

OPINION

Indian Hotel Industry Megashifts Post Pandemic: A Researchers Prediction

By *Dr. Mayukh Dewan* February 16, 2021 2



With the havoc caused by a coronavirus in 2020 across the world, the Indian hospitality industry faced the brunt of this pandemic. All through 2020 till date, we have been hearing almost daily reports of hotels closing across the length and breadth of India. Now with the start of the new year, hospitality professionals across the world are ever so hopeful that this new year brings a coronavirus free world with positive changes emerging in the hospitality and foodservice industries.

This article aims to understand and analyze the global challenges post coronavirus and make informed predictions of all the positive and not so positive changes that may happen in our hospitality industry in the coronavirus aftermath. In the first few paragraphs, I talk about the global changes and challenges, followed by the ones that the Indian Hospitality Industry faces.

One of the major global challenges is the production distribution and efficacy of the various coronavirus vaccines floating in the market now. In this regard, India is in a very favourable space as it is seen as the pharmacy of the world and is producing the vaccines not just for its local brand but also the Oxford vaccine. The vaccines have already started being given to frontline workers all across India and it is estimated that almost all the urban and semi-urban population would get the vaccine by the end of this year. This puts our country at a much higher standing as compared to many other countries in the region who have not even started receiving vaccines from the manufacturers or have not even placed orders for the same.

The second issue is the anxiety of the population in taking the vaccine and is a major challenge faced by policymakers and drug makers across the globe. There are many instances in the West where people are refusing to take the vaccine because they believe in a lot of heresy from social media networking sites regarding the vaccines. Again, fortunately for India, there is still quite a lot of positive social perceptions towards medicines and vaccines. The educated population in India do not easily believe in stuff written about vaccines on the Internet especially from untrustworthy sources.

Corona-Nationalism nationalism is a term which describes the self-centred nationalistic attitudes shown by governments across the world when it comes to vaccine production distribution and propagation. Even in this sector again we see that India being the pharmacy of the world has been the trendsetter and

manufacturing and distributing vaccines (free in many cases like Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh) as a part of its neighbourhood first policy.

How vaccines distribution is managed and how central and state governments respond to the opening of the economy is a challenge that India faces. In this regard, the tourism ministry of the central government, as well as the state governments, would have to work together and not work in silos while coming up with a plan to cater to the opening of the tourism hospitality and foodservice sectors. In my opinion, this is one of the major challenges which if done correctly, would make India one of the trailblazers and leaders in the hospitality industry turn around post coronavirus.

The Hospitality Context

Supply chain management interruptions are a major issue for the hospitality and foodservice industry. As we all know the hospitality and food sector relies not just on the guests but also on its supply chain when it comes to food beverages as well as other amenities and equipment. Any disruption to the supply chain would cause major disruptions in the turnaround of the hospitality sector. As hoteliers and policymakers, we need to keep an eye not just on our own properties but also on our supply chain and make sure we predict and forecast any forthcoming issues so as to mitigate them.

Furthermore, the digitalization of business had already started with the advent of smartphones entering the Indian market. Since the last one year there is a tremendous jump in digitalization of business and hoteliers need to keep on top of this trend to attain full potential from this technological leap. Food delivery apps are no longer seen as a niche market service, rather they have expanded into delivering fresh produce from supermarkets, vehicle and other transportation bookings, insurance and phone top-ups, payment wallets and mobile phones bookings for travels and hotels. All hotels and foodservice industry players need to jump on this bandwagon if they have not done so yet.

The Indian Context

In the Indian hospitality context, one of the first major change and challenge faced is the focus on hygiene. The guests and consumers now have focused more on hygiene and have realised that unhygienic products and venues may not be the right place for them to accept. This is a new norm, and it will continue in the future.

Social distancing in the foodservice industry (Buffets, Restaurants, MICE) will also be the norm for the foreseeable future. This means that F&B outlets like buffet restaurants may have to re-work their setups so as not to let the guests touch the equipment unnecessarily. There will be a need for a higher number of restaurant service professionals to serve food in buffet restaurants. Similar changes are happening in the MICE industry wherein a lot of people would prefer to use equipment which is disposable so that there is a lack of perceived cross-contamination happening in hotels. This may not be very good for the environment and not very financially viable too. The food service industry needs to think about this and make relevant environmentally-friendly changes.

With social distancing becoming a norm in the foreseeable future, hoteliers would have to rework the total number of PAX they can accommodate in their F&B outlets like restaurants, bars and banquets. The hotel industry would also have to find a way to work with this reduction in total PAX per venue but still make had a decent profit.

With the fear of virus contagion spread across the world, tourists especially leisure tourists may not be so forthcoming in their tourism habits. This reduction in tourism mobility will directly affect the hospitality and foodservice industry, especially in tourist destinations.

Overlooking the minor changes and challenges in India especially in the short term would be the rise of stay-at-home tourism habits of potential guests. Especially in the short term till almost 3/4 of the total population does not get the vaccine, people would be scared to move around for leisure purposes. The hospitality and foodservice industry may have to weather the storm for at least the next three quarters. It is expected that consumer confidence would improve from 2022 onwards and tourism movement would start.

Along with the stay-at-home attitude of potential tourists and guests, there will be a rise in virtual tourism habits. Consumers would prefer to do virtual tours on specialist sites which provide immersive experiences to the guests (through 3D glasses and similar equipment). In my opinion, this would also become a part of the tourism habits of people but may not be a mainstay as people still prefer physically visiting places and consuming new experiences.

Finally, it is predicted that there would be a rise in compassion in guests as well as hospitality service providers towards each other. All of us are in this mess together and we realise that the person on the other side is also facing similar issues. This compassionate behaviour should be inculcated and promoted from both ends to provide motivation and mental health alleviation for the guests as well as for the hospitality industry professional.

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