



restaurant industry trends shaping the future of CX





Between rapidly evolving expectations + behaviors and the ongoing consumer-led digital transformation, 2020 has been a landmark year of changes and operational challenges for the restaurant industry.

While many COVID-specific trends will fade over time, some changes ushered in by the pandemic *are* here to stay. Brands need to be aware of how these changes are impacting the customer experience — and use their experience management (XM) programs to keep pace.

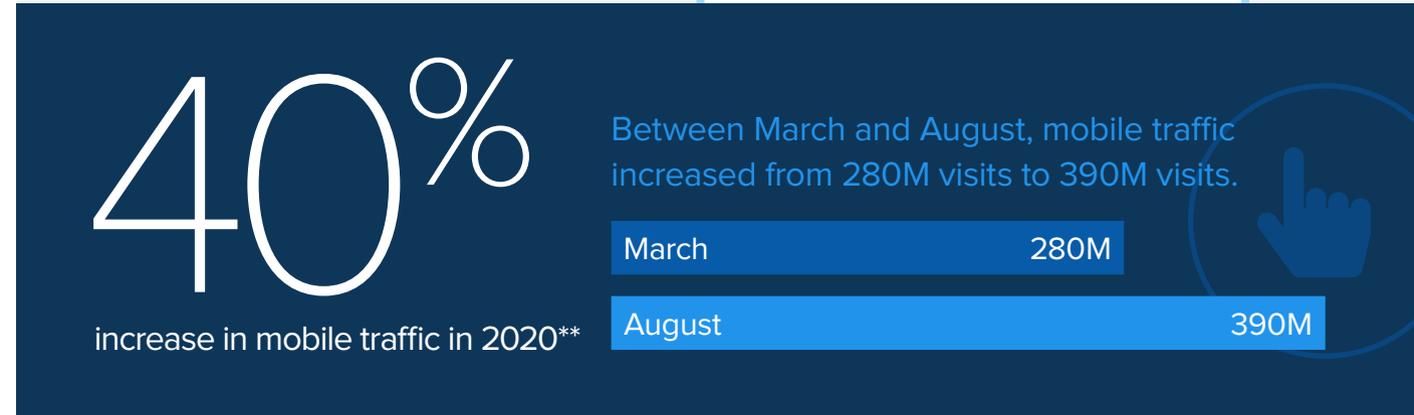
We've used research from US + UK consumers to outline **4 forward-looking trends** to keep top-of-mind when planning for 2021— and **3 takeaways** that will help restaurants improve CX.



TREND #1

Early innovators will see digital investments pay off

Mobile usage increased nearly 40% in 2020—a trend you can expect to carry over well into next year, with a large portion of the surge being attributed to the increased adoption and usage rates across older generations. If you're still deciding where to lean in financially, this one is a safe bet.



*Nation's Restaurant News, **SimilarWeb | www.similarweb.com | August 2020

Your food, their app — who's in control of the customer experience?

When it comes to mobile-first customers, it's not just your branded app you have to worry about. Third-party delivery services like DoorDash and Uber Eats have been a disruptive force for years, but many brands continue to struggle to keep up with customer expectations.

Download the latest installment of this longitudinal third-party delivery research to learn more.



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Find UK-specific data + trends in this executive brief.



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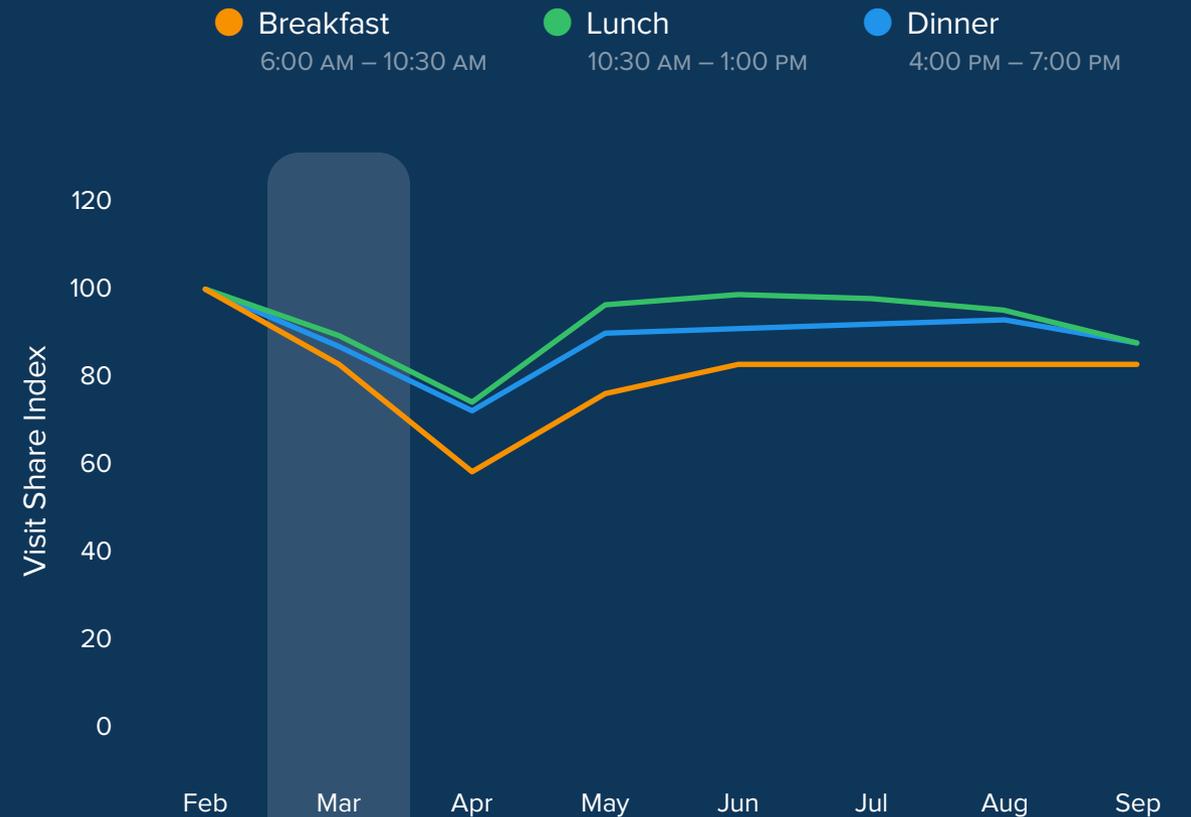


TREND #2

Traffic patterns will stabilize at a new level of normal

Though 2020 had many brands gearing up for the “breakfast wars,” that all changed when safer-at-home policies eliminated morning commutes and forced brands to pivot to menu innovations + new offerings like meal kits to win back share of stomach. Be prepared to continue innovating to meet consumer needs in each stage of the pandemic.

Visit share declined drastically when the pandemic was declared in March 2020

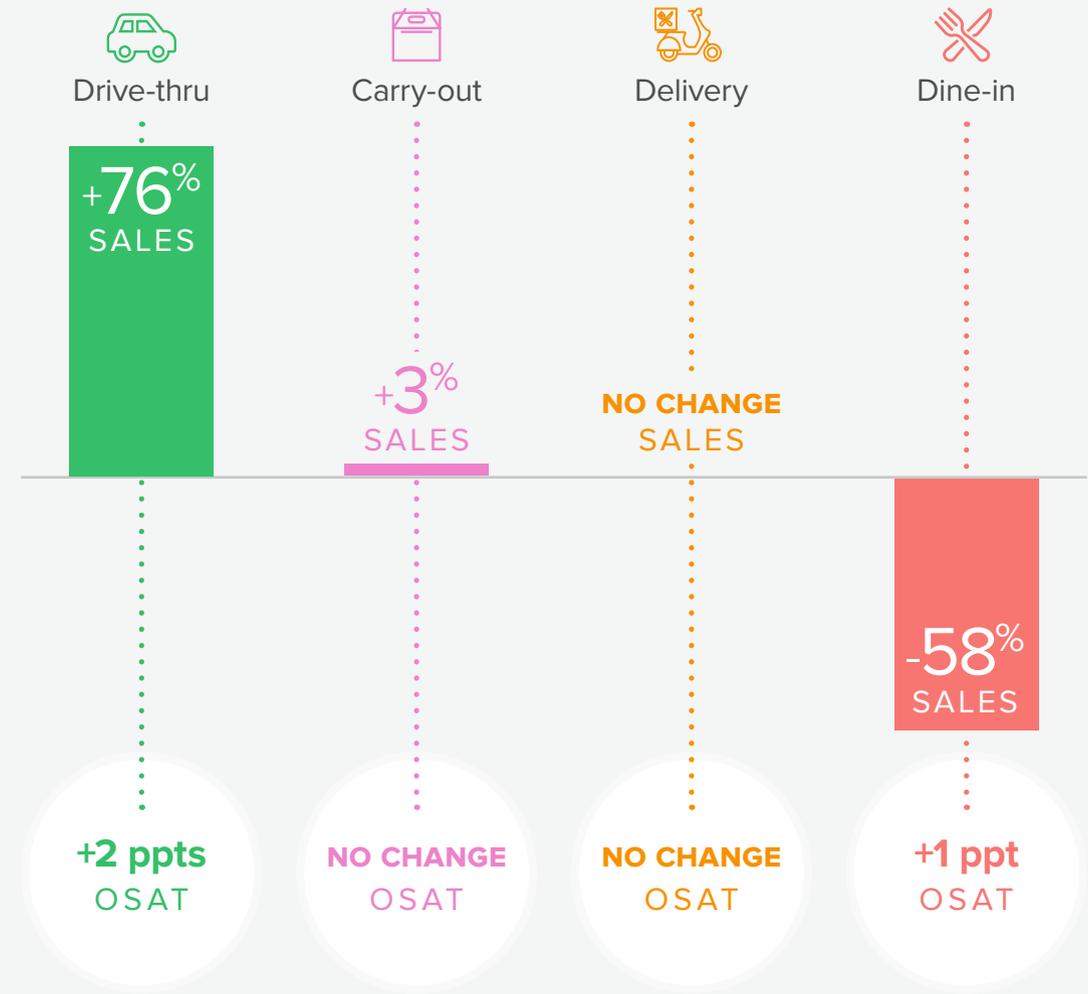


TREND #3

Off-premise orders will continue to drive revenue

With dine-in traffic remaining well below pre-COVID levels, brands have turned to drive-thru, curbside pickup, carryout, and delivery as primary touchpoints — where satisfaction typically lags the dine-in experience. Take the time to identify operational efficiencies that can elevate each touchpoint and curb customer churn.

Usage rates + Overall Satisfaction (OSAT) across channels since onset of pandemic

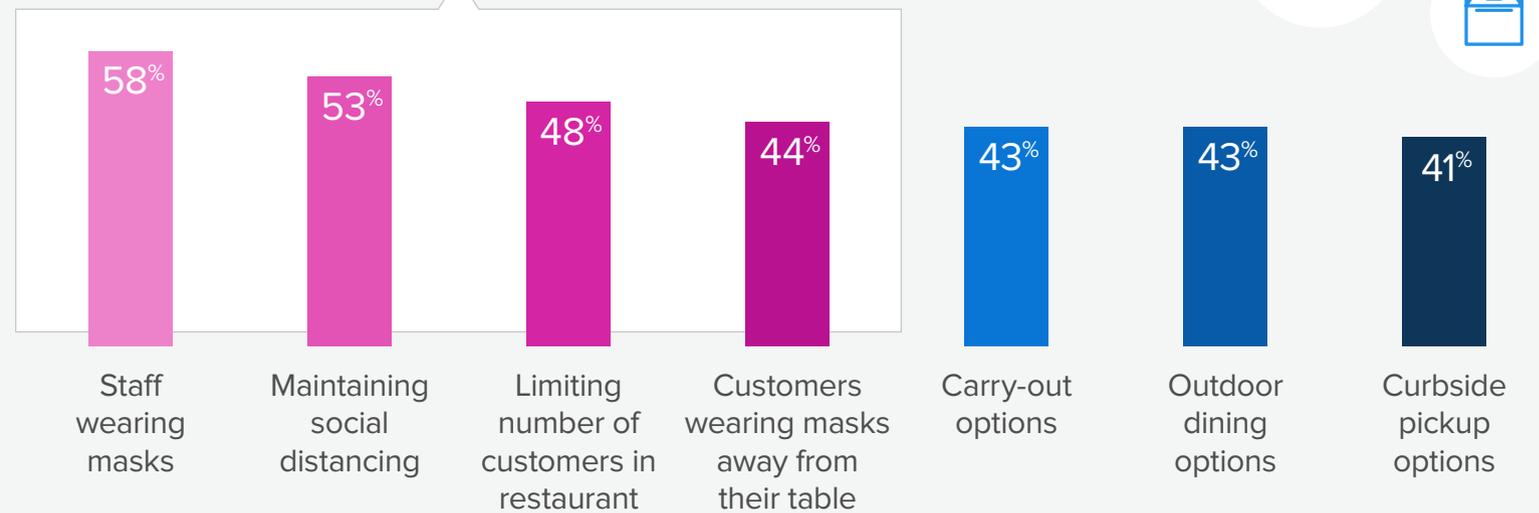


TREND #4

Health concerns will remain a driving force behind purchase decisions + brand perception

With more than half of customers worried about catching COVID when visiting a restaurant, service expectations zero in on heightened health + safety standards. As pandemic weariness sets in, take steps to reinvigorate your team's focus on the health + safety measures that matter to customers.

PPE + distance from other customers are most important when consumers are deciding to visit a full-service restaurant



3 takeaways to help restaurants improve CX in 2021

1 Focus on accuracy + speed

With the uptick in digital engagement and off-premise dining, delivering on satisfaction means getting orders right and out the door quickly.

2 Make it seamless

As more customers embrace mobile as their go-to touchpoint, brands must accelerate their digital transformation strategies + create a differentiated user experience.

3 Prioritize contactless experiences

With the rapid growth of off-premise orders driven by heightened health + safety concerns, restaurants need to revamp operational strategies to meet and exceed customers' rising expectations.

Want to know what steps brands are taking to survive + thrive?

Watch this 10-minute Q+A with Firehouse Subs VP of Operations Rich Goodman. He talks about how the famed sandwich brand quickly pivoted to off-premise dining and discusses what lies ahead for the restaurant industry.



[WATCH NOW ▶](#)

As the customer journey changes, stay connected at every turn

SMG works with more than 500 of the world's leading brands—including 85% of NRN's top 20 restaurant brands. By combining end-to-end measurement solutions with integrated reporting tools and hands-on professional services, we help restaurants navigate uncertainty with precision and adapt with agility.

To learn more, visit smg.com/request-a-demo.

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SMG's interactive XM playbook lays out restaurant-specific recommendations to help brands set priorities, stay on-task, + evolve their experience management strategy throughout the various stages of the pandemic.



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