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Article

Communication Strategies for Building Sustainable Supplier Relationships: A Study of Italian Dining Practices

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Abstract: This study investigates the communication strategies employed by Italian dining establishments to build sustainable supplier relationships. The importance of effective communication in fostering collaboration and ensuring mutual understanding between restaurants and suppliers is critically analyzed. The research utilizes a qualitative approach, involving in-depth interviews with key stakeholders from 26 Italian restaurants and their suppliers. The findings reveal that transparency and clarity in communication serve as foundational elements in establishing trust, allowing both parties to align their sustainability objectives effectively. Additionally, the research highlights the significance of collaboration in decision-making processes, where restaurants engage suppliers in menu planning and sustainability initiatives, promoting innovative solutions that enhance sustainability. Technological advancements also play a crucial role in streamlining communication and facilitating real-time updates, ultimately improving supplier engagement. However, challenges such as cost barriers, cultural differences, and logistical constraints present significant hurdles to achieving sustainable practices. The study emphasizes the need for tailored communication strategies to overcome these challenges and suggests that incentives can motivate suppliers to adhere to sustainability goals. Furthermore, the influence of consumer demand for sustainable products drives suppliers to adapt their practices in alignment with restaurant expectations. The findings underscore the necessity of crisis management communication strategies to navigate disruptions within the supply chain. Overall, this research contributes valuable insights into the interplay between communication and sustainability in the Italian dining sector, providing a framework for restaurants to enhance their supplier relationships and promote sustainable practices effectively.

Keywords: sustainable supplier relationships; communication strategies; Italian dining; transparency; collaboration; technology; food industry

1. Introduction

In recent years, the global food industry has witnessed a significant shift towards sustainable practices, driven by increased awareness of environmental concerns, consumer preferences for ethically sourced food, and the growing demand for transparency in supply chains. In Italy, a country renowned for its culinary heritage, the emphasis on sustainable dining practices is particularly pronounced, as restaurants strive to maintain high standards of quality while also adhering to principles of sustainability. Communication plays a critical role in this context, serving as the foundation upon which sustainable supplier relationships are built. Effective communication not only facilitates collaboration between restaurants and suppliers but also fosters a shared understanding of sustainability goals, ultimately leading to enhanced performance and competitiveness in the market. Asche and Olesen (2019) emphasize that communication strategies in the food industry are pivotal in shaping supplier relationships, particularly in a sector where the origin and quality of ingredients are paramount to success. The Italian dining landscape presents a unique case study for exploring these dynamics, as it encapsulates a rich tapestry of regional food traditions, local sourcing practices, and a commitment to sustainability. Many Italian restaurants prioritize sourcing ingredients from local producers, reflecting a deep-rooted cultural value that underscores the importance of community and regional identity. Bacigalupo and Tiso (2021) highlight that local sourcing not only supports regional economies but also enhances restaurant performance by ensuring freshness and authenticity in menu offerings. In this context, the communication strategies adopted by restaurants become

instrumental in establishing and maintaining sustainable supplier relationships, as they enable stakeholders to align their objectives and collaborate effectively. By engaging in transparent communication, restaurants can convey their sustainability requirements, expectations, and the importance of ethical sourcing to suppliers, thereby reinforcing a shared commitment to sustainable practices. Moreover, the process of building sustainable supplier relationships in the Italian dining sector necessitates a comprehensive understanding of the values, goals, and practices of both parties. Baraldi and Zolkiewski (2020) argue that supplier relationship management in the food sector requires a strategic approach that encompasses not only the procurement of ingredients but also the cultivation of trust, collaboration, and mutual benefit. This perspective aligns with the notion that sustainable supplier relationships extend beyond transactional exchanges; they involve a continuous dialogue that fosters innovation and adaptability in response to changing market demands and consumer preferences. In this light, communication strategies that prioritize active listening, feedback, and relationship building can significantly enhance the effectiveness of sustainable sourcing initiatives. Recent studies have demonstrated that sustainability is increasingly becoming a key criterion in supplier selection processes within the Italian restaurant sector. Bianchi and Mathews (2019) provide evidence that restaurants are more likely to engage suppliers who share their commitment to sustainable practices, further reinforcing the need for effective communication to convey these values. As the landscape of the food industry continues to evolve, restaurants are increasingly recognizing that their success hinges not only on the quality of their offerings but also on their ability to communicate effectively with suppliers regarding sustainability objectives. This shift reflects a broader trend within the food service industry, where green supply chain management practices are gaining traction as a means of enhancing operational efficiency and meeting consumer expectations (Chatzopoulou & Manthou, 2020). In the pursuit of sustainability, Italian restaurants face various challenges that necessitate the adoption of innovative communication strategies. For instance, the integration of technology into supply chain management can facilitate real-time communication and data sharing between restaurants and suppliers, thereby enhancing responsiveness and collaboration. Emon et al. (2024) suggest that digital platforms can serve as valuable tools for establishing transparent communication channels, enabling stakeholders to monitor and evaluate sustainability performance collectively. Furthermore, the use of social media and online marketing channels allows restaurants to engage with consumers on sustainability issues, creating a sense of community and shared responsibility in sourcing practices. The alignment of sustainability objectives between restaurants and suppliers is crucial for the long-term success of their partnerships. Bertini and Koenigsberg (2019) propose a framework for ethical sourcing in the restaurant industry that emphasizes the importance of collaboration and shared values. This framework underscores the notion that effective communication is not merely a means to an end but rather a critical driver of relational success. By fostering an open dialogue, restaurants and suppliers can jointly develop innovative solutions that address sustainability challenges while also enhancing their competitive advantage in the marketplace. In this regard, Emon and Khan (2024) highlight that sustainability efforts must be reinforced through clear, consistent, and strategic communication that ensures alignment between supply chain partners. The Italian dining sector also serves as a microcosm for examining the broader implications of sustainable supplier relationships within the context of global supply chains. As the demand for sustainable practices intensifies, restaurants are increasingly faced with the need to navigate complex supplier networks that span regional and international boundaries. Al-Debei and Avison (2020) argue that communication plays a pivotal role in building resilient supplier relationships, particularly in the face of challenges such as fluctuating market conditions, regulatory changes, and consumer preferences. In this regard, Italian restaurants that effectively leverage communication strategies can not only strengthen their local sourcing efforts but also enhance their overall supply chain resilience. Furthermore, the emphasis on sustainability within the Italian dining sector aligns with the growing trend of consumer activism and demand for corporate social responsibility. Emon et al. (2025) highlight that consumers are becoming increasingly discerning, seeking out restaurants that prioritize ethical sourcing and sustainable practices. This shift in consumer behavior places added pressure on restaurants to communicate their sustainability efforts transparently, thereby building trust and loyalty among patrons. As such, the ability to articulate a restaurant's commitment to sustainability becomes a key differentiator in a competitive marketplace, influencing consumer perceptions and purchasing decisions. The communication strategies employed by Italian restaurants in building sustainable supplier relationships are instrumental in shaping the dynamics of the food industry. As restaurants

strive to balance quality, authenticity, and sustainability, effective communication serves as the foundation for collaboration, trust, and shared goals. The case study of Italian dining practices highlights the importance of local sourcing, supplier relationship management, and the integration of technology in fostering sustainable partnerships. Moreover, as consumer expectations continue to evolve, the ability to communicate sustainability initiatives effectively will be crucial for restaurants seeking to differentiate themselves in a crowded market. Ultimately, the interplay between communication and sustainability in the Italian dining sector offers valuable insights for stakeholders across the food industry, emphasizing the need for continuous dialogue, innovation, and commitment to ethical sourcing practices.

2. Literature Review

The role of communication in sustainable supplier relationships within the Italian dining sector has garnered significant academic interest in recent years. With the increasing demand for sustainability in the food industry, restaurants are focusing on ethical sourcing, environmental responsibility, and supplier collaboration to enhance their market competitiveness. Effective communication strategies play a pivotal role in ensuring the smooth functioning of supplier relationships by fostering trust, transparency, and alignment of sustainability goals. Filippini and Martellini (2019) emphasize that cultural factors influence communication strategies in Italian food businesses, affecting how restaurants engage with their suppliers. Understanding these cultural dynamics is essential for developing communication practices that strengthen supplier relationships and promote sustainability within the restaurant sector. Sustainable supplier relationship management in the food industry requires a multifaceted approach that integrates strategic communication, supplier engagement, and ethical sourcing practices. De Canio and Schmitz (2020) highlight that sustainable supplier development in the Italian restaurant sector is contingent upon long-term collaboration, where effective communication serves as a crucial enabler. Restaurants that prioritize sustainability in their supply chains tend to engage in proactive communication with their suppliers, ensuring that ethical and environmental standards are consistently met. Giaccone and Ricci (2021) further assert that local food sourcing strategies benefit from strong supplier engagement, which is facilitated through clear and transparent communication. When restaurants articulate their sustainability goals effectively, they create mutually beneficial partnerships that reinforce the shared commitment to responsible sourcing. The resilience of supply chains in the food industry is closely linked to communication effectiveness. Christopher and Peck (2019) argue that building resilient supply chains requires continuous information exchange and collaboration among stakeholders. In the context of Italian dining, where the emphasis on quality and authenticity is paramount, supplier relationships must be maintained through open and consistent communication channels. Montanari and Fiore (2020) provide evidence that supplier communication strategies in sustainable supply chains contribute to better coordination, minimizing disruptions while enhancing operational efficiency. These strategies are particularly relevant in mitigating risks associated with fluctuating supply availability and regulatory changes in the food industry. Transparency is a key factor in fostering trust between restaurants and their suppliers. Melacini and Brugnoli (2020) note that transparency in supplier relationships strengthens accountability and ensures compliance with sustainability standards. When restaurants communicate openly about their expectations regarding ethical sourcing, suppliers are more likely to align their practices with sustainability requirements. Furthermore, Fornari and Carbone (2021) emphasize the importance of sustainable communication strategies in the food service industry, noting that clear and honest communication enhances supplier commitment to sustainability initiatives. Effective supplier communication thus serves as a critical mechanism for ensuring that sustainability objectives are consistently met across the supply chain. Collaboration between restaurants and suppliers is essential for driving sustainable innovation in the food sector. Galli and O'Brien (2019) highlight that supplier collaboration fosters innovation by encouraging the development of environmentally friendly sourcing practices. By maintaining open lines of communication, restaurants and suppliers can co-create sustainable solutions that benefit both parties. Frascioni and Donati (2020) further argue that collaborative strategies for sustainability in the restaurant sector require strong communication frameworks that facilitate knowledge sharing and joint problem-solving. These collaborations often lead to innovative approaches to reducing food waste, optimizing resource utilization, and implementing circular economy principles. The integration of sustainability into supplier relationship management is becoming increasingly important for Italian restaurants. Ferri and Bassi (2020) assert that sustainability

considerations must be embedded into supplier management practices, with communication serving as a key driver of this integration. By regularly communicating their sustainability priorities to suppliers, restaurants can ensure that ethical and environmental criteria are met throughout the supply chain. Marra and Nazzaro (2019) identify best practices for sustainable supplier relationships, emphasizing the role of communication in setting clear sustainability expectations and monitoring compliance. These best practices include regular supplier meetings, joint sustainability assessments, and the use of digital platforms for real-time communication. Technology is playing an increasingly significant role in enhancing communication between restaurants and suppliers. Mignemi and Ferrante (2021) highlight the role of social media in supplier engagement, noting that digital platforms provide opportunities for more efficient communication and collaboration. Similarly, Corti and Mandrino (2021) emphasize that social media facilitates real-time information sharing, allowing restaurants to communicate sustainability goals and updates with their suppliers more effectively. This digital shift is reshaping traditional supplier communication strategies, making them more dynamic and interactive. Moreover, Longo and Secchi (2021) explore communication barriers in sustainable supplier relationships, finding that the adoption of technology can help overcome challenges such as misalignment of expectations and information asymmetry. Ethical communication is a critical component of sustainable supplier relationships. Gorriz and Pujadas (2019) argue that ethical communication fosters transparency and accountability in sourcing practices, which are essential for building trust between restaurants and suppliers. When restaurants clearly articulate their ethical sourcing policies, suppliers are more likely to adhere to sustainability commitments. Garofalo and Ranzini (2020) further emphasize that customer communication also plays a role in reinforcing sustainable supplier relationships, as consumer demand for ethical sourcing influences restaurant sourcing decisions. This consumer-driven approach to sustainability highlights the interconnectedness of communication across various stakeholders in the food industry. Local sourcing is a prevalent sustainability practice in Italian dining, and effective communication is integral to its success. Di Giuli and De Rito (2019) provide evidence that food sustainability and local sourcing in Italian restaurants are reinforced through strong supplier communication. When restaurants engage in transparent discussions with local producers, they can establish long-term partnerships that prioritize quality and sustainability. Lalli and Vitali (2020) highlight the dynamics of supplier relationship management in the Italian food industry, noting that communication fosters alignment between restaurants and their suppliers, ensuring that locally sourced ingredients meet both quality and sustainability standards. This strategic approach to local sourcing enhances the overall sustainability of the restaurant sector. Supply chain collaboration in the food industry is deeply rooted in communication effectiveness. Dobson and Smith (2019) argue that communication serves as a key driver in supply chain collaboration, enabling restaurants and suppliers to work together toward shared sustainability objectives. By fostering a culture of open dialogue, restaurants can proactively address challenges related to sustainability compliance and operational efficiency. Munoz and Hazen (2019) further emphasize that sustainable supplier relationships depend on continuous collaboration, which is facilitated through consistent and meaningful communication. These collaborative efforts ultimately contribute to the long-term sustainability of the restaurant sector by ensuring that suppliers remain engaged and committed to ethical sourcing practices. In the evolving landscape of the food industry, restaurants must navigate complex supplier networks while maintaining sustainability commitments. Khan and Emon (2024) highlight that global supply chain complexities require adaptive communication strategies to ensure supplier alignment with sustainability goals. Additionally, Khan et al. (2025) emphasize that digital transformation in supplier communication enhances efficiency, enabling restaurants to manage supplier relationships more effectively. By leveraging digital tools, restaurants can streamline communication processes and improve real-time coordination with suppliers. Khan et al. (2024) further argue that communication adaptability is crucial for overcoming challenges in sustainable supplier relationships, as it enables restaurants to respond proactively to emerging sustainability concerns. The Italian dining sector continues to evolve in response to increasing consumer demand for sustainability and ethical sourcing. Montanari and Fiore (2020) assert that supplier communication strategies are central to the success of sustainable supply chains, as they enable restaurants to establish clear expectations and monitor compliance with sustainability standards. Garofalo and Ranzini (2020) emphasize that customer engagement also influences supplier communication, as consumer preferences for sustainability drive restaurants to maintain transparent supplier relationships. As the industry progresses, communication will remain a cornerstone of sustainable supplier relationship

management, ensuring that restaurants and suppliers work collaboratively to achieve shared sustainability goals. The literature underscores the critical role of communication in fostering sustainable supplier relationships within the Italian dining sector. By integrating strategic communication, supplier engagement, and ethical sourcing practices, restaurants can enhance their sustainability efforts while maintaining high-quality standards. Transparency, collaboration, and the adoption of digital communication tools further strengthen supplier relationships, ensuring alignment with sustainability objectives. As the industry continues to prioritize sustainability, effective communication strategies will remain essential for driving long-term supplier partnerships and fostering a more responsible and ethical food supply chain.

3. Research Methodology

The research employed a qualitative methodology to explore communication strategies for building sustainable supplier relationships within the Italian dining sector. A case study approach was utilized to gain in-depth insights into the communication practices adopted by Italian restaurants in fostering sustainable collaborations with their suppliers. Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews with restaurant managers, procurement officers, and suppliers, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of how communication influenced supplier relationships and sustainability initiatives. The study included a purposive sample of 26 participants, selected based on their direct involvement in supplier communication and sustainability decision-making within their respective establishments. Participants were chosen from a diverse range of Italian restaurants, including small family-owned trattorias, mid-sized establishments, and high-end dining venues, ensuring a broad representation of industry perspectives. Interviews were conducted either in person or via video conferencing, depending on participant availability and geographic location. Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes, providing ample time to explore key themes related to communication strategies, supplier engagement, and sustainability practices. The interview questions were designed to elicit detailed responses on the methods restaurants used to communicate sustainability expectations, the challenges faced in supplier interactions, and the role of transparency, collaboration, and technological tools in maintaining sustainable relationships. All interviews were recorded with participant consent and subsequently transcribed for thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns and themes within the data. Transcripts were systematically coded, and themes were categorized based on their relevance to communication practices and sustainable supplier management. The analysis focused on identifying key communication techniques that facilitated supplier engagement, the impact of digital communication tools, and the role of trust and transparency in sustaining long-term supplier partnerships. Data triangulation was achieved by cross-referencing interview responses with secondary sources, including industry reports, sustainability guidelines, and prior research studies on supplier communication in the restaurant sector. This approach ensured the reliability and validity of the findings. Ethical considerations were strictly adhered to throughout the research process. Participants were provided with informed consent forms detailing the purpose of the study, confidentiality measures, and their right to withdraw at any stage. Data anonymity was maintained by assigning pseudonyms to participants, preventing any direct identification. Additionally, all recorded data and transcripts were securely stored to protect participant confidentiality. The research methodology was designed to provide a nuanced understanding of how Italian restaurants communicated sustainability expectations to their suppliers and the effectiveness of these strategies in fostering long-term, responsible sourcing relationships. By analyzing qualitative data from industry professionals, the study offered valuable insights into best practices for communication-driven sustainability in the food service sector. The findings contributed to a deeper comprehension of how effective supplier communication supported ethical sourcing, enhanced operational efficiency, and strengthened sustainability commitments within the Italian dining industry.

4. Results and Findings

The results and findings of this study reveal the critical role of communication strategies in fostering sustainable supplier relationships within the Italian dining sector. Through qualitative analysis of interviews conducted with restaurant managers, procurement officers, and suppliers, several key themes emerged that highlight how communication practices influence sustainability efforts, supplier engagement, and long-term partnerships. The study found that transparency, trust-building,

collaborative decision-making, and technological integration were fundamental aspects of effective supplier communication. Additionally, challenges related to misalignment of sustainability goals, cultural differences, and logistical constraints emerged as significant barriers that required strategic communication interventions. Transparency in communication was identified as one of the most crucial factors in maintaining sustainable supplier relationships. Restaurants that clearly articulated their sustainability expectations, ethical sourcing policies, and quality standards were able to establish stronger relationships with their suppliers. Open communication helped ensure that suppliers fully understood the environmental and ethical commitments required by restaurants, which in turn facilitated greater compliance and consistency in sustainable sourcing practices. Many restaurant managers emphasized that when suppliers were kept informed about sustainability goals and operational requirements, it reduced misunderstandings and fostered a more cooperative working environment. Furthermore, regular updates and information-sharing regarding regulatory changes, sourcing preferences, and market trends played a vital role in strengthening supplier trust and engagement. Trust-building emerged as another essential element in supplier relationships. The study found that restaurants that maintained long-term partnerships with their suppliers prioritized communication that emphasized mutual respect, reliability, and shared values. Trust was often established through consistent and honest communication, where suppliers felt valued and included in the sustainability journey of the restaurant. Some restaurant managers noted that a history of open and transparent dialogue with suppliers led to a greater willingness from suppliers to invest in sustainable practices, such as adopting environmentally friendly packaging, improving waste management, and ensuring fair labor practices. Trust was also reinforced through regular site visits, face-to-face meetings, and informal check-ins, all of which contributed to stronger interpersonal relationships between restaurant representatives and suppliers. This sense of trust enabled restaurants to negotiate better terms, encourage suppliers to align with ethical sourcing principles, and collaboratively address any supply chain disruptions. Collaborative decision-making was another recurring theme in the findings. Restaurants that engaged their suppliers in joint sustainability initiatives reported higher levels of commitment and innovation in sustainable sourcing. Many restaurant managers described cases where they worked closely with suppliers to develop customized solutions that aligned with both business needs and environmental objectives. This collaborative approach extended to menu planning, where restaurants involved suppliers in discussions about seasonal availability, sourcing alternatives, and product sustainability certifications. Suppliers who were included in decision-making processes felt a stronger sense of partnership and were more likely to proactively suggest sustainable solutions, such as organic produce options, reduced carbon footprint logistics, and alternative eco-friendly ingredients. The study also found that restaurants that provided constructive feedback and encouraged open dialogue with suppliers created an environment where sustainability challenges could be addressed collaboratively rather than through unilateral demands. Technological integration in supplier communication was another key finding. Many restaurants had adopted digital tools to streamline communication, enhance efficiency, and ensure real-time information exchange with their suppliers. The use of online platforms, supply chain management software, and digital tracking systems allowed restaurants to monitor sustainability compliance, track product origins, and manage supplier performance more effectively. Several participants mentioned that digital communication had significantly reduced response times, improved order accuracy, and facilitated better coordination of deliveries. Some restaurants leveraged social media and messaging applications to maintain direct contact with suppliers, share sustainability updates, and receive immediate feedback on supply chain concerns. While digitalization was seen as a major enabler of efficient communication, some challenges were reported, including technical barriers for smaller suppliers who lacked access to advanced digital tools and occasional misinterpretations of messages due to the lack of face-to-face interaction. Despite the effectiveness of communication strategies in fostering sustainable supplier relationships, several challenges were identified in the findings. One of the primary challenges was the misalignment of sustainability goals between restaurants and suppliers. While many restaurants prioritized ethical sourcing and environmental responsibility, some suppliers were more focused on cost efficiency and profitability, leading to conflicts in sustainability expectations. In several cases, restaurant managers reported difficulties in convincing suppliers to adopt more sustainable practices due to higher costs associated with eco-friendly materials, organic certification, and waste reduction measures. This misalignment often resulted in strained relationships and required extensive negotiation and communication efforts to bridge the gap. Cultural differences between restaurants and

suppliers also posed challenges in communication. Given the diverse backgrounds of suppliers, particularly in regions with international sourcing, language barriers, varying business practices, and differing perceptions of sustainability created obstacles to effective supplier engagement. Some restaurant managers described instances where misunderstandings regarding sustainability standards led to inconsistent product quality or non-compliance with ethical sourcing policies. To mitigate these challenges, restaurants employed strategies such as bilingual communication materials, sustainability training programs for suppliers, and third-party audits to ensure that all parties were aligned in their sustainability commitments. Logistical constraints further complicated supplier communication. Supply chain disruptions, seasonal variations in ingredient availability, and transportation delays often created difficulties in maintaining seamless supplier relationships. Some restaurant managers noted that unpredictable factors such as extreme weather conditions, regulatory changes, and economic fluctuations affected supplier reliability and required constant communication to navigate uncertainties. In response to these challenges, many restaurants implemented contingency plans, alternative sourcing strategies, and flexible ordering systems to ensure that sustainability goals were not compromised due to external disruptions. Another finding related to the role of supplier incentives in strengthening sustainable relationships. Some restaurants implemented reward-based communication strategies, where suppliers who demonstrated strong sustainability performance received long-term contracts, priority orders, or financial incentives. These incentives encouraged suppliers to actively participate in sustainability efforts and align their practices with restaurant sustainability goals. On the other hand, some restaurant managers reported that punitive communication, such as strict compliance penalties, negatively impacted supplier relationships and led to resistance rather than cooperation. The study highlighted that positive reinforcement, combined with clear sustainability guidelines, was a more effective approach in motivating suppliers to adhere to ethical sourcing principles. The findings also indicated that consumer demand played an indirect role in shaping supplier communication strategies. Several restaurants reported that increased consumer awareness of sustainability influenced their sourcing decisions, prompting them to communicate more rigorously with suppliers about sustainable sourcing expectations. As consumer preferences shifted toward organic, locally sourced, and ethically produced food, restaurants had to ensure that their suppliers could meet these demands. Some restaurant managers noted that supplier communication had become more proactive, with suppliers voluntarily offering sustainable product options to align with market trends. This consumer-driven approach to sustainability reinforced the importance of transparent communication, as restaurants needed to verify and validate supplier claims before marketing their sustainability commitments to customers. In addition, findings revealed that supplier communication was significantly influenced by regulatory requirements and industry standards. Compliance with food safety regulations, organic certification processes, and sustainability reporting obligations required restaurants to maintain continuous communication with their suppliers. Several participants reported that government policies and industry sustainability guidelines shaped the way they structured their communication with suppliers, particularly in terms of documentation, audits, and verification processes. Some restaurant managers expressed concerns about the complexity of regulatory compliance and emphasized the need for clearer, standardized communication frameworks to ensure consistency across supplier networks.

Table 1. Transparency in Supplier Communication.

Theme	Description
Clear Sustainability Expectations	Restaurants explicitly communicated sustainability requirements to suppliers, ensuring alignment with ethical and environmental standards.
Open Information Sharing	Regular updates about sourcing policies, quality control measures, and regulatory compliance were shared to build trust.

Consistency in Communication	Establishing standard communication protocols helped suppliers understand expectations and reduce misunderstandings.
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Maintaining transparency in supplier communication was essential for fostering trust and sustainability compliance. Many restaurants emphasized the need for clarity when discussing ethical sourcing, environmental standards, and quality expectations. Open information sharing helped suppliers align their practices with restaurant sustainability commitments. Standardized communication methods, such as documented agreements and sustainability checklists, played a crucial role in ensuring that all stakeholders remained informed and engaged.

Table 2. Trust-Building through Communication.

Theme	Description
Long-Term Relationship Focus	Restaurants nurtured long-term partnerships by fostering mutual respect and reliability.
Honest and Transparent Dialogue	Open conversations about sourcing challenges and business expectations strengthened trust.
Face-to-Face Interactions	Regular in-person meetings and supplier visits reinforced relationships and improved collaboration.

The ability to build trust through communication was a defining factor in successful supplier relationships. Many restaurants relied on honest and transparent discussions to address sourcing issues and ensure reliability. Regular face-to-face interactions, including site visits and informal meetings, contributed to a sense of partnership and encouraged suppliers to invest in sustainability efforts. Long-term supplier relationships flourished when trust was prioritized, leading to more stable sourcing arrangements.

Table 3. Collaborative Decision-Making.

Theme	Description
Joint Sustainability Initiatives	Suppliers and restaurants worked together to implement environmentally friendly solutions.
Menu Planning Involvement	Suppliers contributed to seasonal menu decisions based on ingredient availability and sustainability considerations.
Shared Problem-Solving	Open discussions allowed suppliers and restaurants to address logistical and sustainability challenges collectively.

Collaboration between restaurants and suppliers proved to be a key driver of sustainability. Many restaurants involved suppliers in decision-making processes related to ingredient sourcing and menu development. Open dialogue encouraged suppliers to contribute innovative solutions, such as recommending sustainable alternatives and reducing waste. The collaborative approach resulted in stronger partnerships and a greater commitment to shared sustainability goals.

Table 4. Role of Technology in Supplier Communication.

Theme	Description
Digital Platforms for Communication	Online tools facilitated real-time communication and order tracking.
Automated Compliance Monitoring	Digital systems ensured suppliers adhered to sustainability requirements.
Use of Social Media	Restaurants used social platforms to maintain direct engagement with suppliers.

The integration of technology into supplier communication improved efficiency and transparency. Many restaurants adopted digital platforms to streamline order management and track sustainability compliance. Automated systems helped ensure suppliers met environmental standards, reducing the risk of misalignment. Social media and instant messaging tools also played a role in maintaining continuous engagement with suppliers, enhancing responsiveness and collaboration.

Table 5. Challenges in Aligning Sustainability Goals.

Theme	Description
Cost Barriers	Some suppliers hesitated to adopt sustainable practices due to financial constraints.
Resistance to Change	Traditional suppliers struggled to adapt to new sustainability expectations.
Differing Business Priorities	Suppliers prioritized cost efficiency over sustainability in some cases.

Aligning sustainability goals between restaurants and suppliers remained a challenge, as financial and operational priorities often differed. Some suppliers were reluctant to invest in sustainable practices due to higher costs and perceived risks. Resistance to change was particularly evident among long-established suppliers accustomed to conventional sourcing methods. Continuous communication and incentive structures were necessary to bridge these gaps and encourage suppliers to adopt sustainable practices.

Table 6. Cultural Differences in Supplier Communication.

Theme	Description
Language Barriers	Miscommunication occurred due to linguistic differences between restaurants and suppliers.
Differing Business Norms	Suppliers from different cultural backgrounds had varied approaches to negotiation and compliance.
Perceptions of Sustainability	Cultural differences influenced how sustainability was understood and prioritized.

Cultural factors played a significant role in shaping supplier communication dynamics. Language barriers and differing business practices often led to misunderstandings, particularly when sourcing from international suppliers. Varied perceptions of sustainability also influenced supplier engagement, as some cultures placed greater emphasis on environmental responsibility than others. Restaurants addressed these challenges by adopting bilingual communication strategies and providing sustainability training programs for suppliers.

Table 7. Logistical Constraints and Supply Chain Disruptions.

Theme	Description
Seasonal Variability	Ingredient availability fluctuated due to seasonal changes.
Transportation Challenges	Delivery delays and supply chain disruptions affected supplier reliability.
External Market Influences	Economic conditions and regulatory changes impacted supplier operations.

Logistical challenges affected the consistency and reliability of supplier relationships. Seasonal variations in ingredient availability required ongoing communication to adjust sourcing strategies. Transportation issues, including delays and disruptions, necessitated flexibility in ordering and supplier coordination. External factors such as economic instability and regulatory changes further complicated supplier management, making proactive communication strategies essential for navigating uncertainties.

Table 8. Incentives for Sustainable Supplier Engagement.

Theme	Description
Financial Rewards	Suppliers with strong sustainability performance received favorable contract terms.
Long-Term Contracts	Reliable and sustainable suppliers were prioritized for extended partnerships.
Recognition and Promotion	Restaurants publicly acknowledged sustainable suppliers, enhancing their reputation.

Incentives played a crucial role in motivating suppliers to align with sustainability expectations. Some restaurants offered financial rewards or preferential contract terms to suppliers who demonstrated commitment to sustainability. Public recognition, such as featuring suppliers in marketing campaigns, encouraged compliance and enhanced supplier reputations. These incentive structures helped reinforce long-term supplier engagement and commitment to sustainable practices.

Table 9. Consumer Influence on Supplier Communication.

Theme	Description
Rising Demand for Sustainability	Consumers increasingly preferred ethically sourced and environmentally friendly products.

Supplier Adaptation		Suppliers adjusted their sourcing practices in response to consumer preferences.
Transparency for Marketing		Restaurants communicated supplier sustainability efforts to attract eco-conscious customers.

Consumer expectations significantly shaped supplier communication strategies. Restaurants faced growing pressure to ensure their suppliers met sustainability demands, as eco-conscious consumers preferred ethically sourced products. This consumer-driven shift prompted suppliers to adopt more responsible sourcing practices. Transparency in supplier communication allowed restaurants to market their sustainability efforts effectively, strengthening consumer trust and brand loyalty.

Table 10: Regulatory and Compliance Requirements.

Theme	Description
Adherence to Food Safety Standards	Suppliers had to comply with strict food safety and sustainability regulations.
Certification Processes	Organic and fair-trade certifications influenced supplier selection.
Documentation and Audits	Compliance tracking required ongoing communication and verification.

Regulatory requirements played a vital role in shaping supplier communication strategies. Restaurants needed to ensure suppliers complied with food safety regulations, organic certifications, and ethical sourcing guidelines. Frequent audits and documentation processes necessitated ongoing communication to verify compliance. Some suppliers faced challenges in meeting regulatory expectations, highlighting the importance of structured and clear communication between restaurants and their supply partners.

Table 11: Communication Strategies for Crisis Management.

Theme	Description
Contingency Planning	Restaurants developed backup supplier networks to handle disruptions.
Rapid Response Communication	Real-time updates helped address supply chain issues quickly.
Flexible Sourcing Strategies	Adaptive communication ensured minimal impact on operations during crises.

Crisis management was a critical aspect of supplier communication, particularly in response to supply chain disruptions. Restaurants implemented contingency plans, including backup supplier networks, to ensure business continuity. Rapid-response communication strategies helped mitigate supply shortages and operational risks. Flexible sourcing arrangements enabled restaurants to adapt

quickly to unexpected challenges, demonstrating the importance of proactive and agile communication in sustaining supplier relationships.

The findings of the study revealed several critical insights regarding the communication strategies employed by Italian dining establishments to build sustainable supplier relationships. Firstly, transparency emerged as a cornerstone of effective supplier communication, with restaurants emphasizing the importance of clear expectations concerning sustainability practices. This transparency fostered trust and mutual respect between restaurants and suppliers, essential for maintaining long-term partnerships. Secondly, collaborative decision-making processes were highlighted, where restaurants actively involved suppliers in menu planning and sustainability initiatives, leading to innovative solutions and shared commitments to sustainability goals. The role of technology in enhancing communication was also significant, as digital platforms facilitated real-time updates, order tracking, and compliance monitoring, thereby improving overall supplier engagement. Additionally, the study identified challenges in aligning sustainability goals, primarily due to cost barriers and resistance to change among some suppliers. Cultural differences in communication styles and logistical constraints further complicated supplier relationships, necessitating tailored communication strategies to address these issues effectively. Incentive structures, including financial rewards and public recognition for sustainable practices, proved effective in motivating suppliers to adhere to sustainability expectations. Furthermore, the influence of consumer demand for sustainable practices was notable, prompting suppliers to adapt their sourcing methods in response to evolving market preferences. Finally, the findings underscored the importance of crisis management communication strategies, highlighting the need for contingency planning and rapid response measures to navigate disruptions in the supply chain. Overall, these insights illustrate that effective communication strategies are pivotal in cultivating sustainable supplier relationships within the Italian dining sector.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study emphasize the critical role that communication strategies play in establishing and maintaining sustainable supplier relationships within the Italian dining sector. The emphasis on transparency in communication highlights a foundational element that fosters trust and cooperation between restaurants and their suppliers. By setting clear expectations regarding sustainability practices, restaurants not only align their values with those of their suppliers but also create a framework for accountability. This transparency is crucial in an industry where sourcing practices can significantly impact environmental and social outcomes. Suppliers who understand the sustainability standards expected of them are more likely to adapt their practices accordingly, which contributes to a more cohesive supply chain committed to ethical sourcing. The collaborative approach observed in the decision-making processes between restaurants and suppliers further reinforces the importance of partnership in achieving sustainability goals. By involving suppliers in menu planning and sustainability initiatives, restaurants tap into the expertise and insights of their partners. This collaboration not only leads to innovative solutions that benefit both parties but also strengthens the commitment of suppliers to meet the sustainability expectations set forth by restaurants. The dynamic of working together fosters a sense of shared responsibility, which is particularly beneficial in an industry that faces constant changes in consumer preferences and regulatory demands. The role of technology in enhancing communication cannot be overstated. The integration of digital platforms for real-time communication and compliance monitoring significantly streamlines interactions between restaurants and suppliers. This technological advancement allows for more efficient information sharing and reduces the likelihood of misunderstandings that could arise from traditional communication methods. As the food industry continues to evolve, leveraging technology will be essential for maintaining competitive advantages and fostering sustainable practices. However, the study also uncovers challenges that can impede the development of sustainable supplier relationships. Cost barriers and resistance to change remain significant hurdles that restaurants must navigate when encouraging suppliers to adopt more sustainable practices. Many suppliers, particularly those with long-standing traditional practices, may find it difficult to justify the investments required to meet new sustainability standards. This situation underscores the need for restaurants to provide support and incentives that encourage suppliers to embrace sustainable practices rather than viewing them solely as additional costs. Cultural differences and logistical constraints present additional challenges in the communication process. As suppliers come from diverse backgrounds, their communication styles and business norms can vary significantly. Restaurants must adopt flexible

communication strategies that account for these differences to foster effective relationships. Furthermore, logistical challenges, such as transportation issues and seasonal variability in ingredient availability, highlight the need for ongoing dialogue to adapt sourcing strategies dynamically. Consumer influence is also a pivotal factor in shaping supplier engagement strategies. The increasing demand for ethically sourced products compels restaurants to prioritize suppliers who can meet these expectations. This shift not only influences supplier practices but also creates a competitive environment where those who can effectively communicate their sustainability efforts gain a market advantage. Restaurants that articulate their sustainability commitments and promote their suppliers' contributions will likely resonate more with eco-conscious consumers. Lastly, the findings stress the importance of crisis management communication strategies in sustaining supplier relationships during disruptions. The ability to respond swiftly and effectively to supply chain challenges is vital for maintaining operational continuity. Establishing contingency plans and fostering agile communication practices will enable restaurants to navigate unexpected disruptions, ensuring that supplier relationships remain intact even in times of uncertainty. Overall, the study's findings highlight the multifaceted nature of communication strategies in building sustainable supplier relationships, revealing the intricate interplay between transparency, collaboration, technology, and responsiveness to external pressures.

6. Conclusion

The research has underscored the vital role that effective communication strategies play in cultivating sustainable supplier relationships within the Italian dining sector. The emphasis on transparency, collaboration, and the use of technology highlights the essential components that contribute to building trust and mutual understanding between restaurants and their suppliers. By establishing clear expectations and involving suppliers in decision-making processes, restaurants can foster an environment of shared responsibility, driving innovative approaches to sustainability. The challenges identified, such as cost barriers and cultural differences, indicate that while the path to sustainability is fraught with obstacles, it is also rich with opportunities for growth and adaptation. As consumer demand for sustainable practices continues to rise, it becomes increasingly imperative for restaurants to engage their suppliers actively, leveraging incentives and support to encourage the adoption of sustainable practices. Moreover, the importance of crisis management communication emphasizes the need for resilience and flexibility in supplier relationships, allowing restaurants to navigate uncertainties while maintaining operational efficiency. Ultimately, the findings of this study provide valuable insights into the strategies that can enhance supplier relationships, illustrating that a comprehensive approach to communication is not only beneficial but necessary for fostering sustainable practices in the food industry. The ongoing evolution of the sector will require restaurants to remain agile, continuously refining their communication strategies to align with emerging trends and expectations in sustainability, ensuring that they can thrive in a competitive and environmentally conscious marketplace.

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