenditure in order to increase efficiency.

ENGINEERING AND MAINTENANCE DEPARTMENT

1. Filtering air circulation throughout the hotel with strong focus on avoiding potential diseases and contamination.
2. Eliminating heavy materials and equipments that can trap moisture, dust mites and germs.

SECURITY DEPARTMENT

1. Compulsory thermal scanning for all employees and hotel guests
2. Sanitization of guest luggage / Baggage including mobile phones, wallets, handbags etc.
3. Ensuring no guest or staff enter hotel premises without wearing face shield or masks.
4. Monitoring CCTV's and ensuring safe distancing norms are followed.

- 5 Managing quarantine facilities for guest incase of COVID positive diagnosis
- 6 First Aid and COVID Medical kits (*disinfectant wipes, Gloves, Masks etc*) to be easily available
- 7 Immediate responses in case of COVID related emergencies

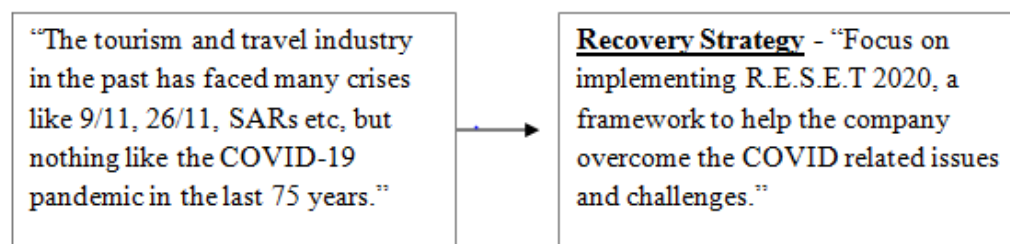
OTHER REVENUE CENTER

- 1 Compulsory thermal screening and use of N-95 mask in particular during exercise
- 2 Single use towel and bottled drinking water to be provided.
- 3 Toilets and changing room areas to have easy access to hygiene facilities like soap and alcohol hand rub.
- 4 Restricting number of users and maintaining physical distancing in steam, sauna rooms, swimming pool, kids play area etc
- 5 Sanitizing gym equipments after every single use.
- 6 Air-conditioning and ventilation as per the guidelines of CPWD (Central Public Works Department of India)

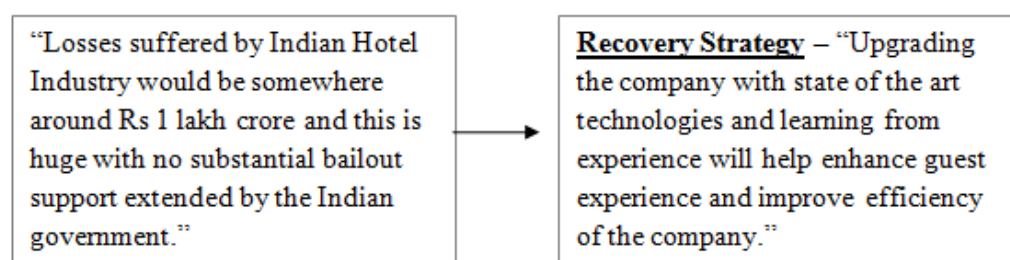
III. MANAGERIAL INSIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Table 2 discusses managerial insights and their recommendations towards recovery. Comments given by top officials and their views on recovery suggests that time is the key player as there is uncertainty over recovery. We may also utilize this time to be creative and implement strategies and procedures to contain such pandemics in future. Coming together as an industry with proper planning and execution would benefit the sector to fight back and tackle similar situations. Creating confidence among consumers and manpower is the need of the hour. However to gain recovery of the economy which includes the tourism industry, an effective government plays in major role in fighting COVID-19 (Yeh, S. S. 2020).

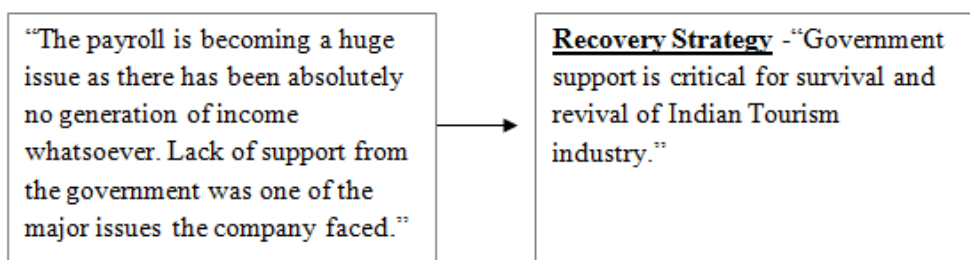
Mr. Puneet Chhatwal - (Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer – IHCL)



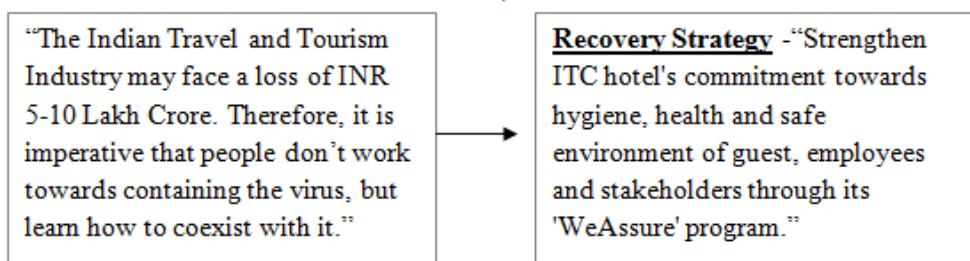
Sri Dilip Ray - (Founder and Chairman of Mayfair Group of Hotels)



Dr Jyotsna Suri - (Chairperson and Managing Director of Bharat Hotels Ltd)



Mr. Nakul Anand - (Executive Director of ITC Limited and Chairman)



Mr. Kavinder Singh - (MD & CEO at Mahindra Holidays & Resorts India Limited)

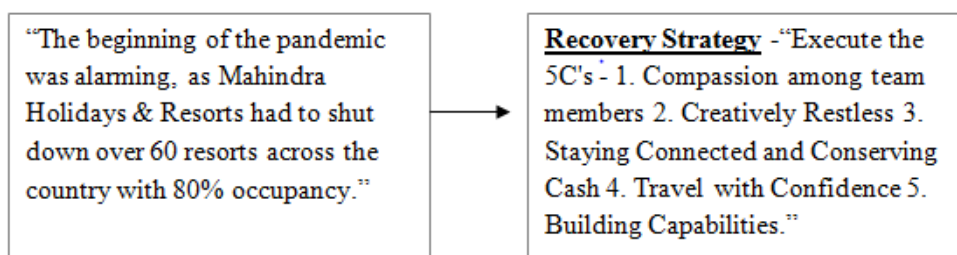


Table 2. Managerial insights and recommendations

IV. METHODOLOGY

This research chose Indian Hotels as the study area. Major Indian hotel brands were chosen considering the adequate amount of articles, publications, webinars, interviews etc from multiple sources. Each finding was sifted with information and data categorized in different ways. Once the target literature was selected, a qualitative collection process was implemented for a systematic and proposed review.

V. DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

COVID 19 has been the largest ever pandemic throughout the world in the last hundred years. The government imposed a complete lockdown in the initial stages of the outbreak, and has been spreading awareness among citizens to maintain physical distancing, wearing masks and avoiding social gatherings. The government after few months lifted the lockdown and gradually opened borders to enable trades to sustain and withhold the economy. The government then allowed gatherings to restricted numbers, permitted reopening of hotels and restaurants with SOP's to follow, declared containment zones and commenced vaccination drives as per age groups with prime priority given to frontline workers. India also sent vaccines to its neighboring countries as a holistic approach “Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam”- The world is one family, to ensure their well being. The vaccination drive launched in mid-January 2021, brought about some relief but is still unknown to say if the virus can be completely eradicated.

Upon relaxing restrictions on travel post the initial stages of the lockdown, hotels saw an upsurge in occupancy with maximum domestic tourist arrivals. It was observed that the drastic restriction in mobility was the reason for zeroing out occupancies. However hotels immediately planned for alternatives and initiatives to help fight the pandemic. Conditions of hospitals were in bad shape and hotels extended their help to support the medical system in the country. The flexibility in operations from a hotel to a quarantine cell, providing laundry services, delivering safe and hygienic food, offering essential commodities to local communities was commendable. Indian hotel brands like 'The Indian Hotels Company Limited' retained all their staff and paid salaries throughout the crisis despite zero business showcasing trust and a sense of belonging towards their employees. Whereas few hotel brands in India asked their employees to resign overnight without ensuring them job security during the critical situation.

With the Indian hospitality and travel sector undergoing a complete paradigm shift, Rigorous hygiene, health and safety practices throughout various operations will act as key drivers in boosting the industry. Enhanced use of Technology, Artificial Intelligence and Robotics would be the new normal in the industry. The Hotel, Travel and Tourism industry will get back to a new normal by implementing appropriate strategies considering the health and wellbeing of staff and their guest.

VI. FUTURE SCOPE OF RESEARCH

Considering the feedback of guest and staff, is essential and will be crucial in hotel operations. Further studies could be done on the same. Also further research can be done on other international hotel brands in India to study the strategies they adopted to survive and identify their plans to recovery. Moreover this research can be taken forward to study the enhanced use of technology, artificial intelligence and robotics in the new hotelier era post pandemic.

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Making meat, better: Indian Consumers' preference and acceptance for plant-based meat

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Abstract

Meat alternatives made using plant-produce and their variants are being consumed at a slower rate in underdeveloped countries. Considering their sustainable benefits, it is important to understand their acceptance among consumers. Additionally, increased meat consumption has undesirable effects on the environment. It will be vital to determine whether the consumers' health and environmental consciousness can be considered reliable allies in achieving this shift toward alternative meat consumption in the future. This empirical research applying SEM purposes to understand the awareness, acceptance of plant-based meat among consumers by evaluating the effect of environmental concern, meat attachment, and understanding of the health benefits. The study findings approve that the health and environmental concern have a significant impact on preference and acceptance of plant-based meat. This study has potential repercussions for the meat industry and the government.

Keywords: Plant-based meat, Meat Consumption, Health Consciousness, Food Neophobia and Food Products.
