

Outdoor Catering Operations & Innovations

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Abstract – Changes in the perspective of the operations and to fulfill the demand of the customer, every industry has seen a dramatic transformation with the use of technology, similarly outdoor catering is also one of the customer service industries which is not left by its embarked presence. Use of various technological systems like online booking system, social media, customer relationship management, tabs and smart phones are enabling the outdoor catering industry to craft a new level segment in customer service. Outdoor catering operation is one of the sectors of hospitality industry where use of smart appliances has made a great influence. As a symbol of showcase i.e. light, camera and action each and everything is on the tips of caterer and customer who ever the end user. Using the technology directly as a part of operations or as assisting appliances in SOP's the purposefulness and efficiency of implementing these may also depends on the acceptance and skills of staff deployed with the assignment. Even though the technology is been introduced in the operations, but the customer's service and satisfaction is still of core importance for the caterer and cannot replace the traditional service techniques. The conceptual framework for studying the relationship of innovations and outdoor catering operations is defined on the ground of "trends, issues and challenges". Top quality food, service, support staff and overall experience is fundamental pillar of the outdoor catering operations, which can be made easier, effective, efficient and memorable to guest with the use of technological innovations.

Key Words – Technology, Innovations, Outdoor Catering Operations, Trends, Issues and Challenges.

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INTRODUCTION

In the view of delivering consistently improved service and to enhance the quality and efficiency in outdoor catering operations multiple variety of technological innovations are introduced in the field.

Implementation and realization process of the practical use is intensified. Accordingly use of technology is increasing day by day in outdoor catering operations with the increase in acceptance and demand of customer's to make the experience memorable for all the parties associated with the event. It could be host, guest, caterer or support staff; everyone has their own perceptions but something new, innovative trend or technology magnetize towards its use at least for once and could experience the advantages and disadvantages respectively. In general every customer comes with their own concept and ideology of presentation, which enforces the due issues and challenges for the caterer and customer too. Customers with their own concept opt for proactive approach and define the entire event by their own, criteria of selection, pricing, staffing, product features and final outcomes of the event.

Oltean et al., 2014 has emphasized that the innovations and technological advancements are needed to be introduced into the general service procedure to maintain the strong competitive environment, so that suppliers may develop the strategies for operation. Innovations and technological advancements have shown a momentous impact on the outcomes of traditional service procedures, on one hand making the things attractive for the customer's and on the other side modifying the SOP's and tasks performed by the staff. Technology has also changed the perspective of the outdoor catering operations; with due change in expectation of the customer's, their level of satisfaction, professionalism of the staff and set skills required.

Innovations are now more and more widely used in outdoor catering operations. This can also be understood as that technology has increased the effectiveness, efficiency and overall productivity of caterer's by reducing the cost and time; and increase in value added products and services that are delivered to the customers.

Technological innovations are also a matter of adaptation, especially outdoor catering operations

in relation to sources of issues and challenges for caterer, staff and as well as customer's being the end user. These issues and challenges may obstruct the successful implementation of technological advancements in outdoor catering operations. Such issues and challenges include all the possible factors associated with the outdoor catering operations i.e. human factors, physical factors and natural factors. Human factors may include command on communication, knowledge, skill, stress and awareness. In physical factors fitness, age, responses and tactics may be important component, where as natural factors include all such factors related to land, water and nature.

The objective of the study is to analyze the impact of technological innovations introduced in outdoor catering operations. This study also aims at the trends, issues and challenges that influence the operations and that, shaped due to use of technology. To achieve the formulated objective a study is being carried out in the research area i.e. Orchha and Jhansi on 20 outdoor catering operators. In this study prime objective of the researcher is to bequeath the number of factors that are associated with the outdoor catering operations and the determinants that are responsible to carry out successful caterings/ events.

To achieve customer's loyalty, it is extremely important to have distinguished features, forecasting the customer's needs and develop the strength by all means to fulfill them. In order to make the event successful and to attain the customer's satisfaction, it is important for the caterer to determine the current trends and the needs of the customer with respect to their level of satisfaction. Outdoor caterer's these days are focusing on innovative technological techniques to attract footfall. They are applying all possible tactics or brainstorming for presenting something unique as in food, service or presentation which has never been offered before. The biggest challenges that outdoor catering is facing these days are to retain the customer or potential to generate repeat orders. In the past investigations it has been found that several changes and adjustments are done time to time in the outdoor catering industry to embark the sustainability and to create a niche in customer's mind. These changes not only have an impact on the customer but also on the caterer's as they have to train their staff, equip their unit and overall resources to attain the customer's satisfaction. Day by day customer's are looking for new and inventive food, beverages, their service patterns and the theme for decoration and dressing. Up scaling the menu, dishes, associated services and refined layout of buffet in urban areas as well as in towns with the help of different methods of print media, social media and the imaginative personalities should be carried out by all the constituents associated with outdoor catering operation industry. An attempt made to serve refreshment and nourishment in intriguing and eye

engaging style to demonstrate the lifestyle of a specific place, their cuisine would help in understanding the culture of that particular place. Catering units must gain the ground towards understanding the needs of the customer, employing or hiring the staff and equipping their units to fulfill the needs and to generate highest level of customer satisfaction.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Some of the important literature is been reviewed, available on the subject in this section. A rapid growth in food & beverage industry offers several options to customers i.e. why customers are focusing on professionalism, perfection and food & beverage service style of caterers. This topic is been rarely researched by the researchers but some similar topics were found and reviewed. The purpose of this section is to throw some light on the importance of food and beverage service in the current scenario and how implementation of innovation and technology has changed the outdoor catering operations. This section also enables to understand the need of introduction of new trends to portray new experience to the customers in terms of outdoor catering operations and what impact does ambience has on overall event.

Alfa, (2018) the Author has said that "in the event you are intending to begin your own eatery you have to realize that there is such a great amount of rivalry around you and you should be the best in your area to pick up your clients trust. You should be in a situation to serve your clients so that they will return to our eatery. Making tasty nourishment is a necessary piece of running an eatery, however it doesn't stop with that, you have to guarantee finish consumer loyalty to have a fruitful business".

Trefor Griffith, (2018) has investigated that "there have been different changes to occur in the earlier years for food and beverage associations, driven as constantly by moving purchaser tendencies. The long standing eagerness for settlement has joined with a hankering for increasingly favorable decisions, and what's more accepting more plant-set up together sustenance concerning a versatile start. In the meantime, at the contrary end of the scale, advancement in liberal things with more diminutive bits has transformed into a key current example for the business".

Mukhles M Al-Ababneh ,(2017) has mentioned "many benefits can be achieved by service quality such as establishing customer satisfaction, contributing to business image, establishing customer loyalty, and providing a competitive advantage to a business".

Polder et al. (2010) has defined that "innovation means introducing new food & beverage product or

bringing significant changes and improvement in the existing service and product which helps in economic growth of any restaurant”.

Lim (2010) proposes that, “customers final satisfaction may have significant effect connected with atmosphere. Ambient conditions within the dining places have either a positive or negative effect on customer satisfaction”.

Tarun Kanti Bose (2010). “Nourishment benefit activities are not just in the matter of giving sustenance and refreshments; they are in the matter of making visitor pleasure. Accomplishing this objective expects meticulousness and planning that starts well ahead of time of respecting the principal visitor. The visitor encounter is dictated by an assortment of interrelated variables from menu plan and place settings to plate introduction and style of administration. Every one of these variables assumes a huge job in accomplishing visitor fulfillment and must be made inside the physical and human limitations of the task”.

IMPACT OF THE INNOVATIONS ON THE OUTDOOR CATERING OPERATIONS

Recent reports says that the entertainment and event market in India is more than 40,000 crore, in which 20,000 crore business is shared by celebrations like weddings, birthday parties, family functions etc. This implies that the need and the demand of the industry in terms of innovations and technology is not ever the less. If Outdoor catering industry has to be defined on the same scale people would found that to please the customer and to gain level of satisfaction innovations and technology are high on demand.

To evaluate the impact of innovations on outdoor catering operations a study is been conducted in the research area i.e. Orchha and Jhansi, to analyze the impact of innovations on outdoor catering industry in research area. Analysis of data shows that more than 80% of caterers are using innovative technological appliances during the operations. It is also been observed that they are not only using these innovations as new product in the market but also understand the impact of the technology during the operations, to frame an impression on the customer, ease of doing, and above all satisfaction level of both customer as well as of own self.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study is carried out in Orchha, Madhya Pradesh and Jhansi, Uttar Pradesh, India. The target population comprised of 50 outdoor caterers. Sampling technique that is used to select the respondents was purposive. Questionnaires and schedules were used for data collection. Data is represented in the form of frequency, bar graphs and

percentages distribution tables after analysis through descriptive statistics.

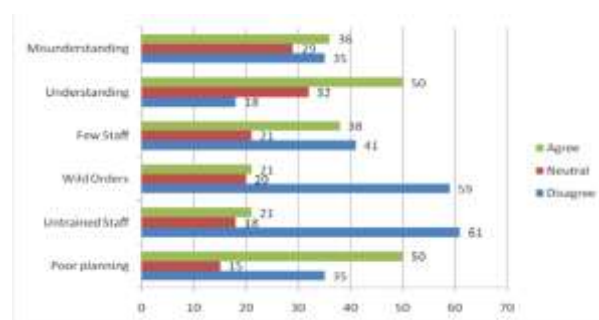
RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Service providers

Form the findings it is very much evident that 90% of outdoor caterers agrees that technological advancement introduced into the field has lessen their workload. Study also suggests that equal percentage 36% and 35% of respondents agreed and disagreed on the point of misunderstanding between the employees due to miscommunication, misinterpretation of information and not incorporating the issues while structuring the agreement may result in outcome of outdoor catering. The results of the same indicates that better use of technology during the presentation and recording the meetings results in healthier relations between the customer, caterer and the staff as all would perform in the required manner.

Technology also helps in budgeting and costing of the menu and services requested or to be provided by the caterer. Poor planning and undercharging is abridged with the use of technology and same is been indicated as 50% of respondents agreed, that outdoor catering has become more professional as one can calculate the amount of raw material, no. of staff, equipments required and eventually profitability. Still incorrect insight may lead to fewer staff or the wild orders during the operations. 38% of respondents agreed and 41 % respondents were those who tried to show that they are never perform with fewer staff or can manage in all situations. Those who agreed have valid reasons to support, as 21% said that wild orders may not be entertained every time as they are always not equipped with the equipments or trained staff to deliver the same.

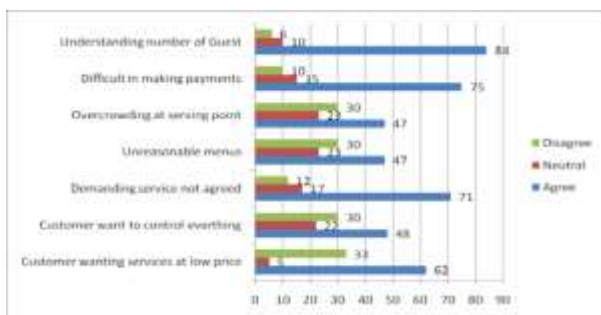
Study also shows that all the caterers do appoint the trained staff but still on certain designations it is not feasible to have the trained one, may be due to availability or the amount that may charge and it is evident as 61% of respondents agrees that staff is hired or employed as in order to their abilities.



Summary of the result is presented in figure 1

Customer Factors

Successful completion of outdoor catering is highly dependent on the number of guest expected and the number of guest entertained. 85% of caterers shown their consent that the outcome of outdoor catering is affected with the number of guests. Estimation of the number is major concern, starting from the planning stage till the end of the services everything revolves around the number only. Number of serving points, quantity of food, number of staff required and equipments needed, everything is related to the number of guests attending the event. Acceptations of the host are also somehow related to the number of guests, wastage of food, leftover, quality of service, food quality and many more such factors may result in complexity during the final payments is rated 75% by the caterers. Payment on right time and that too without any reductions generally motivates the caterers and helps in improving the services future.



Summary of the result is presented in figure 2.

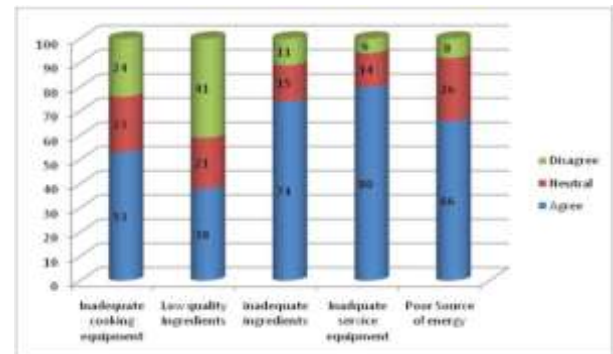
Findings also illustrate that 62% of customer falls in the category that demand for the services at the low price, affecting the caterer professionalism. Due to this caterers have to arrange all the services and supplies at lower cost and have to implement cost cutting at every corner of the catering. On the edge of this it becomes more difficult when caterer hit upon the dominating customer gazing all operation controls in their hand and any decision without consent may result in discomfort of caterer. Caterers do agree that 47% of customers fall in this class, preventing them to work independently. From the same it is also asserted that 47% of customers are responsible for overcrowding of guest at service points and elaborated menu planning resulting wastage of food.

Such factors may result in incompetency of the caterer but with the technology and innovative creations as an aid one can overcome and manipulate the outcomes in positive manner.

Physical Factors

On the onset of physical factors involved in outdoor catering operations it has been observed that equipment and ingredients are the major factors

affecting the outdoor catering as 80% and 74% respectively, where as poor source of energy contributes 66%. Cooking and serving the food in professional manner is the most important function of the catering unit, and to perform these functions it is very much required to that the food to be cooked should be prepared in proper style using adequate equipments and adding sufficient ingredients. Similarly adequate service equipments would be needed to perform service in perfection.



Physical factors affecting the outdoor catering operations are shown in figure 3

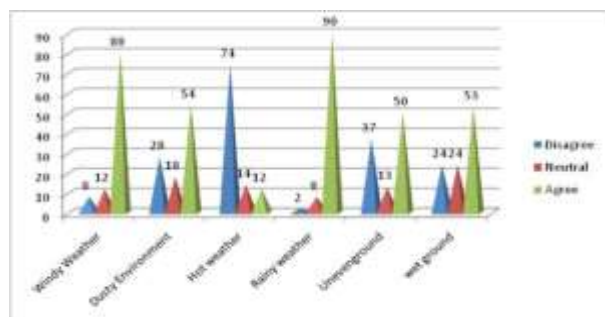
Natural Factors

Nature plays an important contributor in accomplishment of outdoor catering without any troubles, similarly study also reflects the same as 90% and 80 % of caterers accept that rains and windy weather respectively, are the major concern for both host as well as caterer, as it may affect the smooth functioning of an event. Especially in the case of the rainy season it becomes tricky for the guests to reach the site from their respective places and if are on site than too to reach function site from parking or vice versa. Rains also acts as off mood originator to the caterer as it may deteriorate the taste and temperature of the food, may increase the wild orders, disrupts the mobility of the guest and the staff. Along with this rains if it is windy also then what worse can be expected, allowing the straws, napkins and serviettes to blow away easily.

Another environmental factor i.e. dusty environment also has an impact on outdoor catering operation & is accepted with 54% by the respondents. This not only disturbs the chefs but has due impact on service section also by making the plates, table cloths and cutlery dirty. However, hot weather conditions were not found that much disturbing except rare mishandling of food material.

Ground status is of major consideration as 53% agreed on wet conditions and 50% on uneven ground conditions, since both are dangerous for faultless services. One may misbalance, fall or

slide due to these unfavorable conditions whether host, guest and caterer.

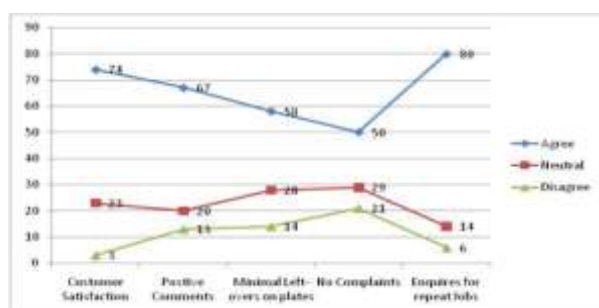


Summary of result is shown in figure 4.

CONCLUSION

Term innovation is not only about technology, it is also concerned with the methods or methodology to break down the pressure of work. It may also be explained as ease-of-doing, any SOP that assist in doing the work easily or which reduces the work pressure from the staff and caterer can be termed as innovation. The study concludes that the factors like human (service provider or customer oriented), physical and natural all indeed have induced with the innovations in certain ways. Service providers have started using the technology, creativity and sense of present ability in better way, where as customers are also turned smarter these days as they furbishing the agreement for operations, capture the shots to make their day memorable or to rationalize at the time of payments and making the digital payments.

In the view of all factors it has been observed that all are related to the outcomes of the outdoor caterings. These outcomes may be recognized as customer satisfaction, positive comments, minimum leftover on plates, zero complaints and repeat orders. This has been graphically represented the figure 5 as 74% for customer satisfaction, positive comments score 67%, minimum leftover on the plates got 58%, 50% i.e. balanced score for the zero complaints and 80% highest for repeat orders.



During operations avoiding these issues and challenges is a difficult task but caterer or customer may overcome such through proper prior analysis and forecasting of emerging situation, conditions during operations and those which may be shaped due to use of technology.

With the help of this research it may be illustrated that innovations has great influence on outdoor catering operations, regarding changes and transformations in:

- Guest's behavior during outdoor catering operations;
- Skills of staff required for special orders during the outdoor catering operations;
- Marketing strategies and company policies should be designed and defined using technological innovations.

The relationship between the outdoor catering industry and technological innovations should be balanced and harmonious. Technology should add the value, amenities, creativity, personalized service but excess use can destroy the relationships that host/ guests and caterer are looking for and appreciating.

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