



## Operational Problems and Strategies of Restaurants in Northern Philippines

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### ABSTRACT

This study aimed to determine the operational problems and coping strategies of restaurants in Tuguegarao City, Philippines. The study employed quantitative research wherein fifty-five managers/owners were surveyed using a questionnaire. Results revealed that restaurant establishments faced operational problems such as pricing, employees and service reliability, food issues, location, and atmosphere/ambiance. Furthermore, restaurants use various strategies to cope with the operational problems they encounter. This suggests that encountering operational problems depends on the type of ownership of a restaurant. Moreover, the strategies to cope with operational problems encountered were used by restaurants, regardless of their type of ownership, length of operations, number of employees, and type of restaurant.

## **INTRODUCTION**

One of the most demanded businesses in today's modern age is the restaurant industry. There are many trendy restaurants because they cater to good quality of food and give good services. The phenomenal growth of the restaurant industry provides customers with delicious and authentic food and refreshment and a place with a good ambiance and accessible for every customer. All restaurant guests, however, have one basic urge known as hunger. In addition, they may also want entertainment, and they will seek a restaurant with a stimulating environment. Some may wish for recognition, so they will go to a restaurant that provides the feeling of importance that comes with recognition (Walker, 2012). A restaurant is an establishment that provides a different style of cuisine that is unusual to every guest. Every customer is looking for food that is not usually on the food they serve in their houses. Hence, customers look and search for restaurants that cater to the kind of food they are looking for that can satisfy their cravings. Also, escape from home beyond hunger has become a popular form of entertainment. People eat and expect pleasure and satisfaction, especially when the food is offered in an endearing place (Abdelhamied, 2011).

The restaurant industry provides the needs and wants of human beings, which are food and beverages. This industry is full of opportunities and prospects that can lead to success if manage and operate well. Many problems can affect the restaurant's success. According to Parsa et al. (2011), restaurants may face domestic and external (economic, political, and health issues) operational problems (low management, poor service, and low-quality goods). Food attributes most strongly valued by restaurants are freshness and taste; price and convenience are important discriminating attributes of local food usage (Inwood et al., 2009). Personal and functional service factors positively influence customers' satisfaction (Alhelalat, 2017). The quality of a restaurant could be influenced assertively and directly by a reasonable cost (Zhong and Moon, 2020). Identifying how customer satisfaction grows, the physical environment, perceived price, and consumer emotions are important (Ali and Amin, 2014). Atmosphere was an important driver of positive experiences in all restaurants (Harrington et al., 2012). But on the other hand, actions and plans must be undertaken in the process. Strategies of the management under the restaurant can be used as they wanted to be done in their future opportunity.

The City of Tuguegarao in the province of Cagayan, was acclaimed as the Regional Primary Growth Center of Region 2. Alongside, food service establishments are continuously flourishing in the city despite the existence of malls. According to Narag et al. (2019), the number of accommodation and dining establishments have noticeably increased in the city and this phenomenon may be undeniably attributed to the fact that the city is the center of trade, commerce and education in Cagayan Valley, Philippines and the regional center of government agencies in the region. Many of the existing restaurants in the city have been around for decades now and many newer and innovative ones were built to meet the demand created by the city's changing demographics. According to Cagurangan (2017), the rapid development of the

restaurant industry in Tuguegarao City often depends closely with the employees training, turnover rate, and unpredictability of the different challenges encountered by the restaurant managers. The restaurant industry in Tuguegarao City plays an integral part in economic development. Given the growth and development of the city, where big business establishments can be seen, no doubt that the influx of people from other places and different feedbacks are expected. Therefore, it is necessary to know the strategies and set of solutions in improving the problems of restaurants. The overall success of the restaurants depends on the management of the restaurant owners and managers. Therefore, this study aimed to determine the operational problems and strategies of restaurants in Tuguegarao City. Specifically, it sought to determine the profile of the restaurants, the common operational problems they encountered and the strategies they used to cope with their problems.

## **THEORETICAL REVIEW**

### *Conceptual Framework*

The study was supported by the concept of issues management. According to Elimimian and Edevbie (2013), issues management process stems from its potential to act as an early detector of significant external trends, and to provide the mechanisms for developing effective strategies to respond to those trends. Issues management provides relevant variables, identification, and response time ranking to surprising changes both external and internal environment of the organization. Responsibility for the pre-identified individual issues is assigned during issues management process for resulting issue. Therefore, issue management is “management action” and not just a planning behavior. Having completed the issues management for any organization, including educational institution, it is then appropriate to have strategic planning.

Additionally, this study was also supported by the concept of service operations management. Kanyan et al. (2016) stated that the service operations management is essential in the food service industry. The restaurants are required to consistently and continuously plan, implement, evaluate and improve on the various aspects of the service operations for optimum customer satisfaction, revisits and positive word-of-mouth. Superior customer service helps in developing good bonding with customers which will lead to long term relationship. The concepts served as the basis and helped the study to determine possible and existing operational problems by the restaurants in Tuguegarao City, and identify their strategies used to cope with the problems that they encountered to improve their services in everyday operations

### *Restaurant Industry*

A restaurant is a registered food service establishment that serves food and drinks to consumers, such as fast food, casual dining, and on-premise restaurants. Although most meals are served and consumed on the premises, numerous restaurants also provide take-out and food delivery services. Eateries come in a wide range of styles and pricing points, with cuisines and service

models ranging from low-cost fast food and cafeterias to mid-priced family restaurants to high-end luxury places. Every restaurant provides three basic attributes (food, service, and physical environment) to customers. Each type of restaurant has its distinct attributes to differentiate the restaurant's characteristics from the other restaurant types and to appeal to its target market (Ryu et al., 2012). According to Harrington et al. (2011), customers expect a certain level of quality according to the attributes provided by restaurant. People are the foundation of a country, and food is a basic human need. Because of the rise in living standards, most individuals nowadays prefer to eat in a restaurant rather than at home. Restaurants can provide high-quality food, a pleasant dining environment, and courteous service to all customers (Di Pangzi, 2013). Restaurant, according to the French encyclopedia, denotes "something that can help individuals restore their soul and energy." And there are only two things that can help people regain their spirit and strength: rest and food. According to Han Dian (2014), some astute individuals begin to serve food, drinks, and dessert to clients in public places in exchange for money. This is the restaurant's prototype. A restaurant is a business where people offer food and drinks to customers in exchange for money in a public setting.

#### *Types of Restaurants*

Restaurants can generally be categorized into different segments or types. Muller and Woods (1994) classified restaurant segments into quick service, midscale, moderate upscale, upscale, and business dining. Recently, restaurants have been extended and segmented as fast food or quick service, fast casual, casual dining, upscale casual dining, fine dining, family dining, business dining, and institutional foodservice (DiPietro, 2017). Each restaurant type has certain service norms that are different from one another in terms of price, service, food, and atmosphere. It has been indicated that depending on these service norms, consumers evaluate each restaurant type differently (Hanks et al., 2017; Hwang & Ok, 2013). Quick-casual service is a contemporary concept that is increasingly gaining in popularity in the restaurant industry. It integrates elements of quick service with casual dining for a holistic dining experience. Unlike quick service restaurants, quick-casual restaurants serve healthier and fresher menus (i.e., made-to-order) rather than pre-assembled (DiPietro, 2017). A full-service restaurant (Chan et al., 2016; Washington & Miller, 2013; Aldaihani & Ali, 2018) is one that provides a full dining experience with comprehensive table service at a reasonable price (Chan et al., 2016; Washington & Miller, 2013; Aldaihani & Ali, 2018). (Hwang & Ok, 2013). Salim et al. (2009) defined a full-service restaurant as a food service establishment that provides table service and accommodates guests for dining service with a variety of food and beverage options. According to North American Industry (2012), a full-service restaurant is a business that provides food to customers while they are seated and then collects money before leaving. To add value to the existing offerings, several establishments include bar service, alcoholic beverages, and entertainment. A full-service restaurant was also mentioned by Parpal (2013) as a customary means of eating outside the house. When clients

come, the servers will greet them and lead them to their seats. As a result, the servers will collect their orders and deliver the meals to the table when they are ready. Furthermore, full-service restaurants are classified as fine dining or casual dining. Fine dining is identical with the highest price level among restaurant with a high standard operating procedure, finest ambience, and atmosphere. It is because business works when the standards are set. Food hygiene and cleanliness of the place are also crucial for the customers experiences as they expect that everything is hygiene in the restaurant (Parpal, 2014).

A fast food restaurant is a growing business and with the time evolving the pattern of eating habits is changing. Therefore, many people have started opting for fast food which is an appealing phenomenon for them (Farooqui & Alwi, 2019). Quick service/fast food businesses are geared to provide inexpensive meals in a timely manner. In order to make a large volume of food in a short amount of time, these restaurants' kitchens usually include a lot of prepared meals. Customers want prompt service, a reasonable price, and consistency. McDonald's, Burger King, Pizza Hut, and other well-known fast food establishments are among the most well-known (Wade, 2006). Food is prepared in a standardized process that can be distributed immediately for ordering and consumption (Canziani et al., 2016). It is less expensive than a full-service restaurant but serves more high-quality food than a quick-service restaurant. Food is made-to-order and innovative food may be served to cater for sophisticated tastes. Customers are drawn to quick-casual restaurants because they offer high-quality cuisine at a reasonable price in a relaxed setting (Ryu et al., 2012)

#### *Restaurant Ownership*

There are two types of ownership for restaurants: chain and independent. A chain is defined as a multiunit enterprise with different locations that are operated under the same name, whereas an independent unit is an enterprise that is not part of a chain (Canziani et al., 2016). When choosing the business's ownership style, the owner must decide what type of ownership works best for their business. Family-owned small businesses are less likely to fail due to family pride and a long-term orientation, which gave them persistence in the wake of others' failures and allowed more stable income from earnings (Amankwah Amoah, 2016; Fitzgerald & Muske, 2016). Independent restaurants are generally family-owned and operated restaurants that are not part of a national chain. The average consumer spends about half of their disposable income dining out in restaurants (Martin, 2018). Due to restaurants' structure and organizational culture, family-owned restaurants stand out as unique small businesses (Koutroumanis et al., 2015). According to Ketchen et al. (2007), it has been empirically supported those well-established partnerships motivate suppliers to provide benefits for buyers to reduce costs, improve product quality and customer service, and accelerate new product development. Soosay et al. (2008) stated that strong relationships with business

partners assist organizations to adopt and integrate effective operations, which enable product development accomplishments.

### *Operational Problems in the Restaurant Industry*

Quality food/drink, service, good customer service, environment, and purity drive positives and negatives of consumers, but these characteristics vary from fast-service to informal food and fine dining to fine dining (Harrington et al., 2012). Physical environment plays a key role in emotions and prices that impact satisfaction of customers. Moreover, consumption emotions and price perceptions significantly mediate the relationship between physical environment and customer satisfaction (Ali et al., 2016). Customer satisfaction is explained by both functional and personal components of service behavior, with personal factors contributing more than functional ones. Personal aspects have shown a superiority in predicting customers' satisfaction. The overall customer satisfaction levels were higher when they had higher perception of restaurant employees' personal service aspects, which indicates that customers highly appreciate the cordiality, politeness, appearance, and personal attitude of restaurant employees (Alhelalat et al., 2017).

In a multi-disciplinary study conducted by Parsa et al. (2011) revealed that location, affiliation, and size are substantial variables on restaurants' failure. The smaller the size of a restaurant the higher the rate of failure. Moreover, the location, density, and affiliation affect the survival of restaurants. Pal and Aradhya (2020) concluded that price sensitivity of the consumer plays a crucial role while determining the pricing strategy. Customers get attractively priced combo meals or 1+1 offers on select snacks and beverages. Prices of raw materials are regularly kept in check by an intrinsic network comprising of suppliers and other middlemen who never fail to deliver quality raw materials at optimum costs at the right time. Additionally, there is ample availability of skilled workers like waiters, line workers, chefs and managerial personnel who work whole-heartedly in delivering best value to consumers. Geographic location and size play a role in restaurant failure, according to a study done by Parsa et al. (2015). When a restaurant location has been rented three times to failed restaurateurs, it may lose its appeal to future restaurant owners.

In the perspective of managers, only two aspects of quality are important to ensuring restaurant quality overall. Kukanja and Planinc (2018) revealed: (1), compassion and assurance and (2) tangible. Interestingly, the results indicate that the above dimensions affect the operating profit in determining the financial success of restaurants. Mensah and Mensah (2018) indicated a 50 percent difference in service quality in four factors: responsiveness, empathy, reliability, and tangible. As a result, it has been demonstrated that service quality has a major influence on customer satisfaction. The local restaurant managers have shared common problems and challenges about the values, performance, and competence of their employees, as well as training and seminars, according to Cagurangan (2017). In addition, certain variables contribute to the most pressing problems and challenges that are identified in each in-premise restaurant's intervention areas.

Four variables (food quality, service quality, price, and atmosphere of a restaurant) positively influence customer satisfaction, revisit intention, and likelihood of recommendation for global fast-food restaurants. However, depending on the type of restaurant, the factors affecting customer satisfaction, revisit intention, and recommendation are different (Chun and Nyam-Ochir, 2020). Perceived cost can significantly influence customers' judgement of the quality dimensions of a restaurant. Moreover, customer satisfaction and happiness can lead to a sense of loyalty. Happiness mediates the relationship between contentment and loyalty. Customers' judgments of food quality based on price and satisfaction levels based on service quality, however, varied dramatically between genders, demonstrating that gender moderation in food consumption occurs (Zhong and Moon, 2020). Food quality, service quality, and conveniences all have a big influence on overall satisfaction and the desire to revise and promote quick-service restaurants. In a QSR context, however, ambience had no direct impact on customer happiness; overall contentment had no bearing on the correlations between the features of the eating experience and the intention of returning to and referring QSRs (Richardson et al., 2019).

#### *Strategies adopted by Restaurants*

According to Ampountolas et al. (2019), hotels employ social media to broadcast and disseminate pricing promotions for consumers. Technological innovations like social media provide hotels avenues for two-way, real-time communication with consumers. Although not every hotel has the capacity to dedicate resources to its use or measure how to drive significant promotional messages through specific social media platforms, the availability of social media allows a hotel or chain to interact more directly with the consumer, which then promotes higher hotel performance. As a result, revenue management optimization should be flexible enough to accommodate and to take into account purchasing trends in line with consumer behavior to promote a higher response rate through various social media distribution channel.

As consumer channel choices continue to expand through an increasing range of internet systems that improve the offered pricing capabilities, alternative modes of pricing and revenue management optimization have arisen (Anderson, 2012). However, it was observed that the reality of day-to-day hotel operations has been quite different: many hotels continue to use traditional pricing approaches and distribution channels. Consumer willingness to pay, expenses, and the competitive environment all play a role in this price optimization. Obtaining in-depth, credible information through observations, interviews, and focus groups, according to Arendt et al. (2012), adds depth and breadth to hospitality studies. However, because of the high turnover in the sector, recruiting and retention are difficult to maintain during research. When doing food safety research in the hotel business, qualitative research approaches such as observations, focus groups, and interviews proved to be successful. Qualitative methodologies have a position in hospitality research.

This methodology should be used in accordance with the study goal and questions. However, stringent criteria must be maintained throughout the

research process, regardless of whether the research approach is qualitative, quantitative, or a combination of both. Researchers might adopt a proactive approach to implementation by recognizing potential problems in advance. Researchers can take a proactive approach to implementing techniques and ensure that stringent standards are kept throughout the qualitative research process by anticipating potential problems in advance.

According to worldwide regulations and recommendations for food outlets, food handler training must contain information dealing with both food quality and personal cleanliness. Personal hygiene, food safety, best practices, Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP), workplace cleanliness, hand washing, and basic microbiology are the most common subjects addressed to food service staff during training (Medeiros et al., 2011). Capable of managing tables as renewable resources and combining different table sizes, restaurants can increase expected revenue and generate a higher revenue than conventional strategies used to support decision making (Guerriero et al., 2014). According to Medeiros et al. (2011), interactive media, notably audiovisuals, films, and lectures, as well as recreational activities including hands-on courses, appear to be the most frequently approved resource, all of which provide more advantages to trainees. It was also noted that training-specific theoretical topics were presented. Hands-on activities are frequently coupled with other instructional approaches and related to hand washing habits throughout training. Hand washing is not only inexpensive, but it is also well-accepted by staff, resulting in improved food safety. Through pre-and post-training evaluation procedures, training evaluations assessed the information obtained by employees. Establishing online channels and delivering online discounts through business partner partnerships with third-party websites, according to Zheng and Guo (2016), have emerged as key and effective marketing methods in the restaurant industry. It argues that for all establishments, neither participation nor online price discounts should be encouraged. Furthermore, internet price discounts boost client loyalty, encouraging customers to place repeat orders. It enhances the company's production and earns a small profit, which can quickly grow due to increased demand for the discounted product. This will provide businesses an advantage in pricing methods when they compete online.

In terms of product/service offering, restaurant owners assessed the availability of a range of foods and beverages, the sanitation and cleanliness of the restaurant and its surroundings, and timely polite service. Cost/expense of the product was the primary basis in setting prices of products. Whereas, advertising and sales promotion were the top promotion tools used by restaurant owners (Domingo, 2018). Certified managers and workers have more food safety awareness than noncertified managers and workers, according to Brown et al. (2014). Furthermore, managers and workers who spoke English as their first language had more understanding of food safety than those who did not. Working in a chain restaurant, working in a larger restaurant, having more experience, and having more responsibilities were also linked to improved food safety awareness. These findings suggest that food safety knowledge increases

with certification, and that there are complicated interactions between restaurant, management, and worker attributes and food safety knowledge. Furthermore, one of the few easily adjustable aspects associated to food safety knowledge is food safety certification. Other food safety knowledge-related criteria, such as restaurant ownership and language abilities, are more difficult to modify than certification status. According to Alberca and Parte (2018), firm size's operational efficiency is affected by firm size, showing that large restaurants perform better than medium-sized and small restaurants. Moreover, the evidence suggests a link between the efficiency index and financial variables, such as credit ratings, probability of default or bankruptcy, leverage, cash flow, and a link with non-financial variables, such as type of auditor.

The emergence of common concerns for all entrepreneurs in the post-pandemic restaurants business, measures to be implemented by governments, and strategies and lessons learned for the future, revealed Madeira et al. (2021). In the restaurant industry, resilience with a view to the future, fears of lack of appropriate measures from the government, strategies for a more immediately available market, and working capital creation are visible concerns. According to Min and Min (2011), one of the most essential service attributes for fast food restaurant consumers' perceptions of service quality is food flavor. This predilection has remained constant throughout the years. They also discovered a pattern of link between overall consumer satisfaction with the fast-food business and its reputation through word of mouth. Customers also favored easily accessible and national fast food restaurant chains over less accessible, newer, and regional equivalents. They also discovered that the influence of "atmospheric" impressions, such as restaurant cleanliness, appears to be relevant, because cleaner dining spaces may appear to consumers to be more hygienic. That is to say, at a fast-food restaurant, freshly cleaned tables, chairs, and floors can help to improve consumer perceptions of service quality and, as a result, customer retention. It's also not unexpected that individuals frequent fast-food restaurants because of their speedy service. Customers at fast food restaurants are still seeking for low-cost or low-value meals. In current period of global economic crisis and rising food prices, a major price rise without a clear change in food flavor or physical restaurant surroundings might jeopardize the viability of fast-food restaurants. According to del Mar Alonso-

Almeida et al. (2013), increasing your customer base will help you convert more customers and improve your sales and leads to higher profits. A business with a firm financial position and improved market share can generally receive financing with little trouble. Wang (2012) stated that the company is more likely to address an emerging trend or niche market, increasing its competitiveness through the offering of new green products or services. Employees are increasingly attracted to environmentally responsible companies. It could lead to more investment, customers, and loyalty for stakeholders. Petree et al. 2012 said that compared with workers in control stores, workers in Team Resilience-trained stores showed significant reductions over time in exposure to problem coworkers and in personal stress. Training and promotion help reduce stress among workers. It boosts their self-esteem

and productivity. Through this, workers are being motivated to become better, the one that can handle restaurant pressure. Stressors such as work overload and busy shifts are common examples of issues that negatively impact workers of all age groups. However, the greater experience these workers have may also bring a different perspective on the significance of these behaviors. Similarly, workers with more tenure reported more personal stress. This may be due to their greater likelihood of juggling the demands of work with other aspects of life.

According to Akroush et al. (2013), there are six dimensions to internal marketing: recruitment, personnel training, internal communications, employee motivation, safety in employment, and retention of personnel. Personnel recruitment had the most significant impact both on employee motivation and on the quality of internal service. A strategy that balances quality of service and cost produces maximum profit. The traditional view of the conflict between service quality and cost can be overcome from a cross-disciplinary marketing and business perspective (Hwang et al., 2010). In Kim et al. (2013), four attributes of health are essential to increase the value perceptions of the value, satisfaction, and revisit intentions of the diners. These are nutrient information, fresh and natural ingredients, weight control, and a nutritionally balanced diet. Scholars have concentrated on serving robots, according to Jang and Lee (2020), since their features are regarded the essential components for measuring consumers' perceived value. These factors can help them decide whether or not they want to return. They argue that, despite labor constraints caused by an increase in the minimum wage, deploying efficient serving robots might be a wonderful approach for attracting more clients, especially given that non-contact services are in the focus owing to the COVID-19 epidemic. Furthermore, consumers' unambiguous intents to return to restaurants may be the most crucial component in the restaurant's long-term viability.

According to Shapiro (2017), consumers conclude that purchasing a bundle was a gain because of the lower cost and greater perceived value. This was consistent with the notion that bundles were more desirable because consumers felt they were getting more value when buying bundles than when purchasing items individually. There are benefits of selling items in a bundle. Many companies utilized bundling but there is still more research to be done on its effect on spending. Consequently, the increased use of bundled meals as a marketing tactic in fast food restaurants creates adverse effects, such as rising obesity rates. Three themes emerged to engage people in the workplace, according to Osborne and Hammoud (2017): (a) incentives and recognition, (b) empowering individuals, and (c) developing a link between leaders and employees. If business leaders include these three concepts into their leadership style, they may be able to boost the company's development potential. Successful employee engagement tactics are crucial to organizational performance, and leaders who implement them must have effective listening skills, be fair, have and display respect, establish trust, and understand their employees' issues.

## METODOLOGY

This study used the quantitative research design. The study was conducted in Tuguegarao City, Philippines. The respondents of this study were the managers from the registered restaurants in Tuguegarao City. A total of 55 restaurants were obtained using the simple random sampling to represent the totality of the population. Out of all the registered restaurants in Tuguegarao City, the restaurants were picked through the method of lottery. In this method, the researchers gave each restaurant a number. From this, the researchers chose random samples using a random number generator application. The researchers used a self-made questionnaire to gather the data needed in the specific problems of the study. The questionnaire was validated by three (3) field experts. After the validation process, the researchers' statistician computed for the value of the reliability of the questionnaire. The research instrument was divided into three different parts. The first part is the restaurants' profile. The second part is the operational problems encountered by the restaurants. The last part includes the strategies adopted by the restaurants to cope with the problems encountered. The researchers used the frequency and percentage distribution and weighted mean to properly conduct a scientific presentation, analysis, and interpretation of data. The answers were organized, tallied, and conclusions concerning the profile, operational problems, and coping strategies was drawn out of these responses, and it was interpreted and analyzed by the researchers with the help of the statistician for content validation and consent. Frequency and percentage distribution was used in analyzing the restaurant's profile. The weighted mean was used to quantify and to evaluate the problems encountered and strategies of the manager of the restaurants in Tuguegarao city.

## RESULTS

**Table 1. Profile of the Restaurants**

Profile Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Type of Ownership		
Sole Proprietorship	34	61.80
Partnership	10	18.20
Corporation	11	20.00
Length of Operations		
Below 1 year	3	5.50
1-5 years	28	50.90
6-10 years	11	20.00
11 years and above	13	23.60
Number of Employees		
Less than 10	29	52.70
11-20	10	18.20
21 and above	16	29.10
Type of Restaurant		
Casual Dining	14	25.50
Quick Service/Fast Food	38	69.10
In-Premise	3	5.50

As gleaned in table 1, most of the restaurant respondents in Tuguegarao City are in a sole proprietorship, with a frequency of thirty-four (34) or 61.80 %. Also, most of them were in their 1-5 years of operation with the frequency of twenty-eight (28) or 50.90 %. Further, it also shows out of 55 respondents, twenty-nine (29) or 52.70 % of the restaurants have less than ten (10) employees. Finally, most of the restaurants in Tuguegarao City are quick service/fast food with thirty-eight (38) or 69.10%.

**Table 2a. Operational problems encountered by the restaurants in terms of food issues**

Operational Problems	Mean	Qualitative Interpretation
1. The food preparation lacks mise-en-place.	1.85	Rarely
2. The foods offered are based on standard quality.	2.20	Rarely
3. There is no variety of foods on the menu.	2.11	Rarely
4. The foods lack nutritional value.	1.62	Rarely
<b>Mean</b>	<b>1.95</b>	<b>Rarely</b>

Table 2a reveals the operational problems encountered by the restaurants in terms of food issues. The table further discloses that the problem on the foods offered are based on standard quality have the highest mean of 2.20, while the problem that the foods lack nutritional value have the lowest mean of 1.62. Both operational problems were rarely encountered by the restaurants in their operations.

**Table 2b. Operational problems encountered by the restaurants in terms of employees and service reliability**

Operational Problems	Mean	Qualitative Interpretation
1. The employees lack communication skills.	1.91	Rarely
2. The timeliness of the services of the employees.	2.80	Sometimes
3. The restaurant is not designed for PWDs.	1.60	Rarely
4. The restaurant lacks a number of work force.	2.02	Rarely
<b>Mean</b>	<b>2.08</b>	<b>Rarely</b>

As gleaned in the table, the operational problems encountered by the restaurants in terms of employees and service reliability. It further reveals that the problem on the timeliness of the services of the employees have the highest mean of 2.80 and was sometimes encountered, while the problem that the restaurant is not designed for PWDs have the lowest mean of 1.60 and was rarely encountered by the restaurants.

**Table 2c. Operational problems encountered by the restaurants in terms of pricing**

Operational Problems	Mean	Qualitative Interpretation
1. The restaurant lacks membership and loyalty discounts.	1.91	Rarely
2. The price of the food is expensive.	2.05	Rarely
3. The restaurant promotes food bundle/combo pricing.	2.80	Sometimes
4. The restaurant gives proper discounts or coupons.	2.73	Sometimes
<b>Mean</b>	<b>2.37</b>	<b>Rarely</b>

Table above reveals the operational problems encountered by the restaurants in terms of pricing. The table further discloses that the problem on the restaurant that promotes food bundle/combo pricing have the highest mean of 2.80 and was sometimes encountered by the restaurants. Whilst the problem that the restaurant lacks membership and loyalty discounts have the lowest mean of 1.91 and was rarely encountered by the restaurants.

**Table 2d. Operational problems encountered by the restaurants in terms of atmosphere/ambiance**

Operational Problems	Mean	Qualitative Interpretation
1. The place is inconvenient.	1.55	Rarely
2. The place is noisy.	1.56	Rarely
3. The place doesn't create comfort.	1.13	Never
4. The place invades customers' privacy.	1.15	Never
<b>Mean</b>	<b>1.39</b>	<b>Never</b>

Table exuded the operational problems encountered by the restaurants in terms of atmosphere/ambiance. It further reveals that the problem on the place is noisy have the highest mean of 1.56 and was rarely encountered by the restaurants, while the problem that the place doesn't create comfort have the lowest mean of 1.13 and was never encountered by the restaurants.

**Table 2e. Operational problems encountered by the restaurants in terms of location**

Operational Problems	Mean	Qualitative Interpretation
1. The restaurant lacks parking space.	2.00	Rarely
2. The restaurant is far from residential areas.	2.04	Rarely
3. The restaurant needs to be improved its security.	2.00	Never
4. Public transportation is not accessible in the area.	1.31	Never
<b>Mean</b>	<b>1.83</b>	<b>Rarely</b>

Table conveyed the operational problems encountered by the restaurants in terms of location. The table further reveals that the problem on the restaurant is far from residential areas have the highest mean of 2.04 and was rarely encountered by the restaurants, while the problem that public transportation is not accessible in the area have the lowest mean of 1.31 and was never encountered by the restaurants.

**Table 2f. Summary of Operational Problems encountered by the restaurants**

Operational Problems	Mean	Qualitative Interpretation
Food Issues	1.95	Rarely
Employees and Service Reliability	2.08	Rarely
Pricing	2.37	Rarely
Atmosphere/Ambiance	1.39	Never
Location	1.83	Rarely
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>1.92</b>	<b>Rarely</b>

Table 2 shows the summary of operational problems encountered by the restaurants. These operational problems were all interpreted as rarely encountered by the restaurants such as (1) pricing, (2) employees and service reliability, (3) food issues, (4) location, and (5) atmosphere/ambiance. The table further reveals that most of the operational problems encountered were in the pricing aspects of the restaurants.

**Table 3a. Strategies used by restaurants to cope with the operational problems they encountered on the food issues**

Strategies	Mean	Qualitative Interpretation
1. The use of social media as a distribution channel to promote pricing strategies.	4.35	Often
2. The use of qualitative research methods such as observations, focus groups, and interviews when conducting food safety.	3.76	Often
3. Getting food safety certification that leads to a greater food safety knowledge.	4.37	Often
4. Training food handlers in the workplace to improve their understanding of procedures.	4.34	Often
<b>Mean</b>	<b>4.20</b>	<b>Often</b>

Table 3a exuded the strategies used by restaurants to cope with the operational problems they encountered on the food issues. The table further reveals that getting food safety certification that leads to a greater food safety knowledge have the highest mean of 4.37, while the use of qualitative research methods such as observations, focus groups, and interviews when conducting food safety have the lowest mean of 3.76. Both strategies were often used by restaurants in their operations.

**Table 3b. Strategies used by restaurants to cope with the operational problems they encountered on the employees and service reliability**

Strategies	Mean	Qualitative Interpretation
5. The development and provision of training courses to achieve behavioral changes and improve skills and knowledge of employees.	4.36	Often
6. The use of interactive media as a resource, particularly audiovisuals, videos, and lectures, in addition to hands-on courses.	4.02	Often
7. Building ramps for easy pathway for PWDs.	4.13	Often
8. Employee training and assessment on hygiene-related practices and attitudes.	4.63	Always
<b>Mean</b>	<b>4.24</b>	<b>Often</b>

As gleaned from the table, the strategies used by restaurants to cope with the operational problems they encountered on the employees and service reliability. It further reveals that one (1) strategy, which is the employee training and assessment on hygiene-related practices and attitudes with the highest mean of 4.63, was always used by restaurants in their operations, and the use of interactive media as a resource, particularly audiovisuals, videos, and lectures,

in addition to hands-on courses have the lowest mean of 4.02 and was often used by restaurants.

**Table 3c. Strategies used by restaurants to cope with the operational problems they encountered on the pricing**

Strategies	Mean	Qualitative Interpretation
9. Establishing online channels and online discounts by building business partner relationships with third-party websites.	4.20	Often
10. Offering discounts and membership cards to loyal customers as a token of their loyalty.	4.00	Often
11. The use of product bundling as a marketing tactic.	4.16	Often
12. The use of product costing to ensure that the foods are correctly valued for providing reasonable pricing.	4.57	Always
<b>Mean</b>	<b>4.12</b>	<b>Often</b>

The table exuded the strategies used by restaurants to cope with the operational problems they encountered on the pricing. It further reveals that one (1) strategy, which is the use of product costing to ensure that the foods are correctly valued for providing reasonable pricing with the highest mean of 4.57, was always used while offering discounts and membership cards to loyal customers as a token of their loyalty with the lowest mean of 4.00 was often used by restaurants in their operations.

**Table 3d. Strategies used by restaurants to cope with the operational problems they encountered on the atmosphere/ambiance**

Strategies	Mean	Qualitative Interpretation
13. Develops a Team Resilience program training designed to reduce stressors in restaurant work.	4.09	Often
14. Develops a dynamic benchmarking that helps in sustaining service excellence.	4.27	Often
15. Persuasive ideas of advertising and shifting the consumers' tastes and preferences to increase product variation.	4.64	Always
16. The use of technological machines as a service provider.	4.64	Always
<b>Mean</b>	<b>4.22</b>	<b>Often</b>

Table conveyed strategies used by restaurants to cope with the operational problems they encountered on the atmosphere/ambiance. The table further reveals that the two (2) strategies, namely: (1) Persuasive ideas of advertising and shifting the consumers' tastes and preferences to increase product variation and (2) The use of technological machines as a service provider with highest means of 4.64, were always used by restaurants in their operations, and one (1) strategy which is to develop a Team Resilience program training deigned to

reduce stressors in restaurant work with the lowest mean of 4.09 was often used by restaurants.

**Table 3e. Strategies used by restaurants to cope with the operational problems they encountered on the location**

Strategies	Mean	Qualitative Interpretation
17. The use of closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras inside and outside the restaurant to secure the customers' safety.	4.93	Always
18. The use of delivery riders to accommodate the orders of customers that are far from the restaurant's location.	4.89	Always
19. The use of parking management practices.	4.27	Often
20. An excellent quality audio system and speakers with good background music to reduce inappropriate sounds.	4.52	Always
<b>Mean</b>	<b>4.40</b>	<b>Often</b>

As gleaned in the table, the strategies used by restaurants to cope with the operational problems they encountered on the location. It further reveals that the use of closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras inside and outside the restaurant to secure the customers' safety with the highest mean of 4.93 was always used by restaurants in their operations, and one (1) strategy, which is the use of parking management practices with the lowest mean of 4.27 was only used often.

**Table 3f. Summary of Strategies used by Restaurants to Cope with the Operational Problems they Encountered**

Strategies	Mean	Qualitative Interpretation
Food Issues	4.20	Often
Employees and Service Reliability	4.24	Often
Pricing	4.12	Often
Atmosphere/Ambiance	4.22	Often
Location	4.40	Often
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>4.24</b>	<b>Often</b>

Table 3f shows the strategies used by restaurants to cope with the operational problems encountered. These strategies were all interpreted as often used by the restaurants to cope with the operational problems in terms of (1) location, (2) employees and service reliability, (3) atmosphere/ambiance, (4) food issues, and (5) pricing. The table further reveals that most of the strategies of the restaurants were used to cope with the problems on the location.

## DISCUSSION

### *Profile of the Respondents*

Well-formulated strategies that can adopt any circumstances have been an ace of every restaurant to control whatever operational problems they are going through. Different restaurants have their own stories of the problem, and as a hospitality management student, it was agreed by the researchers to conduct a study on operational problems and strategies of restaurants,

particularly in Tuguegarao City. The study jives with the conclusion of Cagurangan (2017), that local restaurant managers have shared common problems and challenges about the values, performance and competence of their employees, as well as training and seminar. Food quality, service quality, price, and atmosphere have been the variable that contributes mainly to the customer's satisfaction, the intention of going back, and the chance of recommending the restaurant. However, it all depends on the type of restaurant itself (Chun and Nyam-Ochir 2020).

The findings revealed a total of fifty-five (55) restaurant owners/managers in Tuguegarao City who participated in this study. The restaurant profile was classified in terms of the type of ownership, length of operations, number of employees, and type of restaurant. Regarding its type of ownership profile, those sole proprietorship restaurants scored the highest participation, followed by corporation and partnership. It indicates that the majority of the restaurant respondents are sole proprietors in Tuguegarao City, which further describes that they are owned and managed by one individual only. It is because, proprietorship is much simpler, and it requires no legal filings when starting the business. A sole proprietorship is the most common business structure, even though the business is not legally separate from its owner. The primary reason that many choose to start a business as a sole proprietorship is that they do not have to make choices, get professional advice, or spend any money (Hodge, 2014).

Similarly, the length of operations in most of the restaurants in Tuguegarao City is between 1-5 years only. This describes that most of the respondents are newly established. The result further revealed that the number of employees in these restaurants has less than ten (10) employees, which suggests that it manages a small number of workers, and it seems manageable by the restaurant owners. Moreover, the majority of these restaurants are quick service/fast food. One of the reasons why fast-food restaurant always hits the spot in every meal is its convenience factor. Fast food restaurants prepare a meal in a mere time, allowing a customer to get a full meal in an instant compared to other types of restaurants; that's why fast-food restaurants boom in the area. According to the American Dietetic Association (2019), fast food is popular because it's convenient, cheap, addictive, and tastes good. One of the factors making fast food popular is that it is convenient. Not only can people eat fast food "while steering the wheel of a car," but they are "easy to get to." Today, people are very busy with their working lifestyle as they tend to find fast foods as a good choice, and the packaging makes it easy to take away or bring it wherever you go (Utaru, 2014).

#### *Operational Problems encountered by the Restaurants*

On the other hand, the operational problems by the restaurants were rarely encountered in terms of food issues, employee and service reliability, pricing, atmosphere/ ambiance, and location. This implies that restaurants have rarely encountered these operational problems because they anticipated this kind of problem ahead of time and are prepared in anything that concerns the

restaurant's productivity, promotion, and operation. However, it was illustrated that the most notable operational problem was the restaurant pricing, followed by employees and service reliability, food issues, location, and atmosphere/ ambiance, respectively. This implies that restaurants in Tuguegarao City have shared common operational problems regardless of their profile. This has been a problem in the past and they cannot go about, simply because of high competition in the area. Competition because every restaurant caters to the same target market. The restaurant industry is intensively competitive, marked by a history of price wars and product differentiation. With minimal switching costs and other conditions, customers can be fickle (Hottovy, 2009).

The result reveals that problems on food issue particularly in food preparation lacks mis-en-place, the foods offered are based on standard quality, there is no variety of foods on the menu, and foods lack nutritional value were rarely encountered by most of the restaurants in Tuguegarao City. It implies that they are aware of this existing problem and anticipated it ahead of time and formulate strategies to go about it. However, based on the results according to the mean, foods offered are based on standard quality is the one mostly encountered operational problems of the restaurants in Tuguegarao City. This demonstrates that food quality isn't as important as how well it's prepared and presented, especially in fast food. In terms of nutrition, fast food is often lacking. Fast food frequently contains a variety of harmful ingredients. It also lacks a number of essential nutrients (Huzar, 2021).

Based on the result on problems on employees and service reliability, the timeliness of the services of employees was encountered sometimes by the different restaurants as a problem. This implies that employees lacked flexibility and training and sometimes does not execute the proper form of work that leads to problems on the timeliness of service. The most essential thing a restaurant can do to deliver good customer service is to value the time of its customers. As a result, punctuality is not only a desirable trait at a restaurant, but it is also a fundamental practice that every restaurant should follow. Time management is an important skill for any professional to learn, especially in the restaurant sector, where punctuality is intimately linked to excellent service quality. According to research, restaurants that emphasize timeliness in pre-shift briefings give guests with a better overall experience. And when all departments make the most of their time, the restaurant as a whole functions smoothly (Cvetkovic, 2021). On the other hand, other operational problems such as employees lack communication skills, the restaurant is not designed for PWDs, and restaurants lack number of employees were rarely encountered by the restaurants. It shows that most of the restaurants in Tuguegarao City is prepared to provide services as soon as their establishment opens.

Going further, the result on operational problems encountered by the restaurant according to pricing shows that restaurant promotes food bundle/combo pricing was sometimes a problem encountered by many restaurants. This implies that restaurant has a fixed price on any item they have

and they find it hard to offer combo pricing because it may change something in the production of restaurant. Bundling can also have a detrimental influence on the sales of your most popular items. Customers may be unlikely to pay more on your popular product if you bundle less popular things with it and boost the price, even if they are getting additional stuff. Another disadvantage of price bundling is that the corporation must provide certain discounts for the combined product or service, resulting in revenue loss (Parikh, 2016). Moreover, other operational problems such as restaurant gives proper discount was also encountered sometimes, while restaurants lack membership and loyalty discount and the price of food is expensive was rarely encountered by the restaurants.

In the operational problems on atmosphere/ambiance, the result shows that the place is noisy was mostly encountered problem of the restaurants. It shows that the majority of the restaurants was located roadside and is expected that the noise of vehicle is heard. Tuguegarao City is busy every day, and that noise coming from different establishments and vehicles is on different places. Other operational problems such as the place is inconvenient was rarely encountered by the restaurants, while the place doesn't create comfort and the place invades customer privacy were never encountered by the restaurants. This implies that the restaurant is well accommodating; it provides relaxation and ensures the privacy of its customer. The actual comfort of the sitting, music and noise levels, their relationship with the waiters, the enthusiasm the staff radiates, and many other aspects of the dining out experience may all contribute to a comfortable atmosphere. Finally, a welcoming environment is defined by how all of these characteristics make people feel (Montes, 2019).

According to the operational problems in terms of location, restaurant is far from residential area was mostly encountered by majority of restaurant respondent. This implies that majority of restaurant is located on commercial center part of the city away from residential. On the other hand, operational problems such as restaurant lacks parking space was rarely encountered, while the restaurant needs to improve security and public transportation is not accessible in the area was never encountered by the restaurants. This implies that security in the restaurants was safeguarded and vehicle is not a problem since there are lots of tricycle in the city.

#### *Strategies used to cope with the Operational Problems*

Looking further at the result of the present study, restaurants use various strategies to cope with the operational problems they encounter. Regarding food issues, it revealed that strategies are only used often, such as using social media as a distribution channel, using qualitative research methods, getting food safety certification, and training food handlers in the workplace. This result implies that some restaurants in Tuguegarao City still got something missing in their operation, which is present in today's era. Many restaurants still cannot adopt the new way of providing services and still prefer the traditional way of delivering food because most people are used to it. This result of the study agrees with Cardello et al. (1996) that home and traditional

ways of giving service and orders of restaurants still ranked higher than any other restaurant that is advanced. Direct cashier ordering has also helped the restaurant reduce the wait times, improve accuracy, and most importantly, boost check sizes-benefits that just about any restaurant can enjoy.

Based on the result of this study, the strategies for employees and service reliability showed that employee assessment on hygiene-related practices and attitudes is always adopted to cope with the problems. This implies that employees who perform activities related to food handling have adequate learning, the skills, and the necessary training to become competent when it comes to food safety. The organization is responsible for monitoring and checking if employees have these competencies, and if not, they have to provide proper training provided they too must have been trained. All people involved with food must be aware of their role and responsibility in food safety. According to Codex Alimentarius Commission (2015), food safety is the assurance that food will not cause harm to the consumer where it is prepared and/or eaten according to its intended use. Food handlers must have the necessary knowledge and skills to handle food hygienically. Other strategies in employees and service reliability such as the development and provision of training course, the use of interactive media as resource, and building ramps for accessible pathways for PWD's were only often used. It implies that some restaurants are small with limited resources to go about these strategies and perform in actual operation. They make their budget devoted to the primary need of the restaurant; if ever they have built a budget about it, they can go over this.

Moreover, the strategies related to pricing, the use of product costing to ensure that the foods are correctly valued by providing reasonable pricing is always used by the restaurant. This finding implies that offering discounts and promos on every purchase catch customer's attention and tickles their minds to realize that they can still save money in buying. According to Yuan (2012), one of the primary strategies for a new product is offering low costs with higher discounts. The other strategies related to pricing, such as establishing online channels and online discounts, offering discounts and membership cards, and using product bundling as a marketing tactic were used only as often. This implies that some restaurants don't have enough revenue to afford offer discount. This further means that the product is fixed, and the revenue is not that much to expect.

For atmosphere/ambiance strategies, persuasive ideas of advertising and shifting consumers' taste, and the use of technological machines as a service provider is always used. This means that the selection of the menu provides new and unique guidance to the customer. One of the tactics for enticing consumers to eat in, according to Tinne (2012) and Ozdemir and Caliskan (2014), is to regularly refresh menus by presenting a new and enhanced range of diverse menu items. Menu acts as the main body, which gives a signal on what operations to use, the ingredients and stocks needed, and the equipment to be used. Technological machines make work easier; just click the right button, encode correct information, and that's it. It made every transaction clear

and documented. The other strategies related to atmosphere/ ambiance include developing a team resilience program training designed to reduce stressors in restaurant work and developing a dynamic benchmarking that helps in sustaining service excellence is only used as often. This suggests that some restaurants are not into training that concerns employees' mental health and the benchmarking to maintain service excellence, but they give into the demand and customer satisfaction.

Moreover, the use of closed-circuit television, the use of delivery riders, and an excellent quality audio system were always used to cope with the location's problem. CCTV makes fewer personnel guarding establishments, but it can capture and track every person going in and out. Also, delivery riders fill the distance between customer and restaurant since it connects customer and restaurant door to door. Excellent audio system/ music improves the atmosphere in the restaurant. According to Magnini and Parker (2009), music can calm the customers waiting for their food or await their family/relatives or colleagues and spend additional time on the restaurant. However, the parking management practices was only used often. This implies that some of the restaurants' respondent size of establishment is exactly on the size of a lot where it was built or there is only a limited area of space for parking

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The operational problems faced by restaurant managers in Tuguegarao City and the strategies they employ were explored in this study. Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that the majority of respondents were sole proprietors with one (1) to five (5) years length of operations, had less than ten (10) employees, and were classified as quick service or fast-food restaurant. Moreover, restaurant establishments rarely faced the following operational problems: (1) pricing, (2) employees and service reliability, (3) food issues, (4) location, and (5) atmosphere/ambiance. Additionally, most of the restaurants encountered operational problems in the (1) The restaurant promotes food bundle/combo pricing, (2) The timeliness of the services of the employees, (3) The foods offered are based on standard quality, (4) The restaurant is far from residential areas, and (5) The place is noisy. Similarly, it is concluded that the coping strategies of these restaurants were used always; (1) The use of technological machines as a service provider; (2) Employee training and assessment on hygiene-related practices and attitudes; (3) The use of product costing to ensure that the foods are correctly valued for providing reasonable pricing; (4) The use of delivery riders to accommodate the orders of customers that are far from the restaurant's location; and (5) The use of closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras inside and outside the restaurant to secure the customers' safety.

The researchers recommend that future studies be conducted to compare the research results and acquire in-depth knowledge about restaurants' operational problems. In addition, it is suggested that future studies should further evaluate other possible factors that can positively or negatively affect the restaurant's operational problems. The results acquired by the study can

also be increased by broadening the scope expanding the number of universities or institutions participating in the study. Moreover, the researchers suggest that since there's no difference in the operational problems when it comes to group according to the type of ownership, future research should identify the operational problems based on the type of ownership and check the difference of strategies from the operational problem. The researchers also suggest that the Department of Trade and Industry devise guidelines on the identified operational problems and strategies to guide restaurants. In addition, they may conduct workshops or seminars and establish an organization for restaurant managers in the City for continuous connections and strengthen their operations sufficiently. To further intensify our knowledge about restaurants' operational problems and strategies, the researchers propose that the strategy gathered to be presented to the restaurants that didn't become part of respondents. The researchers recommend to the respondents to eliminate the operational problems that may potentially occur based on the data gathered provided by the researchers and identify better strategies for a well-ordered operation of their restaurants.

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