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Domestic travelers dining Preferences; a study on Indian Domestic tourists visiting Agra-Mathura.

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ABSTRACT

Travel and Tourism industry started growing with rapid pace from late 90s in India. Major factors contributing towards the growth includes rise of affluence, infrastructure development and support, awareness among the generation, adventurous spirit and government and non governmental agencies and organizations realizing the importance of tourism potential in facilitating GDP. Growth of tourism industry has led to the development of various subsidiary industries including hotels and restaurants. The present study is undertaken in one of the major tourism destination of north India Agra-Mathura region of Uttar Pradesh state on 200 domestic travelers to understand traveler's behavior towards hotels for dining. Factors influencing travelers choice of dining varies from international to regional to local brands of hotels and restaurants but majorly classified into two broad categories brand factor and travelers factor. The study identified major brand motivational factor includes perceived quality of food, ambience of hotel and brand image and travelers factor includes- reference, familiarity and accessibility.

Key words: consumer affluence, subsidiary industry, consumer and Brand motivators.

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism industry is one of the major industries of importance in context to employment and economic contributions. Global tourism provides employment to approximately 250 mn people thus making it one of the largest employers among industries. Global tourism accounts for nearly 8% of global employment and 9% of worlds GDP. In India also tourism is one of largest provider of employment. As per the reports tourism creates 78 jobs for every 10 lacs of Investment. In the year 2011-12 Indian tourism industry witness 750 mn of domestic and 6.2 mn foreign tourists respectively. Indian tourism offers several destinations from north to south and east to west. If we look at the data of tourists visiting various domestic destinations Uttar Pradesh stands at first position with 155 mn visitors annually and UP Tourism has identified Taj Mahal as 6th most popular site for domestic visitors according to Report on Promotion and Development of UP Tourism(2012). Mathura and vrindavan along with Agra offers a wide destination ranging from art, architecture, culture and thus is among the popular tourists destinations for domestic as well as foreign visitors.

Agra-Mathura region is one of the popular tourist destinations of north India region situated in western part of Uttar Pradesh state. The twin city is having historic importance. Agra is famous for its Mughal architecture in form of forts, tombs and mosques and primarily Taj Mahal one of the finest architecture. Mathura is having its roots from Hindu mythology and is the birth place of Lord Krishna and nearby Vrindavan the place were lord Krishna and Radha has spent time and resided.

Both the places attract diversified tourists in form of foreign tourists, domestic tourists and local/ nearby tourists. As a result of heavy tourism potential all the three places Agra Mathura and vrindavan is changing and developing very fast. The presence of corporate brands both international and domestic is here with various service offerings including- hotels, restaurants along with government tourists centre with facilities of lodging and fooding and local brands competing for their share of occupancy and food bills.

Nature of tourists comprises of various characteristics. First group of tourists comprises of those tourists who has relatively longer planned stay to visit majority of the region, as they are from far areas of country and abroad. Second group is weekend tourists from nearby places of Delhi, Punjab, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and other parts of Uttar Pradesh. Third group of tourists comprise of tourists with a short trip and generally specific visits to any of these places with the purpose of single day visit.

The region offers itself as a highly competitive market with presence of nearly all types of brands in restaurants and food offerings varying from international to domestic to local. Thus branding and promotion is a major area of focus for all brands.

The study is undertaken on 200 domestic tourists to know their preference of food brands in the region. If we take a look to their budget allocation for visit for those visitors who have stayed here, top three spending avenues includes travelling, staying and food the order varies within the tourist category. When asked about food retailer choice, it was found that 30% of tourists clearly indicated their choice of international food brands as preferred food destination. The class generally consists of affluent class of tourists in upper income group and basic driving force towards these kinds of brands includes hygiene and perceived food and service quality. Another 70% of tourists prefer local food brands as their main driving force was exploration of local and regional taste and palate. When asked about how they decide to visit a particular food retail brand referral and familiarity of brand at other places drives them towards the particular brand.

With majority of tourists intended to explore the local food local and regional food retail brand and restaurants become favored choice thus branding becomes major focus area for them. Apart from the choice hygiene and atmospheric attracts is coupled with quality food experience it goes on for positive referral and repeat visit.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The choice of a brand is generally influenced by various factors. The factors for the study are classified into three major categories-

Personal factors - awareness of brands, desire and drives, other motivational factors

Social factors - reference, social security, like to be seen

Brand factors - brand image, brand association, Positioned price-quality relationship

Literature on previous studies reveals impact of all these factors towards brand choice of a consumer. Thus the present literature review limits to consumer motivation, influential factors towards hospitality industry and branding in context to local and international brands.

Maslows hierarchy of need theory (1943) identified various motivational levels and need existence towards taking any decision. Need for food has its existence across levels. Witt and Bruce (1972) suggested social security as one of the factor towards brand choice of consumers. Individual seeks social approval and wants to be liked. Though Morrison (1985) suggested that individuals are unaware of real reasons for doing certain things. Thus motivations are hidden and are in subconscious.

Schuling and Kapfer (2004) studied on the brand choice in food and beverages and suggested that local brands are leading competitor in context to established international brands. Horner (1999) identified familiarity and security as influencing factors towards brand choice. If we further look into literature regarding food and dining preferences of visitors we come across several other factors prominently affecting visitors' choice towards dining. Food gratifies all the five human senses- vision, tactile, auditory, taste and olfaction (Kirela and Crofts 2006). Fooding and dining add pleasure in supplementing holiday experience and is regarded as an attraction (Richardson 2002). Majority of visitors go for experiencing with local cuisine as they consider it as an essential part of understanding culture and thus adds special appeal to visitors (Friedman 1986).

However there are studies on tourists indicating new food as a hurdle while going to new places and is generally an important concern of visitors. One of the study suggests that there are people who has "food neophobia" which is a natural tendency of people to dislike new food (Pliner and Salvy 2008). Thus acceptability of different new food habits is a big question to certain visitors. The food becomes acceptable only if it is modified as per their taste and palate. Strange food is perceived as a risk.

Dining and spending on food, though comprises of major chunk of expenditure but has different behaviors. As a result tourists' destinations are flooded with all types of restaurants varying from international brands to domestic/ Regional/local brands to unorganized or semi organized food courts, restaurants like "Dhabas". While talking to few tourists it was found that style and servings at open dhabas is not perceived positively approximately 30% of respondents and thus are moving on for international or other standardized food retailers for dining. The most common factor driving them for standardized food retailers includes familiarity with the brand (Aaker 1991).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is undertaken to basically understand Indian travelers behavior towards dining and their preferences towards various aspects of dining choices. The study uses both the qualitative as well as quantitative methodology to analyze tourist's behavior towards food retailer choices at the tourist destinations. The qualitative method includes personal face to face short structured interview on certain

parameters including purpose of visit, stay duration, choice of outlets for dining, attitude towards exploration of local cuisine, basic observations regarding restaurants and so on. The other method includes qualitative technique using a structured questionnaire comprising of various motivational factors towards tourism dining. The total of 250 respondents was touched and 200 questionnaires were used for analysis purpose. Convenience sampling was used. Statistical techniques used for analysis includes mean and standard deviation values, chi square test and cross tabulation.

DATA ANALYSIS

The value of alpha comes out to be 0.87 which shows a significant reliability for the data set. The general profile of respondents is listed in table1. Out of total 200 respondents 58.5% are female travelers and majority of respondents for the analyses falls in age group of 20-29 years. Maximum number of travelers touched for the study is of middle middle income group.

category	frequency	%
Gender		
male	83	41.5
female	117	58.5
age		
20-29	79	39.5
30-39	51	25.5
40-49	41	20.5
>50	29	14.5
income group		
LMIG (Lower Middle Income group)	44	22
MMIG (Middle Middle income group)	96	48
HMIG (Higher Middle income group)	45	22.5
HIG (High Income group)	15	7.5

Table 1 Visitors Profile

The other details regarding visitors choice, travel behavior and food outlets is depicted in fig.2 below

Choice specificity	frequency	%
specific choice of food outlets	146	73
non specific	64	27
Travel frequency		
frequent	86	43
often	47	23.5
sometimes	58	29
rare	9	4.5
Preferred food outlet		
international brands	76	38
local/domestic brands	124	62
Travel companion		
alone	32	16
friends	84	42
family	55	27.5
work colleagues	29	14.5

Table 2: Dining behavior

DISCUSSION

The data on dinning behavior reflects some interesting facts about Indian travelers. A large number of travelers approximately 73% respondents have specific choices towards food outlets. Before visiting a new place they used to collect data on tourists destinations and food outlets especially specialty food outlets which they would like to explore during there visits. Referral consists of there fist choice towards food outlets. A larger proportion of respondents prefer domestic/ local restaurants or food outlets over international brands as they consider it as a part of exploration of the area. The frequent travelers from nearby regions who are visiting the place with short span of a day or two also suggested exploring local restaurants offering indigenous food. The basic factors that they look out for while selecting a food outlet includes – outlet atmospherics, facilities, hygiene and accessibility. Though major international brands have all these aspects but they are well aware of the food and taste and are very much interested for new taste including all segments of food.

While talking to various groups of travelers at various locations. Various insights were shared on dinning preferences. Some of the excerpts are mentioned here.

One group of young travelers all (age group of 25-30, Multinational Professionals from Delhi) comprising of 8 members both male and female on one day trip to vrindavan have there opinions towards dinning preferences-

We are frequent traveler to Agra-Mathura region as this place offers a wide variety of place and things to visit from temples to local markets to art. For dinning we prefer experiments with different local restaurants and dhabas as this gives complete feeling of the place and visit.

A south Indian family has there reservations towards dinning preferences

We are visiting the place (agra-mathura-vrindavan) for first time along with family and we are on a week long trip. In regards to dinning we prefer to locate some restaurants offering south Indian foods and we have names of some restaurants who are offering good food as referred by friends who had visited the place. Although, we would also like to have the taste of specialty sweets and other north Indian foods especially dairy products.

A couple from west Bengal says

We have heard a lot about the place and thought of exploring the place along with the local foods.

Majority of travelers were into the opinion of exploring the food of the place. Exploration and appreciation is common among majority of travelers towards dinning subject to basic facilities related to hospitality like- cleanliness, hygienic food and place, sufficient space and convenient location of the outlet. (Bitner,1990) too suggested the role of service encounters in developing brand perceptions in consumers mind. Better service encounters results in better service experience and is converted into positive referrals.

While further exploring on the other motivational factors affecting visitors' choice of food outlets. Mean value analysis and chi square test with cross tabulation is administered on the respondents data. The revealing of the analysis is as follows.

The mean value analysis for various motivational factors identifies brand familiarity, location and referrals as largest contributor towards dinning brand choices while facilities and services, atmospherics are rated on lower side of visitors preferences while taking a decision for dinning at tourist destinations.

Factors	Mean
Familiarity with the brand	4.08
Ease of accessibility	3.87
Referrals	3.76
Price quality value	3.70
Strong local identity	3.69
Brand image	3.62
Attractive exterior/layout	3.57
Outlet atmospherics	3.47
Facilities	3.41
Avoids crowds/noise ,peaceful	3.38

Fig.3 Factors driving dinning preferences

Likert scale rating 1-5 (1-weakest 5- strongest)

Chi square tests and cross tabulation was further used to identify the relationships between independent and dependent variables and tests for association between two variables. Several significant associations existed.

Chi square test between **gender and driving forces** reveals two positive cross tabulations- Female and outlet atmospherics and brand image while other between males and brand familiarity. Female companions are more of attracted by exteriors and interior atmospherics of food outlets and drives them for spending on food there along with brand image that they had heard about and like to experience. Studies on atmospherics indicated its role in developing positive image (Kotler 1973). While male companions rely mostly on brand familiarity or awareness. Experiencing new food is more in females. Regarding consumers' brand perceptions, (Sirgy 1982) explained that consumer brand consumption is congruent with consumer gender-image and stated that the gender-self can generate strong gender-congruency effects with regards to brand. The role of atmospheric and female attraction is more positively related (Gardner,1985)

Chi square test between **Income profiles of respondents and driving forces** reveals two positive cross tabulations

Middle Middle income groups with referrals and value for money. The particular class of visitors rely more on referrals of restaurants/ food outlets and look out for those outlets mainly. The class of visitors is also very much specific about the value factor.

High income groups with facilities and services. This group of visitors prefers food outlets with higher facilities and services.

Chi square test between **age and driving forces** reveals five positive cross tabulations

Age and brand familiarity. Trying a brand that is familiar to them is more common in upper age bracket. As trying a new brand is perceived as a risk by upper age group of people. Lower age group of people is found to be more of risk takers in context to trying for new outlets and new food offerings. The fact is supporting studies suggesting brands are related with consumer perceptions which can be linked with quality (Ginden 1993).

Age and facilities are significantly positively. All three upper age groups are looking out for restaurants/food outlets having sufficient facilities.

Age and brand image. The first two age groups are more brand conscious. The feeling of like to be associated/seen at prominent brands is positively significantly. A study suggests that people associate quality with Brand name (Grewal, 1998) and this is more common in youths.

Age and referrals. The second and third age group relies on referrals for various brands in case of dining. The fact might is supporting that might be with growing age and knowledge peoples risk taking capacity reduces and thus reliance is more on referrals that too in case of food. While talking to visitors regarding any referred brand of food outlet they would like to experience it was found that many visitors would like to taste the sweets and foods of "brajwasi" (a chain of food restaurants) in Mathura.

Age and location. The age group of more then 50 years and restaurant location is also significant positively. The convenience and ease of access a particular location is dominant as upper age group people might find it uncomfortable to travel more.

CONCLUSION

The study reveals and supports various facts regarding people dining preferences especially in tourist destinations. The factors of importance of domestic tourists comprises mainly of brand image, atmospherics, facilities and services, familiarity and referrals. A larger chunk of domestic visitors are open towards exploring local and new avenues of food as compared to international brands offering standardized foods. Expenditure on food is significant on visitor's budget. The local food retailers/outlets have huge opportunity to en cash the share provided they take care of certain basic hospitality factors properly so that to enhance customer experience and help creating positive referral and thus new customers. The domestic visitors are very much keen to explore local taste and cuisine provided the quality satisfies there perceptions. Branding is also an emphasis for local food outlets specially specialty food outlets as there is significant relationship between domestic visitors and there choice of food outlets.

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