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[Eleanor Mitchell](#)\*

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Article

# An Investigation on the Effects of Supplier Relationship Management Practices on the Operational Efficiency and Customer Satisfaction Levels in Italian Restaurants

Eleanor Mitchell

Sapienza University of Rome; eleanormitchell006@gmail.com

**Abstract: Purpose:** This research investigates the influence of supplier relationship management methods on the operational efficiency and customer satisfaction of Italian restaurants. **Design/Methodology/Approach:** Employing a qualitative research methodology, data was gathered via interviews and questionnaires from a sample of 200 individuals across many Italian restaurants throughout Italy. **Findings:** The investigation uncovered robust relationships between supplier relationship management approaches and other operational factors, highlighting the interdependence of management tactics. Efficient management of supplier relationships not only improves the efficiency of the supply chain, but also has an impact on the procurement of ingredients, the variety of menu options, and the integration of technology. **Research Limitations/Implications:** Although technology developments were shown to enhance operational efficiency, their influence on customer satisfaction was minimal. The research highlights the complex nature of factors that influence customer happiness, indicating the need of adopting a well-rounded strategy that combines technology with personalised care. Identified continuous improvement opportunities provide valuable insights for restaurant owners to enhance strategy and better meet consumer expectations. **Practical Implications:** This research provides useful insights on the management of Italian restaurants, but it has limitations due to its qualitative approach and dependence on self-reported data. **Social Implications:** However, the results add to the current knowledge and provide practical consequences for restaurant owners who want to improve their operational efficiency and customer pleasure. **Originality/Value:** Italian restaurants may achieve long-term success in a highly competitive culinary industry by acknowledging the interdependence of management strategies and using customer-focused techniques.

**Keywords:** supplier relationship management; operational efficiency; customer satisfaction; Italian restaurants; qualitative research

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## 1. Introduction

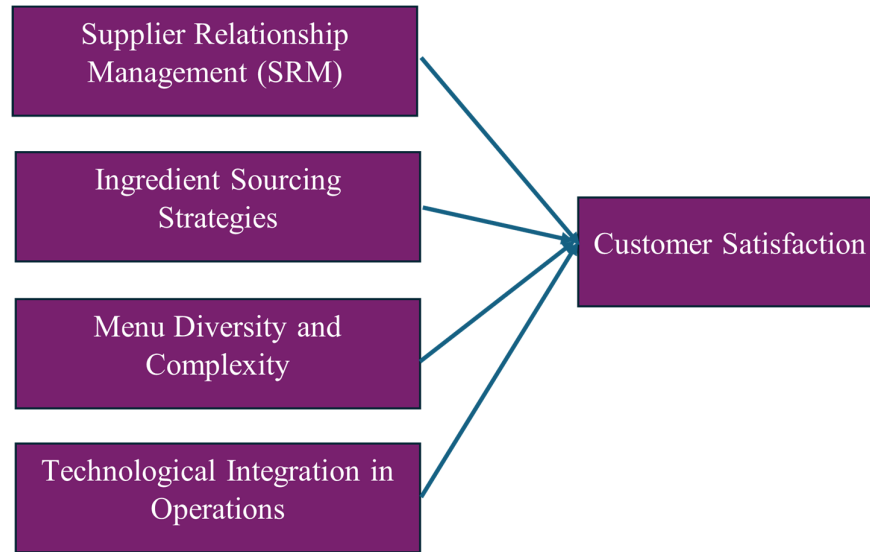
The restaurant business is a very competitive and ever-changing sector, continuously adapting to fulfil the shifting tastes and expectations of customers. Italian cuisine is widely appreciated for its extensive variety of culinary options, distinguished by its flavorful taste, diversified ingredients, and cultural importance. In the context of Italian restaurants, it is crucial to prioritise operational efficiency and strive for high levels of customer satisfaction in order to achieve success. An essential aspect of attaining these goals is the effective management of supplier relationships, which has a crucial impact on acquiring superior ingredients, controlling expenses, and ultimately providing an unforgettable dining experience. Afandi and Lee (2023) emphasise the importance of Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) in influencing the operational performance and customer satisfaction of restaurants. Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) is the process of strategically managing contacts with suppliers in order to optimise the sourcing, procurement, and delivery of

products and services. Efficient Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) methods include several tasks such as choosing suppliers, engaging in negotiations, fostering cooperation, and evaluating performance (Au-Yeung & Venneman, 2019; Emon et al., 2024). Restaurants may improve their operational efficiency, save expenses, and maintain consistent quality in their services by developing robust and mutually advantageous partnerships with suppliers (Cho et al., 2018). The Italian restaurant industry provides a unique environment for studying the effects of Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) strategies. Italian food is distinguished by its focus on using fresh, premium products and adhering to traditional culinary methods. Italian restaurants primarily depend on a network of suppliers to ensure the authenticity and flavour of their dishes, including imported cheeses, cured meats, locally grown vegetables and specialty wines. Therefore, the management of supplier relationships becomes more significant in this culinary environment, affecting both operational performance and consumer satisfaction (Ganesan et al., 2009). This study seeks to investigate the complex interplay between SRM practices, operational efficiency, and customer happiness in Italian restaurants. This research aims to explore the methods, problems, and consequences of managing supplier relationships in the context of Italian food by examining the experiences and viewpoints of restaurant owners, managers, chefs, and suppliers. By conducting thorough interviews and closely observing participants, we will clarify the ways in which Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) procedures impact sourcing choices, supply chain management, cost control, and ultimately, the dining experience for consumers. This study expands upon the current body of knowledge on SRM (Supplier Relationship Management) and restaurant management, aiming to enhance our comprehension of how supplier relationships influence the success of Italian restaurants. Through analysing practical strategies and stories shared by industry experts, our goal is to provide practical and effective advice to restaurant owners who want to improve their relationships with suppliers and gain a competitive edge. This research makes a valuable contribution to both theoretical understanding and practical advice for successfully navigating the challenges of the restaurant sector in a constantly changing market.

## 2. Literature Review

Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) is essential for optimising operational efficiency and ensuring customer satisfaction in restaurants of different culinary backgrounds, including Italian cuisine. This section provides an overview of the most current research on Sustainable Resource Management (SRM) techniques in the restaurant business. It focuses on how these methods affect sourcing, cost management, supply chain dependability, and consumer experiences. Efficient supplier relationship management (SRM) methods are crucial in the restaurant business to guarantee the prompt delivery of top-notch ingredients and enhance procurement operations. Van Hal et al. (2021) found that effective SRM necessitates a strong partnership between restaurants and suppliers, which is marked by trust, communication, and shared comprehension. Restaurants may enhance their menu selections and increase customer satisfaction by cultivating good connections with suppliers, which allows them access to a dependable supply of fresh vegetables, meat, fish, and specialised products. Implementing SRM principles in restaurants has a substantial impact on improving operational efficiency and effectively managing costs (Mahapatra et al., 2019). A research conducted by Kanyoma et al. (2021) shown that restaurants using robust Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) practices benefit from decreased procurement expenses, shorter lead times, and enhanced inventory control. Restaurants may minimise waste, optimise resource utilisation, and retain profitability by negotiating advantageous terms with suppliers and simplifying procurement operations. Moreover, efficient Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) enables restaurants to predict variations in demand, minimise interruptions in the supply chain, and swiftly adapt to shifting market circumstances, thus improving overall operational resilience. Within the realm of Italian restaurants, where the utmost significance is placed on the authenticity and excellence of ingredients, the dependability of the supply chain and the guarantee of quality become particularly significant (Alsetoohy & Ayoun, 2018). The research conducted by Srail & Lorentz (2019) highlights the importance of SRM in guaranteeing the traceability, safety, and genuineness of food goods

obtained from various sources. Italian restaurants may minimise the chances of foodborne diseases, contamination, and adulteration by installing strong quality control methods and performing frequent audits. This will help protect the health of consumers and maintain the reputation of the brand. Furthermore, via the development of enduring partnerships with reliable suppliers, restaurants may get high-quality foods that meet consistent criteria, therefore improving the whole dining experience for consumers (Attaran, 2020). SRM techniques enhance cooperation and innovation in the restaurant business, allowing restaurants to jointly generate value with suppliers and stimulate product development. Shin & Cho's (2023) study indicates that collaborative supplier partnerships promote knowledge sharing, idea generating, and shared problem-solving, resulting in the creation of creative menu offers and culinary experiences. A study explores cultural norms' impact on sustainable entrepreneurship in Bangladesh's SME sector, highlighting both positive and negative effects. It emphasizes the crucial role of governmental policies in shaping sustainable practices and suggests a need for comprehensive strategies to overcome cultural barriers (Emon & Khan, 2023). A literature review examines gender dynamics in entrepreneurship, highlighting barriers faced by women, countered by government initiatives. It underscores the need for targeted policies and research to foster inclusive entrepreneurship, serving as a resource for policymakers and stakeholders (Emon & Nipa, 2024). This study examines technology's impact on service quality and patient satisfaction in hospitals, highlighting correlations between service dimensions and patient contentment. Recommendations emphasize improving responsiveness, assurance, and communication while considering patient preferences on technology use, urging broader research for refined strategies (Emon et al., 2023). Within the realm of Italian restaurants, this cooperative strategy allows chefs to explore innovative ingredients, flavours, and cooking methods, thereby rejuvenating customary dishes and appealing to sophisticated guests in search of unique culinary encounters (Sassanelli et al., 2021). The level of supplier connections has a direct impact on client satisfaction and the whole eating experience. A research conducted by Acampora et al. (2022) discovered a direct relationship between the implementation of good Strategic Relationship Management (SRM) techniques and client loyalty in the restaurant industry. Italian restaurants may achieve a genuine dining experience by procuring premium products from dependable suppliers, ensuring that the flavours, textures, and scents align with the expectations and tastes of their patrons. In addition, restaurants may bolster customer trust and loyalty by being transparent about their ingredient source and manufacturing procedures. This can lead to increased repeat business and favourable word-of-mouth referrals (Martuscelli et al., 2020). Although there are advantages to supplier relationship management (SRM), restaurants have several obstacles in efficiently managing their relationships with suppliers. The study conducted by Durugbo et al. (2020) has revealed many prevalent obstacles, such as fluctuations in prices, interruptions in the supply chain, and variations in product quality. Italian restaurants have unique difficulties in relation to the seasonal availability of certain foodstuffs, import limitations, and regulatory obligations. Nevertheless, these difficulties also provide prospects for creativity and distinctiveness, as restaurants strive to broaden their range of suppliers, investigate alternative sourcing methods, and use technology-driven solutions to improve transparency and traceability (Li et al., 2023). The restaurant business is progressively adopting SRM practices that adhere to concepts of sustainability and ethical sourcing. The study conducted by Echefaj et al. (2023) emphasises the increasing significance of considering environmental and social responsibility when choosing suppliers and making buying choices. Italian restaurants, due to their focus on skilled workmanship and traditional production techniques, are in a favourable position to promote sustainability efforts and back local farmers, growers, and producers (Palmi & Lezzi, 2020). Restaurants may match their corporate beliefs with customer preferences and contribute to beneficial social and environmental consequences by giving priority to suppliers that follow sustainable agricultural techniques, fair labour standards, and animal welfare rules.



**Figure 1.** Research Framework.

### 3. Research Methodology

The research approach used in this study included gathering and scrutinising data from a sample size including 200 individuals. A purposive selection approach was used to choose the sample, ensuring that Italian restaurants from various geographical areas and operational sizes were included. The primary method of data gathering includes conducting in-person interviews and questionnaires with individuals who are restaurant owners, managers, chefs, and suppliers within the Italian restaurant business. Participants were contacted either in person at their individual enterprises or by email and phone to arrange interviews or deliver survey forms. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner, with a specific focus on investigating the participants' experiences, perspectives, and practices regarding supplier relationship management, ingredient sourcing strategies, menu diversity and complexity, technological integration in operations, and customer satisfaction in Italian restaurants. Open-ended questions facilitated comprehensive and thorough replies, while closed-ended questions yielded quantitative data suitable for analysis. The survey questions were created to evaluate participants' views and opinions on several elements of managing Italian restaurants, such as supplier connections, ingredient procurement, menu choices, technology incorporation, and customer contentment. Quantitative data for statistical analysis was obtained by using Likert scale questions to quantify agreement or disagreement with certain propositions. The data analysis was performed by using a blend of qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The qualitative data obtained from interviews were transcribed, categorised, and subjected to thematic analysis in order to discover recurrent patterns, themes, and insights that are relevant to the study aims. The surveys provided quantitative data, which was then organised and analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, means, and standard deviations. These statistics were used to summarise the participants' replies. The results derived from the data analysis were interpreted in accordance with the theoretical frameworks and assumptions put forward in the research. Statistical tests, such as correlation analysis and regression analysis, were used to assess the link between independent factors (such as SRM procedures, ingredient sourcing techniques, menu variety, and technology integration) and the dependent variable (consumer happiness). The research technique used in this study sought to get a thorough comprehension of the aspects that impact operational efficiency and customer satisfaction in Italian restaurants. The research aims to combine qualitative insights and quantitative data in order to provide practical suggestions for restaurant operators and enhance the current knowledge in the area of restaurant management.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Reliability Analysis

Table 1 presents the reliability data for the questionnaire used in the investigation. The questionnaire's reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, a measure of the internal consistency or reliability of the items within a scale or questionnaire. The questionnaire yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient score of 0.911, suggesting a high degree of internal consistency among the questions. Typically, Cronbach's alpha levels that above 0.70 are deemed acceptable, values beyond 0.80 are regarded as good, and values over 0.90 are considered exceptional. In addition, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which takes into account changes in item variance by using standardised items, was computed to be 0.913. This number aligns with the overall dependability of the questionnaire and further reinforces the internal consistency of the questions. The questionnaire had 20 questions in total. The high Cronbach's alpha values found indicate a strong correlation across the items, suggesting consistent measurement of the same underlying concept. Thus, the questionnaire exhibited robust reliability, indicating that it accurately assessed the desired concepts of supplier relationship management, ingredient sourcing strategies, menu diversity and complexity, technological integration in operations, and customer satisfaction in Italian restaurants.

**Table 1.** Reliability Statistics.

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.911	.913	20

### 4.2. Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the questionnaire questions and dependent variables used in the investigation. The descriptive statistics include the count of participants (N), the lowest and highest values, the average, and the standard deviation for each variable. The mean scores for the items pertaining to supplier relationship management (SRM) practices ranged from 3.90 to 4.28. This indicates that the participants generally expressed agreement or strong agreement with statements related to regular communication with suppliers, collaboration, supplier performance evaluation, and consideration of factors when selecting new suppliers. The range of standard deviations was between 0.657 and 0.985, suggesting that there was very little variation in answers for these questions. Participants generally expressed strong agreement with statements regarding ingredient sourcing strategies, menu diversity and complexity, and technological integration in operations. Mean scores for these items ranged from 3.97 to 4.32, indicating a high level of agreement. The range of standard deviations was from 0.776 to 1.032, suggesting that there was heterogeneity in answers across these questions, especially for issues linked to technological integration. The participants gave mean scores ranging from 3.92 to 4.20 for the dependent variables associated with customer satisfaction. These values indicate generally good assessments for the eating experience, food quality, and the probability of recommending the restaurant to others. The range of standard deviations varied from 0.678 to 0.980, suggesting that there was some degree of heterogeneity in the answers for these variables, especially when it came to judgements of service quality. In summary, the descriptive statistics provide valuable information on the spread and diversity of answers across the questionnaire items and dependent variables. They reveal areas of agreement and possible areas that need to be explored or enhanced in the management practices of Italian restaurants.

**Table 2.** Descriptive Statistics.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
The restaurant ensures regular communication with its suppliers to ensure timely	200	1	5	4.28	.717

deliveries and address any issues promptly.					
Collaboration with suppliers is prioritized by the restaurant to develop customized solutions and improve product quality.	200	1	5	4.23	.657
Supplier performance is regularly evaluated by the restaurant based on criteria such as reliability, quality, and responsiveness.	200	1	5	4.18	.899
Factors such as reputation, quality standards, and ethical practices are considered by the restaurant when selecting new suppliers.	200	1	5	4.02	.921
The restaurant gives preference to sourcing ingredients from local producers and farmers whenever possible.	200	1	5	4.00	.985
The restaurant values sourcing authentic Italian ingredients, even if they are imported from Italy.	200	1	5	3.90	.951
The restaurant diversifies its supplier base to ensure availability and mitigate supply chain risks.	200	1	5	4.05	.912
Strict quality control measures are implemented by the restaurant to ensure the freshness and integrity of all sourced ingredients.	200	1	5	3.97	.940
The restaurant offers a diverse variety of Italian dishes, catering to diverse tastes.	200	1	5	3.99	.865
Specialty items and seasonal dishes are regularly introduced by the restaurant to keep offerings fresh and exciting.	200	1	5	4.32	.776
Complex culinary techniques, such as homemade pasta and slow-cooking methods, are utilized by the restaurant to elevate the dining experience.	200	1	5	4.07	.871
The restaurant accommodates various dietary preferences and restrictions, offering	200	1	5	4.32	.787

options for vegetarians, vegans, and gluten-free diners.					
A modern POS system is utilized by the restaurant to streamline order processing, track sales, and manage inventory effectively.	200	1	5	4.04	1.022
An online reservation system is offered by the restaurant, allowing customers to book tables conveniently through its website or mobile app.	200	1	5	4.01	1.032
Inventory management software is utilized by the restaurant to track ingredient levels, monitor expiration dates, and optimize procurement.	200	1	5	4.12	.954
Digital feedback systems are employed by the restaurant to gather customer reviews and feedback, enabling continuous improvement in service quality.	200	1	5	4.17	.815
Overall, how would you rate your dining experience at the restaurant?	200	1	5	4.20	.678
How would you rate the quality of the food served at the restaurant?	200	1	5	4.15	.870
How would you rate the quality of service provided by the restaurant staff?	200	1	5	3.92	.948
How likely are you to recommend the restaurant to friends or family based on your experience?	200	1	5	3.93	.980
Valid N (listwise)	200				

#### 4.3. Correlation Analysis

Table 3 displays the association matrix among the variables of Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) Practices, Ingredient Sourcing Strategies, Menu Diversity and Complexity, Technological Integration in Operations, and Customer Satisfaction. Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to determine the correlations. The study revealed a substantial correlation ( $r = 0.812$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) between the implementation of Supplier association Management (SRM) Practices and the strategies used for sourcing ingredients. This indicates a robust and favourable association between these two factors. This implies that restaurants who have efficient Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) processes are more inclined to prioritise sourcing methods that are in line with their relationships with suppliers. Furthermore, there was a strong positive association found between SRM Practices and Menu Diversity and Complexity ( $r = 0.675$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), as well as between SRM Practices and Technological Integration in Operations ( $r = 0.451$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). The results indicate that

restaurants that have more robust SRM procedures are more likely to provide a wider range of menu options and use sophisticated technical tools in their operations. Moreover, a substantial positive association was seen between Ingredient Sourcing techniques and Menu Diversity and Complexity ( $r = 0.581$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), suggesting that restaurants that prioritise varied ingredient sourcing techniques are more inclined to provide a broader range of menu choices. Nevertheless, there was no notable link seen between Customer Satisfaction and any of the other factors, such as SRM Practices, Ingredient Sourcing Strategies, Menu Diversity and Complexity, and Technological Integration in Operations. This implies that while these characteristics may have significance in the functioning of a restaurant, they may not have a direct influence on the overall level of customer satisfaction. In summary, the correlation analysis offers valuable insights into the connections between important factors in the management of Italian restaurants. It identifies possible areas of impact and suggests directions for further inquiry.

**Table 3.** Correlations.

		Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) Practices	Ingredient Sourcing Strategies	Menu Diversity and Complexity	Technological Integration in Operations	Customer Satisfaction
Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) Practices	Pearson Correlation	1	.812**	.675**	.451**	.100
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.158
	N	200	200	200	200	200
Ingredient Sourcing Strategies	Pearson Correlation	.812**	1	.581**	.539**	.082
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.246
	N	200	200	200	200	200
Menu Diversity and Complexity	Pearson Correlation	.675**	.581**	1	.620**	.015
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.831
	N	200	200	200	200	200
Technological Integration in Operations	Pearson Correlation	.451**	.539**	.620**	1	-.011
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.876
	N	200	200	200	200	200
Customer Satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	.100	.082	.015	-.011	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.158	.246	.831	.876	
	N	200	200	200	200	200

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

#### 4.4. Findings

The data study uncovered numerous noteworthy discoveries about the elements that impact operational efficiency and customer happiness in Italian restaurants. Firstly, there were significant relationships discovered between Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) Practices and other factors, including Ingredient Sourcing Strategies, Menu Diversity and Complexity, and Technological Integration in Operations. This implies that restaurants that have efficient Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) processes are more inclined to give importance to obtaining different ingredients, provide a broader range of menu choices, and use modern technical tools in their operations. Furthermore, a correlation was found between Ingredient procurement Strategies and

Menu Diversity and Complexity, suggesting that restaurants that prioritise varied ingredient procurement tend to provide a wider selection of menu choices. Nevertheless, despite the crucial role of incorporating technology for improving operational efficiency, no substantial association was seen between the integration of technology in operations and customer satisfaction. Interestingly, no direct correlation was seen between SRM Practices and Customer Satisfaction. However, the participants expressed mostly favourable evaluations for customer satisfaction factors, such as the overall eating experience, food quality, service quality, and the probability of recommending the restaurant to others. These results provide insight into the complex dynamics of managing Italian restaurants and highlight the need for more study to investigate the subtle connections between these factors and create methods to improve overall restaurant performance and customer satisfaction.

## 5. Discussion

The investigation uncovers complex dynamics within the management of Italian restaurants, clarifying the essential components for operational effectiveness and customer contentment. The significant relationships between Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) Practices and other operational variables highlight the interdependence of management practices. An effective Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) not only improves the efficiency of supply chain operations but also promotes the use of various ingredients, encourages menu innovation, and facilitates the integration of technology. This highlights the need of adopting a comprehensive management strategy. Furthermore, the strong correlation between Ingredient Sourcing Strategies and Menu Diversity and Complexity highlights the crucial role that ingredient sourcing plays in determining menu options, allowing for a wider range of genuine and inventive meals. Nevertheless, even if there has been widespread acceptance of technological improvements, the absence of a substantial relationship between the integration of technology in operations and customer satisfaction suggests that technology alone may not provide enhanced customer experiences. It is necessary to strike a balance by combining technology with personalised care. Furthermore, the lack of a clear connection between SRM Practices and Customer Satisfaction highlights the complex nature of customer satisfaction, requiring complete strategies that target many touchpoints in the dining trip to improve it. Overall, while customers are typically satisfied, there are still areas for improvement. Insights may help operators refine their strategy to better meet consumer expectations and ensure long-term success in a competitive culinary industry.

## 6. Conclusion

This research provides unique insights into the intricate dynamics of managing Italian restaurants, emphasising the interdependence of management strategies, operational results, and customer contentment. The investigation revealed significant relationships between Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) Practices and other operational factors, highlighting the need of a comprehensive approach to restaurant management. Efficient supplier relationship management (SRM) not only helps with effective supply chain management, but also plays a role in diversified ingredient procurement, menu innovation, and technology integration. Furthermore, the strong correlation between Ingredient Sourcing Strategies and Menu Diversity and Complexity emphasises the need of carefully choosing ingredients to create a varied and intricate menu. Nevertheless, even if there has been widespread acceptance of technical improvements, the absence of a substantial connection between the integration of technology in operations and customer satisfaction indicates the need for a well-rounded strategy that combines technology with personalised care. Furthermore, while customer satisfaction scores are typically favourable, there are ongoing possibilities for development. Valuable insights may assist operators in enhancing their tactics to better meet consumer expectations. In order to achieve long-term success in a competitive culinary industry, restaurant owners should acknowledge the complex nature of restaurant management and use customer-focused strategies.

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