

Digital Skills and Research Method

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Topic: Why are Britain's curry house closing?

Introduction.... 2

Rationale.... 2

Secondary Research.... 3

Article 1

Primary Research.... 6

Interviews

Conclusion.... 7

Introduction

In this report I will discuss the main reasons/factors as to why the curry industry has been struggling in the last decade. Why has one of the oldest businesses decreases rapidly over the years? To investigate this topic I conducted my own primary research by visiting an Indian restaurant known by the local community and doing one to one interviews with the owners, staff and the within the restaurant. Along with using my own gathered information I have also used information from secondary resources (such as articles and reports), this then allowed me to conclude the overall reasons for the decline in the curry industry.

Rationale

My main objective was to see the main cause of the decline in curry houses over the last decade. I used both primary and secondary research to help me compose a summary of reasons for my objective. For the secondary research I used two articles from well-known news sources that had written articles on my subject. Along with that I conducting four interviews with people who are involved in the curry industry as my primary research.

The reason as to why I decided to use the decline in curry houses as my subject was due to me participating in recent campaigns in relation to this subject. These campaigns were organised by BCA 1960 (Bangladesh Catering Association UK), also organising occasional meetings which I attended.

Save Curry Industry Campaign July 10th 2018

<http://bca1960.com/portfolio/save-curry-industry-campaign-on-10th-july-2018>



Secondary Research:

Article 1

UK Curry Restaurants in Crisis as Immigration Rules Keep Out Chefs

Reference:

[https://www.clarkslegal.com/Blog/Post/UK Curry Restaurants in Crisis as Immigration Rules Keep Out Chefs](https://www.clarkslegal.com/Blog/Post/UK_Curry_Restaurants_in_Crisis_as_Immigration_Rules_Keep_Out_Chefs)

Afeefah Shabbir 05 May 2017

The BBC reported last week that an increasing number of Indian restaurants in Scotland were closing due to strict immigration rules which are preventing restaurants from recruiting top chefs from India. The curry industry in the UK which is worth £5bn to the British economy and annually employs 200,000 people, has been in crisis since the government tightened its Tier 2 visa category which resulted in a decline in the number of visas granted to chefs from outside the EEA. Many in the industry have argued that the government's 'racist' immigration policy is preventing their businesses from expanding.

The government's intentions to train British chefs instead was ridiculed after its £1.75m "curry college" scheme only attracted 16 people out of 70 places. With growth in online apps such as Hungry House and Just Eat, Hans Ram, Chief Executive of the catering recruitment agency 'Goldstar Chefs' believes the government's approach to the Indian restaurant sector is just "wrong".

Skilled Chefs under the Tier 2 General visa category

In the majority of cases, migrants sponsored under the Tier 2 General category can only work in a skilled occupation at or above Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) level 6 or above. Chefs fall under SOC code 5434, which is an occupation skilled to RQF level 4. However, due to the shortage of skilled

chefs in the UK, there is an exception which allows restaurants to sponsor chefs from outside the EEA – but only if:

The pay is at least £30,000 per year (more than the average salary for curry chefs);

The candidate has at least 5 or more years' relevant experience in a role of at least equivalent status to the one they are entering;

The job is not in either a fast food outlet, a standard fare outlet or an establishment which provides a takeaway service;

The job is in one of the following roles:

Executive chef (limited to one per establishment)

Head chef (limited to one per establishment)

Sous chef (limited to one for every four kitchen staff)

Specialist chef (limited to one per speciality per establishment)

In addition to this, employers will need to bear in mind that after working for 5 years in the UK, the chef will be applying for Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) and to meet the eligibility criteria at that time, they will need to be earning at least over £35,000 (this threshold is expected to increase again next year).

Immigration rules for chefs – 'Total Insanity'

Ajmal Mushtaq, award winning owner of Mushtaq's in Hamilton, believes that the harsh rules are 'total insanity' and gives the example of holding two portions of a curry, one on a plate and one in a take-away carton – although the same dish, a restaurant serving from a carton wouldn't be able to sponsor a chef from abroad.

Ajmal Mushtaq is not the only critic of the Tier 2 rules; Lord Bilimoria, the chairman of Cobra Beer and a Member of Parliament's curry committee which advises on government policy, is of the opinion, that many restaurants are closing and many more are struggling to survive due to tough immigration rules.

Speaking to the Financial Times last year, he said:

“The only reason that curry has become so popular is thanks to pioneering entrepreneurs who moved to every high street and opened restaurants as complete strangers. That has not been appreciated.”

What next for the curry industry?

Curry restaurant owners as an industry, backed the Leave campaign after assurances that Brexit would lead to more visas for South Asian chefs.

Prior to the EU referendum, Priti Patel, International Development Secretary and a Leave campaigner launched a ‘Save the British Curry’ drive as part of her campaign to convince voters to back Britain’s exit from the EU and believed that a Brexit vote would allow the government to relax non-EU rules and “save” British curry houses.

However, one of Theresa May’s first announcements was to rule out an Australian “points-style” immigration system which would allow the curry industry to recruit more staff from South Asia. In addition, the government continues to move forward with its pledge to bring down the net migration target.

Britain’s curry crisis continues in the same way the government continues to hold its ground on training Brits – forgetting their previous scheme to do the same didn’t amount to much.

Primary Research:

Interviews

When I was organising my interviews I had decided to use open questions when interviewing my participants as it would allow me to have as much detail and depth that I would find relevant to my topic. Moreover, the type of interview I chose to have with my participants was a structured interview as I would be reassured that I have control over the interview if at any point the given answer shows no relevance to the topic.

The main question which I based the interview on was ‘What do you think was the reason for the decline in the curry industry in the last decade?’ Overall most of the answers I received from the participants were similar to each other in certain ways, however they all had a different idea for this question.

Arman Ahmed (Owner), Drummond Villa Restaurant, London NW1

“I think that curry houses are decreasing across Britain is because local supermarkets such as ASDA, Morrison’s or Sainsbury’s have started to sell precooked Indian dishes at low prices. This means that any possible customer that is working will prefer to get Indian dishes from there because its local and does not take much of their time, all they have to do is put the meal in the microwave then eat. Other than that I also think it’s because of the staff shortage because people nowadays are changing their profession from working in the food business to working as a mini cab driver for companies such as Uber.”

Redwan Pasha (Owner) Taste of India, London NW1

“The reason why the curry industry is going down in recent years is because the business rates have been increasing over the last decade. This means that curry houses like us aren’t going to be able to afford these rates if business carries on decreasing at this rate. I also, think that it’s to do with the staff shortage since skilled workers who are usually from Bangladeshi or Indian backgrounds are unable to migrate to the UK and start working in this industry as they don’t have a Visa.

I also think it is because curry owners don’t have any facilities or privileges to give to their workers even though they have two weeks holiday every year in comparison to other larger companies they get a minimum of four week of holiday. Moreover, these workers usually have to work long hours (six days a week) for a relatively small pay in comparison to other jobs. Therefore, skilled workers leave this profession causing the staff shortage we face today to occur.”

Abdul Hafiz, (Owner) Khan Battersea Restaurant, London SW11

“Curry businesses are closing down because there is too much competition with larger, more well-known companies within the catering business. People nowadays are not interested in Indian food because the amount of oil and spices we use are not good for them to eat every day. Instead they choose to have different culinary foods such as sushi or Turkish food as they can have it more often without worrying about their body condition after eating it a few times a week.

Another thing is that we, as a curry house industry, are behind in the upcoming technological advances. By that I mean we don't promote ourselves with things we have access to like using social media to advertise our curry house. Most of the owners in the curry industry do not like using technology as they see it as being too complex and prefer to use older methods of promotion such as newspapers.”

Tarek Ahmed (Chef)

“In my opinion the reason why restaurants like ours are closing down in the recent years are to do with the people working in this industry changing their profession and instead working as a mini cab driver for Uber. Some of my colleagues over the years have done so and they became mini cab drivers because they get paid more for less hours plus they can work at times that suit them, there are no fixed hours and 6 days a week like there is when working in a curry house. Changing their profession just gives them higher opportunities than working in a restaurant so there are less chefs and waiters to hire for restaurants like this.”

Conclusion

In conclusion there are many reasons for the decline in the curry house industry the most highlighted factor being the recent shortage of staff that are needed for curry houses. Moreover, the increase in pre-cooked Indian dishes that has been introduced to people by local supermarkets has caused the overall profits of curry house to decrease in the end causing the curry industry to slowly decrease over the last decade. Another significant factor was how there was the increasing trends in healthy eating, dieting and lifestyle within the public of the twenty first century. This then caused people to avoid spending money and eating from Indian restaurants or curry houses as they view it to be too unhealthy (with the oil and carbohydrates involved).