

DESIGN STUDIO PROJECT REPORT ONE
INDIAN URBAN STREET FOOD POST COVID-19

Team Disease Business

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1.0 Introduction

In this current pandemic, many city dwellers have been forced to let go of many of the conveniences that facilitate a fast paced lifestyle. Working from home has drastically changed the nature of urban life and their daily routines. Of course, many of these ‘conveniences’ are simply ways to cope with the rapid rush of life in the city, but to those who have lived with these conveniences, they have become a way of life and a culture.

One such convenience is the fast and easy access to food. Indian street food is renowned for its popularity with every strata of its society. It transcends most boundaries and is a shared culture that unites all urban Indians. From the vada pav of Mumbai to the kati rolls of Kolkata, from the uthappams of Chennai to the parathas of Delhi, the culture of quick street food is pervasive and unifying. But perhaps none of these dishes is more widespread and popular as paani puri.

In this project we will look at the role paani puri plays in the lives of city dwellers all across India and see how we can preserve this important aspect of our lives while keeping the experience of street food safe and hygienic.

2.0 Brainstorming and problem identification

2.1 Mind mapping

We began by making a mind map of all of the aspects of life that were affected by the coronavirus. We identified many of these areas where a shift had occurred, perhaps permanently, in the public perception of these aspects of life.

We came up with quite a few areas where we saw a scope for further investigation:

- Public washrooms
- Restaurants and other public spaces
- Seating and air conditioning
- Ticket booking in queues and other forms of queueing
- Commuting using shared vehicles including public transit, autos and cabs
- Cash management
- Salons
- Dentists
- Street food

We laid out all these ideas visually and drew connections where we saw them. This helped us branch into other ideas. We did not, however spend too much time on this stage as we needed to begin our research.

2.2 Problem assessment and ranking

We fleshed out each of the problem areas on our final list and put down what they would each broadly cover. Then we scored them against a modified version of the *Real-Win-Worth* system.

The *Real-Win-Worth* (RWW) system¹ uses three metrics to categorise the merits of a problem area. Each metric is broken down into two questions. And each of the six questions are asked of each of the problem statements:

1. *Is the market real?*
2. *Is the product real?*
3. *Can the product be competitive?*
4. *Can our company be competitive?*
5. *Will the product be profitable at an acceptable risk?*
6. *Does launching the product make strategic sense?*

Of course, not having a clear idea of a product in our minds yet, questions 3, 5 and 6 were difficult to answer. So we simplified the questions to the three core ideas:

1. *Is this a real problem?*
2. *Is this problem solvable given our resources and skill sets?*
3. *Can the solution we come up with sustain itself in the real world?*

So we made a table and scored the problems on a tiered scale of 1, 3 or 9. (Table 1) The reason behind using this scoring system was to “pop” highly-ranked factors more clearly, while lowering the scores of low-ranking factors.

Based on our assessments of the problems, we had one clear winner. Street food vendors had a perfect 9-9-9 rating.

3.0 Secondary research

3.1 History

Although there are many myths and legends about the origins of the dish, the actual beginnings of pani puri probably reach back to the end of the 19th century. It seems to have first appeared in South Bihar. It has since proliferated throughout India becoming one of the most recognizable snacks of the subcontinent.

3.2 Local names

There are many names for the dish and they vary in usage mostly by state.

Table 1: Real-Win-Worth analysis

Problem Area	Real	Win	Worth	Total
Washrooms	9	3	3	15
Local Buses	9	1	3	13
Local Trains	9	1	3	13
Salons	3	3	1	7
Ridesharing	3	9	3	15
Street vendors (commodities)	9	3	9	21
Restaurants (paymentsl, seating)	3	9	3	15
Street food stall	9	9	9	27
Medicine transport and storage	9	3	3	15
Telemedicine	9	3	3	15
Home grown food (aquaponics)	3	9	3	15

These different dishes all share the basic concept of a ball shaped puri stuffed and dipped in diluted chutney. But the filling, chutney and even toppings vary from region to region. The three most popular versions of the dish are paani puri, fuchka, and gol gappe. Paani puri is used throughout India, fuchka is used in West Bengal and gol gappe is used in the North and Northwest.

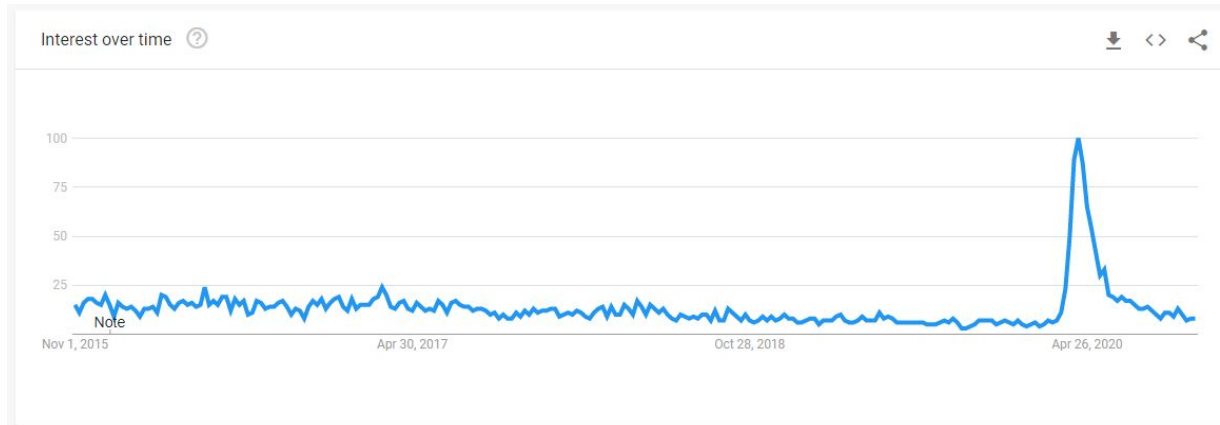
3.3 Travel and food blogs and vlogs

We were limited in our access to paani puri stands and restaurants as we are still in some of the worst of the pandemic in our cities, Delhi Bangalore and Aurangabad. We still needed to observe the experience of eating at a stall and so we looked to the next best option we had; travel and food blogs and videos. We looked at videos to observe the workflows of the vendor as well as the customer. Since there are very few good quality videos with decent angles online we were quite limited in our sample. It also didn't help that the videos were from different regions and thus had different recipes and workflows. However we did get some insights as to the prioritization of cleanliness, hygiene and customizability offered by the vendors.

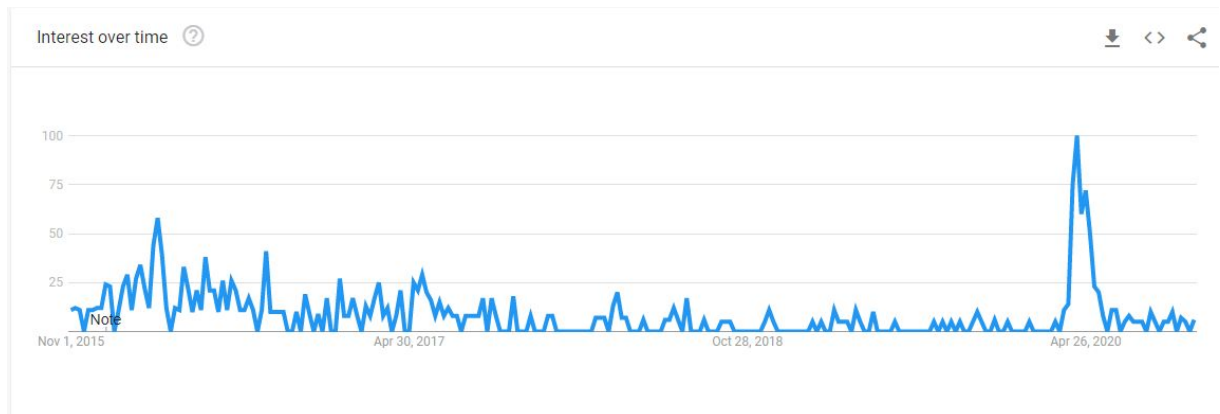
3.4 Google Analytics

Online presence is a great metric to measure recognition of a term and how it changes with time. We ran the terms ‘paani puri’, ‘paani puri recipe’, ‘gol gappe recipe’ and ‘near me’ through google search analytics and got search data from the last five years.

Paani Puri



Gol gappe



Clearly there is a sharp peak in both of these terms at the beginning of the pandemic which peaked around April. This decline can be explained by two possible factors. One is the fact that once it has been googled once, the user has no more need for the recipe. The other possibility is that the recipe did not provide a good alternative to the real thing.

4.0 Primary research

4.1 Questionnaire

We still had a lot of questions for customers that needed to be answered. We designed a short questionnaire to gauge preferences and priorities in their paani puri experience. Each question was made to give us insight into the users needs and requirements in this experience. We covered topics ranging from taste preferences to location and convenience based preferences to toppings to utensils. We even looked at the social aspect of the experience, looking at the social setting people prefer to eat paani puri. We have received 36 responses to the questionnaire so far.

4.2 Interviews

The quantitative data we got from the questionnaire was useful in validating our idea as well as giving us some broad insights into the problem we were tackling, but we needed some in depth answers that required conversations.

4.2.1 Business Interview

We found an entrepreneur who had set up a paani puri stand in Bangalore in 2008. They had bought the stand and rented it to the person who ran the stand. After a while the stand was given to the vendor. This method was sustainable, but perhaps not very scalable. From this interview we got some numbers on the costs and other factors that go into this operation. While we spoke at length about this topic, we also touched on home food production for urban dwellers using aquaponics and vertical farming. While the idea has some promise, we feel that the present conditions make it impossible for us to follow through with this idea and do it justice.

4.2.2 Paani puri enthusiast interviews

These interviews give us insights into the actual experience of the customer at the paani puri stall. We got detailed accounts of the experience as well as insights into the decision making and prioritization that goes into choosing where to go to get paani puri. We put the insights we got from these interviews into a spreadsheet to analyse them in an affinity diagram.

1. Day, George. "Is It Real? Can We Win? Is It Worth Doing?: Managing Risk and Reward in an Innovation Portfolio." Harvard Business Review, 16 July 2015, hbr.org/2007/12/is-it-real-can-we-win-is-it-worth-doing-managing-risk-and-reward-in-an-innovation-portfolio.