

ASSESSMENT OF RESTAURANTS' SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGIES AMIDST COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic is responsible for a sharp drop in business activities particularly in the hospitality and tourism industries. The onset of fear from being ill with Sars-Cov-2 and heightened by government restrictions, businesses were forced to seize operations or reduce capacity which created a big impact in their performance and stability. The objective of this research was to identify the sustainability techniques used by restaurants in Cabanatuan City, Philippines, under this pervasive situation. It addressed specific aspects of sustainable development, focusing on the economic, environmental, and social components. It employed a descriptive research approach with ten randomly selected restaurants, survey questionnaires, and observation to collect data. Findings revealed that restaurants adhered to certain areas of sustainability particularly in the area of Business Management, indicating the right approach in terms of appropriate tools in business activities that foster effective administration, compliance, and cash flow management to achieve its sustainability target, whereas some elements in the areas of Corporate Social Responsibility require improvement. Other notable observations ascribed to shift in the new normal include reliance on digital and social media to transact with clients. Furthermore, a lack of implementation of waste management and water conservation techniques, as well as challenges to food supply chain management sustainability, are imminent, and adoption of renewable energy may be deemed important. The overall score on the eight characteristics examined in this study pointed to the sustainability strategies to verbal interpretation of "often," which, in order to achieve more sustainable development goals, must be changed to "always."

KEYWORDS: sustainability, sustainable development, economic, environmental, social, restaurants, COVID-19



Introduction

Restaurants today do not only concentrate on food and beverage service and gaining profits but maintaining sustainable operations which has been a struggle due to COVID-19. The pandemic had major impacts on the operations of food and beverage service industries. Restaurants nowadays, evolved and continue to adjust to the demands of the “new normal”. Modifying operations; from kitchen to dining areas, evolving sanitation guidelines, improving or enabling delivery services are some changes these businesses are facing. Apart from the challenge of sustaining economical, social and environmental growth.

In 1987, the Brundland Commission defined sustainable development as development that meets the demands of the present without jeopardizing future generations' ability to satisfy their own needs. Jones and Allen, on the other hand, believe that sustainable development is the path to long-term success. The latter must be pursued further and can only be accomplished when the three pillars of environmental, economic, and social factors are balanced (Purvis, et al., 2019). Understanding sustainability necessitates an understanding of sustainable development. These terms may require a deeper understanding and must be addressed in order to fully achieve the industry's purpose. Sustainability, as defined by Mayers in 1987, is a process in which the natural resource base is not allowed to disintegrate. The second alternative description was supplied by environmentalist Paul Hawken, who has written about the knowledge that use of the earth's resources by mankind makes them degrade faster than they can be restored and regenerated.

The triple bottom line approach to sustainable development was broken down into three parts in this study: economic sustainable development was measured using two standards; marketing and business management. Food and Beverage Management, Water Efficiency, Energy Conservation, and Waste Management were among the environmental criteria, while communication and corporate social responsibility were among the social standards. Cabanatuan, as a dynamic and first-class city, offers numerous business prospects, including those in the food and beverage industry. New restaurants and food outlets are constantly springing up. Despite the inception of the epidemic, the city maintains an excellent market for food outlets, with a population of more than 300,000 (2015 census). There are more than 82 food outlets registered in the city as of 2017 (Business Permit and License Division, Cabanatuan City), despite the expansion of ambulant food vendors and the demand for food delivery services. Because the Philippine population is predicted to expand faster than the current year in the coming decades, reliance on more efficient and effective use of farm lands will be required to feed the growing population. Such an increase, as well as the ongoing battle against the pandemic, necessitate an evaluation of restaurant practices in terms of long-term development.

Theoretical/ Conceptual Framework

The research is based on Elkington's Triple Bottom Line (TBL) concept to sustainability, which he presented in 1994. This measure encompasses a framework to evaluate performance of businesses beyond the traditional measures of profits, return on investment and shareholder value. The framework of this study went beyond the traditional outline by presenting in a manner deemed appropriate to be able to specifically indicate the relationship of sustainable development strategies. The sustainable development strategies in order to attain sustainability included Economic, Environmental and Social. The relationships of these three pillars are needed to be balanced in order to achieve true sustainability. These are then subdivided into sub-variables, which comprise the restaurant's economic, marketing, and business management aspects. This paper examines the concept of sustainable development in relation to the restaurants' internal and external strategies, as well as their ethical practices. Food and Beverage Management, Water Efficiency, Energy Conservation, and Waste Management were all covered in the environmental category. This aspect delves into the benefits and drawbacks of sustainable development as used by restaurants. Water, Energy and Waste Management are main concerns of the environment not just in the food and beverage sector but throughout the whole society as well. Social factors indicated Communication and Corporate Social Responsibility. It illustrates the challenges and responsibilities of restaurant operators and business owners in general. Observations were made as part of the research procedure conducted by the researchers and survey questionnaires accomplished by owners and employees of the selected restaurants. Data Analysis and Statistical Treatment were also applied to interpret the data gathered. Microsoft Excel Data Analysis Tools were adapted pragmatically in this paper. The output of this research study included suggested sustainable development regulations and standards for restaurants throughout Cabanatuan City. It also included a proposal to establish a restaurant association in the city.

Method

The descriptive research design was used in the study. According to Cristobal and Cristobal (2013), this research method accurately portrays a population that was chosen based on certain characteristics. It is also used to assess the scope or direction of attitudes and behavior. The goal of this method is to provide a picture of the situation as it occurs naturally. It can be used to develop theories, justify practices, aid in professional judgment, or identify flaws in them. The respondents were limited to ten restaurants using purposive sampling based on their asset size, which should be more than Php 1 million in capitalization, have been in operation for at least five years, and have ten or more employees. It also used observation to validate data when gathering it. A Likert scale was used to determine the extent to which restaurant respondents used the strategies. The interpretation of the Likert scale is based on

the degree of frequency where the options are Always, Often, Seldom, and Never, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Point Value, Range and Verbal Interpretation

Point	Range	Verbal Interpretation
4	3.26 - 4.00	Always (administered every time)
3	2.51-3.25	Often (administered majority of the time)
2	1.76 -2.50	Seldom (administered rarely)
1	1.00 -1.75	Never (not ever administered)

Result

Tables 2–9 provide a summary of the level of practice or application of restaurant sustainable development strategies.

Table 2. Sustainability Strategies – Economic (Marketing)

No.	Item Statement	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
1	Utilizes social media sharing incentives (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter)	3.40	Always
2	Print is used as a marketing medium.	2.10	Seldom
3	Implements loyalty program	3.10	Often
4	The prices are competitive to those found in other restaurants.	3.20	Often
5	Takes orders through digital media.	3.60	Always
6	Has own food and beverage delivery service	3.00	Often
7	Has third party partners for food and beverage delivery (Food Panda, Manong Delivery, Toktok, etc.)	3.50	Always
	Overall Weighted Mean	3.13	Often

This shows that restaurants that use social media sharing incentives like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter consistently had a mean score of 3.40, which can be interpreted verbally as always. Similarly, most establishments today use digital media to take orders, with a mean of 3.60. It was also notable that the restaurants in review often have their own food and beverage delivery service with weighted mean of 3.00 and always have third party partners for food and beverage delivery with a weighted mean score of 3.50.

Table 3. Sustainability Strategies – Economic (Business Management)

No.	Item Statement	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
1	Employees are hired in the region of operation.	3.30	Always
2	Employees are paid on time.	3.50	Always
3	Uses a Point of Sale system	3.30	Always
4	Acceptance of electronic payment (GCash, PayMaya, Credit Card, Debit Card, etc)	3.40	Always
5	Day-to-day financial operations of the company is accounted	3.70	Always
6	Provides a sufficient budget for long-term sustainability measures.	3.20	Always
7	Employees receive customer service training on a regular basis.	2.80	Often
	Overall Weighted Mean	3.31	Always

The data indicate that item number five has the highest weighted mean of 3.70, which can be interpreted verbally as always. The overall weighted mean is 3.31, which can be interpreted to mean always. This would imply that the Economic Sustainable Development Strategies in Business Management specify a degree of applicability and should thus be regarded as manageable and feasible.

Table 4. Sustainability Strategies – Environmental (Restaurant Management)

No.	Item Statement	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
1	The restaurant's food ingredients are sourced locally or regionally.	2.80	Often
2	The restaurant's beverages are sourced locally.	3.00	Often
3	Has a certified food and beverage supplier	3.70	Always
4	Produces all of its own raw materials	2.20	Seldom
5	The menu is often changed or modified	2.00	Seldom
	Overall Weighted Mean	2.74	Often

In terms of restaurant management, table 4 shows that the restaurants "always" have certified suppliers, with a mean of 3.70. However, item number 5, "Changes or modifies the menu on a regular basis," has a weighted mean of 2.00 with the verbal interpretation of rarely.

Table 5. Sustainability Strategies – Environmental (Water Efficiency)

No.	Item Statement	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
1	Water potability is tested on a regular basis.	3.20	Often
2	Has a self-service policy for drinking water or only gives to guest who ask for it.	2.00	Seldom
3	Water is served once the guests are seated.	1.90	Seldom
4	Waterless urinals and water-saving toilets are used in the restroom.	1.70	Seldom
5	Guidelines for conserving water are being implemented	3.20	Always
	Overall Weighted Mean	2.40	Seldom

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The survey shows that despite the fact that guidelines for conserving water are being implemented (mean of 3.20 and interpreted as always), the restaurants lack measures to conserve water in their restrooms which have no waterless urinals or water efficient toilets with a mean of 2.12 and viewed as seldom.

Table 6. Sustainability Strategies – Environmental (Energy Conservation)

No.	Item Statement	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
1	Uses solar panels or similar energy sources.	1.20	Never
2	Light-emitting diode (LED) are used all lighting system	3.00	Often
3	Air conditioning units with inverter technology are used.	3.10	Often
4	Refrigerators with inverter technology are used.	2.50	Seldom
5	AI fresco or open dining area is present.	3.10	Often
6	Energy conservation standards are properly implemented.	3.80	Always
	Overall Weighted Mean	2.78	Often

The use of solar panels as an alternative energy source was reflected by a mean of 1.20 or “never.” In the Philippines, the use of solar panels is in its early stages. Furthermore, the cost of installation can be prohibitively expensive. There is an unlikely initiative for most of these restaurants to adapt to.

Table 7. Sustainability Strategies – Environmental (Waste Management)

No.	Item Statement	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
1	Strictly follows in garbage segregation	3.10	Often
2	The use of plastic materials is discouraged, and instead, reusable or biodegradable food containers are used.	3.20	Often
3	Recyclable take-out bags are being used.	3.20	Often
4	Inventory is conducted to compare purchase and quantity of garbage	2.90	Often
5	3Rs (Reduce, Reuse and Recycle) are being utilized	3.10	Often
6	Guidelines of waste management are rigorously enforced	3.20	Often
	Overall Weighted Mean	3.12	Often

Number 6 or guidelines of waste management are rigorously enforced and analyzed, according to the above-mentioned item assertions. A mean score of 3.20, or "frequently," was discovered.

Table 8. Sustainability Strategies – Social (Communication)

No.	Item Statement	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
1	Water conservation, energy conservation, and trash minimization reminders are prominently displayed inside the restaurant for <i>employees</i> to observe.	3.80	Always
2	Water conservation, energy conservation, and trash minimization reminders are prominently displayed inside the restaurant for <i>customers</i> to notice.	2.40	Seldom
3	The restaurant's social media page features sustainability initiatives.	2.00	Seldom
4	Social distancing markers and signages for <i>customers</i> to see	3.60	Always
5	Social distancing markers and signages for <i>employees</i> to see	3.50	Always
6	Checking of body temperature, health declaration, and hand sanitation before entering the establishment	3.80	Always
7	The menu includes separate descriptions of the food and beverage items.	2.10	Seldom
	Overall Weighted Mean	3.03	Often

Numbers 1 and 6 received the highest mean score of 3.80 out of all the items in table 8, and were verbally interpreted as "always."

Table 9. Sustainability Strategies – Social (Corporate Social Responsibility)

No.	Item Statement	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
1	Activities such as gift giving and contribution drives are carried out as part of social and community development.	2.70	Often
2	Supports/participates in CSR activities and projects of government and non-government organizations.	2.30	Seldom
3	Contributes to charitable organizations	2.20	Seldom
4	Buys from local food providers to support them.	3.20	Often
5	Employees are provided with health benefits.	3.00	Often
6	Provides financial assistance to students for their education	1.90	Seldom
	Overall Weighted Mean	2.55	Often

Table 9 shows that item number 5, "employees are provided with health benefits," had the highest mean score of 3.00 and was interpreted the most frequently.

Discussion

In table 2 Economic (Marketing), the findings support the UN Under-Secretary-General and Director-General of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs' remark, "The post-COVID-19 era will bring forward a new normal- one that will accelerate digital transformation in many areas. These include digital economy, digital finance, digital government, digital health, and digital education" (Liu Zhenmin, 2021). Most transactions transpire either virtually

or through the use of electronic devices which must be adopted towards long-term business sustainability.

In table 3, The data further suggests that restaurants account for effective administration, compliance and cash flow management to attain its sustainability targets. It also builds a stronger link among the company's employees, making it a crucial component for the company's survival and long-term viability. In table 4, What Cabanatuan City restaurants lack is the ability to produce their own materials and ingredients. "Growing your own ingredients" has the potential to produce food in an environmentally friendly manner. According to Ben Kramer, an executive chef. It eliminates the uncertainty of availability or a break in supply as an independent producer (Manitoba, 2013). The issue of supply-chain management emerges as a concern here as well, particularly in the areas of value chain and, ultimately, the efficient and equitable use of resources.

The UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development calls for changes in countries' patterns of production and consumption of goods in order to mitigate the effects of economic progress on the environment (Development Asia, 2020). For table 5, An article published by the Manila Times in June 2016 claimed that water conservation should be practiced not only in the restaurant industry, but throughout the country. At this time of COVID-19 pandemic, clean, safe, potable water is vital. As a result of this problem, the country is likely to face greater challenges until improved management and conservation initiatives are launched. For Sustainability Strategies – Environmental (Energy Conservation). Open dining areas or take-aways are strictly observed during this time of COVID-19 pandemic as regulated by the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases. This posed a challenge for restaurant operators to be able to provide outdoor dining spaces or shift to take-out and deliveries to continue their operations.

In environmental - waste management; guidelines on waste management are rigorously enforced. This is in accordance with the law pertaining to the Solid Waste Management Act of 2000, also known as Republic Act (RA) 9003. The law declares the state's policy of implementing a systematic, comprehensive, and ecological solid waste management program that protects public health and the environment. Based on IATF regulations to operate on take-aways only, recyclable food containers and take-away bags are in demand, however, this is not the case with every establishment as it entails additional costs as compared with disposable packages. The result of the research contradicts with a study conducted by Quieroz de Oliveria on Food Packaging wastes amid COVID-19 pandemic which stated that the crisis intensified disposal of food packaging with fears of contamination with SARS-CoV-2 (2021). In Social – Communication. The fact that reminders to conserve water and energy, as well as to reduce trash, are prominently displayed for all to see, is a solid indicator of restaurant sustainability in communication. Similarly, the IATF and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) laws enforce social separation, body temperature checks, and health

declarations, all of which are visible in the restaurants studied. Restaurants must already comply with a slew of health and safety regulations in order to stay in business.

The findings in table 9 (Social - Corporate Social Responsibility) coincide with a Nestle Philippines study indicating the company's dedication to employee safety and wellbeing by providing a package of perks, working conditions, and safeguards (Marzouki, 2020). Restaurants appeared to be having difficulty supporting students' education during COVID-19.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn and ranked accordingly based on their weighted mean:

Rank 1. In terms of economics - business management, This component of sustainable development strategies has a linguistic connotation of "always," implying that restaurants use suitable instruments in business activities to promote good administration, compliance, and cash flow management in order to meet their sustainability goals. Rank 2. In terms of Economic – Marketing. This component of sustainable development methods has been given a verbal interpretation of "often," as having a digital presence is critical during the COVID-19 epidemic. Rank 3. In the aspect of Environmental - Waste Management, this sustainable development strategy attained an “often” verbal connotation as areas needing improvement encompass policies and stricter guidelines on proper waste disposal.

Rank 4. In the aspect of Social - Communication, the sustainable development strategy got a verbal interpretation of “Often”. The health and safety requirements that restaurants are required to implement in their operations are conveyed. Communication has a salient role in fostering sustainability and the restaurants can be more adept particularly during this time of pandemic that information dissemination is key to battle COVID-19. Rank 5. In the aspect of Environmental - Energy Conservation, this sustainable development strategy attained a verbal interpretation of “often”. Energy saving guidelines are implemented and open dining areas are facilitated in observance of strict measures to avoid spread of Sars-Cov-2. On the other hand, businesses are hesitant to use a more cordial renewable energy. Rank 6. In the aspect of Environment - Food and Beverage Management, this sustainable development strategy got a verbal interpretation of “often”. However, the restaurants’ ability to produce their own ingredients are imminent. Homegrown goods and responsible consumption are key elements to sustainable operations.

Rank 7. In the aspect of Social - Corporate Social Responsibility, this aspect of sustainable development strategy got a verbal interpretation of “often”. Restaurants support local food suppliers, are engaged in gift giving and donation drives especially during this time of pandemic. CSR activities bolstering government and non-government organizations improve social presence and help the community they belong to. Rank 8. In the aspect of Environmental - Water Efficiency, this sustainable development strategy, got a verbal

interpretation of “often”. Some areas still need to be enhanced as not all utilize water efficient toilets and water saving guidelines are stringently facilitated.

Restaurants should actively work to be more ecologically conscious; growing their own food components, as well as changing the menu to reflect seasonal crop variations, are both steps toward sustainability. Restaurants' corporate social responsibility must be strengthened, notably in support of government and non-governmental organizations' CSR initiatives, particularly during this time of pandemic. Sustainable regulations and standards must be established to give direction to restaurateurs and future owners. In Cabanatuan city, an organized association of restaurateurs should instigate measures to promote sustainable operations during and post COVID-19 pandemic. Lastly, further research studies on sustainable development and sustainability may be broadened to include additional factors that contribute to long-term success and provide extensive understanding of the restaurant industry. It can also be extended to other businesses.

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