

What location data tells us about COVID-19's impact on dining out



How foot traffic data can help QSRs/CDRs navigate Year 2 of the COVID-19 pandemic

Introduction

While foot traffic to restaurants is still down across major dining dayparts (i.e breakfast, lunch and dinner) and regions, Foursquare identified several notable trends that can help quick-service restaurants (QSRs) and other dining establishments plan for the months ahead.

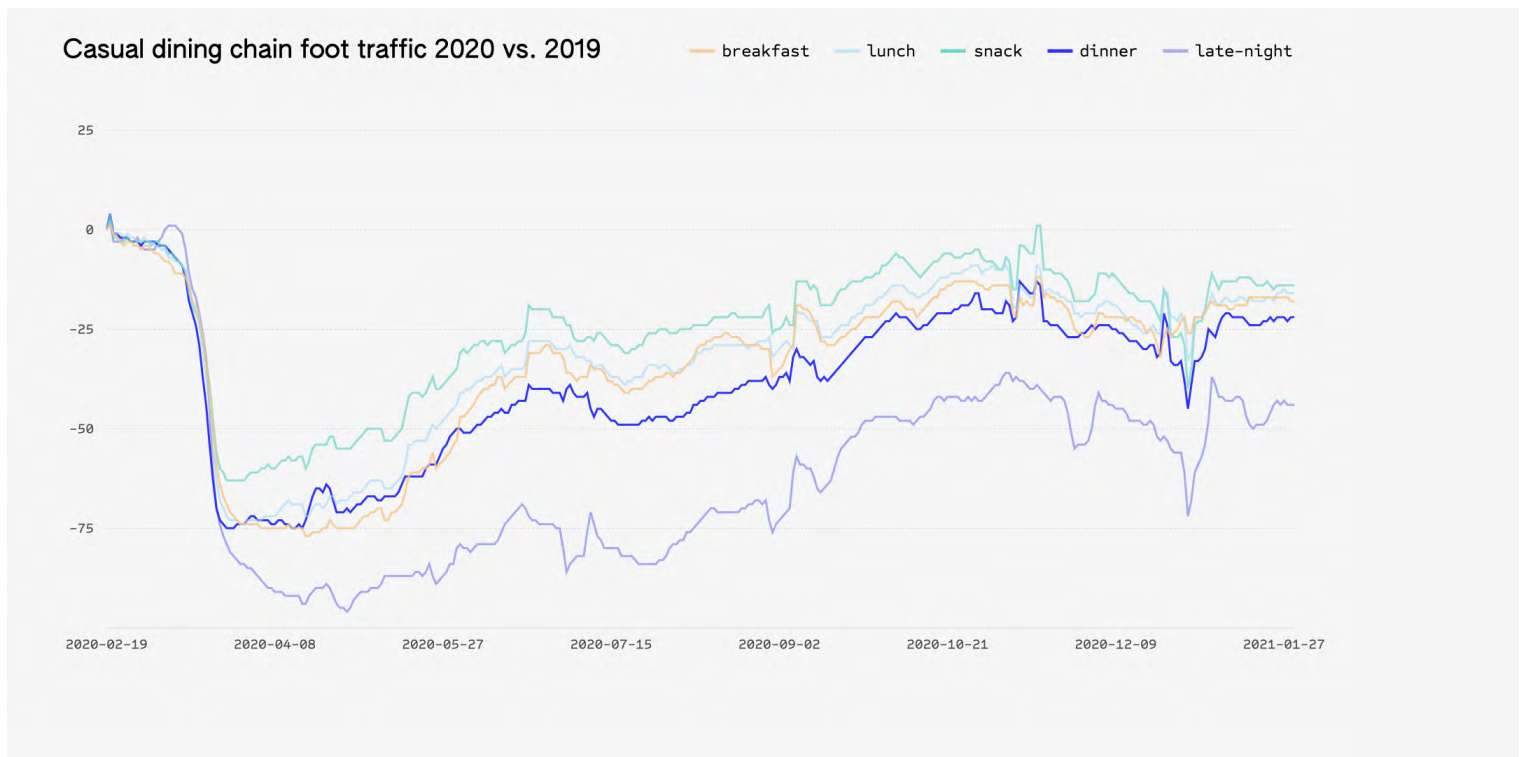
Our methodology: Foursquare analyzes foot traffic patterns from the largest, always-on first party panel of millions of devices. All data is either anonymized, pseudonymized or aggregated, and is normalized against U.S. Census data to remove age, gender and geographical bias. For this study, Foursquare defined breakfast as 6-11am, lunch as 11am-2pm, snack as 2-5pm, dinner as 5-10pm, and late night as 10pm-6am.



Key dining trends to watch:

1. Snacktime is rebounding:

Recently, visits to both casual dining restaurants (CDRs) and quick service restaurants (QSRs) picked back up the most during the 'snack' daypart (between 2pm and 5pm). This could be because consumers are looking to avoid crowds by dining outside of peak mealtimes, or perhaps they're taking advantage of the flexibility of working from home.



2. Late night is still lackluster:

The late night time slot has the slowest recovery for CDRs and QSRs, likely because bars, clubs, and other nightlife entertainment options remain restricted in certain regions and people continue to social distance as much as possible. Traffic to CDRs during late night hours is still down more than **50%** compared to pre-pandemic levels, and while overall visits to QSRs are now above pre-pandemic levels during most dayparts, late night visits to QSRs are still down 10-12%.

3. The “Dinner Rush” remains at a low:

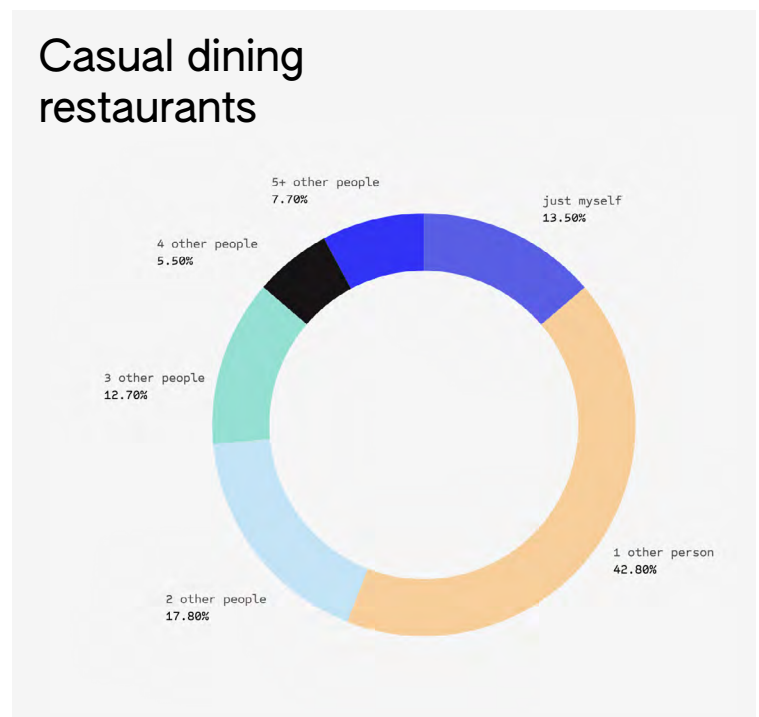
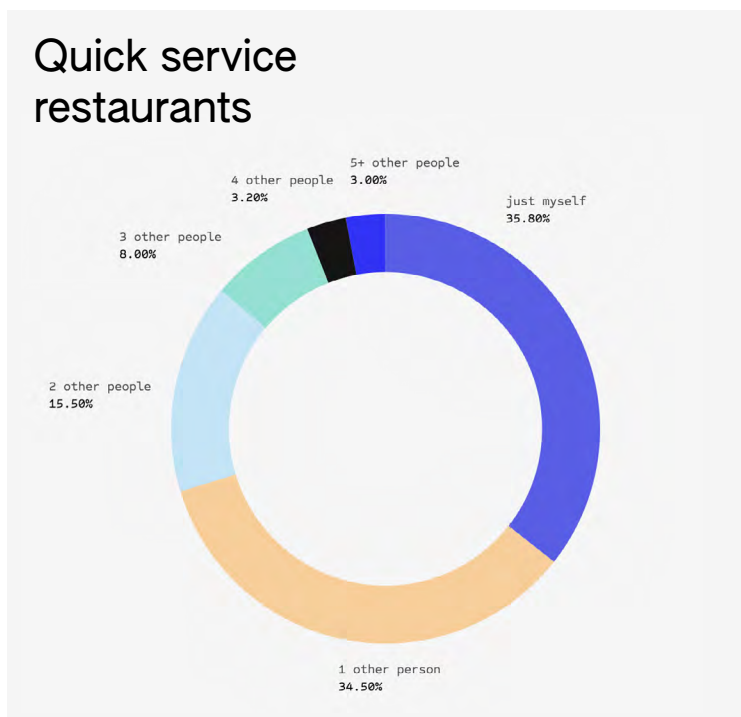
Visits to restaurants during dinner hours (5pm-10pm) remain well below pre-pandemic levels, still down -21% as of January 29 2021. There are many reasons why dinners are trailing behind lunch and breakfast. Perhaps consumers are more willing to dine out or pick up takeout during the day because they’re already out running errands or looking for a way to break up the workday, or perhaps families are cooking at home because it’s more difficult to go out to restaurants with larger groups.

4. Consumers are ordering for one:

The majority (71%) of people visiting QSRs in-person are ordering meals for themselves or for one other person, according to survey data of consumers in Foursquare’s always-on panel from January 2021. This holds true for most people visiting CDRs as well, with 15% ordering just for themselves and 43% ordering for just one additional person as opposed to a family or group. These figures suggest that families with children are more likely to be ordering delivery or cooking at home, rather than dining out, which presents an opportunity for brands to focus efforts on reviving family visits.

5. Consumers are planning ahead:

With people spending less time out and about, going out to eat is being treated as more of an occasion than in the past. According to survey data of consumers in Foursquare’s always-on panel from January 2021, more than 60% of casual dining restaurant visitors planned their trip in advance, as opposed to an impulsive decision. Even amongst QSR visitors, where we might expect more impulsive on-the-go stops, nearly half of visitors (45.5%) reported that they’d planned their visit in advance.



How location data and technology can help

Augment marketing efforts

Whether you're aiming to draw in more visitors during "snacking hours," working to revive dinner and late night dining, or aiming to bring families back to the table, location data and technology can augment your marketing efforts and boost conversion rates in several ways, including:

1. Find and reach

- a. People who have visited your restaurants in the past (pre-pandemic)
- b. People who are similar to those who either previously visited or are visiting your locations during the pandemic
- c. People who are visiting a competitor's location
- d. People who live near your locations

2. Measure the impact of ads—including TV, OOH, and digital—on driving new customers to your locations by using foot traffic data

- a. Understand how changes in how consumers move through the world (due to the pandemic or other forces) can bring in net new customers to your locations
- b. Understand who these new customers are via demographic information

3. Trigger location-based notifications and send ads, coupons, and more to people who are at or nearby a QSR/CDR location

4. Send notifications to people whose lifestyle or demographic information suggest that they may enjoy a specific menu item or promotion.

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Beyond marketing

Location technology and data can play a game-changing role in helping QSR/CDR enterprises with the following strategic decisions and activities:

- Customize app experiences based on where a user is near/ where they like to go
- Site selection
- Territory mapping
- Investment strategies
- In-app customer experience
- Demand forecasting

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The key takeaway

Restaurants of all shapes and sizes cannot afford to wait for the pandemic to fully pass before stepping up efforts to rekindle pre-pandemic levels of foot traffic. Location data can help restaurants—especially QSRs and CDRs with numerous locations across the country—not only understand their consumers' current behaviors better, but deploy marketing tactics that fit consumer needs and help fill the revenue gaps left by trailing foot traffic levels.

Interested in learning more about how location data and technology can help QSRs and CDRs? Contact the experts at hello@foursquare.com.

Wondering where you can access Foursquare's data? Foursquare's Places and Visits data are available via our flat-file and API options as well as through our strategic partners, including the [AWS Data Exchange](#).

Foursquare is the leading independent location technology company, powered by our deep understanding of how people move throughout the world. Our solutions help businesses make smarter decisions, developers create more engaging experiences, and brands build more effective marketing strategies.

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