



UNIQUE COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGES OF RESTAURANT INDUSTRY IN VIETNAM DURING THE NEW NORMAL PERIOD

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>DOI: 10.52932/jfmr.v4i2ene.1016</p> <p><i>Received:</i> July 08, 2025</p> <p><i>Accepted:</i> December 10, 2025</p> <p><i>Published:</i> March 25, 2026</p> <p>Keywords: Competitive Advantage, New Normal, Restaurant Industry, Vietnam</p> <p>JEL codes: Z310, L830, O140</p>	<p>The restaurant industry was one of the first industries to be hit hardest by the Covid-19 pandemic, as it is a service industry that relies heavily on tourism. In the most difficult times, the Vietnamese restaurant industry used its unique competitive advantages to adapt and overcome the difficulties caused by the pandemic. Thanks to that, the industry has regained its growth rate after the pandemic, even surpassing the previous level. However, those unique competitive advantages have not received much attention to maximizing the value they bring. Therefore, this study aims to provide authentic information on the unique competitive advantages that the Vietnamese restaurant industry is relying on to recover and grow impressively. This study uses a sequential mixed-method approach including qualitative research with in-depth semi-structured interviews with 14 respondents and quantitative research with an online survey with a sample size of 202 samples. The four key points explored and verified in this study include a diverse and rich menu, highly valued human resources, the ability to adapt to a rapidly changing business environment, and low prices while still ensuring quality. This study will provide in-depth insights into the Vietnamese restaurant industry, which can help to take advantage of and promote the advantages to effectively develop this industry in the new normal state after COVID-19.</p>

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1. Introduction

In the years before the pandemic, the world economy grew at a fairly steady rate of 2.2 percent for 2017 and 2018. In 2019, it is expected to grow by 3 percent (United Nations, 2019). Tourism also grew strongly during this period. Experts say that tourism has become a key sector in economic development (UNWTO, 2021). On average, this industry directly contributes 4.4% of GDP, 6.9% of employment and 21.5% of service exports. Of which, food and beverage services (16%) account for more than half of total consumption (OECD, 2020). Employment in the hotel and restaurant industry increased by 45% from 1995 to 2015, about 30% higher than the average growth rate of the whole economy and second only to real estate rental and business activities (OECD, 2022).

In Vietnam, the economy also grew quite well during this period. GDP in 2019 increased by 7.02%. Of which, the service sector increased by 7.3% and contributed 45%. The accommodation and catering services sector increased by 9.8%, the tourism sector increased by 12.1%, contributing about 13% of the growth of this sector (General Statistics Office, 2021).

Thus, through the above evidence, we can see that the service industry, especially tourism and tourism-related industries including food and beverage services, play an important role in socio-economic development. However, this industry is the most vulnerable industry when an epidemic occurs (Gössling, Scott & Hall, 2020). The socio-economic system has been deeply affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to an unpredictable market recovery trajectory (Sun et al., 2024). In particular, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019 has had a profound impact on the tourism economy (Ding et al., 2024). The service sector has almost no measures to support its continued operations. The tourism sector in particular has been severely affected. This has forced related sectors to close,

including a series of restaurants that have had to stop operating (Mishra et al., 2020).

Statistics show that tourism has decreased by 74% in international tourist arrivals, more than a billion visitors and decreased by more than 1.3 billion dollars in tourism exports (UNWTO, 2021). This has had a serious impact on the related industries. Most countries have recorded a sharp decline in revenue and input human resources. In the first quarter of 2022, employment in the accommodation and food services industry fell by an average of 9.0% compared to pre-COVID-19 levels. Typically, in Portugal, the decline in tourism revenue has caused human resources participating in the hotel and restaurant industry to decrease by 12% in 2020 (OECD, 2022). In Vietnam, the tourism industry has almost completely closed due to the impact of the epidemic. Causing related industries including accommodation and food services to grow by negative 20.81% in 2021 (General Statistics Office, 2021).

Not giving in to difficulties, entering the “new normal” phase, the world economy has shown positive signs. In 2024, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) reported that despite there are difficulties, there has been a slight recovery in the economy (International Monetary Fund, 2024). Tourism sectors such as restaurants, hotels and travel have also benefited from this recovery. The tourism industry has recovered 88% compared to 2019 (the year the pandemic had not occurred). Regarding the Asian market alone, experts have estimated that by the end of 2024, the tourism industry will have fully recovered (World Tourism Organization, 2024).

The tourism industry in Vietnam has experienced significant growth thanks to the country's recovery strong economy. According to the Department of Tourism (2023), the industry saw a growth rate of 175% in 2022 compared to the previous year, and a further

37% growth in 2023. This recovery has also had a positive impact on the restaurant industry, as tourism, restaurants, and hotels are closely interconnected (Bowie & Buttle, 2004). It is estimated that in 2023, Vietnam's revenue from accommodation and food services will reach 673.5 trillion VND, accounting for 10.8% of total retail sales and increasing by 14.7% from the previous year (General Statistics Office, 2023).

The tourism industry has become a key industry in the economic development of countries. In Vietnam, the restaurant industry has always played an important role in tourism development and contributed to relatively large growth. Entering the "new normal" period, the restaurant industry is showing a strong and surprising recovery. However, in the context of Vietnam, no research has shown what has made the Vietnamese restaurant industry grow strongly again. And previous studies by other authors in other countries are also focusing on the recovery and impact of the epidemic on the restaurant industry. Therefore, this study will fill the research gap on the unique competitive advantages of the restaurant industry in the context of Vietnam and the competitive theory of the restaurant industry in the new normal period. This study aims to: (1) Identify the unique competitive advantages of the Vietnamese restaurant industry in the new normal period, (2) Provide strategic implications in restaurant industry management.

2. Literature Review

2.1. *The new normal*

The concept of "new normal" first appeared in 2009 in Gross's economic essay after the 2008 global economic crisis. Later, this term was popularized by El-Erian. The new normal in this period implies a period of returning the economy to pre-crisis conditions, with stability, low risk and slow growth (El-Erian, 2010). It implies overcoming the consequences of the

economic crisis and gradually developing again compared to before.

The term "new normal" reappeared after the Covid-19 pandemic was discovered and spread globally. At this time, new perspectives on "new normal" were redefined by the authors. The new normal refers to the desired life of society after the pandemic ends (Young, Hoseana & Owen, 2022). "New normal" describes the new living conditions after the pandemic and all countries in the world together fight the pandemic (Sundawa et al., 2021). The period when all activities in society are affected and dominated by the pandemic is considered the "new normal" state (Manuti, 2022).

However, in our study, we use the concept of the whole country unanimously joining forces to focus on both eradicating the epidemic and recovering and developing the economy in the innovation of life and social habits (Do, 2021). This is the state that the Covid-19 pandemic has pushed the world into with challenges in knowledge and the consequences it causes in economic, behavioral and social changes. In which, people are increasingly dependent on digital technology in all aspects (Nawaz et al., 2024).

Entering the new normal phase, the tourism industry in general and related service industries in particular have also had more positive changes. Tourism has received more support from the government, been promoted in the digital transformation process, received support from local people and especially in the restaurant industry with strongly developing delivery services. However, it also has to face the challenges brought by this period. Competition in the recovery phase, decreased purchasing power, climate change, increased inflation causing increased costs, labor shortage and the risk of disease returning. And that is also the context that restaurants in Vietnam are facing (Tri et al., 2024).

In response to this challenge, some businesses have been forced to change their operating strategies to minimize the risks associated with the epidemic (Gössling, Scott & Hall, 2020). Whether to recover or close permanently is a variable that restaurant owners cannot answer. If they continue, restaurant owners will almost have to restructure the entire restaurant (Chen & Chiu, 2022).

To continue operating and developing sustainably after the pandemic, the resilience of restaurants is extremely important (Moraga et al., 2024). There are many factors that help restaurants develop sustainably in the new normal. Situational awareness (Starbucks & Fajourn, 2005) in the context of the pandemic, people have to process huge amounts of information for a long time to understand the constantly changing situation (Christianson & Barton, 2020). The ability to observe and analyze quickly will help business owners make better decisions (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006). Technology and social networks bring many benefits in management and promotion. From there, the ability to recover and develop the economy sustainably is more guaranteed. In addition, identifying key weaknesses through assessing the entire market also needs to be considered in the recovery process (McManus et al., 2008). Learning ability has also been shown to have a significant impact on economic sustainability (Moraga et al., 2024). In addition, Moraga et al. (2024) also emphasize the need to understand the value of collaboration during times of crisis. In normal times, businesses focus on competition and growth, while in times of survival, they increase collaboration.

But the previous authors' view of restaurant industry adaptation is focused on recovery. However, at the present stage, when the epidemic has been controlled and the economy has had more positive changes, restaurants need to change to develop. We must continue to return

to the path of growth and competition for mutual development. Restaurants need to improve their competitiveness by maximizing their inherent strengths. Many years ago, competitiveness was noticed and studied by many authors and many models were born from that. That shows the importance of competitiveness because only competition can create development for the market (Porter, 1980).

2.2. Competitive advantage

Today, there is no unified concept of competitive advantage. According to Bharadwaj et al. (1993), higher performers may possess something unique and difficult to imitate that allows them to outperform their competitors. Competitive advantage can be the result of creating value that no competitor can do or can do less well (Barney et al., 1989). According to Kay (1993), distinctive competencies are competencies that originate from characteristics that other competencies do not have. And this competency also becomes a competitive advantage for a business unit. Porter (1980) said that competitive advantage is the core in a competitive market.

Capturing competitive advantages has become a major research topic in the field of strategic management research (Porter, 1985; Rumelt, 1984). These advantages are developed based on the internal strengths of the unit, seizing opportunities from the market, limiting external threats and preventing internal relationships (Porter, 1980, 1985). Controlling strengths and weaknesses or analyzing the combination of factors to choose a strategy to promote competitive advantage (Hofer & Schendel, 1978).

Competitive advantage has a significant positive effect on the performance of new businesses (Anwar et al., 2018). In addition, competitive advantage also has positive effects on corporate promotion strategies and brings

certain successes to the business (Yasa et al., 2020). The direct relationship between corporate social responsibility and corporate performance is enhanced and promoted by competitive advantage (Saeidi et al., 2015).

According to Schumpeter (1950), there are various resources and combining these resources in new ways creates competitive advantage. Based on this basic assumption, Rumelt (2005) argues that the resources that create competitive advantage include all new innovations in business location, products, technology, promotion, markets and distribution methods. Leadership is the process of constantly questioning assumptions about how the market works (William, 1992). These resources include human resources, financial resources and exploitation rights (Wernerfelt, 1989). Hall (1989) argued that an organization's system is configured by a combination of resources.

Hall continued to update intangible resources including intellectual property rights, brands, trade secrets, and human-dependent or subjective resources about know-how, networks, organizational culture, and product and company reputation (Hall, 2009). According to Grant (1991), to know which resources to exploit, one should identify and classify resources, analyze weaknesses, strengths, and opportunities that can be better captured than competitors. In fact, competitive advantage is built on tangible resources, organizational capabilities, and organizational reputation (Collis, 1994).

Based on those studies, Fahy and Smithee (1999) have concluded the basic resources that create a competitive advantage. Firstly, fixed assets and facilities are things that can be copied from competitors. Secondly, intangible assets such as brands, copyrights, databases, etc. are things that are difficult to copy. Thirdly, organizational capacity is the cooperation between departments, the capacity

of individuals or teams in the organization to create a better working performance than competitors. The organization is a collection of many resources, but not all resources create a competitive advantage (Long, 2012).

2.3. Strengths that create competitive advantage in the restaurant industry

The strengths that create competitive advantage in the restaurant industry are focused on building strong relationships with various stakeholders. This includes maintaining good relationships with the government for support (Arimbawa et al., 2022), establishing sustainable relationships with suppliers to ensure a steady supply of goods (Yan Muhan, 2022), and promoting positive relationships between management and employees to increase work efficiency (Wati et al., 2023). Supply chain management practices are a way to improve competitive advantage, especially in the context of global competition (Siagian, 2024). Additionally, the use of social media has become a valuable tool for managers to connect and collaborate with distributors, consumers, suppliers, and consultants, allowing SMEs to develop effective strategies in the competitive global market (Bakri, 2017). Nanda and Kumar (2023) also found that social media plays a crucial role in communication, marketing, and decision-making for successful businesses, with social media analytics being a useful tool for creating competitive advantage.

In terms of location, countries are prioritizing areas with developed infrastructure and high tourist traffic for restaurants to gain a competitive edge (Arimbawa et al., 2022). Urban areas with high foot traffic are also popular choices for restaurants (Barachnea et al., 2022). According to Wati et al. (2023), being close to customers is a significant advantage for restaurants.

Price is another important factor in creating a competitive advantage, with lower prices

often attracting more customers (Arimbawa et al., 2022). However, it is also essential for prices to be reasonable and reflect the value of the dining experience (Barachnea et al., 2022; Kurniawan et al., 2020; Rubihanto, 2021). One way to achieve competitive prices is by reducing operating costs compared to other restaurants (Greve, 2014).

The physical space of a restaurant can also contribute to its competitive advantage. A unique and visually appealing space can attract customers (Widani et al., 2022), while a spacious and comfortable environment with a beautiful view can also be a draw (Arimbawa et al., 2022; Devi, 2021).

The menu and food offerings are also crucial in creating a competitive advantage. Diversifying the menu allows customers to have more options (Yan Human, 2022), and there is a growing demand for healthier options (Barachnea et al., 2022; Mulyani, 2020). Some restaurants have gained a competitive advantage by catering to specific dietary needs, such as low-fat and low-salt options for those with health conditions (Mohammadi et al., 2021). Additionally, using fresh and unique ingredients can also attract customers (Wati, 2023).

Brand equity is another factor that contributes to competitive advantage in the restaurant industry. Establishing a strong brand can increase customer recognition and loyalty (Agaba and Kalu, 2019). Many restaurants are adopting a chain of brands strategy to expand their reach and gain a competitive edge (Benzaghta et al., 2021). This allows for increased brand awareness and recognition in different locations (Tresna et al., 2019).

Investing in human resources is also crucial in creating a competitive advantage for restaurants. A competitive environment requires effective human resource strategies (Megdad & Onbasioglu, 2024). Having a skilled team can improve service quality (Wati et al.,

2023), and having a simple and effective training and recruitment process can also contribute to employee skills (Widani et al., 2022). A diverse workforce can also bring innovation and creativity to the working environment (Husin et al., 2021). Therefore, it is essential to invest in the recruitment process to attract and retain talented employees (Armoti et al., 2023).

Hygiene is a crucial aspect for restaurants to gain a competitive advantage. Food handlers should also wear face masks and cleaning tools should be readily available to ensure the safety of customers (Wijaya et al., 2022). Additionally, maintaining a clean restaurant and providing a sanitary environment for the staff is highly appreciated (Barachnea et al., 2022).

Restaurants with a variety of attached services, such as payment options and wireless networks, are highly valued by customers (Devi et al., 2021; Rubihanto et al., 2021). In the event of service failures, service organizations should strive to turn dissatisfied customers into satisfied ones in order to increase the likelihood of repeat business. An effective service recovery system has become a competitive advantage for most service organizations (Cao et al., 2008). These services should not only be provided on-site, but also effectively managed online, as an organization's online presence contributes to its competitive advantage (Zhu et al., 2013).

In addition to the aforementioned factors, the strong market track record, market diversification, and the ability to develop and implement strategic solutions through market research capabilities (Yan Muhan, 2022; Benzaghta et al., 2021). Singh's (2023) study also highlights the importance of developing a culinary application platform in helping restaurants gain a competitive edge. And resources-based view play a vital role and assist organizations in not only creating, nurturing and sustaining competitive advantage but also understanding the collective resources needed

to compete favorably in globalized markets and highly competitive (Assensoh-Kodua, 2019).

Previous studies have shown the advantages of the restaurant industry in the world. The theoretical contributions to the world restaurant industry have been shown through each study. However, it is individual and the arguments are theoretical. The studies only stop at the level of analyzing a single unit and have not generalized the context of the entire restaurant industry of a large subject. Based on the previous theoretical foundation, this study continues to fill the theoretical gap that previous studies have not been able to do in generalizing the restaurant industry of a large subject and detailing the unique competitive advantages of a country. Specifically, here is the context in Vietnam.

2.4. The competitive models

And to create competitive advantage, many models have been built. The 5 competitive forces model (Porter, 1980) shows 5 competitive forces from the external environment including competitors, customers, suppliers, product substitution and potential competitors. The industry competition model (Oral, 1986) focuses on cost savings to create advantages. The diamond model (Porter, 1990) shows

the conditions to help a unit lead the market: production factors, demand conditions, supporting and related industries, strategy, structure and competitive environment. The relationship models in the enterprise (Barney, 1991) shows the basis for sustainable competitive advantage, resources must meet the following factors: value, rarity, inimitably and non-sustainability. The double diamond model (Carayannis & Wang, 2012) focuses on competition from the external environment and self-renewal of resources to compete. The SME model (Wisenthige & Guoping, 2016) analyzes that six variables: physical resources, human resources, innovation, network, management, information, supply and demand conditions; if they are out of balance, competitiveness will be inhibited.

And in Vietnam, this study is almost the first study to focus on this issue. Based on the strengths exploited to create competitive advantages in the previous restaurant industry combined with the competitive context in the new normal period. This study approaches to explore the factors that create unique competitive advantages of the Vietnamese restaurant industry.

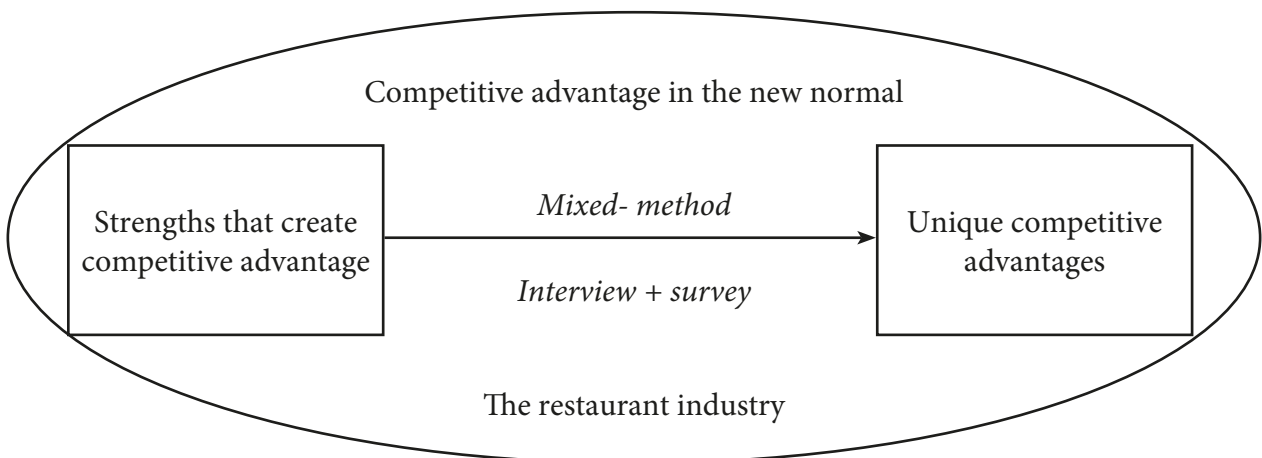


Figure 1. Framework (Author’s systematization, 2025)

3. Methodology

This study utilizes a mixed methods approach. By utilizing a mixed methods approach, the researchers aim to capitalize on the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methods while minimizing their respective limitations (Clark & Wang, 2009). Initially, researchers who use qualitative methods subscribe to a worldview known as constructivism and its variants (Maxcy, 2003). Subsequently, researchers adhered to the tenets of positivism, which is the belief that social research should use the scientific method and involve rigorous testing of hypotheses with quantitative measurements (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994, p. 251). However, this study will lean more towards a qualitative approach. The quantitative part only serves to re-examine the level of agreement in a broader and more objective way.

3.1. Qualitative

In this study, the authors exploited 14 semi-structured in-depth interviews and purposeful sampling techniques to address specific objectives related to the research questions. Interviewees who were leading experts or in mid-level and above management positions in the restaurant industry in Vietnam. The goal was to gather a comprehensive picture of the unique competitive advantages of the restaurant industry in Vietnam.

To obtain useful information, semi-structured questions were used to gain in-depth understanding of the interviewees' perspectives. This type of question allows for flexibility while still focusing on the core content of the topic linked to the research purpose (Minichiello et al., 2008). In this study, the authors used a probability sampling technique, which involves randomly selecting specific units or cases so that the probability of inclusion of each member in the population is "determinable" (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). And interviewers are kept

confidential and coded according to their job titles: E – Expert, C – Chef, M – Manager, F – Founder, CO – Consultant. The serial number following the codes is the interview serial number of that interview position. For example, M1 is the first interviewed manager, M2 is the second interviewed manager, etc. The same goes for the remaining codes.

3.2. Quantitative

After conducting the interviews, the authors developed a set of survey questions for 202 respondents who have been working in the middle and high management positions. This is a common approach in quantitative research, where the deductive approach is used to test hypotheses and ideas derived from previous research (Bryman, 2004). Likert scale was used as an effective and time-saving tool for respondents to quickly and efficiently respond (Likert, 1932).

While the minimum sample size for research is 50, it is recommended to have a sample size of 100 or more to meet the high requirements of the research (Hair et al., 2013). This is the appropriate sample size for research using factor analysis, with $n=5*m$, where m is the number of observed variables. The mean of each factor was calculated to determine the majority opinion of the respondents.

$$\bar{X} = \frac{\sum X_i}{n}$$

Additionally, the agreement rate is calculated to indicate the level of assessment of the factors. The agreement rate is calculated by dividing the total number of votes on the four-point scale (n_4) and the five-point scale (n_5) by the total number of votes.

$$\bar{Y} = \frac{\sum n_4 + n_5}{\sum n} \times 100\%$$

All interviews and surveys were recorded with the permission of the respondents, and

their information was encrypted and coding to ensure confidentiality. The authors are committed to using the interview content only for research purposes and to maintaining ethical standards in scientific research.

4. Results

4.1. Qualitative research results (see Appendix 1)

4.2. Quantitative research results

4.2.1. Data description

The authors selected survey participants who were 23 years old and above and had many years of experience in the industry in order to meet the objectives of the study. The age group with the highest percentage was 29-33 years old (42.6%), followed by 23-28 years old (31.7%), 34-39 years old (16.3%), and over 39 years old (9.4%). The majority of participants were women, accounting for 53.5% of the total, while men accounted for 46.5%. Most participants had a strong educational background, with 76.2% holding a university degree and 15.3% holding a college degree. In order to ensure the

most objective information, participants were required to have at least 1 year of experience. The participation rates by years of experience were 10.4% for over 10 years, 32.2% for 7-10 years, 37.6% for 4-6 years, and 19.8% for 1-3 years. To ensure a diverse range of perspectives and greater objectivity, the survey was conducted in all three regions: the North (7.9%), the Central (5%), and the South (87.1%).

4.2.2. Survey results

There are four unique competitive advantages. First, a diverse and rich menu (UCA1). Second, highly valued human resources (UCA2). Third, the ability to quickly adapt to culinary trends in the market (UCA3). Fourth, low prices while still ensuring service quality (UCA4).

Notes on the survey table below:

UCA: Unique Competitive Advantages.

1- Totally disagree, 2 - Disagree, 3 - No opinion, 4 - Agree, 5- Totally agree

Y%: Percentage agree

X: Mean

Table 1. Survey results of competitive advantages of Vietnam restaurant industry

UCA	Scales					(Y %)	(X)
	1	2	3	4	5		
UCA1	3	0	6	56	137	95.54	4.6
UCA2	2	3	12	68	117	91.58	4.46
UCA3	3	3	10	104	82	92.08	4.28
UCA4	2	2	17	95	86	89.60	4.29

All of these advantages were highly appreciated by respondents and surveyors at over 89%. Of which, the diverse and rich menu was rated the highest at 95.54%. The trends supporting these views are clearly shown through the average index of all being above 4. It shows that the majority agreed with this view and a small number disagreed insignificantly. And the high agreement rate shows that the

majority of respondents agreed and completely agreed with the information provided.

This advantage shows that Vietnam has a diverse menu in serving diners. The diversity is shown through ingredients, processing methods and also through each region. This diversity is thanks to culinary culture, culinary cultural integration, historical features and

diversity of ingredients according to the weather and climate of each region. This discovery helps restaurant managers take full advantage of the diversity available at the place of business to improve the competitiveness of the restaurant.

Friendliness is the nature of Vietnamese people and is also highly appreciated by the world for this virtue. Managers must grasp this nature of Vietnamese people to exploit human resources effectively in training for service and customer care. Skills can be trained, but attitude is very difficult. Therefore, the friendliness and dedicated attitude towards customers in each employee in the restaurant industry is a unique and rare competitive advantage of the Vietnamese restaurant industry.

Rapid adaptation has helped the Vietnamese restaurant industry satisfy most of the customers' needs. New trends in dining styles are quickly adopted by Vietnamese restaurants. With the market changing day by day, this rapid adaptation will help the Vietnamese restaurant industry to grow and gain a competitive advantage.

In terms of exchange rate, the Vietnamese currency does not have many advantages compared to other countries. However, it is a special point to help Vietnamese cuisine attract customers. With reasonable prices, diners can enjoy delicious and carefully prepared dishes in Vietnam. In addition, thanks to the diversity of natural resources, Vietnam has a variety of ingredients in food processing, so the input materials are not too expensive. In addition, the salary for employees in this industry is not too high, so the cost of the dish is also reduced. From there, the dish is created with a cost price that is not too much, so the selling price is very reasonable for diners.

4.3. Discussion

Although the restaurant industry in Vietnam has not yet optimized its strengths in terms of

cooperation and connection, good planning of location and business strategy, brand building - space, food safety control, it still has unique competitive advantages that are similar but also have accompanying differences compared to other countries in the world. In addition, this study also found that the ability to adapt quickly is a special advantage of the Vietnamese restaurant industry in the new normal context that previous studies have not mentioned.

First, compared to the diversity of dishes in Yan Muhan (2022) study, the Vietnamese restaurant industry offers a diverse and rich menu. This diversity extends beyond just the number of dishes, but also includes variations in dish names, preparation methods, service styles, and even the exchange of Vietnamese culinary culture. This diversity is a result of the country's diverse natural conditions and regional culinary traditions. Additionally, while other countries may focus on creating dishes that are nutritionally healthy (Barachnea et al., 2022; Mulyani, 2020) or cater to specific dietary needs (Mohammadi et al., 2021), Vietnam's menu also includes dishes that are suitable for the climate, weather, and various types of medicinal vegetables that are beneficial for health. This is due to the abundance of vegetation in Vietnam, which varies based on the different natural conditions found throughout the country.

Furthermore, while other countries may be known for their highly skilled human resources (Wati et al., 2023), effective training and recruitment processes (Armoti et al., 2023; Widani et al., 2022), and creating a positive work environment for employees to thrive (Husin et al., 2021), the Vietnamese restaurant industry is highly regarded for its customer-centric approach and friendly attitude. The staff's respect for customers and their humble demeanor leave a positive impression on diners. This is a result of the experience passed down from previous generations, a desire to

continuously learn, and the hospitable nature ingrained in every Vietnamese person.

Moreover, the ability to quickly adapt is a prominent competitive advantage that has not been mentioned in previous studies. The Vietnamese restaurant industry is quick to absorb new factors, both in terms of organization and customer service. Managers prioritize staying up-to-date with market trends and catering to the needs of customers. Thanks to the country's easy-going nature and cultural exchange, Vietnam has the ability to adapt quickly to the market.

Lastly, Vietnam's restaurants offer affordable prices without compromising on service quality. While other countries may focus on cutting operating costs (Greve, 2014) and balancing them with customer spending to create reasonable prices (Arimbawa et al., 2022; Barachnea et al., 2022; Kurniawan et al., 2020; Rubihanto, 2021), Vietnam has a stronger advantage in this aspect. The country's low prices are not a result of using cheap ingredients but rather taking advantage of available resources. Additionally, the exchange rate for international visitors is favorable, making Vietnam's prices appear even more affordable. Furthermore, labor costs in Vietnam are relatively low, and the country's abundance of natural resources means that restaurants do not have to spend a significant amount on raw materials. This results in lower food and service costs, making Vietnam's prices more competitive compared to other countries.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

5.1. Conclusion

In the context of Vietnam, this is the first study to clearly identify four unique competitive advantages of the Vietnamese restaurant industry, including a menu with outstanding diversity, human resources highly appreciated

for their service attitude, the ability to quickly adapt to the market and reasonable prices while still ensuring quality. In particular, the ability to adapt quickly is a major advantage of the Vietnamese restaurant industry that previous studies have not mentioned. In addition, previous studies focused more on recovery than on re-competition. While the economy has shown signs of recovery and needs competition to develop (Porter, 1980).

In this study, several meaningful implications emerge for both practice and academia. From a practical perspective, restaurant managers can utilize the results to formulate and implement strategic initiatives that enhance their organization's competitive advantage, ensuring alignment with the unique orientation, resources, and market positioning of their business. These findings underscore the importance of strategic agility, which refers to the ability to quickly adapt to changing consumer preferences, technological advancements, and market dynamics. This capability is a critical determinant of long-term success in the restaurant sector. Furthermore, current and prospective entrants into the industry should carefully consider these influential factors when designing their business models, operational frameworks, and marketing strategies to achieve optimal performance and sustainable growth.

From an academic perspective, the study highlights the need to expand existing theoretical frameworks by integrating the concept of rapid adaptation as a core mechanism for creating and sustaining competitive advantage within the Vietnamese restaurant context. This theoretical enhancement not only contributes to the broader body of strategic management literature but also provides a foundation for future empirical research exploring how adaptability influences competitiveness in emerging markets.

5.2. Other recommendations

The research topic highlights the unique features of competitive advantages in the Vietnamese restaurant industry, creating opportunities for sustainable development of the restaurant industry. Understanding and grasping these characteristics, restaurant management can implement strategies to promote its positive impacts and promote long-term sustainability. This may involve initiatives to improve operational efficiency. Ultimately, by recognizing and leveraging these potentials, restaurants can strive toward a more sustainable future while remaining profitable and socially relevant.

In the process of conducting research on this topic, the sample size in the qualitative phase with 14 participants may not be representative of the entire industry. However, the survey sample in the quantitative with 202 respondents was used to cover the larger scale in Vietnamese context. Furthermore, as this is a new topic, there may not be much previous data available for comparison and contrast. In the future, research on this topic needs to expand the number of respondents participating in interviews or conduct specific research on a certain scope to help the topic become more in-depth.

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