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Posted Date: 8 July 2024

doi: 10.20944/preprints2024070585.v1

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Article

# Customer Satisfaction and Supplier Collaboration in Italian Restaurant Operations

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**Abstract:** This qualitative study explores the dynamics of customer satisfaction and supplier collaboration within Italian restaurant operations. Through in-depth interviews, participant observations, and document analysis, the research investigates key factors influencing these relationships. Trust and communication emerged as foundational elements, crucial for ensuring reliable ingredient supply and maintaining culinary authenticity. Quality and authenticity of ingredients were identified as primary drivers of customer satisfaction, underscoring the strategic role of suppliers in delivering superior dining experiences. Customer feedback played a pivotal role in shaping operational practices, highlighting the iterative process of adapting to customer preferences to enhance service delivery and loyalty. Emotional intelligence among managers facilitated effective supplier relationships, fostering collaborative partnerships and navigating operational challenges with empathy and skill. Economic considerations were vital in balancing cost efficiencies with quality standards, guiding strategic decisions in supplier management. Technological integration enhanced supply chain management, optimizing logistics and responsiveness to market demands. The adoption of sustainable sourcing practices reinforced restaurants' commitment to environmental stewardship and community engagement, aligning with consumer preferences for ethical dining options. The findings suggest actionable insights for restaurant managers to optimize supplier collaborations, enhance operational efficiency, and sustain competitive advantage in the hospitality industry.

**Keywords:** customer satisfaction; supplier collaboration; Italian restaurants; trust; communication; quality of ingredients; emotional intelligence; sustainability

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## 1. Introduction

Customer satisfaction is a crucial determinant of success in the hospitality industry, particularly for Italian restaurants, where the dining experience is not just about the food but also the ambiance, service, and overall dining experience. This research delves into the intricate relationship between customer satisfaction and supplier collaboration in the context of Italian restaurant operations. Italian cuisine, renowned for its emphasis on fresh, high-quality ingredients and traditional cooking methods, relies heavily on the timely and efficient supply of these ingredients. Therefore, the collaboration between Italian restaurants and their suppliers is pivotal in maintaining the standards that meet and exceed customer expectations. Italian restaurants are distinguished by their adherence to culinary traditions, which include the use of specific ingredients such as San Marzano tomatoes, Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, and extra virgin olive oil, among others. These ingredients are often sourced from specific regions in Italy, necessitating a robust and reliable supply chain. Supplier collaboration becomes essential in this context, as any disruption in the supply chain can directly impact the quality of the dishes served, thereby affecting customer satisfaction. The relationship between restaurants and suppliers must be built on trust, mutual benefit, and a shared commitment to quality. This research aims to explore how effective supplier collaboration can enhance customer satisfaction in Italian restaurants. In recent years, the dynamics of the restaurant industry have evolved, with an increasing emphasis on sustainability and ethical sourcing. Customers today are more informed and conscientious about the origins of their food and the practices involved in its

production. This shift in consumer behavior has further highlighted the importance of supplier collaboration. Restaurants are now expected to not only deliver exceptional culinary experiences but also ensure that their sourcing practices are environmentally sustainable and socially responsible. This added dimension complicates the supply chain but also provides an opportunity for Italian restaurants to differentiate themselves by partnering with suppliers who adhere to these values. The alignment of a restaurant's sourcing practices with customer values can significantly enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented challenges to the restaurant industry, including Italian restaurants. Supply chain disruptions, fluctuating demand, and changing customer expectations have necessitated a re-evaluation of supplier relationships. Restaurants that had strong, collaborative relationships with their suppliers were better able to navigate these challenges, ensuring a consistent supply of ingredients and maintaining the quality of their offerings. This period has underscored the resilience and adaptability that come from effective supplier collaboration. It has also highlighted the importance of transparency and communication in these relationships, as restaurants and suppliers have had to work closely to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances. The role of technology in enhancing supplier collaboration and customer satisfaction cannot be overlooked. Advanced supply chain management systems, real-time inventory tracking, and data analytics have become integral in managing the complexities of restaurant operations. These technologies enable restaurants to anticipate demand more accurately, manage inventory more efficiently, and maintain the freshness and quality of ingredients. For Italian restaurants, which often rely on imported ingredients, technology can bridge the gap between suppliers and restaurateurs, ensuring a seamless flow of goods. This technological integration not only streamlines operations but also enhances the overall dining experience for customers by ensuring consistency and quality in every dish. In exploring customer satisfaction in Italian restaurant operations, it is essential to consider the multifaceted nature of the dining experience. While the quality of food is paramount, other factors such as service quality, ambiance, and value for money also play significant roles. Supplier collaboration impacts these factors indirectly but significantly. For instance, a well-coordinated supply chain ensures that the kitchen is always stocked with fresh ingredients, which in turn enables chefs to deliver high-quality dishes consistently. Additionally, suppliers who understand the restaurant's commitment to quality and customer satisfaction are more likely to provide exceptional service, such as timely deliveries and flexible ordering options, which contribute to the restaurant's overall efficiency and customer experience. Moreover, the importance of cultural authenticity in Italian restaurants cannot be overstated. Customers patronize Italian restaurants not just for the food but for an authentic Italian experience. This authenticity is closely tied to the ingredients used and the traditional cooking methods employed. Supplier collaboration is crucial in maintaining this authenticity, as it ensures that the restaurant has access to genuine Italian ingredients and can uphold traditional culinary practices. This authenticity resonates with customers, enhancing their dining experience and satisfaction. It also fosters customer loyalty, as diners are more likely to return to a restaurant that consistently delivers an authentic and memorable experience. The relationship between customer satisfaction and supplier collaboration is also influenced by the competitive landscape of the restaurant industry. With numerous dining options available, Italian restaurants must continually strive to differentiate themselves. One way to achieve this differentiation is through exclusive supplier relationships that provide unique or superior ingredients. For example, a restaurant that sources its olive oil from a renowned family-owned estate in Italy can market this unique aspect to attract discerning customers. These exclusive relationships not only enhance the restaurant's offerings but also contribute to its brand identity and reputation. In a highly competitive market, such distinctions can significantly impact customer satisfaction and loyalty. In the context of Italian restaurant operations, the collaboration between chefs and suppliers is particularly noteworthy. Chefs play a critical role in defining the restaurant's menu and culinary standards, and their interaction with suppliers is fundamental to maintaining these standards. A close working relationship allows chefs to communicate their specific needs and preferences, which suppliers can then accommodate. This collaboration extends beyond mere transactions; it involves a shared passion

for quality and a mutual commitment to excellence. When chefs have access to high-quality, fresh ingredients, they are better equipped to create dishes that delight customers and uphold the restaurant's reputation for culinary excellence. Additionally, the concept of farm-to-table dining, which emphasizes sourcing ingredients directly from local farms, has gained traction in the restaurant industry, including among Italian restaurants. This approach not only supports local agriculture but also ensures the freshness and quality of ingredients. Supplier collaboration is integral to the farm-to-table model, as it requires close coordination between restaurants and local producers. By establishing strong relationships with local farmers, Italian restaurants can offer seasonal menus that highlight the freshest ingredients available, further enhancing the dining experience and customer satisfaction. This localized sourcing also appeals to customers who value sustainability and support for local communities. The financial aspect of supplier collaboration is another critical consideration. Effective supplier relationships can lead to cost efficiencies through bulk purchasing, negotiated discounts, and reduced wastage. These savings can be passed on to customers in the form of competitive pricing, thereby enhancing perceived value for money. In a price-sensitive market, offering high-quality dining experiences at reasonable prices can significantly boost customer satisfaction and loyalty. Moreover, strong supplier relationships can provide restaurants with greater flexibility in pricing and menu adjustments, allowing them to respond more effectively to market demands and customer preferences. In summary, customer satisfaction in Italian restaurant operations is a multifaceted construct influenced by various factors, including the quality of food, service, ambiance, and value for money. Supplier collaboration plays a pivotal role in ensuring the consistent quality and authenticity of the dining experience, which are crucial for customer satisfaction. The dynamic nature of the restaurant industry, coupled with evolving consumer expectations and external challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, underscores the importance of robust supplier relationships. By leveraging technology, fostering strong chef-supplier collaborations, and embracing sustainability and local sourcing practices, Italian restaurants can enhance their operational efficiency and deliver exceptional dining experiences that meet and exceed customer expectations. As the industry continues to evolve, the strategic importance of supplier collaboration in achieving customer satisfaction will only become more pronounced. This research aims to provide insights into how Italian restaurants can optimize their supplier relationships to enhance customer satisfaction and thrive in a competitive and dynamic market environment.

## 2. Literature Review

The literature on customer satisfaction and supplier collaboration in Italian restaurant operations is extensive and diverse, reflecting the multifaceted nature of the dining experience and the complexity of supply chain management. Customer satisfaction in the hospitality industry has been a subject of considerable academic inquiry, with numerous studies highlighting its critical role in ensuring business success and sustainability (Smith, 2022; Jones, 2023). In the context of Italian restaurants, customer satisfaction is closely tied to the authenticity and quality of the food, the ambiance, and the overall dining experience (Johnson & Evans, 2021). The importance of supplier collaboration in achieving these standards is underscored by the need for high-quality, fresh ingredients that are integral to Italian cuisine (Garcia et al., 2022). Recent research has emphasized the significance of supplier relationship management in the hospitality industry. Effective supplier relationships are essential for maintaining the quality and consistency of ingredients, which directly impact the dining experience and customer satisfaction (Emon et al., 2024). The concept of supplier relationship management involves building long-term, mutually beneficial relationships with suppliers, characterized by trust, collaboration, and shared objectives (Liu & Wang, 2021). This approach ensures a reliable supply of high-quality ingredients, which is particularly important for Italian restaurants that rely on specific regional products to maintain the authenticity of their dishes (Brown et al., 2020). Studies have shown that customer satisfaction is influenced by various factors, including the quality of food, service, ambiance, and overall dining experience (Kim & Lee, 2022; Miller, 2023). For Italian restaurants, the quality of ingredients is paramount, as it directly affects the taste and authenticity of the dishes. Supplier collaboration plays a crucial role in ensuring that

restaurants have access to fresh, high-quality ingredients that meet their specific requirements (Khan et al., 2024). This collaboration often involves detailed communication and coordination between chefs and suppliers to ensure that the ingredients meet the desired standards (Smith & Green, 2021). Research has highlighted the importance of this interaction in maintaining the quality and consistency of the food served in Italian restaurants (Khan et al., 2024). The importance of emotional intelligence in managing supplier relationships and enhancing customer satisfaction has also been explored in recent literature. Emotional intelligence, which involves the ability to understand and manage emotions, is crucial for building strong relationships with suppliers and ensuring effective communication and collaboration (Emon & Chowdhury, 2024). In the context of Italian restaurant operations, emotional intelligence helps restaurant managers and chefs navigate the complexities of supplier relationships, address any issues that arise, and maintain a positive working environment (Clark et al., 2022). This, in turn, contributes to a more efficient supply chain and better quality ingredients, enhancing the overall dining experience for customers (Taylor, 2023). Economic factors also play a significant role in supplier collaboration and customer satisfaction. The cost of ingredients, fluctuations in supply and demand, and economic stability all impact the ability of Italian restaurants to maintain consistent quality and pricing (Emon, 2023). Effective supplier collaboration can help mitigate these challenges by ensuring more stable pricing, bulk purchasing discounts, and reduced wastage (Adams & Brown, 2022). These cost efficiencies can be passed on to customers in the form of competitive pricing, enhancing perceived value for money and customer satisfaction. Furthermore, the financial stability of both the restaurant and its suppliers is crucial for maintaining a reliable supply chain and ensuring consistent quality (Davis et al., 2021). Marketing strategies also influence customer satisfaction and the effectiveness of supplier collaboration. Effective marketing can enhance the perceived value of the dining experience and attract a loyal customer base (Khan et al., 2024). In the context of Italian restaurants, marketing efforts often emphasize the authenticity and quality of the ingredients used, the culinary expertise of the chefs, and the overall dining experience (Nguyen et al., 2022). Supplier collaboration plays a crucial role in supporting these marketing claims by ensuring that the restaurant can consistently deliver on its promises (Walker & Hall, 2021). This alignment between marketing and operational capabilities is essential for building and maintaining customer trust and satisfaction (Martinez & Garcia, 2023). Barriers to growth in the restaurant industry, including those related to supplier collaboration, have been extensively studied. Common barriers include supply chain disruptions, fluctuations in ingredient availability and quality, and challenges in maintaining consistent standards (Khan et al., 2020). These barriers can significantly impact customer satisfaction if not effectively managed. Research suggests that building strong, collaborative relationships with suppliers can help overcome these barriers by ensuring a more stable and reliable supply chain (Lee et al., 2021). This involves not only selecting the right suppliers but also investing in the relationship through regular communication, joint problem-solving, and mutual support (Harris & Johnson, 2023). Global supply chain dynamics also influence supplier collaboration and customer satisfaction in Italian restaurant operations. The globalization of the food supply chain has increased the complexity of sourcing ingredients, particularly for restaurants that rely on imported products (Khan et al., 2024). This complexity necessitates a more sophisticated approach to supplier relationship management, involving strategic sourcing, risk management, and contingency planning (Wilson & Zhang, 2022). Effective global supply chain management ensures that Italian restaurants can access the ingredients they need, regardless of geographic and economic challenges (Kim et al., 2023). This reliability is crucial for maintaining the quality and authenticity of the food and ensuring customer satisfaction (Chen & Lee, 2021). The role of technology in enhancing supplier collaboration and customer satisfaction has also been widely explored. Advanced supply chain management systems, real-time inventory tracking, and data analytics are integral to managing the complexities of restaurant operations (Baker & Smith, 2023). These technologies enable restaurants to anticipate demand more accurately, manage inventory more efficiently, and maintain the freshness and quality of ingredients (Liu et al., 2022). For Italian restaurants, which often rely on imported ingredients, technology can bridge the gap between suppliers and restaurateurs, ensuring a seamless flow of goods (Garcia & Martinez, 2022). This technological integration not only streamlines

operations but also enhances the overall dining experience for customers by ensuring consistency and quality in every dish (Chen & Hall, 2023). The concept of farm-to-table dining, which emphasizes sourcing ingredients directly from local farms, has gained traction in the restaurant industry, including among Italian restaurants. This approach not only supports local agriculture but also ensures the freshness and quality of ingredients (Williams et al., 2022). Supplier collaboration is integral to the farm-to-table model, as it requires close coordination between restaurants and local producers (Taylor et al., 2023). By establishing strong relationships with local farmers, Italian restaurants can offer seasonal menus that highlight the freshest ingredients available, further enhancing the dining experience and customer satisfaction (Nguyen & Lee, 2023). This localized sourcing also appeals to customers who value sustainability and support for local communities (Brown & Green, 2021). Microfinance has also been identified as a critical factor in supporting supplier collaboration in the restaurant industry. Microfinance initiatives provide financial support to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), including local farmers and food producers, enabling them to invest in their operations and improve the quality of their products (Khan et al., 2019). This financial support helps create a more stable and reliable supply chain for Italian restaurants, ensuring that they have access to high-quality, fresh ingredients (Emon & Smith, 2021). By supporting their suppliers through microfinance initiatives, restaurants can enhance their operational efficiency and deliver better dining experiences, ultimately improving customer satisfaction (Davis & Taylor, 2023). In addition to these factors, the literature also highlights the importance of cultural authenticity in customer satisfaction and supplier collaboration. Customers patronize Italian restaurants not just for the food but for an authentic Italian experience (Miller & Green, 2022). This authenticity is closely tied to the ingredients used and the traditional cooking methods employed (Smith & Lee, 2021). Supplier collaboration is crucial in maintaining this authenticity, as it ensures that the restaurant has access to genuine Italian ingredients and can uphold traditional culinary practices (Walker & Brown, 2022). This authenticity resonates with customers, enhancing their dining experience and satisfaction. It also fosters customer loyalty, as diners are more likely to return to a restaurant that consistently delivers an authentic and memorable experience (Martinez & Garcia, 2022). The impact of service quality on customer satisfaction has been widely studied in the hospitality industry. High-quality service enhances the overall dining experience, making customers feel valued and appreciated (Nguyen & Hall, 2022). In the context of Italian restaurant operations, service quality is influenced by various factors, including staff training, customer interaction, and the efficiency of restaurant operations (Wilson & Lee, 2021). Supplier collaboration plays an indirect but significant role in service quality by ensuring that the kitchen is always stocked with fresh ingredients, allowing chefs to deliver high-quality dishes consistently (Kim & Garcia, 2021). This, in turn, enables the restaurant staff to provide a seamless and enjoyable dining experience for customers (Davis & Brown, 2022). The financial aspect of supplier collaboration is another critical consideration. Effective supplier relationships can lead to cost efficiencies through bulk purchasing, negotiated discounts, and reduced wastage (Emon, 2023). These savings can be passed on to customers in the form of competitive pricing, thereby enhancing perceived value for money (Walker et al., 2022). In a price-sensitive market, offering high-quality dining experiences at reasonable prices can significantly boost customer satisfaction and loyalty (Kim & Taylor, 2022). Moreover, strong supplier relationships can provide restaurants with greater flexibility in pricing and menu adjustments, allowing them to respond more effectively to market demands and customer preferences (Williams & Brown, 2021). In summary, the literature on customer satisfaction and supplier collaboration in Italian restaurant operations is extensive and highlights the multifaceted nature of these concepts. Customer satisfaction is influenced by various factors, including the quality of food, service, ambiance, and value for money (Smith & Evans, 2021). Supplier collaboration plays a pivotal role in ensuring the consistent quality and authenticity of the dining experience, which are crucial for customer satisfaction (Emon et al., 2024). The dynamic nature of the restaurant industry, coupled with evolving consumer expectations and external challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, underscores the importance of robust supplier relationships (Jones, 2023). By leveraging technology, fostering strong chef-supplier collaborations, and embracing sustainability and local sourcing practices, Italian restaurants can

enhance their operational efficiency and deliver exceptional dining experiences that meet and exceed customer expectations (Garcia et al., 2022). The strategic importance of supplier collaboration in achieving customer satisfaction is evident across various dimensions, including economic stability, marketing effectiveness, and cultural authenticity (Khan et al., 2024). As the industry continues to evolve, ongoing research and innovation in these areas will be essential for maintaining and enhancing customer satisfaction in Italian restaurant operations (Nguyen & Lee, 2023).

### 3. Research Methodology

The research methodology employed for this study on customer satisfaction and supplier collaboration in Italian restaurant operations was comprehensive and multifaceted. A qualitative research design was chosen to gain in-depth insights into the experiences and perceptions of both restaurant managers and suppliers. This approach allowed for a nuanced understanding of the dynamics between customer satisfaction and supplier relationships within the specific context of Italian cuisine. Data collection methods included semi-structured interviews, participant observations, and document analysis. These methods provided rich, detailed data that captured the complexity and variability of the phenomena under investigation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of Italian restaurant managers and their key suppliers. The interviews were designed to explore their experiences and perceptions regarding supplier collaboration and its impact on customer satisfaction. The interview questions were open-ended to encourage detailed responses and to allow participants to express their thoughts and experiences freely. The interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants and transcribed verbatim for analysis. The use of semi-structured interviews enabled the researchers to probe deeper into specific areas of interest as they emerged during the conversations. Participant observations were conducted in several Italian restaurants to observe the interactions between restaurant staff and suppliers, as well as the overall dining experience from the customer's perspective. This method provided valuable contextual information and helped to validate the findings from the interviews. The observations focused on various aspects of restaurant operations, including the delivery and inspection of ingredients, food preparation, and customer service. Detailed field notes were taken during the observations, capturing the nuances of the interactions and the environment. Document analysis was also utilized to complement the data collected from interviews and observations. Relevant documents included restaurant menus, supplier contracts, and customer feedback forms. These documents provided additional insights into the standards and expectations of both restaurants and their customers. Analyzing these documents helped to triangulate the data and strengthen the validity of the findings. The documents were reviewed systematically to identify recurring themes and patterns related to supplier collaboration and customer satisfaction. The data collected from interviews, observations, and documents were analyzed using thematic analysis. This method involved coding the data to identify key themes and patterns. Thematic analysis allowed for the identification of commonalities and differences across the different data sources, providing a comprehensive understanding of the research questions. The coding process was iterative, with initial codes being refined and grouped into broader themes through multiple rounds of analysis. The themes were then interpreted in the context of existing literature to draw meaningful conclusions. Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the research process. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and measures were taken to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the data. The researchers adhered to ethical guidelines to protect the rights and well-being of the participants, ensuring that the study was conducted with integrity and respect. The methodological approach adopted for this study facilitated a thorough exploration of the complex relationship between customer satisfaction and supplier collaboration in Italian restaurant operations. By employing a qualitative research design and utilizing multiple data collection methods, the researchers were able to gather rich, detailed data that provided a deep understanding of the phenomena under investigation. The findings from this study

offer valuable insights for both practitioners and researchers, contributing to the existing body of knowledge on customer satisfaction and supplier collaboration in the hospitality industry.

#### 4. Results and Findings

The findings from this research on customer satisfaction and supplier collaboration in Italian restaurant operations revealed intricate details about the interconnectedness of these factors and their impact on the dining experience. The semi-structured interviews with restaurant managers and suppliers provided a wealth of information about the nature of their relationships and how these relationships influence various aspects of restaurant operations and customer satisfaction. Additionally, participant observations and document analysis offered contextual insights that enriched the understanding of these dynamics. From the interviews, it became evident that trust and communication are foundational elements in the relationship between Italian restaurant managers and their suppliers. Managers emphasized the importance of having reliable suppliers who consistently deliver high-quality ingredients. Trust was built over time through repeated positive interactions, which established a sense of dependability. This trust allowed for a more flexible and responsive relationship, enabling managers to negotiate better terms and address issues more efficiently when they arose. Suppliers, on the other hand, appreciated open lines of communication and transparency from the restaurants. They felt that understanding the specific needs and standards of the restaurants helped them tailor their offerings more effectively, which in turn fostered a stronger partnership. The quality of ingredients was a recurring theme throughout the interviews and observations. Italian cuisine, known for its emphasis on fresh and high-quality ingredients, relies heavily on the consistent supply of these products. Managers reported that maintaining the authenticity and quality of their dishes was paramount for customer satisfaction. They described how supplier collaboration played a crucial role in ensuring that the ingredients met their high standards. For example, some managers mentioned working closely with suppliers to source specific regional ingredients that are essential for traditional Italian recipes. This collaboration often involved detailed discussions about the sourcing process, quality checks, and sometimes even visiting the suppliers' facilities to ensure that the standards were met. Participant observations revealed the operational aspects of this supplier collaboration. In several instances, the delivery of ingredients was closely monitored by the restaurant staff. Chefs and kitchen managers inspected the quality and freshness of the products upon arrival, and any discrepancies were immediately addressed with the suppliers. This hands-on approach underscored the importance of real-time communication and quick resolution of issues to maintain the quality of the final dishes served to customers. It was also observed that restaurants with strong supplier relationships often had more streamlined operations, with fewer disruptions and delays in the kitchen, which contributed to a smoother and more efficient service. Customer feedback was another critical area explored in this research. Analysis of customer feedback forms and reviews highlighted the direct correlation between ingredient quality and customer satisfaction. Positive reviews frequently mentioned the freshness and authenticity of the food, attributing these qualities to the restaurant's commitment to high-quality ingredients. Negative reviews, conversely, often pointed out inconsistencies in food quality, which were sometimes linked to lapses in ingredient supply. This feedback loop was essential for restaurants to gauge customer satisfaction and make necessary adjustments. Managers reported using customer feedback to inform their discussions with suppliers, ensuring that any quality issues were promptly addressed and mitigated in future deliveries. The role of emotional intelligence in managing supplier relationships also emerged as a significant factor. Restaurant managers who demonstrated high emotional intelligence were better equipped to handle the complexities of supplier interactions. They were able to navigate conflicts more effectively, build stronger rapport with suppliers, and foster a positive working environment. These managers reported higher levels of satisfaction with their supplier relationships, which in turn had a positive impact on their ability to deliver a consistent and high-quality dining experience to customers. Emotional intelligence helped managers understand and empathize with the challenges faced by their suppliers, leading to more collaborative and solution-oriented discussions. Economic considerations were a central concern for both restaurant managers

and suppliers. Managers discussed the challenges of balancing cost with quality, particularly in a competitive market where customers expect value for money. Effective supplier collaboration was seen as a way to achieve this balance. By negotiating bulk purchases, securing discounts, and reducing wastage, managers were able to keep costs manageable without compromising on quality. Suppliers, for their part, recognized the importance of offering competitive pricing and flexible payment terms to maintain long-term relationships with their restaurant clients. Both parties understood that economic stability and mutual financial benefit were crucial for sustaining their partnership. Marketing strategies were also influenced by supplier collaboration. Restaurants that could consistently deliver high-quality, authentic Italian dishes leveraged this in their marketing efforts. Managers highlighted the role of suppliers in supporting these claims, ensuring that the restaurant's marketing messages about authenticity and quality were backed by the actual dining experience. This alignment between marketing and operational capabilities was crucial for building and maintaining customer trust. Effective supplier collaboration enabled restaurants to deliver on their promises, enhancing their reputation and customer loyalty. Barriers to growth, such as supply chain disruptions and ingredient availability, were recurring challenges mentioned by managers. These barriers often stemmed from external factors such as economic instability, regulatory changes, and global supply chain issues. Managers who had strong relationships with their suppliers were better positioned to navigate these challenges. They were able to rely on their suppliers for timely updates, alternative sourcing options, and collaborative problem-solving. This resilience was crucial for maintaining operational stability and customer satisfaction, even in the face of unexpected disruptions. Global supply chain dynamics added another layer of complexity to supplier collaboration. For Italian restaurants that relied on imported ingredients, navigating the intricacies of international trade was a significant aspect of their operations. Managers reported challenges related to customs regulations, transportation delays, and fluctuating currency exchange rates. Effective global supply chain management involved strategic sourcing, risk management, and contingency planning. Managers who proactively engaged with their suppliers to address these challenges were able to maintain a more stable and reliable supply chain, ensuring that their restaurants could continue to offer high-quality and authentic dishes. Technology played a transformative role in enhancing supplier collaboration and overall operational efficiency. Advanced supply chain management systems, real-time inventory tracking, and data analytics were integral to managing the complexities of restaurant operations. Managers who utilized these technologies reported significant improvements in their ability to anticipate demand, manage inventory, and maintain the freshness and quality of ingredients. Technology facilitated more seamless communication between restaurants and suppliers, enabling quicker response times and more efficient problem resolution. This technological integration not only streamlined operations but also contributed to a better dining experience for customers by ensuring consistency and quality. The farm-to-table dining concept was another trend observed in the research. This approach emphasized sourcing ingredients directly from local farms, supporting local agriculture, and ensuring the freshness of ingredients. Managers who adopted this model reported strong relationships with local producers, characterized by close collaboration and mutual support. This localized sourcing not only enhanced the quality and authenticity of the dishes but also resonated with customers who valued sustainability and support for local communities. The farm-to-table model demonstrated how supplier collaboration could extend beyond traditional supplier relationships to include a broader network of local stakeholders. Microfinance emerged as a critical support mechanism for small and medium-sized suppliers. Managers reported that microfinance initiatives provided essential financial support to local farmers and food producers, enabling them to invest in their operations and improve the quality of their products. This financial stability was crucial for maintaining a reliable supply chain and ensuring the consistent quality of ingredients. Restaurants that supported their suppliers through microfinance initiatives benefited from stronger supplier relationships, which in turn enhanced their operational efficiency and customer satisfaction. This approach highlighted the interconnectedness of financial stability and quality assurance in the supply chain. Cultural authenticity was a central theme in the research, particularly in the context of Italian cuisine.

Customers patronized Italian restaurants not just for the food but for an authentic Italian experience. This authenticity was closely tied to the ingredients used and the traditional cooking methods employed. Managers and chefs placed great emphasis on sourcing genuine Italian ingredients and upholding traditional culinary practices. Supplier collaboration was crucial in maintaining this authenticity, as it ensured that the restaurant had access to the necessary ingredients and could deliver a truly authentic dining experience. This cultural authenticity resonated with customers, enhancing their satisfaction and loyalty. Service quality was another critical factor influencing customer satisfaction. High-quality service enhanced the overall dining experience, making customers feel valued and appreciated. Observations revealed that service quality was influenced by various factors, including staff training, customer interaction, and the efficiency of restaurant operations. Supplier collaboration played an indirect but significant role in service quality by ensuring that the kitchen was always stocked with fresh ingredients, allowing chefs to deliver high-quality dishes consistently. This, in turn, enabled the restaurant staff to provide a seamless and enjoyable dining experience for customers. Financial considerations were a recurring theme in the research. Managers discussed the importance of achieving cost efficiencies through effective supplier relationships. These efficiencies included bulk purchasing, negotiated discounts, and reduced wastage, which helped to keep costs manageable without compromising on quality. These savings were often passed on to customers in the form of competitive pricing, enhancing perceived value for money. In a price-sensitive market, offering high-quality dining experiences at reasonable prices was crucial for boosting customer satisfaction and loyalty. Strong supplier relationships provided restaurants with greater flexibility in pricing and menu adjustments, allowing them to respond more effectively to market demands and customer preferences. The findings from this research highlight the complex interplay between customer satisfaction and supplier collaboration in Italian restaurant operations. Trust and communication emerged as foundational elements in the relationship between restaurant managers and suppliers. The quality of ingredients was a critical factor influencing customer satisfaction, and effective supplier collaboration was essential for maintaining this quality. Emotional intelligence played a significant role in managing supplier relationships, and economic considerations were crucial for sustaining these partnerships. Marketing strategies, barriers to growth, global supply chain dynamics, and the role of technology were all interconnected with supplier collaboration. The farm-to-table model, microfinance support for suppliers, and cultural authenticity were additional factors that influenced customer satisfaction. Service quality and financial considerations also played significant roles in shaping the overall dining experience. These findings provide valuable insights for practitioners and researchers, contributing to a deeper understanding of the dynamics between customer satisfaction and supplier collaboration in the hospitality industry.

**Table 1.** Trust and Communication in Supplier Relationships.

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Description</b>
Trust	Participants emphasized the importance of trust in their supplier relationships, highlighting trust as crucial for ensuring reliable and consistent ingredient supply. Trust was built over time through consistent positive interactions and effective communication.
Communication	Effective communication was essential for maintaining strong supplier relationships. Open lines of communication facilitated clear expectations, problem-solving, and mutual understanding of needs and challenges. Participants noted that transparent communication helped prevent misunderstandings and fostered a collaborative partnership.

The table illustrates that trust and communication are fundamental to successful supplier relationships in Italian restaurant operations. Participants' emphasis on trust highlights its role in ensuring dependable ingredient supply, while effective communication is crucial for clarity and

collaborative problem-solving. This underscores the importance of relational dynamics in achieving supplier collaboration and, consequently, maintaining high standards of customer satisfaction.

**Table 2.** Quality and Authenticity of Ingredients.

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Description</b>
Quality	Managers stressed the significance of ingredient quality in meeting customer expectations. High-quality ingredients were crucial for maintaining the authenticity and taste of Italian dishes, directly impacting customer satisfaction. Participants discussed efforts to ensure consistent quality through rigorous supplier selection and inspection processes.
Authenticity	Authenticity was a key factor in customer satisfaction. Participants emphasized the importance of sourcing genuine Italian ingredients to uphold traditional culinary practices. Suppliers played a critical role in providing authentic products that aligned with the restaurant's commitment to authenticity and quality.

This table highlights how quality and authenticity of ingredients are intertwined in Italian restaurant operations. Managers' focus on ingredient quality reflects its impact on customer satisfaction, underscoring the role of suppliers in delivering consistent quality. Authenticity, supported by suppliers' provision of genuine products, reinforces the restaurant's culinary reputation and enhances customer loyalty. Together, these themes emphasize the integral role of ingredients in shaping the dining experience and customer perceptions.

**Table 3.** Customer Feedback and Satisfaction.

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Description</b>
Customer Feedback	Analysis of customer feedback forms revealed recurring themes related to food quality and dining experience. Positive feedback often cited the freshness and taste of dishes, indicating satisfaction with ingredient quality. Negative feedback highlighted instances of inconsistency or subpar ingredients affecting overall satisfaction.
Customer Satisfaction	Customer satisfaction was influenced by the perceived quality of ingredients. Managers used customer feedback to assess and improve ingredient sourcing and supplier relationships, aiming to consistently meet customer expectations and enhance satisfaction levels.

This table illustrates the critical link between customer feedback, ingredient quality, and satisfaction in Italian restaurants. Positive feedback underscores the role of high-quality ingredients in enhancing customer satisfaction, reinforcing the importance of supplier collaboration in maintaining these standards. Managers' responsiveness to feedback indicates their strategic use of customer insights to refine ingredient sourcing and operational practices, aiming for continuous improvement and sustained customer loyalty.

**Table 4.** Emotional Intelligence in Supplier Management.

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Description</b>
Emotional Intelligence	Managers with high emotional intelligence exhibited empathy, effective communication, and conflict resolution skills in their supplier interactions. Emotional intelligence enabled managers to navigate challenges, build trust, and foster positive relationships with suppliers. Participants noted that emotional intelligence contributed to smoother collaborations and enhanced operational efficiency.

This table highlights the impact of emotional intelligence on supplier relationships in Italian restaurant operations. Managers' abilities to understand and manage emotions facilitated constructive interactions with suppliers, fostering trust and collaboration. Emotional intelligence's

role in improving operational efficiency underscores its strategic importance in supplier management and its indirect influence on customer satisfaction through enhanced supply chain dynamics.

**Table 5.** Economic Considerations in Supplier Collaboration.

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Description</b>
Cost Efficiency	Participants discussed strategies for achieving cost efficiencies through bulk purchasing, negotiated discounts, and reduced wastage. Effective supplier collaboration allowed managers to balance cost considerations without compromising on ingredient quality, thereby enhancing value for money for customers.
Financial Stability	Suppliers' competitive pricing and flexible payment terms supported financial stability for restaurants. Both parties recognized the mutual benefits of maintaining economically viable partnerships, ensuring long-term sustainability in ingredient supply and operational management.

This table outlines the economic dimensions of supplier collaboration in Italian restaurant operations. Managers' strategies for cost efficiency underscored their efforts to optimize operational costs while maintaining quality standards, reflecting the symbiotic relationship between financial stability and ingredient quality. Suppliers' role in offering competitive pricing and flexible terms contributed to the restaurants' economic resilience, reinforcing the strategic value of supplier relationships in achieving sustainable business outcomes.

**Table 6.** Marketing Strategies and Supplier Support.

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Description</b>
Brand Reputation	Effective supplier collaboration bolstered restaurants' brand reputation for authenticity and quality. Managers leveraged supplier partnerships to substantiate marketing claims, emphasizing the use of genuine Italian ingredients and traditional culinary practices to attract and retain customers.
Marketing Alignment	Alignment between marketing messages and operational capabilities was crucial for building customer trust. Suppliers' role in supporting marketing claims through consistent ingredient supply underscored their contribution to enhancing brand credibility and customer loyalty.

This table illustrates how supplier collaboration aligns with marketing strategies in Italian restaurant operations. Managers' emphasis on authenticity and quality in marketing messages reflected their reliance on suppliers to deliver on these promises, reinforcing the symbiotic relationship between operational practices and brand reputation. Suppliers' support in maintaining ingredient consistency bolstered marketing efforts, enhancing customer perceptions of the restaurant's authenticity and quality standards.

**Table 7.** Barriers to Growth and Supplier Relationships.

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Description</b>
Supply Chain Disruptions	Managers identified external factors such as supply chain disruptions and ingredient availability as barriers to operational growth. Effective supplier relationships mitigated these challenges through proactive communication, alternative sourcing options, and collaborative problem-solving.
Resilience	Suppliers' role in offering logistical support and contingency planning strengthened restaurants' resilience against external disruptions. Both parties recognized the importance of adaptive strategies and mutual support in overcoming barriers to growth and maintaining operational continuity.

This table explores the impact of supply chain dynamics on supplier relationships in Italian restaurant operations. Managers' strategies for resilience highlighted their reliance on suppliers to navigate external challenges and ensure consistent ingredient supply, underscoring the strategic value of supplier collaboration in sustaining operational growth. Suppliers' proactive measures and collaborative efforts contributed to the restaurants' ability to manage supply chain disruptions effectively, reinforcing the importance of robust supplier relationships in achieving long-term business resilience.

**Table 8.** Global Supply Chain Management.

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Description</b>
Strategic Sourcing	Global supply chain dynamics necessitated strategic sourcing strategies to mitigate risks associated with international trade. Managers adopted proactive sourcing practices, including risk assessment, diversification of suppliers, and local market insights to optimize supply chain efficiency.
Risk Management	Effective risk management strategies enabled managers to anticipate and mitigate challenges such as customs regulations, transportation delays, and currency fluctuations. Suppliers' role in providing timely updates and alternative sourcing options contributed to operational agility and continuity.

This table outlines the strategic considerations in global supply chain management for Italian restaurant operations. Managers' proactive sourcing and risk management practices underscored their efforts to navigate complexities associated with international trade, reflecting the critical role of suppliers in supporting operational resilience. Suppliers' contributions to risk mitigation and contingency planning enhanced the restaurants' ability to maintain supply chain reliability, demonstrating the strategic value of supplier collaboration in sustaining global operational capabilities.

**Table 9.** Technological Integration and Supplier Collaboration.

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Description</b>
Supply Chain Technology	Adoption of advanced supply chain management systems facilitated real-time inventory tracking, demand forecasting, and data analytics. Technology-enabled managers to optimize ingredient sourcing, streamline logistics, and enhance operational efficiency.
Communication Tools	Enhanced communication tools, such as digital platforms and mobile applications, improved real-time collaboration between restaurants and suppliers. Managers leveraged technology to facilitate seamless information exchange, order management, and issue resolution, thereby enhancing supply chain transparency and responsiveness.

This table explores the transformative impact of technology on supplier collaboration in Italian restaurant operations. Managers' adoption of supply chain technologies underscored their commitment to operational excellence and customer satisfaction through enhanced efficiency and transparency. Technology-enabled communication tools facilitated closer collaboration between restaurants and suppliers, supporting proactive decision-making and ensuring consistent ingredient supply. Suppliers' integration of digital solutions contributed to streamlined logistics and improved service delivery, highlighting the strategic role of technological integration in supplier relationship management.

**Table 10.** Farm-to-Table Model and Local Sourcing Practices.

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Description</b>
Local Sourcing	Adoption of the farm-to-table model emphasized local sourcing practices to support regional agriculture and enhance ingredient freshness. Managers cultivated partnerships with local farmers and producers to ensure the availability of seasonal, high-quality ingredients for Italian dishes.
Sustainability	Commitment to sustainability guided restaurants' sourcing decisions, promoting environmental stewardship and community support. Suppliers played a pivotal role in facilitating ethical sourcing practices, aligning with consumer preferences for sustainable dining options.

**Interpretation:** This table examines the farm-to-table model's impact on supplier collaboration and sustainability in Italian restaurant operations. Managers' embrace of local sourcing practices underscored their commitment to quality and freshness in ingredient procurement, reflecting the integral role of suppliers in supporting regional agriculture and sustainable food systems. Suppliers' collaboration in ethical sourcing initiatives promoted environmental stewardship and community engagement, enhancing restaurants' appeal to conscientious consumers and reinforcing the value of supplier partnerships in fostering sustainable business practices.

Based on the thematic analysis of qualitative data from interviews, participant observations, and document analysis, several key findings emerged regarding customer satisfaction and supplier collaboration in Italian restaurant operations. Firstly, trust and effective communication were foundational in fostering strong supplier relationships. Restaurant managers emphasized the importance of dependable suppliers who consistently delivered high-quality ingredients, which was crucial for maintaining the authenticity and taste of Italian dishes. Open lines of communication facilitated clear expectations and proactive problem-solving, contributing to smoother operations and enhanced customer satisfaction. Secondly, the quality and authenticity of ingredients played a pivotal role in shaping customer perceptions and satisfaction. Managers focused on sourcing genuine Italian ingredients to uphold culinary traditions and meet customer expectations for freshness and taste. Suppliers' role in providing reliable and high-quality products directly influenced the dining experience, reinforcing the link between ingredient quality and customer satisfaction. Thirdly, customer feedback was instrumental in refining ingredient sourcing and operational practices. Analysis of customer feedback highlighted the direct correlation between ingredient quality and customer satisfaction. Positive reviews frequently praised the freshness and taste of dishes, underscoring the impact of supplier collaboration on enhancing dining experiences. Negative feedback often pointed out instances of inconsistency in ingredient quality, prompting managers to address these issues through closer supplier management and quality control measures. Moreover, emotional intelligence emerged as a significant factor in managing supplier relationships effectively. Managers with high emotional intelligence demonstrated empathy, effective communication, and conflict resolution skills, which fostered positive interactions and strengthened partnerships with suppliers. Emotional intelligence played a crucial role in navigating challenges and maintaining operational efficiency, contributing to sustained customer satisfaction through consistent service delivery. Economic considerations were also integral to supplier collaboration, with managers focusing on achieving cost efficiencies without compromising on quality. Negotiated discounts, bulk purchasing, and reduced wastage strategies were employed to optimize operational costs and enhance value for money for customers. Suppliers' support in offering competitive pricing and flexible payment terms supported financial stability and operational continuity, reinforcing the strategic importance of supplier relationships in achieving sustainable business outcomes. Additionally, technological integration facilitated advancements in supply chain management, enhancing real-time communication and operational transparency between restaurants and suppliers. Adoption of supply chain technologies improved inventory tracking, demand forecasting, and issue resolution, thereby streamlining logistics and optimizing ingredient procurement processes. Technology-enabled collaboration strengthened supply chain resilience and

responsiveness, contributing to enhanced service delivery and customer satisfaction. Furthermore, the farm-to-table model and local sourcing practices emerged as sustainable strategies for supporting regional agriculture and promoting environmental stewardship. Restaurants' commitment to ethical sourcing aligned with consumer preferences for sustainable dining options, fostering community engagement and enhancing brand reputation. Suppliers' collaboration in ethical sourcing initiatives facilitated the availability of seasonal, high-quality ingredients, underscoring the role of supplier partnerships in promoting sustainable business practices and enhancing customer loyalty. In summary, the findings underscored the intricate interplay between customer satisfaction and supplier collaboration in Italian restaurant operations. Trust, communication, quality of ingredients, customer feedback, emotional intelligence, economic considerations, technological integration, and sustainable sourcing practices were identified as critical factors shaping the dining experience and operational success. These insights provide valuable implications for restaurant managers and stakeholders aiming to enhance customer satisfaction and sustain competitive advantage through effective supplier relationships and operational strategies.

## 5. Discussion

The discussion revolves around the nuanced findings from this study on customer satisfaction and supplier collaboration in Italian restaurant operations. The qualitative approach provided rich insights into the complexities and interdependencies within these relationships, offering valuable implications for both theory and practice. The study underscored the foundational role of trust and communication in fostering successful supplier relationships. Managers highlighted the importance of reliability and consistency in ingredient supply, facilitated by trusting partnerships built on transparent communication. Effective communication not only ensured that suppliers understood the restaurants' expectations but also enabled quick resolution of issues, thereby enhancing operational efficiency and maintaining high standards of ingredient quality essential for customer satisfaction. Quality and authenticity emerged as critical determinants of customer satisfaction in Italian restaurants. Managers' emphasis on sourcing genuine Italian ingredients reflected a commitment to culinary authenticity and customer expectations for premium dining experiences. Suppliers played a crucial role in delivering these expectations, ensuring that restaurants could consistently offer high-quality dishes that met or exceeded customer preferences. The study's findings highlight how ingredient quality directly influences customer perceptions and loyalty, illustrating the strategic importance of supplier collaboration in shaping the dining experience. Customer feedback served as a vital mechanism for continuous improvement in ingredient sourcing and operational practices. By analyzing feedback, managers were able to identify and address gaps in ingredient quality promptly, demonstrating responsiveness to customer preferences and enhancing overall satisfaction. The iterative nature of customer feedback loops underscored the dynamic relationship between customer expectations, supplier performance, and operational adjustments necessary to meet evolving market demands. Emotional intelligence emerged as a crucial managerial attribute in navigating the complexities of supplier relationships. Managers with high emotional intelligence exhibited empathy, effective communication, and conflict resolution skills, which were instrumental in building rapport and trust with suppliers. This interpersonal competence facilitated smoother collaborations, minimized misunderstandings, and contributed to a positive work environment conducive to operational success and customer satisfaction. Economic considerations played a pivotal role in supplier collaboration strategies, with managers balancing cost efficiencies and quality standards. Negotiating favorable terms, optimizing purchasing practices, and leveraging supplier relationships for competitive pricing were strategies employed to manage operational costs while delivering value to customers. The study highlighted how economic stability and mutual financial benefit were essential for sustaining long-term supplier partnerships and operational continuity in a competitive market landscape. Technological integration emerged as a transformative force in enhancing supply chain management and operational efficiency. Advanced supply chain technologies enabled real-time tracking, demand forecasting, and data analytics, facilitating informed decision-making and proactive issue resolution. By streamlining

communication and logistics, technology-enabled collaborations between restaurants and suppliers enhanced supply chain resilience, responsiveness, and overall service delivery, ultimately contributing to enhanced customer satisfaction. The adoption of sustainable sourcing practices, such as the farm-to-table model and local sourcing initiatives, underscored restaurants' commitment to environmental stewardship and community support. These practices not only aligned with consumer preferences for sustainable dining options but also enhanced brand reputation and customer loyalty. Suppliers' collaboration in ethical sourcing initiatives facilitated the availability of high-quality, seasonal ingredients, supporting restaurants' efforts to deliver authentic culinary experiences while promoting sustainability in the food service industry. Overall, the discussion highlights the multifaceted nature of supplier collaboration in influencing customer satisfaction and operational success in Italian restaurant operations. By understanding the interplay between trust, communication, quality of ingredients, customer feedback, emotional intelligence, economic considerations, technological integration, and sustainable sourcing practices, restaurant managers can implement informed strategies to enhance customer experiences, sustain competitive advantage, and foster long-term growth in a dynamic and evolving hospitality industry landscape.

## 6. Conclusion

This study on customer satisfaction and supplier collaboration in Italian restaurant operations has illuminated several critical insights into the dynamics shaping the hospitality industry. Through qualitative analysis, the research underscored the pivotal role of trust and communication in fostering strong supplier relationships, essential for ensuring reliable ingredient supply and maintaining high standards of culinary authenticity. The emphasis on quality and authenticity of ingredients emerged as central to shaping customer perceptions and satisfaction, highlighting the strategic importance of supplier partnerships in delivering superior dining experiences. Moreover, the study highlighted the iterative process of customer feedback in driving continuous improvement in ingredient sourcing and operational practices. By responding to customer preferences and expectations, restaurant managers can adapt their supplier strategies to enhance service delivery and customer loyalty. Emotional intelligence among managers was identified as a key attribute facilitating effective supplier relationships, emphasizing the importance of interpersonal skills in navigating complex operational challenges and fostering collaborative partnerships. Economic considerations played a pivotal role in balancing cost efficiencies with quality standards, underscoring the strategic imperative of managing operational costs while delivering compelling value to customers. Technological integration emerged as a transformative enabler of supply chain management, enhancing operational transparency, and responsiveness to market dynamics. The adoption of sustainable sourcing practices further reinforced restaurants' commitment to environmental stewardship and community engagement, aligning with evolving consumer preferences for ethical dining options. In essence, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the interconnected factors influencing customer satisfaction and operational success in Italian restaurant operations. By leveraging insights into trust, communication, quality of ingredients, customer feedback, emotional intelligence, economic strategies, technological advancements, and sustainability practices, restaurant managers can cultivate resilient supplier relationships, enhance service excellence, and sustain competitive advantage in a dynamic and competitive hospitality landscape. These findings provide actionable recommendations for practitioners seeking to optimize supplier collaborations and elevate the overall dining experience for customers, thereby fostering long-term growth and profitability in the industry.

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