THE AMBIVALENT ALLIANCE BETWEEN SUSTAINABILITY AND RESTAURANT BUSINESS

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ABSTRACT
In the contemporary landscape, the assessment of business performance and societal advancement increasingly hinges on the concept of sustainability. Restaurant operators are now urged to elevate the significance of sustainability and implement measures more earnestly. The incorporation of sustainable practices has become imperative for the advancement of restaurants, and integrating sustainability into the overall business strategy is not only a moral imperative but also a pathway to securing a competitive edge. Yet, effectively managing a business while navigating the delicate equilibrium between sustainability and profitability presents significant challenges and is anything but straightforward. Restaurant operators encounter obstacles when considering the integration of sustainability practices into their business operations. Despite these challenges, there are also notable advantages. Overall, the crucial point is that restaurants have promising opportunities if they choose to embrace sustainability and take a step forward in that direction. This article delves into the discourse on sustainability in prior literature, exploring the factors considered by the researchers. Subsequently, it examines the obstacles that impede restaurant owners from embracing sustainability practices, along with the associated benefits. The final section outlines the opportunities that await restaurants that choose to incorporate sustainability. The overarching goal of this article is to provide restaurant operators with a comprehensive understanding of sustainability in the food and beverage industry, ultimately encouraging them to integrate sustainable practices into their business operations.

KEYWORDS: *sustainability, green restaurant, dining trends, advantages of sustainability practice, disadvantages of sustainability practice, opportunities in sustainability*

1.0 INTRODUCTION
Restaurant operators are currently very concerned about the post-pandemic impact on their businesses. During epidemics and outbreaks of infectious diseases, consumers tend to reduce their consumption of restaurant meals and refrain from dining out due to concerns about contracting infections. Consequently, this behaviour has a detrimental impact on the financial performance of the food industry (Kim et al., 2020). Hence, to face the challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is imperative for restaurant operators to actively foster customer trust and confidence. This is crucial for ensuring that customers maintain their trust and continue utilizing the products and services provided by restaurants.

After the pandemic, people become more aware and concerned with what they consume as well as how it will impact the community and environment. According to a survey conducted by Vase Technologies Sdn. Bhd., a marketing research firm, only 12% of Malaysians have been eating out since the implementation of the Recovery Movement Control Order. This emphasizes the need for change and highlights the urgency for restaurants to find ways to compete effectively while also contributing to sustainable development (Hakim, 2020). In the event that customers are not convinced about sustainability measures implemented by restaurants, there is a potential risk of losing their patronage, which could ultimately lead to the closure of restaurants. Therefore, sustainability is no longer just an optional choice but rather a compelling call to take immediate action (Kalva, 2017a).

In the pursuit of delivering value to customers, restaurants must also strive to create environmental and social benefits for society at large. While the objective is well-defined, whether actions have been taken or how far it has been towards achieving sustainability remain uncertain. There is a lack of explicit evidence regarding the

extent to which sustainability practices have been implemented in restaurants. Furthermore, discussions on sustainability seem to primarily revolved around waste reduction and engagement in community service initiatives. Hence, this article aims to review previous studies on sustainability practices in restaurants, the benefits and barriers of sustainability adoption by restaurants, as well as opportunities in the future should restaurants opt to adopt sustainability in their operation.

2.0 THE CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABILITY

The term sustainable development was introduced by the Brundtland Commission as documented in Our Common Future (Lim, 2016). Sustainability entails meeting the present generation's needs while ensuring that future generations have the ability to meet their own needs without compromise (Jianu et al., 2015). This definition aligns with the OECD's 2002 description of sustainability, which emphasizes consuming goods and services that meet essential demands and maintain quality of life while safeguarding the needs of future generations (Pomering, 2017). These needs were further elaborated in the United Nations' 2015 Sustainable Development Goals.

Traditionally been viewed as a concept or theory (Huang, 2020), sustainability encompasses three fundamental dimensions, often referred to as the Triple Bottom Line: people (social dimension), planet (environmental dimension), and profit (economic dimension) (Jianu et al., 2015; Kumar et al., 2012). The social dimension of sustainability pertains to the well-being of both internal and external stakeholders within an organization, economic sustainability is associated with the organization's enduring financial growth, and environmental sustainability concerns environmentally conscious organizational practices as well as ongoing efforts to conserve and safeguard natural resources (Jang & Zheng, 2020). Crucial considerations of sustainability include whether organizations prioritize the values and interests of the environment and society, take into account the impact of their operations on business partners, trade collaborators, and employees, and if they make decisions and voluntary efforts that go beyond fulfilling their legal obligations (Böröcz & Herceg, 2015).

Although sustainability is commonly associated with environmental concerns, it also encompasses social and economic aspects. Socially responsible operations encompass fair treatment and a thorough understanding of their impact on individuals and groups interacting with the restaurant. In interactions involving the restaurant, consideration must extend beyond customers and employees to encompass business partners and the local community (Böröcz & Herceg, 2015).

3.0 SUSTAINABILITY AND THE RESTAURANT INDUSTRY

Today, sustainability is considered a critical factor in evaluating business performance and social progress (Kalva, 2017b). It is high time for restaurant owners to prioritize and take sustainability measures more seriously. Exploring sustainability practices has become essential for the growth and development of restaurants. Adopting sustainability as part of a restaurant's business strategy is not only a moral obligation but also a means to gain a competitive advantage. However, successfully operating a business while balancing sustainability and profitability poses considerable challenges and is far from easy. Can restaurants effectively compete while simultaneously contributing to sustainable development? Is this aspiration too idealistic or unrealistic? The truth remains that action must be taken.

Consumers are becoming more cognizant of the environmental implications of their food purchasing decisions, and a growing number are making conscious food choices based on social, economic, and environmental values (Chevallier-Chantepie & Batt, 2021). According to Qoura and Gomaa (2022), prior studies indicate that customers exhibit enhanced awareness, expertise, and understanding of the influence of food choices on their well-being and the ecological implications of dietary patterns. Additionally, consumers tend to gravitate towards hospitality establishments that have embraced sustainability measures, displaying curiosity about the origins and production methods of their meals. Sustainability becomes a trend in the restaurant industry (Božić & Milošević, 2021). The increasing popularity of sustainable food practices suggests their potential to connect with a broader audience (Pinard et al., 2014).

The concerns that surround public interests and environmental issues have gained significant attention from stakeholders. How businesses impact the environment in the long run and the society at large have eventually become something that the restaurant industry could not oversee, particularly in the past decade. Embracing environmental sustainability involves making decisions and taking actions that prioritize the well-being of preserving the natural world, with a particular focus on safeguarding the environment's capacity to support human life. It revolves around making responsible decisions that will minimize the adverse impact of industry on the

environment (Henshaw, 2020). While restaurants may not be classified as major polluters, their impact on the environment is still quite notable and is regarded as one of the most unsustainable industries globally when it comes to emitting greenhouse gases and producing waste (Costa et al., 2023).

According to Sarmiento and El Hanandeh (2018), any dining establishment that demonstrates a strong awareness of environmental issues is regarded as a green restaurant. Hence, numerous previous research have explored sustainability practices in restaurants, by extensively focusing on green elements (Alsetoohy et al., 2021; Buenaventura & Gutierrez, 2023; Chaturvedi et al., 2022; Chevallier-Chantepie & Batt, 2021; Chiu & Hsieh, 2016; Eren et al., 2023; Goral et al., 2022; Henshaw, 2020; Kumar et al., 2023; Kwok et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2020; Mahasuweerachai & Suttikun, 2022; Mai et al., 2023; Namkung & Jang, 2013; Nicolau et al., 2020; Shishan et al., 2021; Teng & Wu, 2019; Teng et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2016; Yu et al., 2018) and environmental aspects (Buenaventura & Gutierrez, 2023; Camilleri, 2021; Chaturvedi et al., 2022; Fernández-Gámez et al., 2020; Filimonau et al., 2017; Gruia et al., 2021; Jacobs & Klosse, 2016; Jang & Zheng, 2020; Jang et al., 2017; Joo & Hwang, 2023; Karagiannis & Andrinos, 2021; Kim & Hall, 2020; Kumar et al., 2023; Lo et al., 2017; Martínez-Navalón et al., 2019; Namkung & Jang, 2014; Niu et al., 2021; Peng, 2020; Remar et al., 2022; Riva et al., 2022; Sarmiento & El Hanandeh, 2018; Satchapappichit et al., 2023; Su et al., 2019). The terms Green Practices and Green Restaurant emerge as the most frequently used keywords in previous literatures, demonstrating a high frequency of occurrence and strong associations with other keywords in the literature (Goral et al., 2022).

While many researchers concentrate solely on the environmental dimension, sustainable diets necessitate consideration of social and economic aspects as well (Maynard et al., 2020). An initiative in social sustainability, corporate social responsibility (CSR), has an impact on an organisation's economic sustainability. According to Jianu et al. (2015), CSR links to enhancing a company's financial outcomes, demonstrating the favourable impact of CSR on market capitalization value.

Researchers have observed that sustainability, viewed through economic, social, and environmental lenses, serves as a catalyst for innovation, consequently amplifying competitive advantages (Hubbard, 2018).

4.0 RESEARCH FINDINGS ON SUSTAINABILITY PRACTICES IN RESTAURANTS

4.1 Sustainability and restaurant performance

An increasing number of restaurants are embracing a dual focus on sustainability as well as profitability, and proactively align themselves with the principles of sustainable development, thereby garnering added benefits in the competitive market (Böröcz & Herceg, 2015). Studies found that there is a positive correlation between the environmental sustainability performance of restaurants and their overall performance (Cantele & Cassia, 2020; Jang et al., 2017).

4.2 Sustainability and restaurant reputation

One primary motive behind companies adopting green practices is to enhance their public image and reputation. Restaurants bolster their reputation when they function within environments that prioritize health and sustainability (Fernández-Gámez et al., 2020). The implementation of these green practices impacted how customers perceive the environmentally conscious image of a restaurant (Namkung & Jang, 2013). Hence restaurant managers should concentrate on enhancing the restaurant's image to demonstrate the company's commitment to the environment by implementing green practices (Buenaventura & Gutierrez, 2023).

The restaurant's sustainability practices and commitment should then be made known to consumers through marketing. According to American Marketing Association (AMA) (1975), the marketing of products (or services) that are assumed to be ecologically sound and supportive of the environment is called green marketing (Nekmahmud & Fekete-Farkas, 2020). Research found that green marketing directly influenced the restaurant's brand image (Wang et al., 2016).

Remar et al. (2022) found that the establishment of a restaurant's image is not directly influenced by consumer environmental consciousness. However, among individuals from Generation Z, their perception of restaurant image is notably influenced by their green self-identity (Mahasuweerachai & Suttikun, 2022).

4.3 Sustainability and food tourism

In the tourism industry, the positive effects on destination branding were found to be significantly influenced by the sustainability dimensions and the overall sustainability of the local food supply chain (Alsetoohy et al., 2021).

A notable correlation existed between the adoption of sustainable practices by restaurants and the branding of food in the corresponding destinations (Karagiannis & Andrinos, 2021).

4.4 Sustainability and consumer behaviour
4.4.1 Impact on consumer's overall attitude
Green practices have a noteworthy and positive impact on customers' attitudes (Mai et al., 2023). The way certain components of a restaurant's sustainability message, including factors like time, location, and social relationships, are perceived and understood to play a crucial role in shaping both the processing of the message and its subsequent influence on attitudes toward the restaurant (Line et al., 2016).

The practices adopted by sustainable restaurants exert a significant influence on diner behaviour, encompassing active participation in waste reduction practices and fostering loyalty toward sustainable dining establishments (Kim & Hall, 2019).

4.4.2 Impact on consumers' intention
Namkung and Jang (2013) revealed that incorporating green practices had an impact on customers behavioural intentions.

Consumers' attitude, perceived behavioural control, and curiosity played a role in influencing their behavioural intention to choose sustainable restaurants, and this behavioural intention, in turn, impacted their actual behaviour (Shishan et al., 2021; Tommasetti et al., 2018). Individual values and overarching attitudes exert a favourable influence on consumers' inclination to patronize eco-friendly restaurants (Teng et al., 2014). Sociodemographic factors, except gender, were observed to have an insignificant correlation with the intention to dine at green restaurants (Shishan et al., 2021).

The revisit intention of customers is positively and significantly influenced by both green consumerism and the perceived value associated with environmentally friendly practices (Riva et al., 2022). The favourable perception of service quality contributes positively to the image of environmentally friendly restaurants and encourages customers to consider revisiting. A positive environmental image of a restaurant strengthens customers' inclination to revisit, leading to higher rates of revisit intention for green establishments (Eren et al., 2023).

Consumers' intentions to visit and support eco-friendly restaurants are positively affected by the validation of expectations regarding the quality of ambiance which is shaped by factors such as cleanliness, design, and décor (Yu et al., 2018). The intention to revisit green restaurants are significantly impacted by sustainable practices encompassing food safety, food sustainability, environmental sensitivity, and food quality (Chaturvedi et al., 2022).

Green marketing is found to influences purchase intention both directly and indirectly (Wang et al., 2016).

4.4.3 Impact on consumers' willingness to pay
Consumers are inclined to pay a premium for environmentally friendly services or restaurants (Sarmiento & El Hanandeh, 2018). The readiness to pay a premium for eco-friendly practices in restaurants is influenced significantly by factors such as age, previous experience, involvement, and self-perception. Those with a greater inclination to pay extra for green practices exhibited higher perceptions of a restaurant's environmentally friendly brand image compared to those less willing to pay a premium (Namkung & Jang, 2014). The perceived seriousness of environmental problems, ascription of responsibility, as well as community attachment exert a substantial influence on personal norms and in turn, impact customers' willingness to pay at green restaurants (Mahasuweerachai & Suttikun, 2023).

Younger consumers, millennials and individuals who placed importance on attributes related to food and administration showed a greater willingness to pay extra at a green restaurant (Kwok et al., 2016).

Customer satisfaction, attitudes and emotional attachment were discovered to have a substantial and positive influence on their willingness to consume, including a willingness to pay a 5 percent premium for green products (Mai et al., 2023).

4.4.4 Impact on consumers' satisfaction

Green practices exert a substantial and positive impact on customer satisfaction (Mai et al., 2023). Consumer satisfaction is significantly influenced by sustainable practices, encompassing aspects such as food safety, food sustainability practices, environmental sensitivity, and food quality (Chaturvedi et al., 2022).

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), as a sustainability approach, has a significant positive impact on customer satisfaction (Hanaysha, 2017). Integrating environmentally sustainable practices would positively affect customer reviews (Sarmiento & El Hanandeh, 2018).

On the opposite, another research by Martínez-Navalón et al. (2019) found that there was no notable direct and positive correlation between environmental sustainability and satisfaction.

4.5 Sustainability and stakeholder engagemen

The pivotal role of top management values and leadership was instrumental in advancing environmental commitment (Jang et al., 2017). Environmental sustainability strategies arise as an individual concern and, consequently, become assimilated into the knowledge culture, leading to a normative approach to leadership (Wellton & Lainpelto, 2021).

According to Jang et al. (2017), engaging with stakeholders impacts restaurants' commitment to environmental sustainability in a significant way. This is reaffirmed in a study by Satchapappichit et al. (2023) on restaurant owners and managers in Thailand which found that both primary and secondary stakeholders had significant influence on the implementation of Environmental Sustainability Practices (ESPs).

In addition, chain restaurants exhibited a higher level of involvement in conveying their environmental practices to stakeholders (Jang & Zheng, 2020).

4.6   Sustainability and type of restaurant

Whether sustainability adoption or impact is dependent on restaurant type and size has also been an issue of interest by scholars. Different types of restaurants exhibit distinct levels of commitment to environmentally sustainable strategies and practices (Jang & Zheng, 2020). Wellton and Lainpelto (2021) found that the size of a restaurant did influence decision-making in both financial and social sustainability aspects. The effectiveness of sustainability practices also varies according to the type of restaurant (Namkung & Jang, 2013).

Independent restaurants were noted to have a higher prevalence of various environmentally sustainable practices (Jang & Zheng, 2020). Sit-down restaurants showed a higher inclination to embrace healthy sustainable eating practices in comparison to fast-food establishments (Yoon et al., 2020). In upscale casual dining establishments, green practices centred around food had a more significant impact on improving a restaurant's green brand image and influencing behavioural intentions compared to initiatives with an environmental focus, while, for casual dining customers, green practices emphasizing environmental aspects were more effective in enhancing a restaurant's green brand image and influencing behavioural intentions compared to initiatives focused on food (Namkung & Jang, 2013).

5.0 BENEFITS OF PRACTISING SUSTAINABILITY IN THE RESTAURANT INDUSTRY

Restaurants can experience various benefits by embracing sustainable initiatives. These include cutting down on waste and its related expenses (Chevallier-Chantepie & Batt, 2021; Costa et al., 2023; Gruia et al., 2021), boosting employee welfare, elevating stakeholder approval, and making overall advancements across all aspects of sustainability (Costa et al., 2023).

Gaining recognition as an environmentally friendly restaurant can enhance the overall positive perception of the establishment (Böröcz & Herceg, 2015), reputation (Fernández-Gámez et al., 2020), corporate image (Chevallier-Chantepie & Batt, 2021; Costa et al., 2023), and food branding (Karagiannis & Andrinos, 2021).The integration of environmental consciousness into the corporate identity should be actively pursued because there is a notable correlation between the adoption of sustainable practices by restaurants and the branding of food in their respective locations (Karagiannis & Andrinos, 2021). Being recognised as a restaurant that practices sustainability not only boosts its popularity but also positions it as a role model and a source of inspiration for both current and aspiring sustainable restaurant (Böröcz & Herceg, 2015). According to Loeurng (2021), implementing effective food waste management practices can serve as a positive message to attract a larger customer base and enhance a positive

brand image. The image of the restaurant is also moulded by consumers' environmental awareness (Remar et al., 2022). Hence, practising sustainability and being able to attract environmentally-conscious patrons would escalate the restaurant's image.

Moreover, implementing sustainability practices in restaurants and events offers numerous opportunities to cut costs (Böröcz & Herceg, 2015) and enhances restaurants' profitability or financial performance (Chevallier-Chantepie & Batt, 2021; Costa et al., 2023). There is a positive correlation between the environmental sustainability practice of restaurants and their financial and non-financial performance (Cantele & Cassia, 2020; Jang et al., 2017). In contrast to conventional assumptions, the anticipated higher costs associated with sustainable sourcing were offset by augmented profit margins and the minimal impact of sustainable ingredients on the overall operational expenses (Zanella, 2020).

Adopting sustainable practices is also beneficial in terms of better customer-restaurant relationship. It results in increasing customer contentment (Costa et al., 2023), customer satisfaction (Chaturvedi et al., 2022; Mai et al., 2023), positive influence on customer reviews (Sarmiento & El Hanandeh, 2018), customers' revisit intention (Chaturvedi et al., 2022; Eren et al., 2023; Maynard et al., 2020); and customers' willingness to pay more or a premium price (Božić & Milošević, 2021; Chevallier-Chantepie & Batt, 2021; Kwok et al., 2016; Mai et al., 2023; Maynard et al., 2020; Sarmiento & El Hanandeh, 2018), while at the same time boosts the restaurant's capability to draw in new consumers and the likelihood of meeting the expectations of existing customers (Chevallier-Chantepie & Batt, 2021). In addition, increased awareness of climate change and the adoption of sustainable restaurant practices, covering aspects like food sustainability and waste reduction, has been found to have a notable positive impact on consumer behaviour which includes active participation in waste reduction initiatives and a sense of loyalty towards restaurants committed to sustainability (Kim et al., 2020; Kim & Hall, 2019). Individuals gravitated towards restaurants embracing sustainable practices because they perceived sustainability as synonymous with utility. Those who prioritized sustainability features in their restaurant choices, such as food safety, decreased fixed costs through enhanced energy efficiency, waste reduction, food recycling, and selecting "right food," believed that this combination of elements was beneficial not only for themselves but for the broader community as well (Tommasetti et al., 2018).

Adopting sustainability not only benefits the restaurants involved and their loyal or local customers, but also patrons from outside the local market and the community at large. A study on the influences of the Sustainable Local Food Supply Chain (SLFSC) of green fine-dining restaurants on tourist food experiences and destination branding in the USA by Alsetoohy et al. (2021) found favourable impacts across all sustainability dimensions— environmental, social, and economic—of local food on the health and perceived taste/quality value among tourists. Offering local food with consideration for environmental, social, and economic factors heightens tourists' personal satisfaction. This satisfaction is attributed to factors such as the inclusion of environmentally friendly ingredients, the provision of nutrition information, adherence to proper food handling procedures, the utilization of local agricultural supplies, and support for local farmers. Consequently, it has the potential to strengthen social relations within the community and contribute to social justice for locals (Alsetoohy et al., 2021).

Sustainability practices in restaurants also include being socially responsible. A study by Bansal and Roth (2000) on companies in United Kingdom and Japan highlighted the significance of the human dimension of sustainability. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a social value-added tool that illustrates a company's demonstration of socially responsible practices, encompassing areas such as ethical business conduct, employee relations, and environmental considerations (Kim et al., 2020). CSR is found to exert a noteworthy positive influence on customer satisfaction (Hanaysha, 2017) and positively influence customer reviews (Sarmiento & El Hanandeh, 2018).

6.0 BARRIERS TO PRACTISING SUSTAINABILITY IN THE RESTAURANT INDUSTRY

Although there are advantages to adopting sustainability practices in restaurants, restaurant owners do encounter challenges and some are in no hurry in the attempt to embrace sustainability in their operations. This is attributed to a variety of reasons.

Firstly, financial concerns. Most restaurants view the adoption of environmental sustainability practices as an extra expense (Böröcz & Herceg, 2015; Buenaventura & Gutierrez, 2023; Maynard et al., 2020). According to Iaquinto (2014), the independent restaurateurs in Japan face significant financial barriers that confine the array of options available for exploration. It is comprehensible that opting for a nutritious meal made from local

ingredients, taking into account the sustainability challenges in food production, can incur significant costs for both consumers and restaurants. Consequently, consumers may need to bear a premium to offset the sustainability-related expenses associated with the production, processing, and distribution of local foods (Alsetoohy et al., 2021).

Secondly, low market demand. Restaurant managers hesitated to adopt sustainable practices because there was insufficient evidence that customers would recognise and value these practices (Maynard et al., 2020). Customers do not actively request or exert pressure on restaurants to adopt environmentally friendly practices (Buenaventura & Gutierrez, 2023; Costa et al., 2023). In Hungary for instance, the majority of consumers do not exhibit environmentally friendly behaviour when making purchases (Böröcz & Herceg, 2015). A study by Lo et al. (2017) on hotel diners in Hong Kong found that customers consider various menu attributes when dining at a restaurant, placing a higher emphasis on nutritional aspects rather than sustainability.

Thirdly, lack of awareness and knowledge. Băltescu et al. (2022) found that the lack of adequate education on responsible practices for restaurant managers serves as the main obstacle to the adoption of sustainable development practices. Restaurants also encounter challenges in implementing eco-friendly practices due to a lack of awareness about practical methods within the industry (Maynard et al., 2020). Arguably, advancements in the three pillars of sustainability hinge on the application of sustainable knowledge and conscientious decision-making within work organizations (Wellton & Lainpelto, 2021).

Fourthly, practising sustainability is not a priority. While green practices contribute significantly to assessing restaurant quality, they are deemed less crucial in comparison to other factors such as food, service, and atmosphere which are regarded as the primary components influencing perceived quality in restaurant evaluations (Eren et al., 2023). Michelin-starred restaurants (MSRs) in China prioritize more on authenticity and awards as key factors, placing comparatively less emphasis on sustainability (Huang et al., 2023). The implementation of sustainable development measures is not a priority for restaurant managers in Romania too, but the economic and social pressures require the adoption of specific practices that primarily focus on decreasing electricity and water consumption, minimizing the usage of detergents and consumables, implementing selective waste collection, reducing food waste, adjusting menus to align with contemporary consumer demands, sourcing fresh ingredients from local producers, integrating intelligent systems to improve supply operations and overall management, and giving priority to the well-being of the staff (Băltescu et al., 2022).

Fifthly, the absence of an eco-friendly supply chain (Cantele & Cassia, 2020; Costa et al., 2023). Restaurants are facing a crucial challenge pertaining to the supply of their essential food ingredients (Alsetoohy et al., 2021). Obtaining sustainable ingredients poses a challenge because of restricted distribution channels (Zanella, 2020).

Other factors that contribute to weak adoption of sustainable practices in the restaurant sector are a small cohort of restaurants embracing green methods and hurdles posed by environmental laws and regulations (Costa et al., 2023). Some restaurants even felt that sustainability practices might affect food authenticity (Huang et al., 2023).

7.0 STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES FROM ADOPTING SUSTAINABILITY IN THE RESTAURANT industry

Restaurant owners could no longer dismiss the need to adopt sustainable practices in their business operations. This is not unfortunate nor something to be dreadful about. The future is promising and full of opportunities. The realm of sustainable practices and guidelines for establishing, upkeeping, and operating an environmentally-friendly business remains largely untapped within the restaurant sector (Costa et al., 2023). Moving forward, there are a number of aspects for restaurants owners and management to discover in their strategic journey towards embracing sustainability.

7.1 Readily available sustainability standards and guidelines

There are established sets of sustainability indicators in restaurants, making it very convenient for restaurants to apply. In a nutshell, the standards for environmentally friendly restaurant management cover three primary elements: sustainable food practices, eco-friendly surroundings and equipment, and responsible management with a focus on social responsibility (Wang et al., 2013). It meets criteria such as energy efficiency and preservation, water usage reduction, effective waste management and composting, minimizing disposable items, curbing chemical usage and pollution, and employing sustainable ingredients, furnishings, and construction materials

(Qoura & Gomaa, 2022).

Noteworthy global entities have designed and developed specific guidelines that can be immediately adopted by restaurants. The Sustainable Restaurant Association (SRA) and the Green Restaurant Association (GRA) for example, have formulated sustainability frameworks intended to assist restaurants aspiring to embrace this approach (Costa et al., 2023). The Green Restaurant Association has furnished restaurants with guidelines that outline seven indicators of sustainability that encompass energy, water, waste, disposables, reduction of chemicals and pollution, sustainable food, and the use of sustainable furnishings and building materials (Jang et al., 2017). In Indonesia, The Guide for Implementing Cleanliness, Health, Safety, and Environmental Sustainability in Restaurants is designed for entrepreneurs, managers, and staff to address the requirements for providing guests with clean, healthy, safe, and environmentally friendly hospitality products and services (Maemunah, 2021).

Scholars and experts also contributed in the development of such standards. Legrand et al. (2010) established and evaluated a set of indicators to assess the extent of sustainable performance attained by individual restaurants, and offered a framework for all restaurant establishments to adopt sustainable practices. The set of indicators, were then put to test on four self-proclaimed 'sustainable' London restaurants. The findings demonstrated the effectiveness of the indicators to be applied by restaurants seeking to enhance their sustainable performance.

A study by Batat (2020) found Michelin-starred chefs' embrace and advocate sustainability extend beyond the commonly discussed external factors of the planet and people. They also encompass intrinsic elements like the plate (culinary creativity), pleasure, and place (culinary aesthetics). The sustainable initiative most frequently mentioned was the dissemination of nutrition-related information, followed by providing healthy menu choices and integrating organic/natural produce. Illustrations of these practices encompass expanding the availability of healthful options, presenting smaller portion sizes, using fresh and locally sourced ingredients, and employing health-conscious cooking methods (Yoon et al., 2020).

Concerning the environmental aspect, experts attributed the utmost significance to specific critical outcomes. These include safety and stock, wildlife preservation, regulatory compliance, zero-potential equipment, efficient equipment usage, water and energy conservation, waste management, composting or reuse practices, solid waste reduction, utilization of renewable energy, and proper handling of special or hazardous waste, as well as initiatives for the reduction, reuse, and recycling of resources.

In the social domain, pivotal outcomes encompass the work environment, employee health and safety, employee satisfaction, equitable working conditions and wages, adherence to laws and obligations, anti-discrimination policies, ensuring customer health and safety, enhancing customer satisfaction, fostering community development, and establishing a unique identity in the competitive landscape.

Within the economic sphere, the most crucial outcomes revolve around business image, identification of market opportunities, fair pricing strategies, compliance with legal standards, maintenance of quality standards, and continuous monitoring of productivity (Costa et al., 2023).

Other than the indicators developed by organisations and experts, customers perception on sustainability-friendly restaurants can also be used as a guideline. Yu et al. (2018) conducted a study in China and found that green restaurant customers anticipate quality of food by factors like the presentation, variety, and freshness of the dishes. Likewise, the validation of service quality expectations hinges on the behaviour of the staff and the efficiency of service extended. In addition, the expected quality of the ambiance in a green restaurant is affected by factors such as cleanliness, design, and décor. These affirmation levels play a crucial role in positively influencing the intention of potential customers to choose green restaurants.

7.2 Sustainability as a marketing tool

As global awareness of environmental issues increases and recognition of the interdependence among the environment, society, and economy grows (starting from the late 1980s), marketing shifts its focus. It now directs efforts not only towards reducing environmental damage but also towards achieving broader sustainability (Dangelico & Vocalelli, 2017). There are significant shifts in marketing, consumer behaviour, attitudes, and value systems. The growing mainstream adoption of environmental awareness in consumer behaviour becomes a crucial aspect of corporate marketing that cannot be overlooked.

Concurrently, various components of the marketing environment exert influence on the behaviours and practices of both corporations and consumers (Böröcz & Herceg, 2015). Organizations possess the capacity to significantly impact users and their perceptions as well as enhance their awareness of environmental sustainability through publications on social media (Martínez-Navalón et al., 2019). Achieving recognition as an eco-friendly restaurant can bolster the general positive perception of the establishment, turning sustainability into an effective marketing tool with tangible benefits (Böröcz & Herceg, 2015). Wang et al. (2016) found that green marketing has a direct and indirect influence on brand image. The researchers also found that brand image mediates the impact that green marketing has on purchase intention (Wang et al., 2016).

The way certain elements in a restaurant's sustainability message, such as timing, location, and social connections, are perceived and interpreted plays a crucial role in how the message is processed and, consequently, influences attitudes toward the restaurant (Line et al., 2016). Alsetoohy et al. (2021) asserted that well-crafted advertisements showcasing sustainable local food have the potential to evoke a positive emotional response from customers such as pleasure, excitement, and relaxation.

Green restaurants can customize their advertising campaigns to target a specific group of individuals who are more inclined to support their business through the identification of market segments within the health-conscious millennial demographic (Nicolau et al., 2020).

7.3 Targeting and segmentation of the market
The integration of sustainability has become a distinct asset that boosts the competitiveness of restaurants, offering them the chance to appeal to targeted market segments (Costa et al., 2023). Adopting sustainability in restaurants presents several chances to reduce expenses and draw in new customers by distinguishing oneself from other dining establishments (Böröcz & Herceg, 2015). Mahasuweerachai and Suttikun (2022) found that individuals with a strong green self-identity tend to view restaurants with eco-friendly practices as socially and environmentally responsible, rather than solely profit-driven. Additionally, these individuals are more likely to experience positive emotions when dining at establishments that actively showcase efforts to protect the environment.

Namkung and Jang (2014) conducted a study to investigate the characteristics of consumers who exhibit a greaer willingness to pay more. They explored the relationship between consumers' perceptions of a green brand image and their inclination to pay an additional amount for a restaurant's environmentally-friendly practices. The results revealed that factors such as age, prior experience, level of involvement, and self-perception significantly impact consumers' preparedness to pay a premium for eco-friendly practices in restaurants. Furthermore, younger customers and those placing importance on attributes related to food and administration are more likely to engage in behaviours such as paying higher prices, enduring longer waits, or traveling greater distances to dine at environmentally-conscious establishments (Kwok et al., 2016). This statement reiterates the finding of an earlier study by Schubert et al. (2010) that young customers (individuals under the age of 35) generally prioritize the importance of organic products and a reduced ecological footprint more for green restaurants compared to their older peers. They also exhibit a stronger conviction than their older counterparts that dining at green restaurants is healthier for them than opting for non-green ones (Schubert et al., 2010). In the same vein, Su et al. (2019) found that customers among Generation Z, especially those known as sustainable activists and sustainable believers (having moderate ecological awareness) give preference to the qualities as eco-friendliness and healthiness when making choices for sustainable food purchases. In addition, millennials in the middle-income category are found to have an increased willingness to pay (WTP) and ready to invest additional time and effort to travel longer distances (Nicolau et al., 2020).

Restaurants adopting sustainability practices can broaden their customer base to these particularly appealing market segment such as the millennials and Generation Z. Creating distinct profiles for various eco-conscious consumer groups within these valuable patrons is achievable by incorporating food choices associated with healthy eating habits (Su et al., 2019).

In addition, sustainability-friendly restaurants can also broaden their customer base beyond the local population. Alsetoohy et al. (2021) found that the interactive connection between the environment and tourists presents an opportunity for sustainable fine-dining establishments to uncover the emotional value derived from meals, both during and after the COVID-19 era. Key players in the restaurant industry could introduce local cuisine as a source of excitement and relaxation to attract new customers.

7.4 Establishment of sustainability supply chain and ecosystem

Restaurants can enhance their collaborations with suppliers, including farmers and other retailers, to establish responsible inventory management systems and adopt just-in-time purchasing. Sustaining regular communication between restaurateurs and suppliers can foster collaborative practices, leading to positive outcomes such as the procurement of higher-quality products with extended lifecycles and longer expiration dates (Camilleri, 2021).

Furthermore, regulatory authorities and policymakers have the capacity to encourage hospitality professionals to embrace environmentally friendly systems that efficiently decrease food loss and waste. Additionally, they can facilitate the development of essential infrastructure and allocate resources for this purpose (Camilleri, 2021).

Relationship with relevant organisations should also be fostered. For example, The Sustainable Restaurant Association (SRA), a non-profit organization located in the UK, aids restaurants in their journey toward sustainability and helps diners make environmentally conscious choices during their dining experiences. (Qoura & Gomaa, 2022).

8.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Being in the post-pandemic era, it is timely to incorporate sustainability practices since it has become a requirement and an obligation for restaurants in their effort to achieve competitive advantage (Kumar et al., 2012). As conscientious business entities, restaurants ought to prioritize the values and interests of the environment and society. They should consider the impact of their operations on business partners, trade collaborators, and employees, making decisions and voluntary efforts that extend beyond mere compliance with legal obligations. This article has explored the discourse on sustainability found in previous literature, delving into the factors considered by scholars. It subsequently examined the barriers hindering restaurant owners from adopting sustainability practices, along with the associated benefits. Additionally, it outlined the opportunities that await restaurants opting for sustainability. It is recommended that restaurant operators gain a comprehensive understanding of sustainability in the food and beverage industry and foster encouragement to integrate sustainable practices into their business operations. Developing a robust sustainability strategy is now crucial for companies striving to attain a competitive edge and improve overall performance (Dangelico & Vocalelli, 2017). Ultimately, such an approach can lead the restaurant business to achieve success in economic, social, and environmental aspects.

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