

## Impact of COVID 19 on the business of Home Bakers in Pune

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### Abstract

It is undeniable that coronavirus has severely impacted the world economy, and the victims of this pandemic are from the MSME sector. Home bakers are not an exception to this. 'Home baker' is the widely used term for entrepreneurs who sell bakery products made in their own homes. They serve personalised and unique cakes and other baker's delights as per customers' needs by attending and preparing each order separately, whether it is related to the design of a cake, price, or packaging. Their uncompromising quality, affordable price structure, made-to-order operations, and a wide range of customised products have taken the bakery market to an ultimate level of business. Since it based on word-of-mouth has faced many challenges during the lockdown period. In India, the lockdown was enforced in mid of March 2020 resulted in cancelled orders, unused stock of supplies, and even returned advances. Though the lockdown has created some economic constraints, it has enabled the home bakers to come up with new innovative ideas of business. Hence, this research study will present the challenges faced by the home bakers in the lockdown period as well as new ideas of business when the restrictions enforced in Pune.

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### Keywords:

Home baking;  
COVID 19;  
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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Bakery Business in India

Bakery products are an integral part of the Indian Food Industry. Though the bread and biscuit do not fall under the list of essential commodities, have found great acceptance in India. Bakery items such as cakes and pastries are still part of the upper class. Bakery products in India started developing in the British Era to meet the needs of the British Army. Hence, Kolkata became the first centre of producing bakery products even before Mumbai, to cater to the needs of army personnel. World War II is the crucial factor for the evolving bakery industry in India as supplies from overseas were reduced which helped the industry to experience key-changes. The modern bakery products are consumed along with tea, coffee, or milk as a complementary food. Bakery items are also considered as staple diet as it provides supplementary nutrition in low-cost price. One of the major reasons for gaining popularity in such products among all is that these products are easy, convenient, and ready to eat form. In the food industry of India, bakery plays a vital role in economic development as the abundant use of wheat and other products are involved in the production of bakery items. Capital investment in this business is far lower as compared with other capital intensive industries in India. That's why, there are approximately 75,000 bakery units all over India from MSME sector.

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### 1.2. History of Pune's Bakery Industry

Pune, also known as "Oxford of the East" is widely known as "IT Capital of India" and "Automobile hub of India" has been building modern industry against the backdrop of its traditions, of education and administration. Despite of industrial renaissance the city is considered as educational centre in India, with approximately 50% of the total international students in the country are studying in Pune City. Pune has a great historical significance, too. The earliest reference to Pune is found in 8th century's copper inscriptions. After defeating Yadavas, Pune was under Muslim Regime. In the Muslim Culture, Naans and Roaths are used widely in the months of Ramzan, Moharrum and Safar. Though Muslim regimes ruled Pune for about 350 years there is no evidence that they established Bakery industry in Pune. In the Pune region, there is evidence of the bakery business since the 18th Century.

Post-independence from the British Rule, the bakery business started growing at a pace and Maharashtra State was on the top of the list with a total of 690 bakery units, according to the survey in 1992. There was only one bakery unit serving 46,000 Puneites in the 1740s. And today, the number has crossed 400 bakery units (including small & large) serving 3.5 million Puneites. It has observed from the data that one bakery unit serves almost 8000 residents of Pune City. In Europe, it has considered that for every 1000 population there should be one bakery unit. Considering this ratio, Pune City should have been 3500 bakeries, but since the bread is not an essential commodity in India the number of bakery units is lesser than the European Standard.

### 1.3. Home Bakers: Concept & Demand in Pune

Home bakers in Pune started increasing about a decade ago due to change in the demands and trends of the market. This is due to a change in lifestyle or culture. The birthdays and anniversaries became an event. And to celebrate such events "Cake" happened to be a crucial element. The simple cake began turning into multi-layered ones. There were very few bakeries in Pune providing the bakery delights other than just bread and biscuits. The demands of the market started evolving and coping up with such high demands became difficult for the bakery units in Pune City. That gives birth to the "Home Bakers." Home baker is a concept that is widely used in today's era to an entrepreneur who is a free-lancer, caters to the need of the customers. He/she may not be a professional baker but their hobby and instincts stimulate them to be creative and innovative. The women are leading in this business as they are god gifted with two major abilities that are essential for the business – creativity & imagination. The home bakers majorly serve cakes for various occasions. Along with cakes they also serve cookies, bread, chocolates as per demand. Customisation is the key feature of home bakers. They provide customers with super-customised, sometimes signature cakes and other bakery delights. This business initially was not considered as the main source of income. Amateurs or non-professionals used to do this business for the hobby as well as to earn extra income. Since the demand for bakery products has augmented the professional bakers are turned into home bakers and non-professionals are undergoing training to upgrade their skills required for it. Thus, home baking has turned into main source of income to many in the city.

### 1.4. Objectives

1. To study the various challenges faced by the home bakers during the lockdown.
2. To identify various strategies used by home bakers in the lockdown.

### 1.5. Significance of the study

Home baking, though initially started to cherish hobby and earn additional penny, now has turned into a business. As the name suggests 'Home Baker' is not yet considered as commercial business, but plays an important role in the bakery industry. The business backed by hobby and passion has great scope in the market as cakes, pastries, biscuits & cookies have become every day's food items. The 'Cake' is an integral part of birthdays, anniversaries, farewells and such occasions that has increased demand for it. Not only frosted or decorated cakes, but even small cakes such as muffins & tea cakes are in a demand. Biscuits and cookies are treated as complementary or accompanying food items to tea and coffee which starts the day of most of the Indians. This business is sustaining in the market based on one key principle i.e. customisation. Unlike other commercial bakeries, home bakers are not keeping their inventory on shelves. They produce goods as per order.

The pandemic of coronavirus has a great impact on the business of home bakers. Hence, the main aim of this study is to find out the impact of coronavirus and the lockdown due to pandemic on the business. As well as to identify which strategies did the home bakers used in the lockdown period to deliver safe and hygienic products to their customers. This study also presents the challenges faced by the home bakers during the lockdown and the impact on the sales due to unanticipated lockdown enforced in India.

### 1.6. Scope & Limitations of the study

This study pertains to the impact of COVID 19 and due to which the challenges or obstacles faced by the home bakers in the lockdown period. Researchers have made a sincere effort to identify the impact of the pandemic of coronavirus on the business as well as various strategies and precautions implemented in the operations by the home bakers to provide safe, hygienic, yet delicious bakery products to the customers. This study also present experiences of few home bakers of the business during lockdown period.

This study has some limitations. The participants of the research are the home bakers of Pune. The total sample size was designed for 75 responses out of which 59 have been recorded using Google Forms. This becomes 79% of the total sample, hence can be considered as reliable. The study is limited to the home bakers only and no commercial bakeries were involved in the research study. Home bakers based in Pune were targeted and hence does not have any relevance to any other location elsewhere. The Central Government of India enforced lockdown from mid-March till end of May, thus, findings of this research may not apply to any other period or even same period elsewhere in India, or any other period for the same area and even to the same home bakers. The sample size may be too small as compared with total population of home bakers in Pune. However, researchers have put their best efforts to reach out maximum home bakers during the restriction period.

### 1.7. Research Methodology

The presented study is an applied research. Quantitative approach has been used while conducting this research study. The targeted audience for the research were home bakers from the Pune. Method used for sampling is purposive and judgemental. This research includes Primary & Secondary data. Primary data was collected through structured questionnaire about the impact of COVID 19 on the business of home bakers using Google Forms. These forms were sent using email and other social media channels and the analysis has been done based on the responses. 53 responses were recorded out of 75 i.e. targeted sample size, which is almost 71% response rate. Secondary data was collected through various websites, blogs, news articles and reports.

### 1.8. Literature Review

1. The blog written on the website of Dawn (Mar 2020), "Tips for bakeries in COVID 19 environment" has mentioned the key business strategies to maintain the customers, work smarter and gain more out of less & limited resources to adjust in "new normal" world. Social media, which is economical in cost and has a positive impact on the business, to be used to reach the market on a large scale. Offering delivery (if feasible) within a certain radius of the location should be provided, which increases the revenue. Innovation is the key and using creative, innovative ideas with the help of technology keep revenue coming in.
2. The newspaper article in The Economist (8 April 2020) 'home baking is on the rise' presents the statistics of Nielsen – a market research company – in France, there is a sudden increase in the sale of flour by 160% and soap by 220%. The company has not mentioned the figures for the flour elsewhere, though the journalists for The Economist have reported the scarcity of bakery supplies for homemade bread, cakes & buns.
3. Shambhavi Anand (12 May 2020) mentioned in the column of Economic Times that there is a 60% increase in the sale of bakery related items such as baking soda, cocoa powder, and other ingredients as lockdown has made people to dust off their hidden skills of baking.
4. Aurelia Lambrechts (May 2020) has presented some tips in her blog on 'philosophy-of-yum.' In that, she has specified hints to increase the business of home bakers. Here she quotes that the business of home bakers will be going to get affected as it won't be generating revenue as usual. Hence, home bakers should try doing things differently, which will attract customers. Further, she mentions that the bakers should communicate to their clientele what are the precautions and safety measures they are taking to keep the products safe and hygienic. Alternative income to bakery businesses like conducting bakery classes online will also be a good and innovative idea, so the revenue doesn't stop.
5. Article by Puratos on their web portal (2020) 'Adapt bakery's services in times of COVID-19', there is a list of strategies the bakers should use whilst the lockdown period. In this article, it has mentioned that the consumers' needs and behaviour are changing promptly. Therefore, the approach towards the business should also be changed. Optimising the in-house management such as inventory management, hygiene measures, etc. should be given prime importance. Innovative ideas such as loyalty bonus points, delivery of goods, and being in touch with the customers (maybe through Facebook or YouTube live) is crucial.
6. 'Psychology-backed reason why so many people are baking during the lockdown' - a newspaper article in Times of India (11 May 2020), states various aspects of home baking. In this pandemic, many in the society are facing depression. Making a loaf of bread or maybe a cake has psychological factors behind it. When people are feeling uneasy or stressed, they hasten to comfort food. Bread & Sugar are the comfort

food that act as a soothing agent in stressful situations. Baking and cooking are therapeutic way as it requires a lot of patience, efforts, and skills which balances the anxiety or stress levels.

7. The New Indian Express (18 June 2020) – Hyderabad's home bakers continue to whip delights amid COVID-19 lockdown. In this article, the survey of home bakers in Hyderabad have presented. In spite of lockdown and hurdles in logistics and raw material supply many home bakers have achieved success in their business. New customers were added and the demand for such home-baked items was increased extensively. Innovation in the use of raw material such as using substitutes for scarce items without compromising on the taste and the quality was the crucial factor in the lockdown.
8. Mallika Bhagat (07 May 2020) has stated in the news article of Hindustan Times that 'Sweet nothings: Home bakers whip up and deliver delights amid lockdown' the home bakers in Delhi are facing troubles to meet the higher demands in limited resources. Still, they have not shut down; instead, they are trying to cope-up with the demand in the market by using some new innovative ways to prevent supply from being obsolete. With all the precautions about safety and hygiene, Delhi's home bakers are offering no contact delivery of their delicacies as well as pick-ups from their source locations.

## 2. Data Analysis & Interpretation

### 2.1. Home Bakers of Pune

To collect data about the home bakers in Pune, a structured questionnaire using Google Forms was created and circulated through email and other social media channels. In this questionnaire basic contact information and some general questions regarding their business were also included. In their response, it has proved that the women are leading in the numbers of home bakers in Pune. **Figure 1 (A)**. The age group of 18–25 years that means young adults (Gen Z) are greater in the numbers. **Figure 1 (B)**. The second largest group is 26–35 years of age which can be termed as millennials (Gen Y).

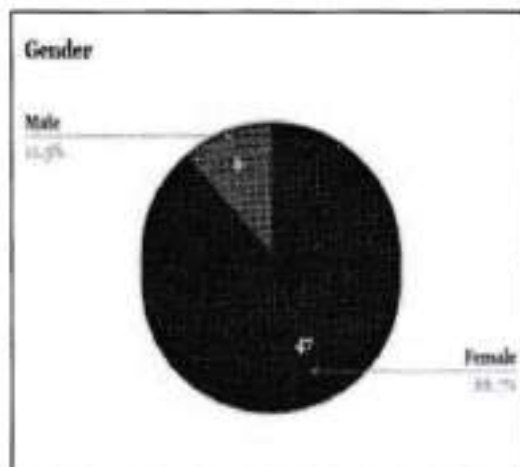


Figure 1 (A)

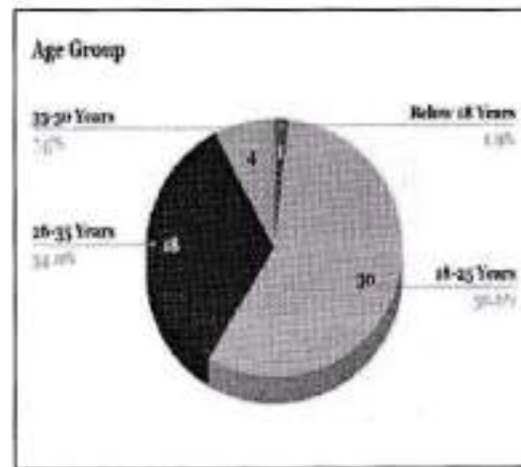


Figure 1 (B)

For this research activity, Pune was divided into five zones (refer to the **Figure 2**) – East, West, Central, North & South – to identify the zone in which there are maximum number of home bakers. Except for North Region, the home bakers are in similar numbers in other four regions. **Figure 3**.

The central region covers the area from *Shivajinagar Railway Station* to the south *Deccan Gymkhana, Tilak Road* till *Sarabhaug*. And from *Swargate* to the north *MG Road, GPO* till *Pune Railway Station*. This region also includes all the *Pethas* in Pune. The East Region has two major highways that links prominent cities of Maharashtra – Ahmednagar & Solapur – one of it is a National Highway while other is a State Highway. *NH 65* is a highway that connects Pune and Solapur cities while *SH 27* links Pune & Ahmednagar cities. Apart from it, this region also has *Pune International Airport*. Most of the Five Star hotels are in this region. Hence this region is of great importance from the international clients' perspective. In the West region there are basically all the residential complexes. This region includes *Karve Road, Paud Road*, some part of *Sinhgad Road, Kothrud, Warje* in the south part, and towards north, this region includes *Pune University, Pashan, Audh, Baner, Bavdhan* and *Balewadi Stadium*. The west region also covers *Mumbai-Bangalore Bypass Road* from north to south.

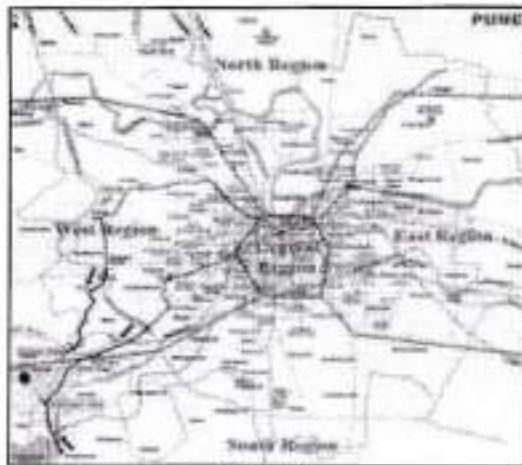


Figure 2

Source: <https://www.istanbul-city-guide.com/map/India/pune-map.aspx>

The north region starts with *Old Mumbai-Pune Highway* and includes *Sangamwadi, Khadaki, Range Hill, Pune Yerawada Jail, Alandi, Vishrantwadi, Dhanori, Dapodi, Chakan*, etc. North-west region has the IT hub i.e. *Hinjewadi Rajiv Gandhi InfoTech Park, Pimpri-Chinchwad*, the sister city of Pune, *Sanghvi*, etc. South region has mostly residential area starting with *Svargate, Parvati, Salisbury Park, Bibwewadi, Padmavati, Kondhwa, Hingane, Wadgaon, Dhayari* and the one of the biggest city/complexes in Pune, '*Nanded City*.' Historical monument like *Sinhgad Fort* is also in the South region of Pune. *The Rajiv Gandhi Zoological Park and Wildlife Research Centre, Katraj* is in south region, too. Pune's lifeline that is *Khadakwasla Dam* is towards south-west of Pune. The India's *National Defence Academy (NDA)* is also at south-west of Pune, on the banks of *Khadakwasla Dam*.

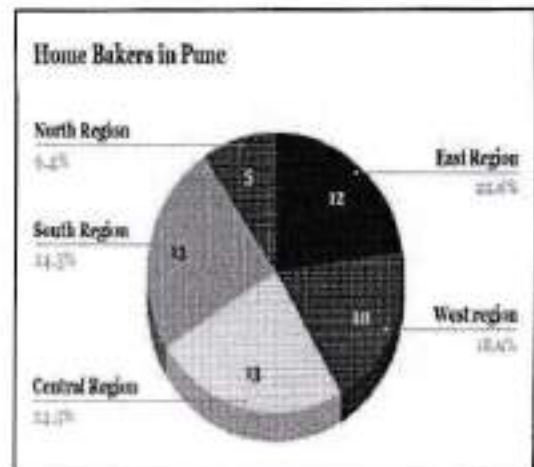


Figure 3



Figure 4 (A)

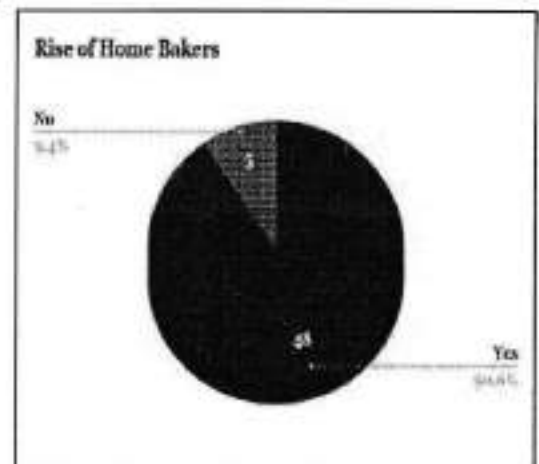


Figure 4 (B)

Most of the home bakers have started the business recently within a span of one year. Almost 47% of the sample have been doing the business more than a year but less than 5 years [refer Figure 4 (A)]. There are few which are in this business for a long while i.e. more than 5 years and most of them are above 25 years of age. Due to the lockdown, the people have started with home baking business as we can see rise of the home bakers in the Figure 4 (B). And hence, the number with less than one year of operations is higher in the statistical presentation.

Stimulus for the business of home baking is to pursue hobby and passion. The lock-down has also helped the individuals to pursue and develop their hobby for baking. 72% of the sample have entered into the business to cultivate the hobby of baking and the passion for fashioned cakes & cookies. Professional education & training is vital in preparing such high skilled desserts. Figure 5 (A) presents the statistics about the stimuli to enter into the business. Earning extra penny is always a motive to start a new business, but since this business requires high set of skills which can be impossible without dedication and passion for it.

Baking or cooking is an art. Hence, making a frosted/iced cake requires patience, dedication and lots of practise. One cannot achieve it in a day. It requires good observation and practise. Patience and dedication are intrinsic factors. One major external factor which is required for the baking is the formal education and

training. Figure 5 (B) exactly explains it. 74% of home bakers have undergone a formal training in which they have learnt the crux of bakery.

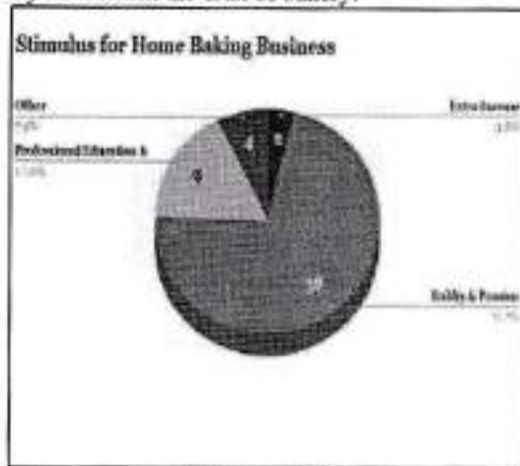


Figure 5 (A)



Figure 5 (B)

## 2.2. Psychological-based Reasons

While coronavirus has created fear about the future in the minds of people, it has also made people start entrepreneurial activity like baking at home and thus increasing the number of home bakers that many were not aware of. From a simple muffin to a delicately iced cake, people have invested their free time (due to lockdown) in learning a new skill. There are some psychology-backed reasons why people have turned to produce bakery products at home. Figure 6. Bread and sugar are considered comfort food (refer article – Psychology-backed reasons, *The Times of India*, May 11, 2020). When a human being feels a stressful situation, he/she rushes to comfort food. Hence, the art of bakery has become a way to distress and self-soothe for people. Consuming sugar in a stressed situation, regulates mood, appetite, and social behaviour. People feel happier after consuming sweet delicacies. Likewise, bakery delights also work to fix the body to be “happy” temporarily. The art of baking is a conscious effort and require a lot of patience. When somebody is putting their efforts and time sincerely in the construction of something positive, it reduces stress and anxiety levels. Hence, cooking and baking also act as a therapeutic medium.

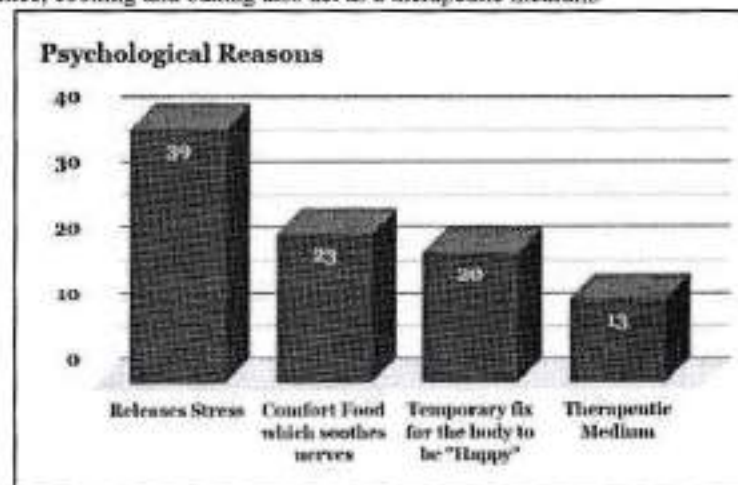


Figure 6

## 2.3. Revenue Generation

The below statistical charts represent the financial probability of the business. As there is larger group of home bakers under the age of 25 years, it provides an extra income opportunity to them. Almost 56% of the total sample [Figure 7 (A)] earns below ₹ 5000 per month that indicates economic potential of the business. However, we cannot overlook the 44% of the sample, too. There are few home bakers who have turned it into their main income source. Some of the home bakers are producing the bakery products as per demand and selling it through a small outlet. To operate an outlet, more manpower is needed. Thus, they have some employees who assists them in their business. Otherwise, all home bakers are solely operating their entire business. [Figure 7 (B)]

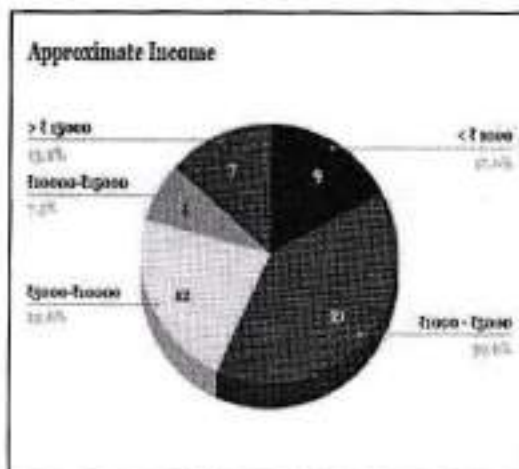


Figure 7 (A)

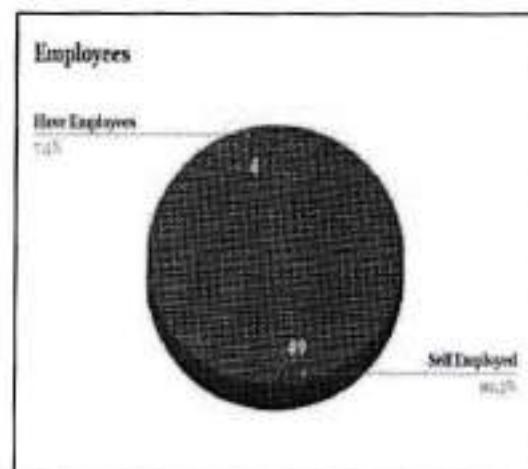


Figure 7 (B)

#### 2.4. Impact of COVID 19

The worldwide outbreak of coronavirus has severely affected on the business of home bakers. In initial phases of lockdown, the home bakers have faced many challenges and therefore the impact was negative. As people started to cope up with the situation, the business was again on the go and starts flourishing. This was due to curtailment in the production and supply chain of bakery items. The demand for bakery items were at its peak and home bakers got a good opportunity to cover the losses due to lockdown. Hence, we can see a mixed impact of COVID 19 on the business of home bakers [refer Figure 8 (A) & (B)].

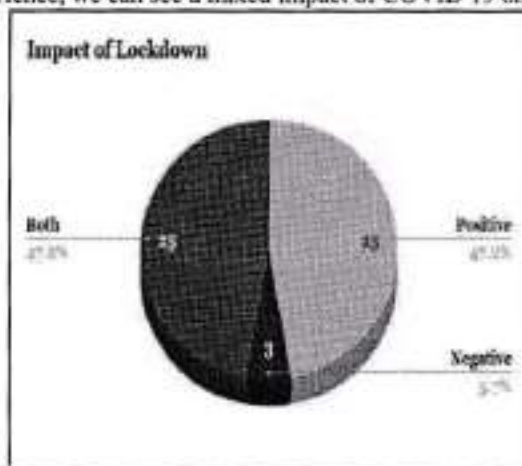


Figure 8 (A)

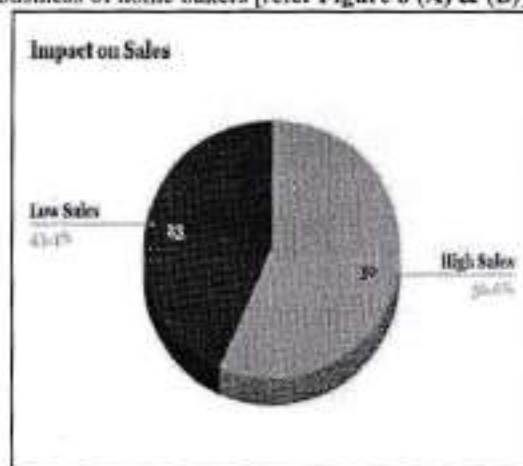


Figure 8 (B)

#### 2.5. Challenges faced by Home Bakers in Pune

The sudden lockdown due to coronavirus has made the home bakers face various challenges (Figure 9). The major challenge was the scarcity of raw material. Bakery products require some special ingredients which are not available at Indian Grocers' Shop. These ingredients are available in supermarket stores & due to COVID 19 fear, all the supermarket stores were closed. This resulted in a shortage of supply & eventually, the cost of raw materials was on rise. Also, the customers were scared of buying food stuffs which were prepared by somebody else. This perception of customers has a huge impact on the business of home bakers in Pune. To change the perception of customers, home bakers had to invest a high amount of cost in the sanitation & other preventive measures. In initial phases of lockdown, the home bakers have faced some logistical challenges, too. As the petroleum fuel was reserved only for the essential services such as police, medical practitioners & staff, press media, administrative personnel & essential food commodities (grocery, dairy, fruits & vegetables), the home bakers couldn't offer delivery of bakery products to the customers. Thus, due to all above mentioned reasons, the sales were affected and home bakers experienced a huge list of cancelled orders.

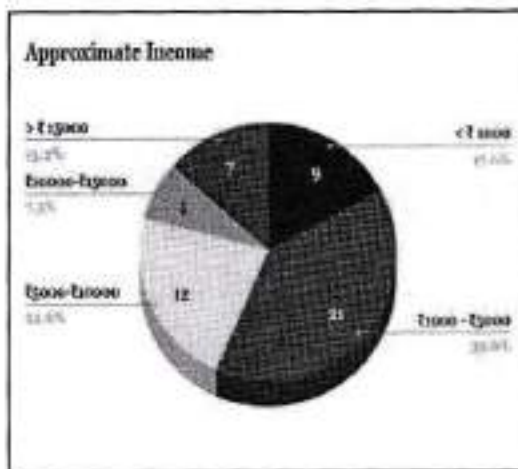


Figure 7 (A)

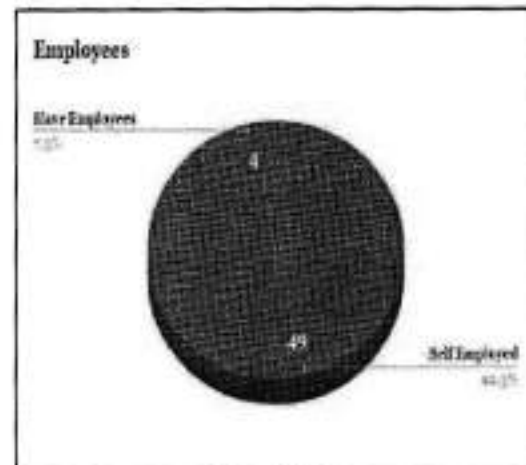


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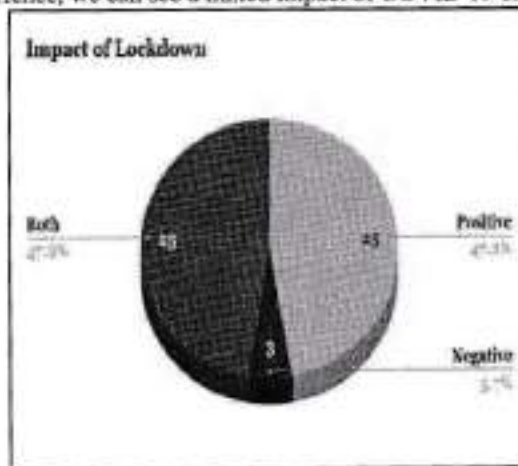


Figure 8 (A)

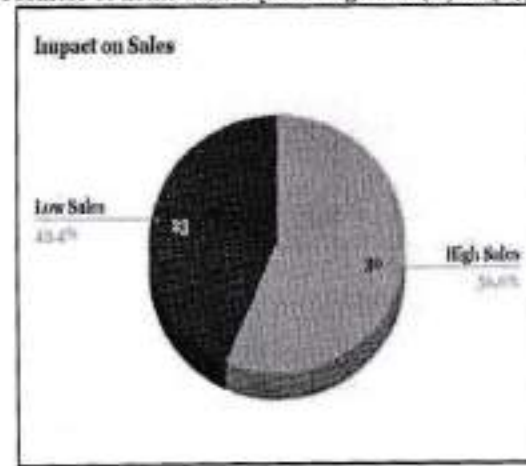


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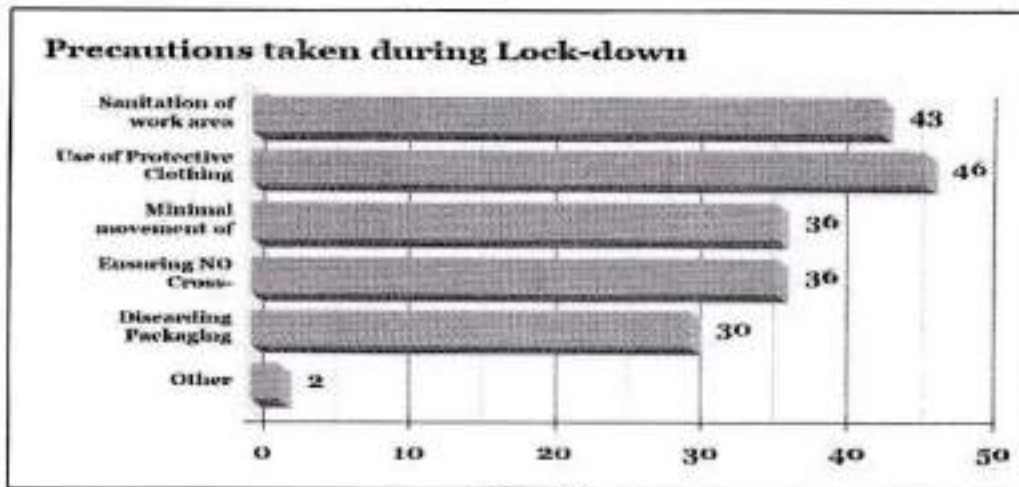


Figure 11

### 2.8. Various Strategies implemented in Lock-down

The strategy is a plan of action to achieve organisational goals. As the nationwide lockdown enforced, pause all the business operations. Hence, the home baking business, too. When the market started to cope up with the situation, home bakers have implemented some strategies to regain customers and so business to cover the backlog of income; these various implemented strategies presented in Figure 12. Though the lockdown has not lifted entirely in Pune, some restrictions have been relaxed in certain areas to allow business operations to take place. The home bakers were following strict hygiene and sanitation practices. These were communicated through various channels to create trust in the minds of customers. Contact-less pick-ups & deliveries were also offered by the home bakers to effectuate "new-normal" norms. The list of products was revised to start the operations after the lockdown period, to present a variety of products that will suit the "new-normal" demand of the market.

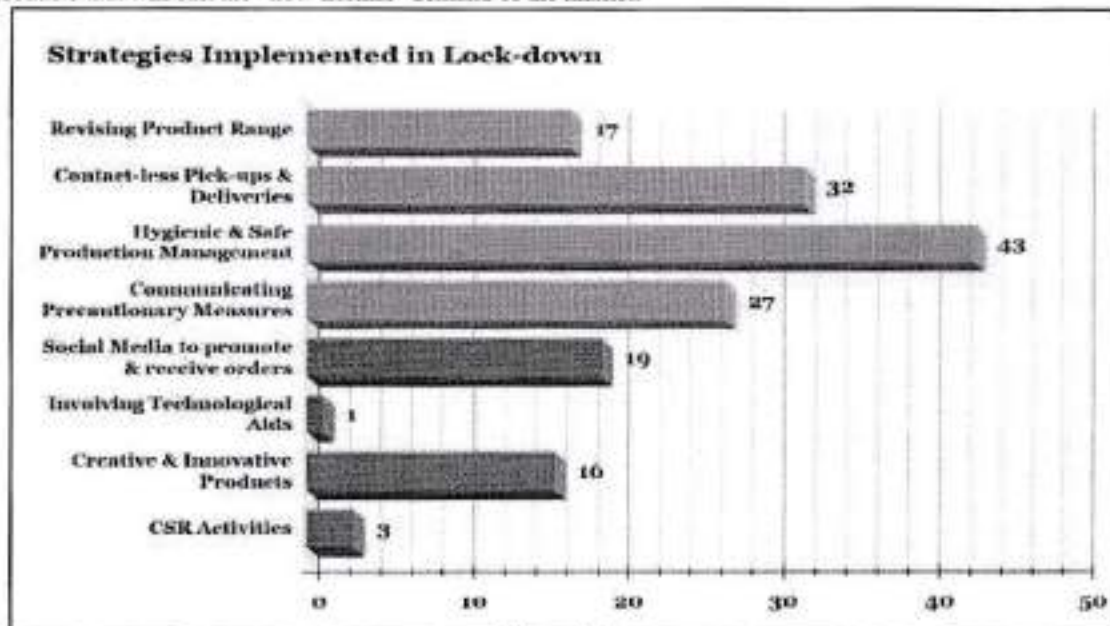


Figure 12

There were some unique strategies carried out by the home bakers to attract customers; these presented in pink-coloured bar charts. The most effective platform of this era, to promote the business is Social Media. Home bakers have used this platform to advertise as well as to receive orders from the customers. By revising product range, they have also included some creative, innovative, and attractive, mouth-watering delicacies in the menu to attract more customers. Few of them have also worked socially to perform their duty towards the country & man-kind.

### 3. Results & Recommendations

The above research study has proved that the home baking business has great significance from an economic perspective. Maximum home bakers are women in society and from the age group of 18-25 years. The pandemic of coronavirus has resulted in the rise of home bakers. Most of the home bakers have started the business within one year (due to lockdown). And almost 47% are into this business ranging from one year to five years. Though the stimulus for this business is hobby and passion, most of the home bakers have completed formal training, and 62% of the sample are certified. Lockdown caused by COVID 19 has helped the people to pursue their hobby and passion for baking. During the lockdown period, many have invested their free time in learning a new skill. Since the bakery is an art, it requires passion, dedication, and patience. And when somebody is putting their efforts into creating something positive, it works as a therapeutic medium. Hence, the art of baking has become a way to release stress, regulate mood, and social behaviour. That is why it has some psychology-based reasons. This business may not be financially sound to operate, but if backed by passion and dedication, one can earn ₹ 5000 to ₹ 15000 per month or even more. However, current statistics reveal that 56% of the population is grossing up to ₹ 5000 per month.

Home baking business is not an exception to the severely affected businesses due to COVID 19. The nation-wide lockdown enforced in India had resulted in many restrictions and challenges to the home bakers. But the demand for the bakery products was at its peak home bakers turned this opportunity in their favour. Thus, the impact of lockdown on the business is mixed. The sales were down in initial phases of lockdown, nevertheless as demand was on its rise, the sales figures were thriving as home bakers could manage to earn the revenue lost due to the lockdown. One of the crucial challenges, due to the lockdown, is the scarcity of raw materials. The supermarket stores were closed during the lockdown as a preventive measure from spreading the virus, which resulted in a shortage of supply of bakery related ingredients. Although, many of the home bakers had already stocked-up their inventory that ensured the smooth operations. The deficiency of supply in the market of bakery related ingredients and supplies led to a rise in the price of commodities. Also, the perception of customers affected sales in the early stages of lockdown. The cancellation of orders has created stress within the home bakers, as they had to return the advances, while some offered a credit note to save future sales. Home bakers had to invest a high amount of funds in sanitation that has helped them to change the perception of the customers.

There are various strategies implemented in the operations by the home bakers. Observing the strict hygiene and sanitation practices in the production and communicating the safety measures taken while producing the bakery items was the widely used strategy by the home bakers. This strategy was not only to attract customers but also to create "trust" in them. Contact-less pick-ups & deliveries were also offered by the home bakers to effectuate "new-normal" norms. The existing menu had revised with the affordable and suitable for the "new-normal" demand of the market. This menu has an ample variety of bakery products. Some home bakers have also used a few very unique strategies such as using social media platforms to advertise the business that helps reach the greater geographical region and to receive orders as well. The new, revised menu had included certain creative and attractive, mouth-watering bakery delicacies to attract customers. Very few home bakers have worked socially to perform their duty towards the country and have helped the needy people with essentials to sustain in such hard situations.

Today, the home baking business is not considered a commercial business; but it has the potential to be one as the baking is one of the professional arts. Though the business stimulus is hobby and passion, the potential, as well as existing home bakers, should seek professional training and courses which will advance their skills and knowledge. Also, it helps to widen the scope of business. Revenue from the business can be improved by exercising unique strategies and novel products. Cancellations need to be handled in such a way to secure sales. Various innovative tactics must be implemented to avoid cancellation. In this advertising world, home bakers should take their business online that helps to operate and promote the business functions. Social media and similar online channels should be used at its best. Also, various technological advancements such as apps, cloud-based systems, inventory management systems should be used to monitor the business operations. The guest database needs to be maintained which helps generate leads. Business strategies should be flexible that can be executed in miserable situations, too. The seasonal offers or limited-period offers if implemented may help to boost sales. In short, the home baking business has a tremendous scope and demand in the near future, if operated in the best possible manner. The primary motive of the business must be, supply unique, quality products in the market to comply with the demand in a professional manner.

### 4. Conclusion

After completing this research activity, the researcher has drawn some conclusions. Bakery products play a significant role in the Indian food industry. The home baking business has immense potential in the market; hence, one who has a passion for baking should pursue professional education in the field of the bakery before commencing the business. Due to the lockdown of COVID 19, the business of home bakers

has severely affected. The primary phase of lockdown had resulted in low sales and cancelled orders; however, the demand for bakery products in the market boomed in the later stages. The increased demand has helped the home bakers to cover the backlog of sales. When the restrictions were lifted, home bakers have used various strategies to attract customers back to their businesses. These strategies are in association with government norms and regulations. They have also implemented some unique strategies to attract more customers, thereby increasing sales.

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