AN EVALUATIVE STUDY ON STRATEGIC DIRECTIVES FOR BRAND DELIGHT AND ITS IMPACT ON CUSTOMER RETENTION IN INDIAN FOOD INDUSTRY AMIDST COVID-19

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Abstract:

This study is an evaluative study on strategic perspectives on brand delight and its impact on Indian fast-food Industry amidst Covid19. The global crisis and turmoil have crippled and transformed the entire operations of the globe. The Indian fast-food industry has been closed for almost six months. There is a need for revamping and restarting this industry for economic and social contributions.As social distancing, wearing masks and following the government norms has become the order of the day, this has also led to change in consumer's perceptions and attitudes. The study by nature evaluates strategic perspectives which could lead to brand delight in Indian fast food industry. This would also ensure brand retention in these challenging times. As there has been very little empirical investigations which have been attempted in this industry during these tough times in India, this study addresses the research gaps and also provides practical inputs for Indian fast-food industry on consumer perception towards brand delight and retention, which is the need of the hour. This is an empirical and quantitative study which attempts to provide strategic perspectives for Indian fast-food industry by collecting primary data through Questionnaire. The primary data for the study has been collected with 64 fast food consumers from Delhi, Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Amritsar and Calcutta. Stratified random sampling has been used in this study. The collected data has been analysed using SPSS tools as correlation, Wilcoxon signed rank test and Friedman two-way non-parametric Anova test has been conducted in this study. In this study it is found that brand communication can be made very effective using Digital display & advertisements &SEO Tools getting next Social media like FB getting least ranking which is very surprising. In this study it is also found that image of the product and awareness, popularity of fast-food leads to more purchase of fast-food products. It is found from this study that there is a positive correlation between the factors of satisfaction with fast food products and engagement and expectation of more products in fast food industry. It was also found that majority of the respondents love Indian dishes and Indian restaurants, Dominos, Pizza hut, McDonald are their favourite choices and also, they expecting to have more spicy and vegetarian varieties in fast food industry. The factors for customer retention have been provided in this study which includes Pleasing environment and good food are my preferences for happiness and satisfaction, Variety of dishes and menu has attracted customers to this food and customers are happy with the experience and would come again, & Communication of staff is very essential which makes consumers happy and satisfied. From these findings it is concluded that Indian fast-food industry must have these strategic perspectives for brand delight and customer retention.

INTRODUCTION:

Indian fast-food industry

The Indian fast-food industry has changed in dimensions, intensity and focus with global players who are competing in this market. The lifestyle, food habits and expectations of Indian consumers have changed drastically. Quality oriented food items with variety of menus and global cuisines have pushed the expectations to a global level. We could witness fast developments and growth in this industry for the last five years, and suddenly this pandemic had struck.[1]

The global pandemic, Covid 19 has reshaped the nature and focus of this industry. Safety and health has been the top focus all over the world and Indian companies have been forced to change to this new dynamics of operations. Online buying behaviour and door delivery of food products are the norms of the day. As restaurants all over the world have been almost closed for the last 120 days it is a new phenomenon which has grappled the world. The fast food industry must devise new strategies, methods and approaches to manage this pandemic and provide health services to its consumers.[2]

This introduction would be discussed in two levels:
Pre pandemic position, situation analysis and implications
Post pandemic situation, strategies and the way forward

Pre pandemic situations and implications:

The Indian lifestyle and living has changed dramatically in the last one decade. As the Indian population moves out in search of jobs and economic prosperity, we could find that diversified Indian is constantly exploring on global menus and food items. These explorations have led to constant innovation and quality food items in this market. The younger generation is looking for such new impetus and menus which can provide taste and quality to their buds.[3]

[4]had estimated that the Indian quick service restaurant industry is worth 350 billion dollars. This industry is expected to grow at a rate of 26% per year. The industry is expected to grow to 400 billion dollars by 2020 due to the presence of global players and life style of Indians.[5]

Indian demography and culture has significant influence and effects on the growth and development of Indian fast food restaurants. Preference towards fine dining, quality food, quick service, take home options have favoured the growth of QSR in India. This has got excellent reception from both college students and employed people in this country.[6]

McDonalds and KFC have adopted and suited to the local requirements and food habits. Although they are global in operations, they have followed the local culture; taste and preference in preparing menus and in providing quality food which has made them survive for the last two decades in India. So these companies have been successful due to their glocal strategies – having global focus and providing local strategies to win the market.[7]

Indian Quick service Restaurant's market:

The Indian economy is poised to be one of the fastest growing economies with growth projections averaging 8% per year. With a population of 130 crores it is one of the biggest markets in the world, which could scale

any investment or business in the horizon. Food is a very lucrative and most profitable business here as volumes and cost have a major role to determine purchases. The Indian QSR market is flooded with products and services across the range from simple road side restaurants to global multi cuisine restaurants all have been successful here. Customer orientations and catering to the demand of consumers is the strategy for success here always. Simple strategies with transformations and modern approaches have made the process of customer retention, delight and satisfaction a very simple process. The Indian restaurant service market comprises of QSR, fine dining, casual dining, bars, pubs and cafes. The market has been growing very strongly and consistently over a period of time and it is bound to register 10% growth by 2020. The industry dynamics has changed totally as we find new companies; menus and services from all over the world cater to this rich cultural country focusing on values and cost.

In this industry cost is the prime differentiator

LITERATURE REVIEW:

This literature review would be purposive, pertinent and significant as it would analyse the various dimensions of brand delight – brand communication, brand personality, brand image and brand related services. This review would also evaluate whether strategic directives of brand delight led to customer retention in Indian fast-food industry.

Customer delight:

[8]had done an analysis to evaluate the role of brand loyalty in creating customer delight in Pakistan. This study was conducted as an empirical study by administering a Questionnaire with 350 persons in Lahore city. From the data analysis done with SPSS it was found that customer satisfaction does not play a major role on customer delight which is an interesting finding in itself. It was also found in this research that brand loyalty has an important role on customer delight.

However it is found that no empirical studies have been conducted on brand delight and its impact on customer retention in Indian fast food industry.

[9] examined and told that customer delight is the most important factor for management of effective relationship with customers.

It is the process of providing much more engaging and delightful experiences with brands which is more than customer satisfaction. This creates a permanent association of consumers with brands. The strategies, ways and means of providing customer delight in Indian fast food industry has to be explored and implementation mechanisms have to be provided.

[10] analysed and found that there are two dimensions which lead to customer delight and happiness. The positive experiences and customer intentions lead to customer delight. This was validated in a study conducted in Pakistan and however we do not find research studies which relate to brand delight and factors influencing it in India. There is a need for empirical research to be conducted in this direction.

[11]analysed and found that customer delight can generate more loyalty with customers than satisfaction. Delight is a much bigger concept in application and has implications for industries. Research has to be conducted on the various ways and means to improve customer delight in Indian fast food industry which is needed now.

Research gaps

It was found from the literature review that there is a need for research to be conducted in brand delight on which empirical studies have not been conducted in India. As this dimension is not evaluated or assessed in Indian fast food industry, there is a need for empirical and conceptual research to be conducted in this domain.

Customer retention studies

[12]had done an evaluation to assess and ascertain the role of customer satisfaction on customer retention. This study was conducted in Oyo state, Nigeria with a reputed bank. The study was done to find out the relationship and assess the important role of customer satisfaction on customer retention.

In this research, survey method was used and data has been collected by administering a Questionnaire who was bank's customers. In this study it was found that customer satisfaction had a determinable role in customer retention. It is concluded from this study that customer satisfaction leads to customer retention.

There is a need for empirical studies to be conducted on the role of customer satisfaction on customer retention in Indian fast food companies.

[13]had conducted a research on the various strategies on customer retention and loyalty in various organizations. These valuable customers of the company must be provided with strong relationships which could determine future values also. The study also provides the cost of retention which is very less when compared to acquiring a new client. So the strategies and implications of retention of customers in Indian fast food industry must be evaluated with conceptual and empirical researches.

[14] done an evaluation and concluded that social relationships and customer relationships would provide huge advantages for the company in the long run. There is a need for formulation and management of value oriented strategies which can ensure customer retention and satisfaction for Indian context.

[1]had concluded that consumer word of mouth had a powerful role on determining perceived excellence in quality. This would also in turn decide on perceptual and attitudinal responses which engage in positive transformation of information. The role of word of mouth and its influences in creation of value for consumers as research which could be determined in Indian fast food industry has to be done immediately.

[2] had asserted that relationship marketing leads to intensive repeat purchase and behaviours which leads to customer satisfaction and retention. There is a need to study the role of relationship marketing on customer satisfaction and retention practices in Indian organizations.

Brand communications:

[15] had done a research on brand communications and its impact on brand promotions in Egyptian context. In this study brand awareness, brand loyalty and brand trust were taken as the factors of research. This research was conducted as a qualitative study and the information was collected through questionnaire. In this study it was found that personal selling, direct marketing and advertising had a major role to play in developing customer-based brand equity.

Brand communication and younger audience engagement practices:

[16]conducted a study and evaluated the various strategies and methods of engagement of younger consumers through brand communication and engagement practices. They are open minded and they are very loyal in their brand engagement and brand involvement. The study concludes that there is a need for effective engagement of these younger generation consumers with the brands. As they are very valuable there is a need for effective and

stronger, active engagement with younger generation. There is a need for technology oriented solutions to be provided to tech savvy younger generation consumers which would build an emotional bonding with consumers. Authenticity in brand communication, brand entertainer, engages younger generation in conversations, provide offers to younger generation as it would attract and retain them totally.

Brand communication and engagement with Facebook:

[7] had done an evaluative study to reveal the relationship between brand communication and engagement with user generated content which increased consumer-based brand equity with FB. 302 data sets were used in this study and it was found that brand communication through social media play an important role on brand awareness, loyalty and quality. This study was investigated with 60 major brands. SEM modelling was done in this study for evaluation and management. In this study it was found that user generated content had the maximum positive impact on brand loyalty and quality.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

Conceptual framework for the study
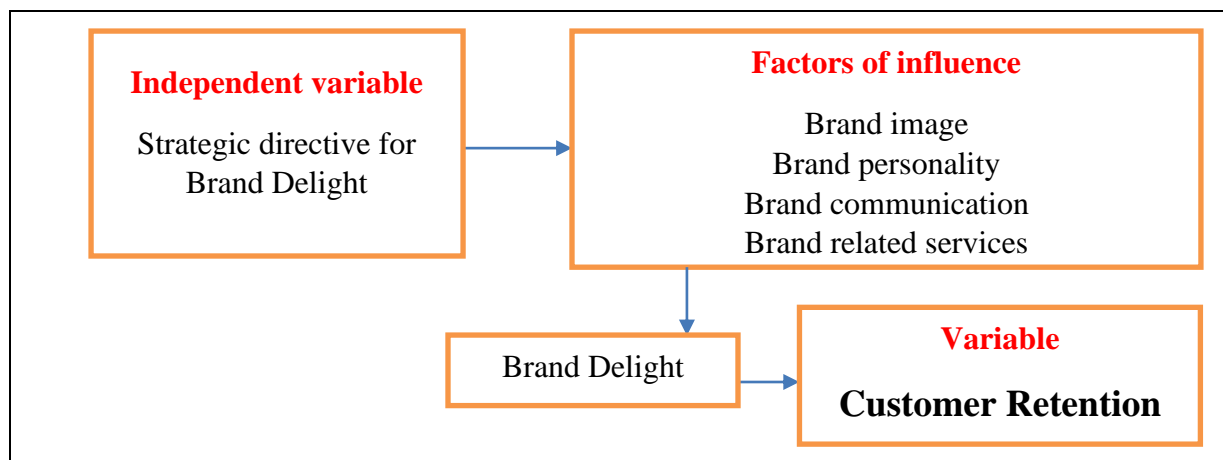
Variables of the study:

Independent variable: strategic directive for brand delight

Dependent variable:Brand delight leads to customer retention

Aim of the study:

This study aims to provide strategic directives for brand delight and its impact on consumer retention in Indian fast food industry during Covid 19 situations.

Objectives:

1. To evaluate the impact of strategic directives of brand delight on customer retention in Indian fast food industry in Covid 19 times
2. To assess the role of SMM and SEO tools in creation of brand delight for Indian fast food consumers during Covid 19 situations
3. To examine the role of brand communication on customer retention for Indian fast food consumers during Covid 19 crisis
4. To provide strategies for brand image retention during Covid 19 times for Indian fast food consumers

Hypothesis:

HO: The impact of strategic directives of brand delight on customer retention in Indian fast food industry in Covid 19 times is positive

H1: The impact of strategic directives of brand delight on customer retention in Indian fast food industry in Covid 19 times is negative

HO: SMM and SEO tools lead to creation of brand delight for Indian fast food consumers during Covid 19 situations

H1: SMM and SEO tools do not lead to creation of brand delight for Indian fast food consumers during Covid 19 situations

HO: Brand communication has a positive impact on customer retention for Indian fast food consumers during Covid 19 crisis

H1: Brand communication does not have a positive impact on customer retention for Indian fast-food consumers during Covid 19 crisis.

Sampling process:

The study would involve 64 individual fast food consumers who are in Delhi, Mumbai, Amritsar, Ahmedabad and Calcutta. Stratified random sampling method would be used for selection of sample. The sample would be stratified based on income, age, gender and type of residence in these locations.

Data collection methods:

Primary data would be collected from individual fast food consumers using Questionnaire. The Questionnaire would involve open ended questions, multiple choice questions, Likert's five point scale questions.

Secondary data would be collected from articles, publications, periodicals, magazines which related to individual investing and practices in globe and in India from 2015 till date. PhD works in the field and related domains would also be studied in depth and in detail.

Data Analysis methods:

The collected data from customers would be analysed using SPSS - correlation, regression & Anova tools would be used for analysis.

I level analysis
Cross tabulations of various demographic factors and its impact would be assessed at the first level.
II level of analysis
Cross tabulations of various factors and its impact would be assessed at the second level and necessary interpretations would be provided.
III level of analysis
Correlation, Friedman test, Wilcoxon Test, Mann-Whitney U and cluster model analysis for hypothesis basedtesting would be done for this study.

Scope and limitations:

The study is confined to Delhi, Mumbai, Amritsar, Ahmedabad and Calcutta in India only and the other cities & other states are not covered in this study.

The aspects which are mentioned as objectives would be covered in this study and the other aspects other than objectives & conceptual framework do not form a part of this study.

Expected research outcomes:

1. The study would evaluate the impact of strategic directives of brand delight on customer retention in Indian fast food industry in Covid 19 times and conclude that brand delight leads to customer retention.
2. There is a positive role of SMM and SEO tools in creation of brand delight for Indian fast food consumers during Covid 19 situations which have to be managed effectively for future.
3. There is a positive role of brand communication on customer retention for Indian fast food consumers during Covid 19 crisis
4. This research would provide strategies for brand image retention during Covid 19 times for Indian fast-food consumers with brand communication on digital media front as the top focus and approach.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATIONS
Table 1:Wilcoxon SignedRank test on purchase of fast food through online and direct visit

		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Ordering of fast food online - Visiting restaurants for taking fast food	Negative Ranks	10[a]	17.40	174.00
	Positive Ranks	29[b]	20.90	606.00
	Ties	25[c]		
	Total	64		
a. Ordering of fast food online < Visiting restaurants for taking fast food				
b. Ordering of fast food online > Visiting restaurants for taking fast food				
c. Ordering of fast food online = Visiting restaurants for taking fast food				

Test Statistics[a]	Ordering of fast food online - Visiting restaurants for taking fast food
Z	-3.107[b]
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.002

Inference:

From table 1 it is inferred that most of the respondents prefer online orders than the visiting the restaurant directly for fast food .[17]study reveals that youngsters are mostly assured to use online food ordering services. The most influencing factors for the online order are item costs, offers and discounts, customer convenience, timelydelivery.

Table 2: Rank test on online purchase of fast food with gender and age

	Gender	N	Mean Rank
Online purchase of fast food items are preferred	Male	39	33.32
	Female	25	31.22
	Total	64	
Test Statistics[a,b]	Online purchase of fast food items are preferred		
Chi-Square	.223		
df	1		
Asymp. Sig.	.637		

	age	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Online purchase of fast food items are preferred	16-25	37	33.70	1247.00
	26-35	26	29.58	769.00
	Total	63		
Test Statistics^a			Online purchase of fast food items are preferred	
Mann-Whitney U			418.000	
Wilcoxon W			769.000	
Z			-.945	
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)			.345	

a. Grouping Variable: age

Inference:

From table 2 it is inferred that online purchase of fast food items are preferred more by male than female .And the youngster with the age group 16-25 preferred online fast food items highly than 26-35 years of age group.

Brand communication

Table 3: Friedman ranking test analysis of brand communication process

	Mean Rank
Effective communication and promotional strategies leads to fast food product purchases to a larger and greater extent	2.93
Digital display and advertisement of products and services have enhanced my decision making choices	2.68
Search engine optimization tools have helped me to decide on fast food products	2.41
I see the products on FB, which has helped me to decide on fast food items, menu and recipes	1.98
Test Statistics^a	
N	64
Chi-Square	27.772
df	3
Asymp. Sig.	.000
a. Friedman Test	

Inference:

From table 3 it is inferred that in the process of brand communication the effective communication and promotional strategies getting highest ranking and Digital display & advertisements, SEO Tools getting next closest ranking. Social media like FB getting least ranking.

Brand image and brand personality

Table 4: Descriptive statistical analysis of brand image and brand personality

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Image of the product and awareness leads to purchase of fast food products	64	1	5	3.95	1.201
Popularity of fast food products leads to more purchases	64	1	5	3.87	1.189
Valid N (listwise)	64				

Inference:

From table 4 it is inferred that image of the product and awareness, popularity of fast food leads to more purchase of fast food products.[18]concludes that the increasingly consumer to consumer or person to person oral communication across groups is achieving trust and also the highest use of Internet, will expand exponentially.

Brand delight:

Table 5: Correlation between satisfaction with fast food products and engagement and expectation of more products

		I'm happy with fast food products and totally satisfied	I'm personally connected ad engaged with the products and services of fast food companies of India	I agree that I would love to have more products and services with novelty and innovation in IFFI
I'm happy with fast food products and totally satisfied	Pearson Correlation	1	.527**	.498**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	64	64	64
I'm personally connected ad engaged with the products and services of fast food companies of India	Pearson Correlation	.527**	1	.470**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	64	64	64
I agree that I would love to have more products and services with novelty and innovation in IFFI	Pearson Correlation	.498**	.470**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	64	64	64

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Inference:

From table5it is inferred that there is a positive correlation between the factors **satisfaction with fast food products and engagement and expectation of more products in fast food industry.**

Customer choice and Strategies

Table 6:Friedman ranking analysis of customer choice and strategies

	Mean Rank
I love Indian dishes and Indian restaurants	5.11
Dominos. Pizza hut and McDonalds are my favourite choices	4.22
More spicy and vegetarian varieties have to be provided	4.13
The food products are novel and satisfying the tongues with flavour richness and variety	3.98
Satisfied totally with the services like to buy fast food products for my family as well regularly	3.57
Fast food outlets are healthy and hygienic with good food items and I would revisit them	3.55
I love any dish as long as it is palpable	3.45
Test Statistics[a]	
N	64
Chi-Square	36.469
df	6
Asymp. Sig.	.000

a. Friedman Test

Inference:

From table 6 it is inferred that majority of the respondents love Indian dishes and Indian restaurants, Dominos, Pizza hut, McDonald are their favourite choices and also they expecting to have more spicy and vegetarian varieties in fast food industry. The following factors getting moderate ranking for customer choice and strategies fast food products are novel and satisfy the tongues with flavour richness and variety, Satisfied with services, Health and hygienic fast food items, like the dish as long as it is palpable.

Customer retention factors

Table 7: Ranking analysis of customer retention factors

	Mean Rank
Pleasing environment and good food are my preferences for happiness and satisfaction	5.64
I feel that there is a change in my food consumption due to Covid 19 crisis	5.49
Variety of dishes and menu has attracts customers , customers are happy with experience and would come again	5.33
Communication of staff is very essential which makes me happy and satisfied	5.27

I prefer ordering of online food and items during this crisis and would continue after the crisis as well	5.18
Even though purchases are made online I buy the same food and menu which I was buying earlier	4.88
My friends recommended me and Im happy with the experience of food services	4.66
Website and advertisements has attracted me towards these brands which make me happy	4.40
Digital advertisements are classy and it has customer to choose food products and I am happy to the core	4.14
Test Statistics	
N	64
Kendall's Wᵃ	.049
Chi-Square	25.245
df	8
Asymp. Sig.	.001

a. Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance

Inference:

From table 7 it is inferred that the following factors are getting highest mean rank for the customer retention.

- Pleasing environment & good food
- Variety of dishes and menu
- Good Communication of staff

HYPOTHESIS TEST SUMMARY:

HO: The impact of strategic directives of brand delight on customer retention in Indian fast food industry in Covid 19 times is positive

HO: SMM and SEO tools lead to creation of brand delight for Indian fast food consumers during Covid 19 situations

HO: Brand communication has a positive impact on customer retention for Indian fast food consumers during Covid 19 crisis

Model for hypothesis test

Hypothesis 1:brand delight on customer retention in Indian fast-food industry in Covid 19 times is positive	**Hypothesis 2:**SMM and SEO tools lead to creation of brand delight for Indian fast food consumers during Covid 19 situations

Model Summary

Algorithm	TwoStep
Inputs	3
Clusters	4

Cluster Quality

Poor   Fair   Good

-1.0   -0.5   0.0   0.5   1.0
Silhouette measure of cohesion and separation

Inputs:

- I feel that there is a change in my food consumption due to Covid 19 crisis
- I prefer ordering of online food and items during this crisis and would continue after the crisis as well
- I'm happy with fast food products and totally satisfied

Model Summary

Algorithm	TwoStep
Inputs	2
Clusters	5

Cluster Quality

Poor   Fair   Good

-1.0   -0.5   0.0   0.5   1.0
Silhouette measure of cohesion and separation

Inputs:

- Search engine optimization tools have helped me to decide on fast food
- Digital advertisements are really classy and it has made me to choose these food products and I'm happy to the core

Hypothesis 3: Brand communication has a positive impact on customer retention for Indian fast-food consumers during Covid 19 crisis

Model Summary

Algorithm	TwoStep
Inputs	2
Clusters	2

Cluster Quality

Poor   Fair   Good

-1.0   -0.5   0.0   0.5   1.0
Silhouette measure of cohesion and separation

Inputs:

- Effective communication and promotional strategies lead to fast food product purchases to a larger and greater extent
- Digital display and advertisement of products and services have enhanced my decision making choices

SUGGESTION & RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Most of the customers are online users and have knowledge and experience on online ordering for fast food. This is a great opportunity for fast food industry to develop their business .especially the recent covid 19 pandemic changed the people life style and made awareness on online food ordering it's a good time for online business.
- Decision making of fast food items and selection take place with the help of social network.
- There is a demographic changing in India and there is tremendous opportunity for those who can deliver variety
- Majority of the respondents love Indian dishes and Indian restaurants, Dominos, Pizza hut, McDonald are their favourite choices and also they expecting to have more spicy and vegetarian varieties in fast food industry. The following factors getting moderate ranking for customer choice and strategies fast

food products are novel and satisfy the tongues with flavour richness and variety, satisfied with services, Health and hygienic fast-food items, like the dish as long as it is palpable.

Highest mean rankfactors for the customer retention

- ➢ Pleasing environment & good food
- ➢ Making arrangement for food items and price in crisis time
- ➢ Variety of dishes and menu
- ➢ Good Communication of staff
- ➢ Easy technical adaptability (mobile friendly, easy payment methods etc.,) for online orders.

CONCLUSION:

Operational strategies
Purchase of fast-food items through online is higher than the direct visiting of the restaurant for fast food purchase. The usages of fast-food services among youngster are high.

Branding strategies
Brand image, Brand service and Brand communication getting the highest priority factors for influencing the fast-food purchase. Brand personality is getting next closest priority. Image of the product and awareness, popularity of fast food leads to more purchase of fast food products

Communication strategies
Effective communication and promotional strategies leads to fast food product purchases to a larger and greater extent. Next closest accepted factors for fast food purchase extensions are Digital display and advertisement of products and services and SEO tools.

Brand Delightment
Customers are happy and satisfied with fast food products and they are personally connected and engaged and the customer expecting more products in fast food industry.

Customer choice and strategies
Love Indian dishes and Indian restaurants, Dominos, Pizza hut, McDonald are their favourite choices and expecting to have more spicy and vegetarian varieties in fast food industry. The following factors getting next ranking for customer choice and strategies fast food products are novel and satisfy the tongues with flavour richness and variety, Satisfied with services, Health and hygienic fast food items, like the dish as long as it is palpable.

Customer retention
Pleasing environment and good food, variety of dishes and menu, good staff communication, changes in food items and menu price during crisis period are getting highest priority for customer retention. The next prioritized factors are same food and menu followed in online orders, prefer to online order during crisis time, recommend from friend, classy digital advertisements, website visits.

So it is concluded that the study will provide the operational strategies, branding strategies, communication strategies for brand delight and its impact on consumer retention in Indian fast food industry during Covid 19 situations.

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