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Article

# Trust and Sustainability: Best Practices in Supplier Collaborations within Italian Dining

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**Abstract:** This research examines the convergence of trust and sustainability in supplier relationships within the Italian dining sector, emphasizing the essential importance of trust in forming and sustaining successful collaborations. With the increasing need for sustainable practices from customers and regulatory entities, understanding the dynamics of trust in supplier relationships is essential. This qualitative research, conducted via interviews with 51 stakeholders from diverse Italian eating businesses, highlights critical themes including trust, transparency, shared values, communication, and the obstacles encountered in establishing lasting relationships. The results indicate that trust is fundamental to enduring relationships, facilitating open communication and cooperative endeavors aimed at common sustainability objectives. Transparency in sourcing processes and the congruence of values between restaurants and suppliers are crucial for cultivating trust. Nonetheless, problems such as price competition and variable product quality may jeopardize these connections, requiring efficient communication to resolve issues and sustain alignment. Moreover, external factors, such as customer expectations and regulatory modifications, necessitate that both parties adjust their processes and improve teamwork. The study highlights the significance of proactive involvement and education in building trust and maintaining relationships. This study offers significant insights into the intricate relationship between trust and sustainability, presenting practical implications for stakeholders in the Italian dining sector and establishing a framework for further research aimed at improving supplier relationships in the context of sustainability.

**Keywords:** trust; sustainability; supplier partnerships; Italian dining industry; transparency; communication; shared values

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## 1. Introduction

The intersection of trust and sustainability in supplier partnerships has emerged as a pivotal theme in the contemporary discourse surrounding business practices, particularly within the dining sector. This is particularly relevant in the context of Italian dining businesses, renowned for their commitment to high-quality ingredients and culinary traditions. As consumer awareness regarding environmental sustainability and ethical sourcing continues to grow, dining establishments increasingly recognize the necessity of forging strong, trust-based relationships with their suppliers. Trust is not merely a relational aspect but a foundational element that significantly impacts the operational dynamics between dining businesses and their suppliers. In this context, it is essential to understand how trust influences the adoption and implementation of sustainable practices within supplier partnerships, as well as the challenges that may arise in fostering such relationships. Recent studies have highlighted the role of trust in facilitating cooperation among stakeholders, thereby enhancing the sustainability of business operations (Alhammoud et al., 2021; Arslan et al., 2022). Furthermore, trust serves as a catalyst for transparency, enabling dining businesses to ensure that their suppliers adhere to sustainable practices that align with the values of their clientele (Cho et al., 2021; Emon & Khan, 2024). The Italian dining industry, characterized by its emphasis on local sourcing and traditional food practices, provides a unique context to explore these dynamics. In exploring the intersection of trust and sustainability in supplier partnerships, it is crucial to

acknowledge the diverse factors that contribute to building and maintaining trust in these relationships. Research indicates that trust is often established through consistent communication, shared values, and a commitment to mutual benefit (Belieres et al., 2020; Fawaz & Salam, 2018; Khan et al., 2024). Dining businesses that prioritize transparency and ethical sourcing tend to cultivate stronger relationships with their suppliers, which in turn fosters an environment conducive to implementing sustainable practices. As sustainability becomes an increasingly critical criterion for consumers, the pressure on dining establishments to source ingredients responsibly and sustainably has intensified (Duarte et al., 2022; Fidan et al., 2018). This growing demand necessitates that suppliers not only deliver high-quality products but also adhere to environmentally friendly practices. Trust acts as a facilitator in this context, enabling dining businesses to engage suppliers who share their commitment to sustainability. The reliance on trust is particularly pronounced in the Italian dining sector, where relationships between chefs and suppliers often span generations. These long-standing connections are typically grounded in a shared understanding of quality and sustainability, resulting in a robust network of partnerships that support local economies and promote sustainable agricultural practices (Bonilla-Hernández & Martínez-Gutiérrez, 2021; Gonzalez et al., 2022). However, the complexities of modern supply chains present challenges that can erode trust. Price competition, fluctuations in quality, and the increasing complexity of sourcing ingredients from diverse regions can strain supplier relationships, particularly when dining businesses prioritize cost-cutting over sustainability (Bhattacharya et al., 2021; Greco et al., 2022). In this regard, dining establishments must navigate the delicate balance between maintaining profitability and fostering trust with suppliers, which is essential for implementing sustainable practices. Moreover, the importance of trust extends beyond the immediate supplier relationship, influencing the broader ecosystem within which dining businesses operate. Research shows that businesses that engage in sustainable practices often experience enhanced reputation and customer loyalty, as consumers increasingly favor establishments that demonstrate a commitment to ethical sourcing and environmental stewardship (Gonzalez-Aleu et al., 2022; Goffe et al., 2018; Khan & Emon, 2024). This shift in consumer behavior underscores the necessity for dining businesses to prioritize trust and sustainability in their supplier partnerships, as these elements directly impact their market positioning and long-term viability. Additionally, suppliers who invest in sustainable practices often benefit from increased demand from dining establishments, creating a symbiotic relationship that reinforces the importance of trust in fostering sustainability (Ceynowa et al., 2023; Ceynowa et al., 2024). The dynamic interplay between trust and sustainability in supplier partnerships also raises critical questions regarding the measurement and assessment of trust in these relationships. While qualitative factors, such as communication and shared values, are integral to establishing trust, quantifiable metrics are essential for evaluating the effectiveness of these partnerships. Studies have explored various frameworks for assessing trust in supply chain relationships, highlighting the need for clear criteria and indicators that can guide dining businesses in selecting and evaluating their suppliers (Fuster et al., 2022; Goffe et al., 2019; Emon et al., 2025). Implementing such frameworks not only enhances the ability of dining establishments to make informed decisions regarding supplier partnerships but also reinforces the importance of sustainability as a key criterion in these evaluations. The intersection of trust and sustainability in supplier partnerships represents a critical area of exploration for the Italian dining industry. As dining establishments increasingly prioritize sustainable practices in response to consumer demands, the role of trust in fostering these partnerships becomes ever more pronounced. Building trust through transparency, communication, and shared values is essential for establishing long-term relationships with suppliers who are committed to sustainability. However, challenges such as price competition and fluctuating quality pose significant obstacles that dining businesses must navigate. As the industry evolves, the necessity for effective frameworks to measure and assess trust will become increasingly important, ensuring that dining establishments can forge meaningful, sustainable partnerships that enhance their operational effectiveness and contribute to the broader goals of environmental stewardship and social responsibility.

## 2. Literature Review

The intersection of trust and sustainability in supplier partnerships is a complex and multifaceted area of study that has garnered increasing attention in the literature. As businesses navigate the pressures of globalization, sustainability, and consumer expectations, understanding the dynamics of trust within supplier relationships becomes essential for fostering sustainable practices and achieving long-term success. Trust has been recognized as a critical component in the development and maintenance of supplier partnerships, influencing collaboration, communication, and shared goals (Hiranphaet, 2019). The significance of trust in supply chain management has been emphasized by numerous scholars, highlighting its role in enhancing performance and facilitating the implementation of sustainable practices (Kotebagilu et al., 2023; Khan et al., 2024). Sustainability, defined as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, is increasingly recognized as a vital consideration in business operations (Kaluthanthri & Osmadi, 2020). The concept encompasses environmental, social, and economic dimensions, making it imperative for businesses to adopt a holistic approach to sustainability in their supply chains (Lee et al., 2019). As businesses face growing scrutiny from consumers and regulatory bodies regarding their environmental and social impacts, the need for sustainable sourcing practices has become more pressing (Zeng et al., 2018; Khan et al., 2025). Consequently, the role of suppliers in this context cannot be understated; they are often the primary source of raw materials and resources that significantly influence a business's sustainability performance (Melo et al., 2019). The interplay between trust and sustainability in supplier partnerships has been explored in various contexts, with researchers identifying multiple factors that contribute to the establishment of trust within these relationships. Hillier-Brown et al. (2019) assert that trust is built upon shared values, mutual understanding, and transparent communication between suppliers and buyers. The authors emphasize that trust fosters collaboration and enables suppliers to innovate and adopt sustainable practices more readily. In a similar vein, Kang et al. (2023) highlight the importance of relational trust, which is developed over time through consistent interactions and shared experiences. This relational trust not only enhances the quality of communication between partners but also encourages the exploration of joint sustainability initiatives, as both parties are more likely to invest in long-term solutions when a strong foundation of trust is present. However, the establishment of trust in supplier partnerships is not without its challenges. Research indicates that various factors can undermine trust, including price competition, inconsistent product quality, and lack of transparency in supply chains (Kao & Chueh, 2022; Kathuria et al., 2020). In an environment characterized by increasing pressure to reduce costs, dining businesses may be tempted to prioritize short-term gains over the cultivation of trust and sustainable practices (Khan et al., 2025). This can lead to a transactional approach to supplier relationships, which ultimately undermines the potential for long-term collaboration and shared sustainability goals (Prakash, 2018; Emon et al., 2024). Therefore, it is essential for businesses to adopt a strategic approach to supplier management that prioritizes trust and sustainability, as these elements are interdependent and mutually reinforcing (Singh, 2024). In the context of the Italian dining industry, the significance of trust in supplier partnerships takes on added complexity. Italian dining businesses often pride themselves on their commitment to quality, authenticity, and sustainability, which necessitates strong relationships with suppliers who can deliver high-quality, sustainably sourced ingredients (Sulistiyadi et al., 2019). The reliance on local suppliers and traditional sourcing practices enhances the importance of trust, as these relationships are often deeply rooted in cultural and historical contexts (Voytovych et al., 2020). Moreover, dining businesses that cultivate trust with their suppliers are more likely to receive consistent quality and timely deliveries, which are essential for maintaining high standards in their culinary offerings (Lyu et al., 2022). The literature also underscores the role of communication in building and maintaining trust in supplier partnerships. Effective communication is critical for aligning expectations, addressing concerns, and fostering a shared understanding of sustainability objectives (Oprea et al., 2019). Regular communication facilitates transparency and helps to mitigate potential misunderstandings that could undermine trust (Hiranphaet, 2019). Additionally, the use of

technology in communication can enhance trust by providing real-time information about supply chain operations, thereby increasing transparency and accountability (Khan & Emon, 2024). For example, digital platforms that enable collaborative decision-making and data sharing can strengthen relationships between dining businesses and their suppliers, fostering a sense of partnership that is conducive to sustainable practices (Wu & Teng, 2023). Moreover, the literature highlights the significance of shared values and a common vision for sustainability as foundational elements in establishing trust within supplier partnerships (Fidan et al., 2018; Khan et al., 2024). When dining businesses and suppliers share a commitment to sustainability, they are more likely to work collaboratively toward achieving common goals. Research indicates that organizations that actively engage with their suppliers in sustainability initiatives tend to experience improved trust and stronger relationships (Kumar & Sodhi, 2024). This collaborative approach not only enhances the sustainability of individual businesses but also contributes to the overall resilience of supply chains, enabling them to adapt to changing market conditions and consumer demands (Greco et al., 2022). Trust is also associated with risk management in supplier partnerships. In the context of sustainability, businesses face various risks, including reputational risks associated with unethical sourcing practices and environmental risks related to resource depletion and climate change (Khan et al., 2024). Trust mitigates these risks by fostering open communication and collaboration, enabling dining businesses to work closely with their suppliers to identify and address potential challenges. By building trust, businesses can enhance their ability to respond to sustainability-related risks and ensure compliance with emerging regulatory requirements (Sureeyatanapas & Damapong, 2024). This proactive approach to risk management is particularly important in the Italian dining industry, where consumer expectations regarding sustainability and ethical sourcing are rapidly evolving. The role of trust in supplier partnerships is further emphasized in the context of innovation. Studies have shown that trust can facilitate the sharing of knowledge and resources, leading to innovative solutions that enhance sustainability (Meneguel et al., 2022). When suppliers and dining businesses trust each other, they are more likely to engage in collaborative innovation, developing new products, processes, and practices that align with sustainability objectives (Voytovych et al., 2020). This collaborative innovation is particularly relevant in the dining industry, where the demand for sustainable practices and locally sourced ingredients continues to grow. By fostering an environment of trust, dining businesses can encourage their suppliers to invest in sustainable innovations that enhance the overall sustainability of the supply chain (Hiranphaet, 2019; Khan & Emon, 2025). Furthermore, the importance of ethical leadership in fostering trust within supplier partnerships cannot be overstated. Ethical leadership involves demonstrating integrity, transparency, and a commitment to sustainability, which are essential for building trust with suppliers (Gonzalez et al., 2022). Research indicates that leaders who prioritize ethical practices are more likely to cultivate trust among their teams and external partners, thereby enhancing the overall sustainability of their operations (Hiranphaet, 2019; Khan et al., 2024). In the context of the Italian dining industry, ethical leadership plays a crucial role in shaping the culture of supplier partnerships, as it sets the tone for how businesses engage with their suppliers and stakeholders (Fuster et al., 2022; Emon & Khan, 2024). Finally, the literature suggests that measuring trust in supplier partnerships is essential for understanding its impact on sustainability outcomes. While trust is often perceived as a qualitative attribute, several researchers have developed frameworks for quantifying trust in supply chain relationships (Khan et al., 2025). These frameworks typically include dimensions such as communication quality, reliability, and shared values, providing businesses with tools to assess the strength of their supplier relationships (Laoh et al., 2020). By adopting such measurement frameworks, dining businesses can gain insights into their supplier partnerships, identify areas for improvement, and develop strategies to enhance trust and sustainability. In conclusion, the literature on the intersection of trust and sustainability in supplier partnerships underscores the critical importance of trust in fostering sustainable practices within the Italian dining industry. As businesses face increasing pressure to adopt sustainable sourcing practices, the role of trust in supplier relationships becomes ever more pronounced. Trust facilitates collaboration, enhances

communication, and fosters innovation, all of which are essential for achieving sustainability objectives. However, challenges such as price competition and inconsistent quality can undermine trust, necessitating a strategic approach to supplier management that prioritizes long-term relationships and shared sustainability goals. By cultivating trust with their suppliers, dining businesses can enhance their sustainability performance and contribute to the broader goals of environmental stewardship and social responsibility, ultimately positioning themselves for success in an increasingly competitive and sustainability-conscious marketplace.

### 3. Research Methodology

The research methodology employed in this study was qualitative in nature, aimed at exploring the intersection of trust and sustainability in supplier partnerships within the Italian dining industry. The researchers utilized a semi-structured interview approach to gather rich, in-depth data from various stakeholders, including restaurant owners, suppliers, and industry experts. The sample size comprised a total of 51 participants, selected through purposive sampling to ensure a diverse representation of perspectives and experiences. The participants included 25 restaurant owners from different regions of Italy, 15 suppliers of local and organic ingredients, and 11 industry experts with extensive knowledge in sustainability and supply chain management. The researchers developed an interview guide that contained open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed responses regarding participants' experiences, perceptions, and insights related to trust and sustainability in supplier partnerships. The questions addressed various themes, including definitions and perceptions of trust, the influence of trust on sustainable practices, challenges in building and maintaining trust, and strategies for fostering sustainable supplier relationships. Interviews were conducted both in-person and through virtual platforms, allowing for flexibility in participation while accommodating geographical constraints. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes, and participants were encouraged to share their thoughts freely, enabling the researchers to gather comprehensive qualitative data. The interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants and subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis. The data analysis process involved thematic analysis, which entailed identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within the qualitative data. The researchers meticulously reviewed the transcripts, coding the data to highlight recurring themes and insights related to trust and sustainability. This iterative process allowed the researchers to refine their understanding of the relationships between trust and sustainable practices in supplier partnerships, ultimately leading to a comprehensive interpretation of the findings. In addition to the interviews, the researchers conducted a thorough review of relevant literature to contextualize the findings within existing theoretical frameworks and empirical studies. This combination of primary qualitative data and secondary literature provided a robust foundation for understanding the complexities of trust and sustainability in the context of the Italian dining industry. The study adhered to ethical guidelines, ensuring that participants' confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process. In conclusion, the methodology employed in this study effectively facilitated an in-depth exploration of the intersection of trust and sustainability in supplier partnerships, yielding valuable insights that contribute to the ongoing discourse in this field.

### 4. Results and Findings

The results and findings of this study revealed significant insights into the intersection of trust and sustainability in supplier partnerships within the Italian dining industry. Through the analysis of 51 semi-structured interviews conducted with restaurant owners, suppliers, and industry experts, several key themes emerged that illuminated the complexities and dynamics of these relationships. The participants expressed a profound understanding of the importance of trust in fostering sustainable practices, and their narratives highlighted both the benefits and challenges associated with building and maintaining trust within supplier partnerships. One of the predominant themes that emerged from the interviews was the critical role of trust as a foundational element in supplier

relationships. Participants consistently emphasized that trust was essential for establishing long-term partnerships that could support sustainable sourcing practices. Many restaurant owners noted that their ability to rely on suppliers for high-quality ingredients was directly linked to the trust they had developed over time. This trust was often built through shared experiences, consistent communication, and a mutual commitment to quality and sustainability. Restaurant owners described their relationships with suppliers as collaborative partnerships, where trust enabled open dialogues about sourcing practices and sustainability initiatives. The suppliers echoed these sentiments, stating that trust allowed them to innovate and propose sustainable practices without the fear of jeopardizing their relationships with the dining establishments. Furthermore, the results highlighted the significance of transparency in fostering trust within supplier partnerships. Participants noted that transparent communication regarding sourcing practices, production methods, and sustainability efforts was paramount in building trust. Many restaurant owners expressed a desire for suppliers to provide detailed information about their products, including certifications, sourcing origins, and environmental impacts. This transparency not only enhanced trust but also empowered restaurant owners to make informed decisions about their sourcing practices. Suppliers acknowledged that providing such information required a commitment to transparency, which could sometimes be challenging due to competitive pressures and the complexities of the supply chain. Nevertheless, those suppliers who embraced transparency found that it significantly strengthened their relationships with dining businesses and facilitated collaboration on sustainability initiatives. Another important finding was the influence of shared values on trust and sustainability. Participants articulated that trust flourished when both parties shared a common vision for sustainability and ethical sourcing. Restaurant owners expressed their preference for working with suppliers who aligned with their sustainability goals, whether that meant using organic ingredients, supporting local farmers, or minimizing environmental impact. Suppliers who demonstrated a commitment to sustainability were perceived as more trustworthy, and this alignment of values served as a catalyst for deeper partnerships. The interviews revealed that many restaurant owners actively sought out suppliers who shared their dedication to sustainable practices, as these relationships not only enhanced their credibility with consumers but also contributed to their overall mission of promoting sustainability within the dining industry. Despite the emphasis on trust, the findings also illuminated several challenges that participants faced in building and maintaining trust within supplier partnerships. Price competition emerged as a significant barrier, as restaurant owners often grappled with the pressure to keep costs low while still prioritizing sustainability. Some participants noted that the pursuit of lower prices could lead to compromises in quality and sustainability, potentially eroding trust between parties. Suppliers acknowledged the challenges they faced in balancing cost competitiveness with their commitment to sustainable practices, as the rising demand for affordable options sometimes conflicted with the principles of ethical sourcing and environmental stewardship. This tension highlighted the need for dining businesses to recognize the long-term value of investing in sustainable supplier relationships rather than prioritizing short-term cost savings. Moreover, the interviews revealed that inconsistent product quality could undermine trust within supplier partnerships. Several restaurant owners shared experiences of fluctuating quality in ingredients, which led to concerns about reliability and consistency. When suppliers failed to meet quality standards, it created uncertainty in the restaurant operations and jeopardized the dining experience for customers. Participants emphasized the importance of reliability in supplier relationships, as any lapses in quality could erode the hard-earned trust that had been established over time. This finding underscored the need for suppliers to maintain consistent quality and reliability to sustain trust and foster long-term partnerships. The findings also shed light on the role of effective communication in nurturing trust within supplier partnerships. Participants indicated that open lines of communication were vital for addressing concerns, resolving conflicts, and aligning expectations. Restaurant owners appreciated suppliers who proactively communicated about changes in sourcing, product availability, or sustainability initiatives. Regular communication fostered a sense of partnership and facilitated collaborative

problem-solving. Conversely, participants noted that poor communication could lead to misunderstandings and erode trust. The importance of effective communication was emphasized as a mechanism for building rapport and ensuring that both parties were on the same page regarding sustainability goals and practices. An unexpected finding was the impact of external factors, such as regulatory changes and consumer trends, on trust and sustainability within supplier partnerships. Participants acknowledged that the evolving landscape of sustainability regulations and consumer expectations influenced their relationships with suppliers. Many restaurant owners expressed that increased consumer demand for transparency and sustainability pushed them to seek out suppliers who could meet these expectations. Suppliers recognized the need to adapt to changing regulations and consumer preferences, which often required them to invest in sustainable practices and certifications. This dynamic interplay between external pressures and internal relationships highlighted the importance of adaptability and responsiveness in building trust and fostering sustainable partnerships. In addition to the challenges, the interviews revealed several strategies that participants employed to strengthen trust within their supplier partnerships. Many restaurant owners highlighted the importance of establishing long-term relationships with suppliers, as this allowed them to develop a deeper understanding of each other's values, practices, and goals. By prioritizing long-term partnerships over transactional relationships, both parties could invest in collaborative sustainability initiatives that benefited the entire supply chain. Several participants mentioned that they actively participated in joint sustainability projects with their suppliers, which not only reinforced their commitment to sustainability but also deepened their trust in one another. Furthermore, the findings indicated that education and capacity-building played a significant role in fostering trust and sustainability within supplier partnerships. Participants expressed a desire for training and resources that would enable them to better understand sustainable sourcing practices and the environmental impacts of their decisions. Suppliers who provided educational resources and engaged restaurant owners in discussions about sustainability were perceived as more trustworthy partners. This collaborative approach to education and capacity-building contributed to a shared understanding of sustainability goals and facilitated joint efforts to implement sustainable practices across the supply chain. The results also illuminated the significance of ethical leadership in fostering trust within supplier partnerships. Many participants emphasized the importance of leadership in shaping the culture of trust and sustainability within their organizations. Ethical leaders who prioritized integrity, transparency, and a commitment to sustainability were seen as instrumental in cultivating trust among their teams and external partners. This emphasis on ethical leadership resonated particularly strongly among restaurant owners, who recognized that their commitment to ethical sourcing and sustainability set the tone for their relationships with suppliers. By modeling ethical behavior and fostering a culture of trust, leaders could inspire their teams and partners to align with sustainability goals. The findings further suggested that measuring trust and sustainability within supplier partnerships was essential for understanding the effectiveness of these relationships. Participants expressed the need for clear metrics and indicators that could help them assess the strength of their partnerships and the impact of trust on sustainability outcomes. Some restaurant owners indicated that they were developing frameworks for evaluating supplier performance in terms of sustainability practices, communication, and overall relationship quality. These measurement frameworks not only provided valuable insights but also encouraged continuous improvement in supplier relationships.

**Table 1.** Role of Trust in Supplier Relationships.

Theme	Sub-Themes	Description
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Trust	Foundation of	Trust emerged as a fundamental element in establishing long-lasting partnerships between dining businesses and suppliers. Participants highlighted that trust enabled open communication and collaboration, fostering an environment where both parties could work together towards common sustainability goals. The development of trust often took time and was reinforced through consistent interactions and positive experiences in sourcing practices.
	Long-term Relationships	

The findings revealed that trust serves as the bedrock of supplier relationships in the Italian dining sector. Participants expressed that a strong foundation of trust facilitated collaboration, which is essential for sustainable sourcing practices. Over time, trust developed through shared experiences and effective communication, allowing both dining establishments and suppliers to work towards mutual sustainability objectives. This emphasis on trust suggests that fostering genuine relationships is vital for achieving long-term success in the industry.

**Table 2.** Importance of Transparency.

Theme	Sub-Themes	Description
Transparency	Communication of Sourcing Practices	Transparency was identified as a crucial factor in building trust. Participants emphasized the need for suppliers to provide clear and detailed information about their sourcing practices, production methods, and sustainability initiatives. This openness allowed restaurant owners to make informed decisions and reinforced the credibility of suppliers, enhancing the overall trust within the partnership.

The emphasis on transparency highlighted its significant role in establishing trust within supplier partnerships. Participants indicated that open communication regarding sourcing practices and sustainability efforts allowed restaurant owners to feel confident in their suppliers' commitments. By providing detailed information, suppliers demonstrated their accountability and integrity, which contributed to a stronger bond of trust. This openness not only facilitated informed decision-making but also empowered both parties to engage collaboratively in sustainable practices.

**Table 3.** Shared Values and Vision.

Theme	Sub-Themes	Description
Shared Values	Alignment of Sustainability Goals	Participants noted that shared values and a common vision for sustainability significantly influenced trust in supplier partnerships. When restaurant owners and suppliers aligned their sustainability goals, it fostered deeper collaboration and commitment to ethical sourcing practices. This alignment not only enhanced the credibility

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of both parties but also encouraged joint initiatives aimed at achieving sustainability.

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The analysis revealed that the alignment of values between dining establishments and suppliers plays a pivotal role in building trust. Participants expressed that when both parties share a commitment to sustainability, it strengthens their partnership and promotes collaborative efforts toward ethical sourcing practices. This shared vision fosters a sense of camaraderie and mutual understanding, allowing for innovative solutions to emerge that align with the sustainability objectives of both the dining business and the supplier.

**Table 4.** Challenges in Building Trust.

Theme	Sub-Themes	Description
Challenges	Price Competition	Participants identified several challenges that hindered the development of trust within supplier partnerships. Price competition often led to a focus on cost savings at the expense of quality, resulting in inconsistencies that eroded trust. Additionally, fluctuations in product quality created uncertainty, prompting restaurant owners to question their suppliers' reliability. These challenges underscore the complexities of balancing cost considerations with the commitment to sustainability.
	Quality Inconsistency	

The findings shed light on the various challenges faced by participants in establishing and maintaining trust within supplier partnerships. Price competition emerged as a significant barrier, as the pressure to reduce costs sometimes led dining establishments to compromise on quality. This focus on cost savings, coupled with inconsistent product quality, created an environment where trust could be easily undermined. The insights suggest that navigating these challenges requires a delicate balance between cost considerations and the pursuit of sustainable practices that foster long-term relationships.

**Table 5.** Importance of Communication.

Theme	Sub-Themes	Description
Communication	Open Lines for Collaboration	Effective communication was recognized as a vital component of trust in supplier partnerships. Participants emphasized the need for open lines of communication to address concerns, resolve conflicts, and align expectations. When suppliers maintained proactive communication, it fostered a sense of partnership, while poor communication could lead to misunderstandings that undermined trust. This

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highlights the essential role of communication in strengthening supplier relationships.

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The results underscored the critical importance of communication in nurturing trust within supplier partnerships. Participants stressed that open and transparent communication is essential for addressing concerns and aligning expectations, creating a sense of collaboration. Proactive communication from suppliers facilitated a stronger partnership, while lapses in communication could create misunderstandings that erode trust. The findings indicate that investing in effective communication strategies is crucial for fostering sustainable relationships within the supply chain.

**Table 6.** External Influences on Trust.

Theme	Sub-Themes	Description
External Influences	Regulatory Changes and Consumer Trends	Participants acknowledged that external factors, such as changing regulations and evolving consumer expectations, influenced their relationships with suppliers. Many restaurant owners felt the pressure to align with sustainability standards driven by consumer demand. Suppliers recognized the need to adapt to these changes, often requiring investments in sustainable practices. This interplay between external pressures and internal relationships highlights the need for adaptability in fostering trust and sustainability.

The analysis revealed the significant impact of external influences on trust and sustainability within supplier partnerships. Participants recognized that shifting consumer expectations and regulatory changes could compel them to seek suppliers who could meet evolving sustainability criteria. This adaptive response underscored the necessity for both dining businesses and suppliers to remain flexible and responsive to external pressures while maintaining strong relationships grounded in trust. The findings indicate that the ability to navigate these changes collaboratively can enhance sustainability outcomes within the supply chain.

**Table 7.** Strategies for Strengthening Trust.

Theme	Sub-Themes	Description
Trust Building	Long-term Relationships and Collaboration	Participants highlighted various strategies to strengthen trust within supplier partnerships. Establishing long-term relationships allowed for deeper understanding and collaboration on sustainability initiatives. Many restaurant owners actively sought to engage suppliers in joint projects, reinforcing their commitment to sustainability and fostering trust. This focus on collaboration and shared goals served to enhance the overall quality and reliability of supplier relationships.

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The findings illuminated effective strategies employed by participants to strengthen trust within their supplier partnerships. Establishing long-term relationships emerged as a crucial approach, enabling both parties to develop a deeper understanding of each other's values and goals. Collaborative projects focused on sustainability further reinforced this trust, as participants expressed a commitment to working together to achieve mutual objectives. The results suggest that prioritizing collaborative efforts can lead to more resilient and reliable supplier partnerships in the pursuit of sustainability.

**Table 8.** Education and Capacity-Building.

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Sub-Themes</b>	<b>Description</b>
Education and Capacity	Training and Resources	Participants identified education and capacity-building as significant factors in fostering trust and sustainability within supplier partnerships. Many restaurant owners expressed a desire for training and resources to enhance their understanding of sustainable sourcing practices. Suppliers who provided educational support and engaged restaurant owners in discussions about sustainability were perceived as more trustworthy. This collaborative approach to education contributed to shared goals and strengthened partnerships.

The results emphasized the critical role of education and capacity-building in fostering trust within supplier partnerships. Participants expressed a strong desire for training and resources that would enhance their knowledge of sustainable practices and sourcing. Suppliers who actively engaged in educational initiatives not only bolstered their credibility but also contributed to a shared understanding of sustainability goals. This collaborative educational approach underscored the importance of continuous learning and development in building sustainable supplier relationships, ultimately enhancing the overall trust and effectiveness of the partnerships.

The findings of this study on the intersection of trust and sustainability in supplier partnerships within the Italian dining industry revealed several critical insights. Trust emerged as a foundational element in establishing and maintaining long-term relationships between dining establishments and suppliers, facilitating open communication and collaboration. Transparency played a significant role in building trust, as participants highlighted the importance of clear and detailed information regarding sourcing practices and sustainability efforts. The alignment of values and shared visions for sustainability further strengthened trust, as dining businesses preferred to work with suppliers who reflected their commitment to ethical sourcing. However, challenges such as price competition and inconsistent product quality posed significant barriers to trust development, necessitating a balance between cost considerations and sustainable practices. Effective communication was recognized as essential for addressing concerns and aligning expectations, while external influences, including regulatory changes and evolving consumer demands, shaped the dynamics of trust within these partnerships. Strategies for strengthening trust included establishing long-term relationships and engaging in collaborative sustainability initiatives. Additionally, education and capacity-building were identified as crucial factors, with participants expressing a desire for training and resources to enhance their understanding of sustainable practices. Overall, the findings underscored the complexities of trust and sustainability in supplier partnerships, highlighting the need for

genuine relationships and collaborative efforts to achieve shared sustainability goals in the Italian dining industry.

## 5. Discussion

The discussion of the findings emphasizes the intricate relationship between trust and sustainability in supplier partnerships within the Italian dining industry. The data clearly illustrate that trust is not merely a byproduct of good business practices; rather, it is an essential prerequisite for fostering sustainable relationships. The reliance on trust allows for open dialogue, which is crucial in addressing the multifaceted challenges that arise in sourcing sustainable ingredients. In this context, the establishment of long-term partnerships becomes particularly significant, as they enable both dining establishments and suppliers to develop a mutual understanding that goes beyond transactional interactions. The importance of transparency cannot be overstated. The findings indicate that when suppliers provide clear and detailed information about their sourcing practices, it fosters confidence among restaurant owners. This transparency not only enhances the credibility of suppliers but also empowers dining businesses to make informed decisions that align with their sustainability goals. In an era where consumers increasingly demand ethical sourcing and sustainability, the need for suppliers to adopt transparent practices is paramount. It is clear that the alignment of values between restaurants and suppliers plays a pivotal role in the success of these partnerships. When both parties share a commitment to sustainability, it leads to deeper collaboration, where innovative solutions can be developed collectively. However, the discussion also highlights the challenges faced in this landscape. Price competition is a significant concern that often forces dining establishments to prioritize cost over quality and sustainability. This tension between affordability and ethical sourcing creates a dilemma that can erode trust, making it essential for stakeholders to recognize the long-term value of investing in sustainable practices rather than focusing solely on short-term gains. Inconsistencies in product quality further complicate this issue, as fluctuations can lead to uncertainties that undermine the reliability of suppliers. The necessity of effective communication in addressing these challenges is evident. Open lines of communication allow for the resolution of conflicts and align expectations, which is vital for maintaining trust throughout the partnership. External influences, such as evolving consumer preferences and regulatory changes, add another layer of complexity to supplier relationships. The pressure to adapt to these changes often drives both parties to seek alignment in their sustainability efforts. This adaptability can lead to enhanced trust, as suppliers who are responsive to market demands demonstrate their commitment to shared goals. The proactive engagement of suppliers in educational initiatives further reinforces trust, as it shows their willingness to support restaurant owners in understanding sustainable sourcing practices. In summary, the discussion reinforces the notion that trust is a multifaceted construct that plays a crucial role in the sustainability of supplier partnerships within the Italian dining industry. The findings suggest that fostering trust requires a holistic approach that encompasses transparency, alignment of values, effective communication, and a commitment to continuous improvement. By prioritizing these elements, dining establishments and suppliers can create a robust framework for sustainable collaboration, ultimately benefiting the entire supply chain and contributing to a more sustainable future in the food industry.

## 6. Conclusion

The study's exploration of the intersection of trust and sustainability in supplier partnerships within the Italian dining industry highlights the critical role that trust plays in fostering effective collaborations. The findings reveal that trust is not only foundational for long-term relationships but also essential for navigating the complexities associated with sustainable sourcing practices. Through transparent communication, shared values, and mutual understanding, dining establishments and suppliers can cultivate an environment conducive to collaboration, ultimately enhancing their sustainability efforts. However, challenges such as price competition and inconsistencies in product

quality pose significant obstacles that require careful navigation. The emphasis on effective communication and proactive engagement between partners underscores the importance of addressing these challenges to maintain trust and ensure a commitment to sustainability. The insights gained from this research underscore the necessity for both dining businesses and suppliers to adopt a holistic approach that prioritizes trust-building strategies, aligning their goals and practices to foster a sustainable supply chain. As the industry continues to evolve, the importance of nurturing these relationships will become increasingly evident, positioning trust as a key driver in achieving sustainability objectives in the ever-changing landscape of the Italian dining sector. The study serves as a foundation for further research into best practices for enhancing trust and sustainability in supplier partnerships, ultimately contributing to a more resilient and responsible food industry.

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