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# **The Sustainable Catering Service Industry in the Philippines During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

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## Thesis abstract

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COVID-19 was the most detrimental pandemic in the 21st century. It challenged the catering industry severely due to various restrictions and economic downturns. Likewise, the catering sector encountered various obstacles to sustaining the business in the rural areas of the Philippines. Nevertheless, there is no in-depth research into the catering industry. Therefore, this study endeavors to evaluate the sustainability of the catering service sector in the Philippines during the COVID-19 pandemic. It considers the guided principles of Michael Porter's five forces and the generic strategy. The inductive approach and qualitative research strategy are also reflected. Consequently, respondents such as the owner and manager of a case company were interviewed over the phone. Narrative analysis was accomplished to explain the sector's resilience and adaptation strategies amidst the crisis.

The empirical findings show that companies commonly encountered supply chain distribution, financial, and operational issues in the catering service industry in the Philippines during the COVID-19 crisis. To overcome the challenges, the companies successfully implemented business strategies reforming safety measures, product and service innovation, and customer satisfaction. Furthermore, the study indicates that Michael Porter's five forces and generic strategies must consider the business model elasticity to sustain the businesses in any crisis.

The study suggests that Philippine companies must incorporate sustainable initiatives into their regular business operations, considering flexibility in supply chain management, digital technologies for business operation, employees' and customers' hygiene, and customer satisfaction. Finally, continuous innovation in products and services, processes, and business models assist companies in making sustainable and resilient in any disaster like the COVID-19 pandemic.

<sup>1</sup> Keywords: COVID-19, Pandemic, Sustainability, Philippines, Catering Service.

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## Terms and Abbreviations

<b>COVID-19</b>	Coronavirus Disease 2019
<b>PPE</b>	Personal Protective Equipment
<b>SME</b>	Small Medium Enterprise

# 1 INTRODUCTION

The chapter explains the study background, including challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. Next, it illustrates current knowledge gaps by critically assessing previous studies. It then states the research aims and questions arising from the unresolved gaps. Finally, the research scope, the key concepts, and the study structure are addressed.

## 1.1 Research Background

The catering industry in the Philippines has always been a vital part of the diverse culinary culture, woven into the fabric of celebrations, from weddings and birthdays to corporate events and social gatherings (Anagaran et al., 2024). Adapting to changing trends and customer preferences over time, the heart of the catering sector faced an unprecedented challenge with the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic (Josh, 2023). Lockdowns, bans on gatherings, and heightened health concerns significantly declined event-based catering businesses, causing financial setbacks and raising fundamental questions about the industry's resilience and adaptability (Anagaran et al., 2024). Angeles-Agdeppa et al. (2022) pointed out that the repercussions of the COVID-19 outbreak have brought about new trends in the broader food service industry landscape. Shimaly (2021) noted that crises like the COVID-19 pandemic often present industries with opportunities and challenges.

Traditional catering practices are a vital component of the food service industry; however, a significant effect was seen due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The national government must recover consumer confidence and use its monetary tools to increase the aggregate demand. Consequently, through assistance, businesses can buy into the platforms and follow through on the health and safety measures to ensure that workers and customers return to work and purchase goods and services from that business physically or virtually (Hidalgo et al., 2021). Stimulating the economy is not only in the hands of governments, but companies also play their part. It also demands an organized response and cooperation from other sectors of society. In the long run, more extensive and profound changes in the organizational characteristics of both government and business departments and their strategies are needed. This would call for an upgrade of digitization by the private and the public sectors for a leaner and well-articulated economy (Hidalgo et al., 2021).

The prospects for the catering market are promising. With its primary objective being to provide consumers with quality food services, introduce innovative solutions in the course of its work, and meet the demands of its clients, catering that is successfully responding to development trends and actively looking for growth opportunities is undoubtedly ready for further growth in the following years (Josh, 2023).

## 1.2 Research Gaps

Among the different industries today, the catering service sector in the Philippines is deeply affected by the pandemic. Amidst the significant changes, there is a need for essential research. The sustainable catering service industry is similar to many service sectors that have experienced significant trouble because of the aftereffects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is the most unusual challenge in history. With the assumption of restrictions for gatherings, social distancing measures, and fluctuations in customer behaviors, catering businesses have faced considerable disruptions in their activities, causing financial suffering and uncertainty in their operations. As such, comprehending how ICTs shape resilience and reduce economic problems becomes critical for policymakers and planners. Nevertheless, the research available, for instance, the work by Castillo et al. (2022), demonstrates that there needs to be more clarity around the marketing strategies different food services have applied in the face of COVID-19, and the assessment of their efficiency is also unavailable. The research needs to explain the catering industry's strategy but has highlighted the challenges. It also does not state the efficiency of these strategies in changing and bouncing back from the pandemic effects. This difference leads to an incomplete understanding of what would work best for the catering sector when such storms hit, further limiting their ability to make informed decisions and policy interventions to boost the industry.

In addition, another contribution by Yao (2023) is pointed out by his emphasis on the absence of empirical evidence or data-driven analysis as the research gap in the proposed strategies for small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) sustainable operation in the post-pandemic period. The research does not demonstrate the theory and practical examples but needs to quantify or qualitatively research results to prove how the given strategies work in real-world contexts. Besides, the hindrances or limitations SMEs might experience in implementing these strategies have yet to be discussed comprehensively. This has led to a low understanding of the repertoire and applicability of the recommended approaches.

Therefore, the subsequent research initiatives can work by conducting studies or surveys to collect data about SME situations when the suggested strategies are applied and identify any possible barriers in the implementation processes.

Similarly, Shahin et al. (2017) signified the research potential of a method such as TRIZ with the Kano Model, which integrates service quality attributes in shaping customer needs. In addition, Menina (2023) pinpointed the deficit in the systematic literature reviews that implement a consistent analysis of the methodology features, research clusters, achievements, and guidelines of business sustainability in the period of the small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) and covering COVID-19 epidemic challenges. Considering the previous studies, the research identifies a significant gap in investigating the issue of the COVID-19 pandemic in the catering industry. Therefore, this research aims to investigate the challenges the catering industry faces and its strategies to overcome the pandemic's effects in the Philippines. By examining the industry's response to the crisis and its embrace of sustainable practices, this study tries to uncover potential pathways for the catering sector to emerge resilient from the pandemic's aftermath and as a champion of environmentally conscious and sustainable business practices.

### 1.3 Research Question and Objectives

The study focuses on the sustainable catering service industry in the Philippines during the COVID-19 pandemic. It tries to implement systematically and continuously the process of planning, executing, and supervising alterations in the operations of catering companies to ensure sustainability. Therefore, based on the study aim, the research question is: How was the catering industry sustained during the pandemic in the Philippines? Consequently, to answer the research question, the study segments the research question into the various forms of action called objective. Therefore, the following objectives are as follows.

- To recognize the challenges the catering industry has faced since the Covid-19 pandemic started.
- To identify the industry's strategies to overcome the impact of COVID-19 in catering services.

Theoretically, the study applies Michal Porter's five forces and generic strategy to successfully conduct the research objectives, answer the research question, and reach the research aim. Empirically, the study interviewed owners and managers from one case company in the Philippines who were interested, witnessed the challenges during the pandemic, and applied sustainable strategies. Hence, the overall purpose is to determine the preventive actions applied by caterers in the industry.

## 1.4 The Study Scope

This study investigates the detailed analysis of sustainability challenges facing XYZ Food House in light of the catering industry in the Philippines. This was the case when the COVID-19 pandemic was detrimental to society. The study mainly considers exploring how COVID-19 has influenced XYZ Food House and Catering Service, such as the problems encountered in service delivery, market structural adjustments, and changes in customers' buying behaviors. Several strategies used by XYZ Food House and Catering Service to face the pandemic were discussed in this text. It explores strategies that have been put in place to make the company resilient even though the pandemic brought about extraordinary challenges.

Moreover, the study finds a way to use safety, innovation, and customer satisfaction approaches to help sustain XYZ Food House and Catering Service during the COVID-19 crisis. The study takes place in Sindalan, a city in the Philippines, and information was obtained from the owner and the manager of XYZ Food House and Catering Service. The interview was conducted online; each participant was asked a research question to share and evaluate any experiences the XYZ Food House and catering service encountered during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the study considers qualitative and uses an inductive method in the investigation. The interview tools used were Messenger and Viber to facilitate the online interview. The study takes four months to complete and focuses on the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and the present situation. Also, this study does not disclose the company and respondents' names.

## 1.5 Key Concepts

The following are the key concepts utilized for the current study.

Table 1. Key Concepts.

<b>Concepts</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
COVID-19	The coronavirus disease 2019 disrupted the globe by changing health policies, economies, and social practices worldwide (Naseer et al., 2023).
Pandemic	An epidemic has spread globally, with many people affected and affecting the different sectors of the community, leading to multiple disruptions (Piret & Boivin, 2021).
Sustainability	The ability to persist and cling to balanced, inclusive, and sustainable development basics. In this sense, the expression means an industry that can stay relevant in the long run and survive severe challenges (The 3 Pillars of Sustainability: Environmental, Social, and Economic, 2023).
Philippines	A country in Southeast Asia comprised thousands of islands and became the geographical element of this catering service study during COVID-19 (Hernandez et al., 2024).
Catering Service	For sustaining food and beverage services at distant settings, events, or establishments, such as small-scale mobile grocery stores or large-scale catering enterprises, this industry in the Philippines is examined within the context of the crisis and sustainability concerns of the virus (Josh, 2023).

## 1.6 The Study Structure

The first chapter illustrates the core objectives of the research and highlights the gaps within this discourse. It gives a general orientation of the field researched, sets research questions, and guides the focus of the study. Furthermore, it serves as a road map of the critical concepts analyzed in the following chapters, creating a good framework for a deeper understanding.

Chapter Two explains the foundations of theoretical frameworks later used to perform a sustainable catering service operations assessment during the COVID-19 outbreak. It has a firsthand session on critical issues impacting crisis management, sustainability practices, and industry effectiveness. The chapter here is focused on Michael Porter's widely acclaimed Five Forces model while highlighting its applicability in ascertaining the competitive dynamics of the catering sector in times of crisis.

Chapter Three of the thesis is an in-depth discussion of the research methodology used to scrutinize the difficulties confronted by catering companies in the Philippines during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. It contains all the essential elements, including research methodology, design, data-acquiring methods, analytical procedure, measures to check validity and reliability, and ethical issues. The chapter comprises the philosophical point of view, the exact approach, and the philosophy that guided in deciding the methodology is presented. Furthermore, the interviewing technique is also briefly described in terms of data collection. In addition, the section explicates methods of assuring the study findings accuracy and reliability, arguing ethics like participant confidentiality and informed consent.

Chapter Four is devoted to an XYZ Catering in the Philippines case study with a covid-19 pandemic background. This type of work, which thoroughly describes the business and its unique product line along with its market positioning strategies, customer service approaches, contemporary determining factors, and strategic development plans, is contemplated. The careful analysis of various aspects of the catering dilemma faced by XYZ Catering during the COVID-19 period brings out information on how it navigates the difficulties.

Chapter Five presents the findings and describes the challenges XYZ Catering faced in the Philippines during COVID-19, the adaptations and strategies implemented to resolve those problems. Such studies set the framework for the following stages of this research, which interprets the data collected. The results of such research contribute to a better understanding of the impact of the pandemic on the sustainability practices of the catering business.

Chapter Six elaborates on the significance of the findings, considering how they relate to the research queries, main objectives, and goals; the discussion generates valuable interpretations of the theoretical, practical, and policy implications. The chapter undergoes a critical and analytical understanding, resulting in a deeper grasp of the impact of the research outcomes on practice and policy. It contributes to the discourse on crisis management and sustainability in the food service industry.

Chapter Seven summarizes the essential results and meanings and draws conclusions. This article outlines the research findings utilizing research issues, goals, and objectives and discusses their conceptual, management, and policy implications. Apart from that, the chapter also identifies the disadvantages defined by this research's methodology and offers solutions for more research in that direction. The research outcomes are an overview and analysis in this chapter, which progress the field and provide research and practice guidance for managing the sustainable catering service industry in crises.

## **2 SUSTAINABLE CATERING SERVICE INDUSTRY IN THE PHILIPPINES: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE**

This chapter illustrates different theories, such as Michal Porter's five Forces and Generic strategies. It also considers the catering industry literature during a pandemic. It then explains various challenges companies faced during the pandemic and the sustainable strategies companies used to overcome the challenges from the previous literature.

### **2.1 Michal Porter's Five Forces**

In the currently intensive catering service industry, the market situation and its dynamics are being monitored, and this is crucial for producers who want to stay competitive. One approach that enables the comprehension of the rivals in the business industry is Porter's Five Forces Framework. According to Goyal (2020), Porter's Five Forces framework provides a strategic tool that one can use to evaluate the industry as a whole and then figure out the forces that determine the competition in the industry. When buyers hold strong bargaining power, purchases are characterized by the buyers' ability to force the seller to drop the price to boost sales. Some industries have high bargaining power toward buyers in particular cases. For example, if a few buyers populate the industry and purchase many products, these buyers are influential, especially in industries that incur high fixed costs (Porter, 2008).

Consumers also have a strong hand in such circumstances where the industry products are uniform and when the consumers are not confronted with high switching costs. The signs, such as higher profitability of the key players in the industry, become a valid reason for the buyer to set up its production backward, which grants it access to the same goods (Porter, 2008). Customers' power can be neutralized by raising the switching costs for the customer, inducing customer loyalty to the brand, or by differentiating the products such that customers are willing to pay a premium beyond the commodity price for its unique value-added features, which shift the purchase decision from a price-based to a product-based (Recklies, 2015). Suppliers with power can profit more through increased marginal pricing, deterioration of the quality and reduction of the services, or passing the transmission of costs to the participating industries. Powerful thumbs drive profitability away from the market, which cannot transfer costs into prices, for example, in the airline industry (Porter, 2008).

According to Cook (2024), there is high seller power when suppliers are few, have unique products, and can abandon the industry by integrating backward. A company can deal with these by drawing them inward or outsourcing their requirements. Various management thinkers say that the above can be the most difficult because the entry barriers are fragile in today's next generation of management. New entrants confront the already set-up industry players with the demand of slashing prices, consequently taxing their revenues. Perhaps this group of newcomers could sell traditional players such as Apple and Nokia of the market (Porter, 2008). Some of the possible entry restraints include minimizing the switching costs to the customers as an effort to build loyalty or by having an unbalanced supply chain system that unfavorably can affect the newer entrants' efficiency. On the other hand, heavy marketing (cutoff in prices) is likely to be another strategy a firm can produce to cleanse the entry of new competitors (Backhaus et al., 2015).

The concept of substitutes riskily implies that the entire market is under the influence of substitute products, which are in the hands of consumers to constantly choose between related products that can also provide the same level of satisfaction. For example, the high-speed Eurostar train is the alternative to the journey between London and Paris, which is a cheaper way of travel, and many of the population choose Eurostar over a flight. Switching from one product to another with a vital substitute is likely when a low trade-off is possible between an attractive price and performance or when buyers can have lower switching costs. It might look simply to dispose of, but this has caused several problems as firms often need to be made aware of substitutes. Therefore, they might ignore some lethal ones (Porter, 2008).

The intensity of these competitors is one of the primary determinants of the height to which rivalry affects an industry's profit potential, and the nature of their competitive strategies is another factor. They can be elevated in case of weak growth or when there are many opponents. Furthermore, they may stem from situations when firms cannot read each other's signals. However, owing to the similarity to the Game Theory- Prisoner's Dilemma Model, where cooperation is not attainable (Deng & Deng, 2014) and one firm's growth is another company losing. In this case, the effect can be either negative or positive sum, where each player chases different segments of the market, which allows them to consolidate their position (Porter, 2008).

## 2.2 Michal Porter's Three Generic Strategies

In highlighting the sustainable catering services in the Philippines during the COVID-19 era, the contribution of Michael Porter's three generic strategies of business competition is helpful for companies that want to sustain their competitiveness. Under conditions of economic pressure and organizational barriers, the concept of cost leadership becomes critical to increase control over production costs, optimize processes, and achieve economies of scale that help attract buyers who are highly sensitive to the costs of products and services and guarantee the highest profits in conditions of significant competition and fluctuations in prices (EPAM, 2023). In this context, differentiation strategies acquire value by providing new approaches, such as delivery without physical contact, environment-friendly packaging, or customized services. Focused on superior quality, brand value, and excellent customer relations, the companies can obtain loyalty and thus stand out in a susceptible market to health and the environment (Dieffenbacher, 2024).

Focus strategy brings a clear advantage to catering companies and The Philippines by allowing them to aim directly at industry segments. The two strategic approaches of cost focus, which targets becoming the best or the lowest in cost within the specified niche, and the differentiation focus, which targets providing unique products and services to narrow niche markets, both seem to cultivate a firm and stable niche market and address a variety of customer's needs sustainably (Dieffenbacher, 2024). Catering companies can sustain themselves in the market, transform their sustainability strategies, and thrive before, during, and after COVID-19 by unlocking one of these generic strategies.

### 2.3 Business Challenges during the COVID-19 Pandemic

According to Sun (2023), catering service businesses faced many problems because of the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced them to react to the changes quickly to survive. The upcoming compliance task with new health and safety protocols like social distancing intensified sanitization, and PPE usage resulted in higher operational costs and complexity. Anagaran (2024) also added that due to the viral outbreak, the Philippine government implemented the ECQ through many regions and cities where most catering businesses can be found. This led to the small trading stores being closed and a drastic cut in the number of people that could attend an event, which caused many events to be called off. Hence, many business operations had severely negative impacts on revenues and sales, as well as the lack of opportunities to accommodate crowds.

Apart from the loss due to the cancellation of hosting events, catering ventures had to incur significant costs in meeting new health and safety standards. These were expenses towards the PPE of staff, facility sanitation, and constant health screening of the employees and clients. Other challenges included the necessity to follow the general recommendations of social distancing: staying at least six feet apart from others, which made it possible to lower the attendance rates in restaurants and other places, limiting the potential income (Engidaw, 2022). Among the areas that came under the pandemic impact, specific trends were identified concerning the employees in the catering industry. Orders were reduced, and many companies had to downsize employees' working hours, cut their wages, or dismiss them due to lack of business. The disruption of public transportation services worsened these problems, making it challenging for employees to travel to work safely. The unpredictability and pressure that cleared the pandemic also affected the mental state and health of not only the employees but the owners of the businesses as well (Gravois, 2022).

The International Labor Organization (2020) states that catering companies also had financial problems as they used credit to cover fixed expenses like rent and employees' salaries. The pandemic, in turn, caused problems in the workforce not only in managing reduced staff levels due to illness or quarantine but also in addressing concerns with employees' health and safety. The change to remote or contactless business options demanded purchasing equipment and creating new procedures. Therefore, they added complication and expense. Frequent changes at the last minute and the need for the organizations to follow them quickly caused the operational atmosphere's unpredictability.

Pandemics brought changes in the supply chain that caused interruptions in getting ingredients and other equipment that often ended up in the rise of prices and lack of availability (Helper & Soltas, 2021). The demand for catering industries dropped to below levels because of the event restrictions for large gatherings and events. Businesses in the catering industry were forced to face severe operations problems because business was scarce. At the same time, many companies had to change to new business models to survive, for instance, delivery of home-based services, meal kits, and so forth (Engidaw, 2022). However, Arucan et al. (2023) state that the pandemic also influenced the further development of digitalization businesses, making many catering businesses suffer as they lacked the proper setup for any online platforms. These businesses that were previously based on commuter contacts and physical service delivery were generally forced to establish virtual ordering platforms, digital promotion, and delivery services. This entailed a huge capital outlay on key technologies and staff covenant in service delivery, which was another cost factor when income was already low.

The COVID-19 pandemic altered consumers' habits, and their behavior affected the types of catering services required. Observations imply that consumers' primary concern has shifted toward health, safety, and sustainability; therefore, consumers' preferences have shifted toward healthier and more environmentally friendly catering services (Das, 2022). However, the economic recession caused by the outbreak of COVID-19 made some consumers shift more attention to price-sensitive and sustainable products, hence a high shift in price consciousness. One of the major threats and issues identified for catering companies to address sustainable goals and keep competitive, viable, and attractive to consumers of different backgrounds was the challenge of keeping both costs and menu options accessible (Das, 2022).

Additionally, communicating with customers about safety practices was vital to the caterer; thus, sometimes, direct communication with health authorities or certification for health authorities was necessary. Survivability was the primary concern for businesses that had to innovate even faster to make it rise again, either by introducing new service offerings, creative features of the menu for delivery, or discovering how to cut costs without reducing the quality. The widespread economic effect of the pandemic created difficulties for long-term planning as it has been hard to ensure it fits the business and consumer expenditures (Sun, 2023).

## 2.4 Company's Strategy during the Crisis of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Through the pandemonium triggered by COVID-19, the catering business had to react rapidly to keep going (Guy, 2024). In return, catering companies masterfully developed safety, innovation, and customer satisfaction to be the foundation of their sustaining strategies. First, the safety concern was furthered, and the strict rules regarding health and sanitation were immediately enforced and delivered along with personal PPE protective items and contactless options. Effective communication of these strategic steps was significant in gaining customer loyalty (Achari et al., 2023). Eventually, various entrepreneurship turned out to be the key to resilience. Many companies started doing home delivery, catering via meal kits, and virtual event catering, which allowed them to continue working.

According to Sun (2023, p. 331), these inventions did not only react to immediate customer necessities by bringing lockdowns but also produced other revenue, rising to the challenge. Due to the advancement of technologies, specifically the Internet, many people can accomplish something they could not do earlier, like convenient takeout meals. Currently, takeaway is a thing that was initially associated with ordering food by phone. Telephone orders have many drawbacks; for instance, one cannot see all dishes simultaneously, cannot see the price of food, and must ask about the taste and the price of each dish separately, which is rather inconvenient. However, now, through the phone, one can use some software to order food, which is so convenient and fast that time and energy do not have to be spent going to the store, and one can have the food directly. Due to the absence of a necessity to go to the store, most restaurant hosts have introduced their stores to the delivery software to sell homemade meals.

This period was tumultuous, but catering services remained resilient and attentive to unwavering customer satisfaction (Manilova, 2019). Customer attention was placed on excellence, flexibility, and personalized experiences. According to Commetric (2019), aligning the items offered with those of rapidly changing customer tastes, including choosing healthier and more environmentally friendly food, was critical to remain in demand. Businesses use digital platforms to create easy ordering and courteous customer care (Leachman & Scheibenreif, 2023). Every catering company addressed the safety, innovation, and customer satisfaction issues during the pandemic and came out resilient and strengthened to manage the challenges left by the post-COVID-19 landscape (Raj et al., 2022).

### **3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research methodology chapter details the philosophical underpinnings guiding the research, the chosen research approach, the methodological design, data collection methods, analysis techniques, measures to ensure the validity and reliability of findings, and ethical considerations.

#### **3.1 Research Philosophy, Approach, and Design**

The research philosophy of this study is subjectivism on the ontological view, while interpretivism is in the context of epistemology. Consequently, it considers the constructivist research paradigm, which states that individuals are limited by relying on stored memories and perceptions, which constructs the theory because it promotes individuals' trials and errors in their experiences, perceptions, and understandings of the catering business during the COVID-19 period (Rahman, 2023). Cherry (2023) states that culturally grounded extreme relativism represents a perception of reality that may be subjective and shaped socially, depending on the number and range of views, perspectives, and contexts. Following the research philosophy, the study considers a qualitative research strategy that includes a case study research design. Much more than quantitative research, qualitative research foregrounds an in-depth understanding of complex events as it explores the many contexts, meanings, and subjective interpretations associated with the targeted phenomenon.

It investigates industry participants' perspectives, encounters, and obstacles; a qualitative methodology is suitable (Davidson et al., 2003). This strategy allows the collection of detailed, contextual data required to comprehend sustainable practices in the specific setting thoroughly. According to the admin of the Planning Tank (2023), Qualitative research is a form of social investigation that primarily focuses on the diverse ways people make sense of their knowledge in their world. It also involves the interpretation of their experiences in their daily life. The purposefully selected company, XYZ Food House and Catering Service was engaged in an interview, which is the primary method of collecting data. These virtual interviews respect safety protocols, allowing participants to share their experiences and insights. Quantitative research alone cannot be used to get all the information required for this thesis, so limitations resulting from paying only attention to qualitative research should be accepted. In the case of qualitative research, a small sample size and a deep focus on a particular context or a specific phenomenon are involved (Eze & Ugbu, 2023, p. 29).

Besides that, qualitative research is highly dependent on the researcher's interpretation and analysis of the data, which creates a gateway to subjectivity and bias (op. cit., p. 33). The researchers' thoughts, values, and life course cannot intentionally provide the data analysis process with what it requires. Also, qualitative research requires significant time and funds for data collection and analysis. Completing research projects, for instance, interviewing, observing, and examining qualitative data, is usually very time-consuming and tiresome (op. cit., 2023, p. 22). Additionally, quantitative research design commonly shuns statistical models. Thus, it becomes challenging to mathematically demonstrate and measure the relationships between independent and dependent variables. The limitation is that its conclusions cannot be drawn confidently, and the results cannot be generalized from the qualitative data with high certainty. Nevertheless, an essential aspect of being investigated is the probability that the researcher's presence affects participants' behavior and responses to the research, subsequently influencing the outcomes and imprecision of the fieldwork accomplishments (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Hence, while qualitative research provides inspiring data, at the same time, the experts should take such limitations into account and use other research methodologies that would add to the research outcomes for a holistic understanding (Eze & Ugbu, 2023).

Okoli (2022) states that the research method comprises deductive and inductive approaches. Theoretical construction mainly relies on the inductive approach, while the deductive method checks theories and how expected connections between designated variables are constructed. Since the research is based on a constructivist view, it is considered an inductive approach. A Case study design chosen for this study aims to deeply understand the experiences, perspectives, and challenges that XYZ Catering and its stakeholders encountered during the COVID-19 pandemic. One-on-one interviews serve as the primary method for data collection, providing participants with a personalized platform to share their insights and experiences in detail (Adams, 2015, p. 493). Conducting semi-structured interviews allows for a flexible approach to conversation, enabling participants to elaborate on specific topics while exploring unexpected themes (Adams, 2015, p.494). This method facilitates a rich exchange of information, enabling the researcher to explore the complexities of sustainability practices, adaptation strategies, and the pandemic's impact on business operations. Through one-on-one interviews, the researcher aims to capture nuanced insights and understand the diverse perspectives within the business. Building rapport and trust with participants fosters open and candid discussions, contributing to the depth and richness of the data collected (Adams, 2015, p.498).

### 3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

According to Coughlan et al. (2009), an interview as a form of research is a good tool for understanding people's conceptions, knowledge, and even their experiences towards a predetermined phenomenon and can be helpful in data accumulation. Interviews with the manager and the owner of the XYZ Catering company are potential participants who provided a firsthand account of experiences, feelings, and opinions about the sustainable catering service sector in the Philippines during the COVID-19 situation. Additionally, Horton (2004) argues that Interviews allow the researcher to ask questions and follow up with more detailed questions that are generally relevant to the discussed subject. This helps to understand the specifics of the sustainability problems that occur in the business during the pandemic. For instance, it is possible to study how XYZ Catering Company has changed its business and aimed to meet the health and safety protocols, the changes in consumption habits during the pandemic, and the strategies taken to overcome the crisis.

During the Interviews, the researchers identify themselves with the participants and develop social contacts. They may be more comfortable sharing their experience and standing in a one-on-one setting, giving out more truthful information. Interviews also allow researchers to probe more into responses, elucidate any ambiguities, and investigate new insights that emerge during the discussion (Adams, 2015, p.498). When examining the Philippines' sustainable catering service sector during the COVID-19 epidemic, interviews might yield rich and insightful information that may be difficult to get using other qualitative research techniques. Through direct interaction with professionals in the industry, researchers can thoroughly comprehend the obstacles and prospects encountered by XYZ Catering, along with the tactics utilized to guarantee viability throughout a worldwide crisis (Adams, 2015).

Consequently, the data collection method is an in-depth interview to identify various points of view and various aspects of sustainability practices in catering businesses. Through semi-structured interviews, participants are encouraged to share their perspectives on sustainability initiatives, adaptation strategies, and the impact of the pandemic on their business operations (Adams, 2015). These interviews allow for in-depth exploration of individual experiences and facilitate a nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics within the business. The data analysis for this study includes a comprehensive narrative analysis application that comprises a systematic identification, analysis, and interpretation of either patterns or themes obtained from the qualitative data obtained from the interviews.

The thematic analysis allows us to drill down on the experiences, views, and routines of restaurants that face COVID-19 via contextualization and addressing similar topic areas into group themes. Selecting stories unearths the main takeaways and recurring themes, enabling a deeper understanding of the problems catering businesses have tackled during the pandemic and how they have overcome this situation. Moreover, thematic analysis also leads to the possibility of examining the strategies businesses use, which show adaptation and signs of resilience during the crisis time by extracting the information in context from the transcripts.

### **3.3 Validity, Reliability, and Ethics**

In order to achieve validity and reliability of the research results, such methods as member checking and triangulation are used. Birt et al. (2016) state that member checking also referred to as participant or respondent validation, is a strategy to gain information on the believability of results. Feedback in the form of data or results is provided to the participants to indicate how well the findings correspond to the participants' experiences. It is frequently described as one of the validation methods, though it stands alone in its title of member checking (Birt et al., 2016). Some ethical issues that may come up are mainly getting permission from the responder and ensuring that all matters are kept discreet, and that the responder's identity is concealed from the public in any way possible, as well as practicing the principles and ethical conduct of the research. The subjects are informed of the objectives and nature of the study, their rights as subjects, and the fact that volunteerism is encouraged in the study. All the viable risks and the interest conflicts are pointed out and explained in detail to maintain the ethical nature of the given work (Bellalem et al., 2023).

Due to the need for higher internal validity of this study on the sustainable catering service industry in the Philippines during the COVID-19 pandemic, the participants engage in a member check where the collected data is assessed to enhance validity and reliability. This was done by comparing the interview, questionnaire, and literature results. Regarding the previously discussed ethical concerns, every subject was required to complete the consent form, subjects' anonymity was observed, and all the subjects in the study received details about the investigation, their rights, and the voluntary nature of their involvement. Everything that might be a risk or even a conflict of interest was considered to prevent it from being against the principles of ethical behavior.

## **4 THE CASE STUDY OF XYZ CATERING SERVICE**

This chapter describes the case company's business operating in the Philippines. It gives insight into the company's information and then details its services.

### **4.1 Description of the Case Company**

This company, the XYZ Food House and Catering Service, is in Sindalan City of San Fernando Pampanga, Philippines 2000, and it is famous for making good, tasty, and cheap foods. XYZ is a catering service founded in 2012 that caters to people for different functions, from private and minor parties to significant corporate events. The company's mission is to ensure that all consumers get tasty and fulfilling meals without negotiations on the quality of food to be produced.

XYZ boasts of its wide selection of catering services that fit its customers' needs and eating habits in Pampanga. From close-knit families and small-scale events to large business dinners, the banquet menu list specifies options such as buffet services, plated dinner services, cocktail services, and other themed services. With a choice of meal dishes, it was seen that clients could choose from a host of dishes that included traditional Filipino meals and meals from around the world with an offer for a more personalized meal plan depending on the client's wants. In the competition for the catering business in Pampanga, XYZ has claimed its niche as a provider of quality meals without burning people's pockets. Due to this commitment, XYZ has built a customer base and established itself as the go-to catering service provider. By offering a winning combination of delicious food, competitive pricing, and exceptional service, XYZ has successfully differentiated itself from competitors and established a strong foothold in the market.

## 4.2 Company's Catering Food and Services

XYZ's strategy revolves around its core values of affordability, quality, and reliability of catering food and services. The company achieves this by meticulously selecting fresh and flavourful ingredients, optimizing operational efficiency, and implementing cost-effective practices without compromising taste or presentation. By prioritizing customer feedback and preferences, XYZ ensures that each catering experience is tailored to exceed expectations, leaving a lasting impression on clients and guests alike. In today's dynamic catering landscape, customer satisfaction hinges on various factors, including food quality, affordability, reliability, and customer service (Kabir, 2023). XYZ recognizes these contemporary determinants and strategically focuses on delivering top-notch food quality at accessible prices, with reliable service and attentive customer support. By consistently meeting and exceeding these expectations, XYZ continues to enhance customer satisfaction and maintain its competitive edge in the market.

Looking ahead, XYZ is committed to further enhancing customer satisfaction through continuous innovation and improvement. The company plans to expand its menu offerings to cater to evolving culinary trends and dietary preferences in Pampanga while investing in technology to streamline the ordering and delivery process. Additionally, XYZ aims to strengthen its customer engagement initiatives, such as loyalty programs and feedback mechanisms, to foster deeper connections with clients and ensure their ongoing satisfaction. By staying agile and responsive to changing market dynamics, XYZ is poised to remain a leader in providing quality and affordable catering services in Pampanga, Philippines, for years to come.

## 5 THE STUDY RESULTS

The research findings contribute to acquiring knowledge of the catering service management industry in the Philippines more comprehensively and precisely, reflecting the successes, challenges, and corporate measures assembled by XYZ Catering in contrast to the Covid-19 pandemic. This chapter integrates the results of qualitative research through a synthesized presentation, highlighting the company's challenges, strategy, market positioning, and future development in the catering industry during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### 5.1 Challenges in the Catering Service Industry during the COVID-19 Pandemic

In line with the research objective, the owner and the managers were asked the following question: What difficulties and obstacles has this industry sector faced since the pandemic started? The following are the summarized interviews based on the interview transcripts.

As the owner of XYZ catering service, COVID-19 posed numerous challenges we had to meet head-on to survive. Physical changes were new standard protocols such as taking more measures in washing, social distancing, and wearing PPE. These rules made running the business costlier, and the others made managing it complex. Further, since supply chain issues presented a challenge in sourcing the ingredients and equipment we required, everything was expensive and sometimes unavailable to be sourced. Since big gatherings were out of the question, the demand was significantly reduced, so we had to look for other means of adopting new services like home deliveries and meal kits to sustain the business. (H1)

On the financial side, our revenues decreased, and our costs increased due to implementing all the health and safety measures. On the contingency budget, we could barely afford essentials such as rent and employees' salaries, so we had to take loans. Employing our staff was also a problem. A car service was utilized so the workers would not be exposed to the virus. Going to contactless services could mean purchasing new equipment and developing new policies, which brought in more costs and issues. (H2)

It remained important to ensure the communication of safety measures to customers. Sometimes, speaking to the health departments and obtaining approvals was necessary to reassure the clients that the set standards were being adhered to safely. People devised many innovative ideas to plunge through the odds during such a time. New services were launched while the menu was modified for delivery services, and all this was done while looking for ways to trim expenses. The pandemic hindered planning because one could not predetermine how much the financial situation would change or how much the customers would be willing to spend. (H2)

## 5.2 Strategy to Overcome the Challenges during the COVID-19 Epidemic

To meet the research objectives, questions were posed to the catering service industry's owners and managers: Identify the industry's strategies to overcome the impact of COVID-19 in the catering service. The interview transcripts were then compiled and summarized to understand better the sector's approach toward the difficulties arising from the COVID-19 outbreak.

When COVID-19 hit the world as a world pandemic, as owner of XYZ catering company, we had to adapt to the situation. We focused on three main things: employees and customers were concerned with safety, the possibility of introducing new ideas, and the satisfaction of our customers. (H1)

As the manager, I always ensured that everyone washed their hands and wore masks; we provided all the required personal protective equipment and all disposable items or digital purchases customers were offered. We also had to innovate how best to communicate with our target customers, such as making home deliveries and online events. Throughout this exercise, we kept our ears to the ground to determine what the customer sought. We saw that they were seeking options that would be healthier and closer to the environment. Thus, we altered the list. (H2)

At XYZ Catering, we tackled the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic by being resourceful and customer-focused. We worked on cutting costs while maintaining quality and offered unique menu options tailored to our customers' preferences. This helped us stand out and build trust with our clients, ensuring their satisfaction and loyalty. (H2)

We also simplified the process so that customers could order food from us via the Internet, and we were very attentive to their needs. Safety, experimenting, and making customers smile helped overcome COVID-19's rough days. We have never been less threatened than we were during the pandemic, and now we are well-prepared for any challenge. (H1)

## 6 DISCUSSION OF THE STUDY RESULTS

This chapter elaborates on how the researcher analyzed the responses, understood their connotations, and established the results from the interviews with the manager and the owner of XYZ catering service. After that, it presents findings and what it possibly meant to indicate. Having conducted the interviews, the researcher reviews them, identifies themes, and comprehends people's thoughts.

### 6.1 Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Catering Industry

According to Statista (2023), inflation in food and event catering sales between 2013 and 2024 was affected by various situations, among them the perspective of the economy and the impact of COVID-19. During economic development from 2012 to 2016, sales grew slowly, corresponding to the demand for catering services.

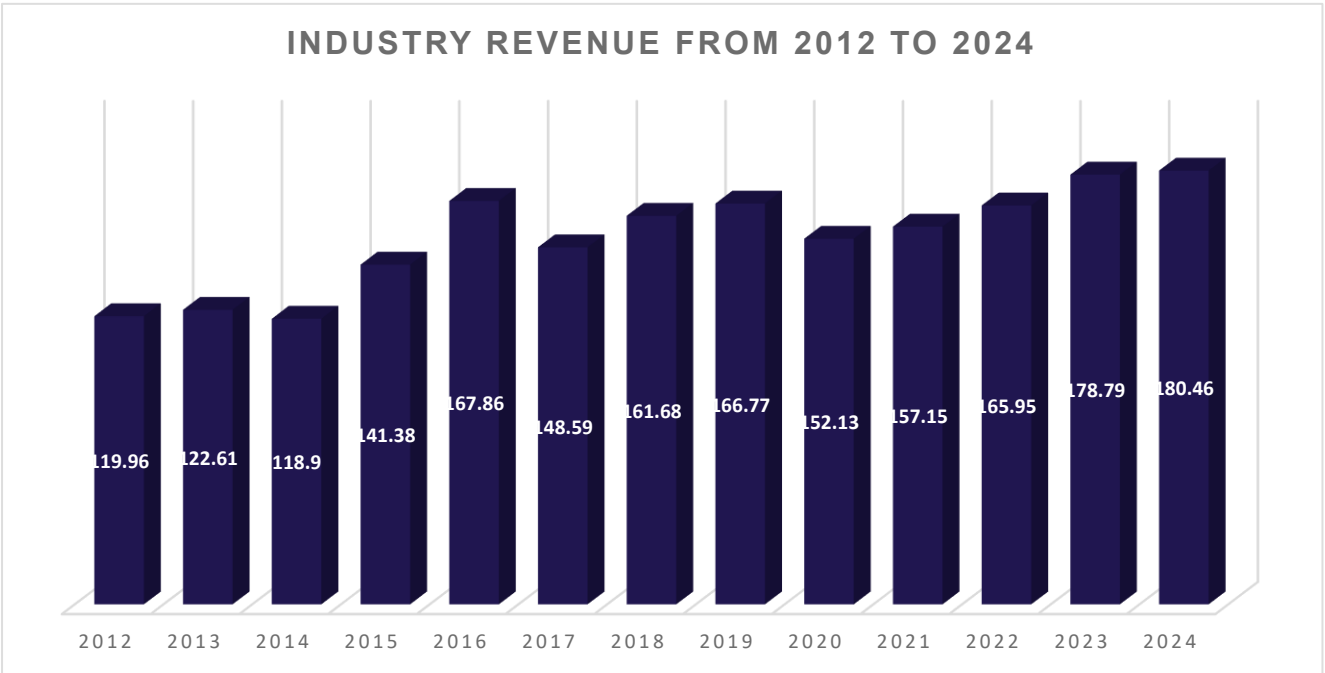


Figure 1. Catering and other food service activities in the Philippines (Statista, 2023).

However, an early year in 2017 might indicate rising consumer behaviors or economic concerns. The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 brought about a fall in sales because of event cancellations and the limitations in dining. In that context, although the industry went through difficult times, it took advantage of that situation, delivering services to the home and effective health protection measures. Further years after that saw a gradual increase in sales, illustrating that the industry is adaptive and as capable as the experts claim. Consequently, the period of instability in sales demonstrates the market's adaptability to the challenges presented in the case of the pandemic.

## **6.2 Company's Challenges During COVID-19**

The study elaborates that the Philippine catering services encountered several challenges primarily due to the COVID-19 pandemic. There are increased operational costs and complexity due to health regulations, supply chain disruptions causing ingredient shortages and higher prices, reduced customer demand from restrictions on large gatherings, financial strain, communicating safety measures to customers, and uncertainty in long-term planning (Green et al., 2022). It can also be seen that the challenges faced by catering services in the Philippines have significantly helped overcome them. Thus, by being more attentive to such threats, the catering service industry can improve its potential for greater sustainability and a better result.

### **6.2.1 Operational Challenges**

The COVID-19 pandemic affected the world, and the catering business was threatened with many challenges (Naseer et al., 2023). One day, the business was always busy, and then suddenly, they were thrown into a world that focused on health and safety measures. Due to the unexpected pandemic, authorities in different countries introduced severe restrictions to prevent the virus's spread (Maison et al., 2021). Food service operations were forced to adhere to various new norms and standards, including social distancing norms, sanitation methods, and the utilization of personal protective equipment (PPE). Thus, the necessity of compliance with such conditions led to significant changes in all the activities of catering businesses. They had to change layouts to ensure clients could maintain a safe distance away from each other, purchase sanitation tools and adhere to protocols, and provide personal protective equipment for the employees, like masks and gloves.

Furthermore, there were many sundry costs, such as extra time spent training the staff and insistence on compliance with these policies for the safety of the customers and employees alike.

### **6.2.2 Supply Chain Distributions**

Besides operational issues, the supply system in catering businesses was also affected by various issues. According to Zurek and Rudy (2024), the pandemic disrupted international trade and business, affecting supplies, delivery, and prices in different sectors. For catering businesses, this implied having to deal with challenges regarding the supply of food items for preparation, utensils for cooking, and other requirements. Several issues were established because of the disturbances to the supply chain for catering businesses. All those materials that were easy to come by earlier became rare assets, and companies were pushed to search for substitutes or endure with what was available.

At times, this translated into how menus had to be altered according to the accessibility of specific ingredients or the use of occasional inventions. Nevertheless, these workarounds were generally associated with some degrees of negative consequences, such as loss of quality, higher costs, and other related issues. Furthermore, higher consumption of specific items and pressure on supply chains caused the overall cost of products to rise and lead times to be longer, which added pressure to catering companies. Nevertheless, catering businesses have proved quite sensitive and adaptable to change and were able to come up with ways and means of sustaining their forms of operation.

### **6.2.3 Economic Strain**

Even though managing operations and supply chains is already complicated for any business, the pandemic also put considerable pressure on catering firms regarding their financial performance. The outbreak of the crisis affected the industry to the core since many organizations and events halted or rescheduled their operations. Their mainstream income was eradicated almost overnight, damaging many catering businesses. However, the expenses were not the last of their kind since more were in the waiting line ahead of them.

Apart from the lost sales, catering companies faced higher costs connected with changes in operations due to COVID-19. Health and safety investment and repair of overhead costs like rent, utility cost, and employees' wages were among several instances in which business organizations discovered that they were faced with several cost increases. Thus, the situation with the pandemic's duration and virulence discouraged catering businesses from making long-term plans. There was no sign of when this would stop, or at least no idea of any stability when attempts were made at disruptions; businesses had to recognize that their survival was unclear. Some organizations had to make decisions they never imagined they would face, such as firing their workers, cutting their working hours, or even shutting down their businesses for good.

### **6.3 Company's Strategy for the COVID-19 Crisis**

To avert the challenges that confront the catering service industry, various approaches can be enhanced depending on the needs of an organization's industry to mitigate the impacts of challenges. Here are the essentials noted from the interviews.

#### **6.3.1 Prioritizing Safety Measures**

Since the outbreak of COVID-19 markets, catering firms faced numerous unpredicted obstacles, responding actively and profoundly (Guy, 2024). Due to the increased awareness of and the necessary measures to protect the health and safety of customers and employees of catering establishments, stringent safety measures were quickly introduced. These measures can be summarized by a conforming implementation of legal health and sanitation protocols, cleaning facilities and utensils, and maintaining adequate stock of protective devices like masks, gloves, and hand sanitizers for front-line workers. Furthermore, new strategies such as no-touch product delivery and card payments were embraced to eliminate face-to-face contact and reduce the spread of the virus. These formulated and well-executed strategies not only reassured the customers and built their confidence in their respective catering companies but also underscored the firm's commitment to the provision of healthy and safe feeds through more robust public health essentials.

### **6.3.2 Adapting Innovation**

When faced with the highly unpredictable environment and occasional threats, catering businesses embarked on a process of innovation and change (Guy, 2024). Understanding the need to redefine how business is done due to the complexities of the pandemic environment, such businesses adopted the concept of agility and innovation. Based on this, the claims for adapting their service portfolios, seeking novel revenue sources, and communicating with customers seem opportune. At the same time, the examples of catering businesses' reactions to the crisis pointed to an excellent level of flexibility.

Various home delivery services, meal kit subscriptions, and varied services of virtual event catering experiences were noted to be hallmark trendsetter examples of the industry illustrating the novelty of flexibility in consumers' dining services. Adopting the best use of advanced technologies and customer-related applications, food catering services integrated the right analytical tools with the gathered feedback to make the right decisions and serve the relevant consumers. Thus, considering innovation as one of the critical values of their survival and development, catering businesses not only survived the pandemic but also became more competitive and sturdier in their post-pandemic environment.

### **6.3.3 Customer Satisfaction**

Even when the pandemic was most rife, catering-orientated firms did not waver in their dedication to the end consumer and providing the highest standards of catering services (Guy, 2024). Realizing that the success formula is about building long-term relations with clients, these businesses were eager to strive to satisfy or surpass customers' expectations, providing the best culinary experiences in town.

The type of cuisine that catering companies present in their meals, from the variety of offered dishes and the client's ability to choose individual meals based on their preferences or dietary restrictions, as well as the ability to adapt to customers' needs by introducing new, healthier, and environmentally friendly options in response to changes in the market and the demands of their clientele, the latter seemed to understand their customers exceptionally well. Also, they committed many resources to improving the convenience of ordering through the Internet through proper interface designs of their systems for delivering meals to clients, efficient customer support, and customer relations strategies.

Catering businesses secured a constant flow of loyal and new customers by integrating the customer into their strategies. They sufficiently established themselves as field leaders, ready for long-standing development and sales increase following the pandemic. XYZ Catering, in turn, resorts to the Three Generic Strategies to carry through the routines of the catering industry, especially for periods of crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic. The world-known management theorist Michael Porter explained the processes and the terms used in cost leadership, differentiation, and focus (Porter's generic strategies, n.d.). The catering center is concentrated on total cost leadership, which constitutes a form of operational excellence achieved through reducing production costs while bearing quality standards in mind. To attain this goal, they keep their operation processes as smooth as possible, endeavor to sign manufacturers as suppliers at the best possible rate and polish the use of resources to align with lean management principles. Besides, they adopt technological breakthroughs to enhance productivity, reduce wastage, and increase workflow efficiency. By decreasing expenses, XYZ Catering can achieve price competitiveness and profitability by proposing the correct prices to their customers, making them competitive.

To further this strategy, XYZ Catering applies a differentiation strategy seeking to differentiate itself from its competitors by bringing products or services that are defined by uniqueness to the market. They focus on quality, innovation, and customer experience; therefore, they lead to the introduction of signature menu items, using locally sourced or sustainable ingredients, and providing customized services depending on the customers' needs. The company's strategic branding, marketing, and engagement initiatives help tell the customers that their brand and product description are thriving even in trying times like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Finally, XYZ Catering's market approach is focused on different market segments or niches so that the peculiarities of any such group are met. The operators choose cuisines and diet preferences or emphasize certain event types or industries. When they operate in specific areas, they target their market. XYZ Catering provides specialized services, personalized care, and tailored solutions that customers enjoy and take pride in; as a result, it becomes their cusp of preference within given market segments.

## 6.4 Resilience

Like many other catering companies during the COVID-19 pandemic, XYZ Catering experienced some shocks. However, they did many things to overcome these uneasy times. Moreover, the administration prioritizes the safety and cleanliness of their facilities, and both the staff and the clients feel secure. Having safe health standards and a clean environment shows that XYZ cares for its clients, which maintains their trust and loyalty. Finally, XYZ 's discipline in menu offerings to satisfy the ever-evolving demands of consumers during the pandemic was an example of his success during that period. Being aware of the raised demand for healthy choices and easy meal solutions, they created do-it-yourself meal kits with a new idea. Such versatility in their products made XYZ catering service the frontline in the market despite the challenges of the changing business environment.

## 6.5 Brand Recognition

In the catering market, where differentiating the business from competitors is the key to success, distinguishing the business through a unique offer is essential. XYZ's quality, affordability, and reliability stood out in the market. Contrary to most competitors prioritizing only food quality, XYZ balanced the two by ensuring that his work remained cost-effective without damaging the flavor. It was the value proposition that XYZ's customers were most drawn to. Hence, the company created an identity for itself in the industry.

In the same way, XYZ used technology to automate operations and improve the client experience. XYZ gained more clients by investing in digital systems for orders and delivery; as a result, the catering process was simplified for clients, making it more convenient and efficient. Technology also improved operational efficiency. XYZ is different as a modern and innovative catering service provider, which distinguishes it from its competitors.

## 6.6 Companies Success

Though XYZ's success story can be considered phenomenal, it provides some essential points for all catering businesses struggling with difficulties. When confronted with these challenges, he focused on creating a customer-safe environment, adapting to customers' new preferences, and being innovative and creative. Such principles define a blueprint for sector companies to confront highly fluctuating economies and come out better.

Moreover, the company's customer-oriented approach emphasizes that relationships should be the main point of customer interaction (StudySmarter UK, n.d.). Customers like to have their dilemmas resolved and their felt needs attended to. Additionally, listening to their requirements and establishing fluid communication creates loyalty and trust, two indispensable assets for companies to thrive in the long run. The events surrounding XYZ provide the basis for how customer satisfaction, in turn, fuels the growth and sustainability of a business.

## 7 SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter presents a general overview of the study and explains its theoretical, managerial, and policy implications. The remaining parts discuss the study's limitations, practical implications, and recommendations for future research.

### 7.1 Summary of the Study

This research was conducted to analyze the sustainability of the catering service industry in the Philippines during COVID-19, and the case study of XYZ Food House and Catering Service was chosen. The study investigated problematic issues, improvisations, and sustainability strategies the industry applied to overcome the obstacles during the crisis and win it successfully. The research revealed the XYZ strategies for weathering and long-term sustainability through qualitative research, including interviews with stakeholders, the owner, and the manager. XYZ Catering had to cope with many problems related to the pandemic, such as 'supply chain distribution, economic strain, and operational challenges. The business underwent a resilience test, demonstrating its commitment to placing safety, innovation, and customer satisfaction at the top of its priorities, and thus survived this storm intact. The practice of their selection of the menu, communication with their customers, and technology help show that they have good crisis management techniques in the catering industry.

Finally, the respondents provided a good insight into what they had experienced throughout the pandemic. In this study, the researcher has successfully addressed the ambiguity regarding the efficiency of marketing strategies, the absence of empirical research on sustainable operational strategies for SMEs, and the inability to establish a relationship between sustainability and innovation in the catering business in the wake of COVID-19. None of those studies demonstrated the specific measures the company must undertake to ensure effective control of the consequences of the challenges that impact the success of catering services in the Philippines. Hence, the expected research aim is met. Thus, with this study, the company can create actionable plans to counteract the challenges to the success of catering services in the Philippines for improved organizational resilience and development, especially after COVID-19.

## **7.2 Theoretical Implications for Five Forces and Generic Strategies**

From a theoretical perspective, the findings of this research are meaningful in understanding and managing crises and adapting strategic decisions using theoretical guidelines. Expanding on the analysis of general ideas, it is possible to understand better how theoretical concepts like Porter's Five Forces and the Three Generic Strategies can effectively decipher the industry, especially during crises. For instance, one of the theories described in the research, XYZ Catering, concerns an actual business model and may help understand the strategic decision-making approach. The study analyses the critical strategic patterns, including cost leadership, differentiation, and focus. It explains how companies can operate and advance during crises, following their opportunities and minimizing threats to maintain a competitive advantage.

In addition, the research points to the importance of customer-focused tools and creativity in revitalizing the organization and enhancing the conditions for productivity during crises. This research concludes that organizations can improve customer satisfaction, loyalty, status, and future stability by considering and focusing on customers' needs and wants. Besides, practical innovation is a critical mechanism that helps organizations cope with changing market environments, respond to newcomers' and threats' emergence, and create competitive advantages. Thus, the theoretical conclusion of this work can be viewed not only as a contribution to the catering industry but also as the presence of practical recommendations for managers and conceptual tools that can be applied to different sectors experiencing similar problems. This discussion applies theoretical frameworks interdependently with scenarios and cases to address strategic management and optimize organizational capacity to function in volatile contexts.

## **7.3 Managerial Implications for the Companies**

Managerial implications are very relevant to catering organizations, as the information provided in this thesis sheds more detailed light on the application of efficient crisis management and organizational sustainability. In appreciating XYZ Catering's case study, one deduces that safety, flexibility, and customer satisfaction are vital facets managers can enhance to respond to the core of crises. From the above demonstration of risk management at XYZ Catering, managers can learn several issues that can help them in the future.

It can also prepare functional risk contingency plans, direct resources to technology and innovation, and focus on executing activities that improve customer relations and make their organizations resilient to future shocks. Moreover, the study claims that the adaptability of the approaches to the new tendencies of the catering business is crucial. Thus, managers are urged to be more attentive to market factors that may influence trends, customers' preferences, or the emergence of new threats and opportunities that need to be addressed. Thus, by using such an approach, as can be witnessed with XYZ Catering, managers can enhance the competitiveness of their firms and guarantee the exploration of new trends, which contribute significantly to shaping the market in the long run.

#### **7.4 Policy Implications for the Companies and Government**

Based on the findings of this study, the policy implication suggests that SMEs should always consider crisis management in regular food service operations. Any supportive measures from policymakers and government officials are also highly encouraged. The governments have a pivotal role in helping organizations by providing financial requirements and technologies and promoting and implementing innovation requirements by covering adverse economic conditions, as illustrated in the case of the XYZ Catering Company. Thus, developing and implementing specific policies to support SMEs allows policymakers to lessen the impact of crises and give businesses the tools to better cope with such conditions.

Moreover, policymakers are under immense pressure to decide about food safety (FSA) norms to regain consumers' trust and maintain health in the country when the crises hit. In that regard, by strengthening the regulatory requirements and increasing people's compliance with the necessary sanitary standards of food services, governments can guarantee the safety and reliability of this market for people and restore consumer confidence. Ultimately, political authorities have considerable control over defining the legal conditions conducive to SMEs' development and ensuring long-term sustainability in the food service sector.

## 7.5 Limitations of the Entire Research Process

While this study provides good insights, some limitations are worth discussing to present this study's findings from the proper perspective. One of the primary sources of research weakness is that it is qualitative research, which sometimes gives limited generalization potential, especially when the results may only apply to XYZ Catering. Furthermore, interviewing as the primary data collection tool also raises the risk of bias or, at best, subjectivity, given that the sections of the respondents' viewpoints obtained do not necessarily capture the full spectrum of experience. As a result, future studies should consider long-term interventions and use qualitative and quantitative methods with more significant sample sizes. Therefore, by going further into the analysis, researchers can provide more accurate insights into sustainable relief operations in catering during crises and use the information to help policymakers and members of the catering sector.

## 7.6 Suggestions for Future Research

To make the investigation more comprehensive, further studies could investigate environmental sustainability and community participation programs that impact sustainable practices among caterers. Analyzing how the above factors shape the uptake of sustainability practices by catering companies could be helpful in establishing the efficiency of this practice and its areas of strength or areas that need enhancement. Moreover, investigating specific types of catering businesses and their activity in various geographical or cultural settings and the cross-comparison of the identified coping patterns in different areas can lead to a better understanding of the differences in the cultural approaches to crisis management. Thus, analyzing these aspects helps researchers identify the factors determining the ergonomics of catering companies' activities in crises.

In addition, more extended research studies of the industry that focus on its evolution throughout the years, as well as changes in trends and the behavior of the consumers, provide much helpful information on the long-term effects of crises on the catering industry. From the analysis of issues, the trend of recovery, continued development, and the possible problems associated with their handling may be identified. This study design can thus promote a continuous observation of how crises influence the catering business and the evolution of worthy mitigation measures to deal with future emergence.

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## **APPENDICES**

Appendix 1. Interview questions for XYZ Food House and Catering service.

**Appendix 1. Interview questions for XYZ Food House and Catering service.**

## Company Information:

- Name of the Company
- Business Type
- Years in Operation
- Geographical Location
- How many employees are working in the company?
- Is there an intention to expand the company?

## Impact of COVID-19:

- How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your catering business overall? (e.g., changes in demand, revenue, customer preferences)
- What strategies have you employed to adapt to the challenges posed by the pandemic and ensure the continuity of your catering services?
- Have you observed any shifts in consumer preferences towards more sustainable catering options during the pandemic? If yes, please elaborate.

## Outlook in the Future:

- In your opinion, how can sustainable practices contribute to catering businesses' long-term resilience and success in the post-pandemic era?
- Are you planning to further enhance or introduce new sustainability initiatives in your catering services in the future? If yes, please provide details.

## Additional Comments:

- Is there anything else you would like to share regarding your experience with sustainable practices in the catering industry during the COVID-19 pandemic?