

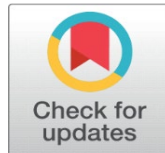
# GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES IN DINING PREFERENCES: A RESEARCH-BASED EVALUATION OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR IN THE RESTAURANT SECTOR

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**Received** 07 January 2024

**Accepted** 08 February 2025

**Published** 31 March 2025

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## DOI

[10.29121/granthaalayah.v13.i3.2025.6496](https://doi.org/10.29121/granthaalayah.v13.i3.2025.6496)

**Funding:** This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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## ABSTRACT

The fast-changing face of the Indian restaurant industry has been driven by shifting lifestyles, digital influence, and changing consumer expectations. This paper looks into differences in dining behavior along age divisions using primary data from visitors to a restaurant located in an urban environment. It investigates some key drivers of choice that include food quality, service experience, ambiance, pricing, hygiene, and finally, online engagement. The descriptive research design was followed, and responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic interpretation. Outcomes suggest that whereas food quality and hygiene are important across the board, digital presence and aesthetics appeal more to younger consumers, while comfort, familiarity, and courteous service are traits valued by older groups. The study underlines the requirement for restaurants to use targeted approaches that meet generational expectations. The results contribute to a deeper understanding of consumer behaviour in the contemporary Indian dining sector.

**Keywords:** Consumer Behaviour, Dining Preferences, Age Groups, Service Quality, Restaurant Industry, Customer Satisfaction

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The dining industry in India has been evolving with increased urbanization, digitalization, and exposure to global cuisines. Restaurants today have to cater to several segments of customers, each with different sets of expectations formed by the age factor, lifestyle, and cultural influences. Younger consumers seek novelty, visual appeal, and digital engagement, while middle-aged and older groups prioritize hygiene, taste consistency, and comfort. Understanding these variations is

essential for restaurants aiming to improve satisfaction and retention. This study, therefore, seeks to identify major factors that influence dining choices among different age groups in an urban restaurant and how generational differences mold consumer expectations and entire dining experiences.

## 2. OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this study is to analyse how dining preferences vary across different age groups in the restaurant industry.

Specific objectives include:

- To identify key determinants influencing customers' dining decisions, such as food quality, ambiance, service, hygiene, pricing, and digital presence.
- To compare how each age group prioritizes these factors differently based on lifestyle and expectations.
- To analyse the impact of online reviews, social media, and digital visibility on customer choices across generations.
- To assess satisfaction levels and revisit intentions among different age segments.
- To provide recommendations that help restaurants tailor their offerings to diverse consumer needs.

## 3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Consumer dining behavior has been one of the major research focuses in the hospitality industry, and such studies have always identified demographic, psychological, and cultural variables affecting the choices of restaurants. Food quality has always emerged as a key determinant of satisfaction, comprising taste, freshness, portion size, and presentation. As identified by scholars such as Kotler and Keller, perceived value, developed by the balance between quality and price, greatly forms customers' decisions in dining environments.

Another domain widely studied is service quality, for which the SERVQUAL model has often been used to evaluate responsiveness, reliability, empathy, and tangibility. It appears from the research that politeness of staff, speed of service, and correctness in the handling of orders increase customer satisfaction and loyalty. Obviously, all these aspects are valued more highly by older consumers, who prefer interpersonal contact and predictability.

Ambiance and physical environment, including aspects like lighting, décor, cleanliness, and comfort of seating, also play an important role. Studies show that younger consumers are most influenced by visual aesthetics and "Instagram able" spaces, connecting ambiance to social validation and peer influence. This is also in tune with findings that digital exposure, online reviews, and social media engagement are increasingly shaping dining expectations.

Generational differences are highlighted across several studies. Younger customers tend to seek novelty, affordability, and digital-driven experiences, whereas middle-aged customers value convenience, balanced pricing, and a pleasant atmosphere. Older consumers emphasize hygiene, comfort, and traditional flavours. Such distinctions underscore the importance of demographic segmentation in restaurant strategy.

Existing literature also reveals gaps, particularly within the Indian context, where cultural diversity and rapid digitalization significantly influence dining preferences. Few studies examine age-based differences within single-restaurant environments using local data. Additionally, limited research integrates digital influence and generational behaviour into a comprehensive framework. This study addresses these gaps by analysing age-specific dining preferences using primary data collected at an urban restaurant.

## **4. RESEARCH METHODS AND PROCEDURES**

This study adopted a descriptive research design to understand the dining preferences of customers across different age groups at an urban restaurant. A descriptive approach is appropriate because it enables the researcher to observe and analyse existing behaviors, attitudes, and preferences without manipulating variables. The objective was to capture customer perceptions related to food quality, service, ambiance, hygiene, pricing, and digital influence.

### **4.1. SAMPLING METHOD AND SAMPLE SIZE**

A non-probability convenience sampling method was used due to accessibility and time limitations. The sample consisted of 100 respondents divided into three age groups: 18–25 years, 26–40 years, and 41–60 years. These groups were selected to reflect distinct life stages and consumption patterns.

### **4.2. DATA COLLECTION TOOLS**

A structured questionnaire served as the primary data collection tool. It included both closed-ended questions using a Likert scale and a few open-ended questions to capture additional insights. The questionnaire was administered in person to restaurant visitors over a two-week period. Respondents provided informed consent, and their anonymity was ensured.

Secondary data was obtained from academic journals, research reports, hospitality textbooks, and credible online sources. This data helped build the theoretical foundation and supported the interpretation of results.

### **4.3. DATA ANALYSIS**

Collected data was tabulated and analysed using descriptive statistics such as percentages and frequency distribution. Responses were categorized to identify trends across age groups. Qualitative responses were analysed through thematic interpretation to identify major patterns and sentiments. Graphs and charts were used to visually present the findings.

### **4.4. LIMITATIONS**

The study is limited to a single restaurant and a modest sample size, which may not fully reflect the broader population. Convenience sampling introduces bias, and results may vary based on timing and respondent availability. Despite these limitations, the study offers valuable insights into generational differences in dining preferences.

## 5. DATA ANALYSIS

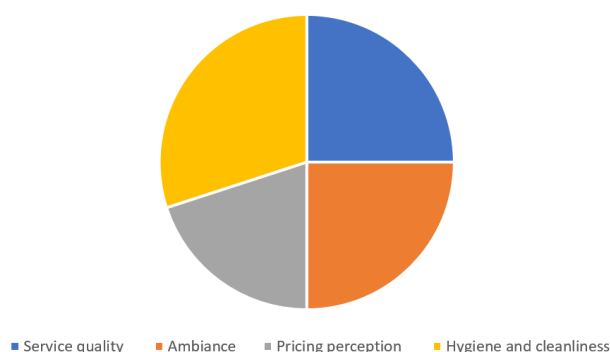
Data from 100 respondents were analyzed in order to understand how dining preferences differed across various age groups. Results show a distinctive trend that underlines the impact of generational differences on consumer behavior. Food quality was the most important determinant for all three age groups, although the attributes that were valued varied. Taste, presentation, and innovation were emphasized by the younger respondents. Freshness, authenticity, and consistency took precedence among older respondents.

The quality of services was the second most influential factor. The respondents in the age bracket 26–40 years valued timely service because of work commitments, while the older customers appreciated politeness in interaction and attentiveness of the staff.

Ambiance played a big role, especially among the 18–25 age group, who wanted a space that looked good enough to be on social media. As for older consumers, comfort, cleanliness, and the least amount of noise were higher priorities.

Pricing perceptions also differed according to the age of the respondent. Younger consumers were the most price-sensitive and sought cheap alternatives. The middle-aged consumer emphasized value for money, while the oldest segment attached greatest importance to the overall experience rather than price alone. Regarding hygiene and cleanliness, all respondents gave high ratings; the 41–60 group attached the highest importance to these factors.

Relative importance of Factors Across Age Groups



Digital influence was prevalent among the younger age group, most of whom relied on online reviews and ratings and social media postings. Middle-aged respondents relied on Google reviews, while older consumers showed minimal reliance on digital platforms.

Revisit intention was strong, with most of the respondents willing to return because of their positive experiences with regard to food quality, ambiance, and cleanliness. Overall, the analysis suggests that restaurants should adopt age-specific strategies to respond to the diverse expectations.

## 6. FINDINGS

Age clearly distinguished the preferred dining characteristics: food quality was interpreted differently, being ranked as the most important across the board, followed by presentation and uniqueness for younger consumers and consistency and freshness for the older consumers. Besides food, quality of service, atmosphere, price, and hygiene were significant factors in dining patronage. Younger consumers'

dining choices were heavily dependent on digital reviews, whereas reliance on personal experience increases with age. Customers' revisit intention is relatively high, which indicates general customer satisfaction. It confirms that age is a significant factor in forming expectations about dining and satisfaction.

Revisit intention was strong, with most respondents expressing willingness to return due to positive experiences related to food quality, ambiance, and hygiene. Overall, the analysis indicates that restaurants must adopt age-specific strategies to address diverse expectations effectively.

## 7. SUGGESTIONS

Restaurants should strengthen their digital engagement by posting high-quality visuals, responding to reviews, and using social media promotions to attract younger consumers. Additionally, improving service efficiency during peak times and diversifying the menu to cater to varying taste preferences across age groups will enhance satisfaction. Maintaining strong hygiene practices and offering comfortable seating will further appeal to middle-aged and older customers.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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