

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

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Appendix 1. Qualitative research results

1. The first competitive advantage: The menu of the Vietnamese restaurant industry has outstanding diversity.

This result is consistent with the study of Yan Human (2022) that menu diversity can create competitive advantages. In addition, meeting the diverse needs of the market such as healthy menus (Barachnea et al., 2022; Mulyani, 2020; Mohammadi et al., 2021) also brings certain advantages, which is consistent with the opinions of experts in this study. In addition, the study also has similarities in the view that the diversity of ingredients also contributes to increasing market competitiveness in the restaurant business (Wati et al., 2023). However, the diversity of menus in Vietnam also has some differences.

Vietnam has a unique culinary culture that has created many attractive dishes that attract diners. Anyone can explore and experience this diverse culinary culture. The development of cuisine has created diversity and richness in the restaurant industry menu.

M1: Vietnam's strength is its diverse and rich food, having a rich food source and many dishes also creates a great position.

M2: Food and drinks are very diverse, not like a coffee shop that only serves drinks but also side dishes, while a restaurant specializes in both food and drinks.

The diversity in the menu is also shown through the diversity in the ingredients and composition of the dish. This diversity has been combined by chefs to create many delicious dishes to serve customers. It also shows the richness of cooking ingredients in Vietnam.

E1, C1: The cuisine is very rich, more than other countries, each region has its own typical ingredients, each region has differences such as the ingredients for cooking the broth.

E2: The dishes that Vietnam develops more strongly than the countries around us are dishes related to salads. Vietnam is one of the countries that is known as the fruit of four seasons. Because of seeing dishes related to salads, such as coconut crab salad, everything or related to the main-court dish, there are many available ingredients to make.

In particular, in the diversity of ingredients and components of the dishes, there is the existence of a variety of vegetables and fruits and healthy vegetables. This is the unique strength of Vietnamese cuisine, creating an attractive and rich picture. Creativity comes from the flexible and skillful way of combining vegetables, creating meals that are not only delicious but also good for health.

C2: Compared to the world, Vietnamese food is healthy and diverse in vegetables, and people are increasingly accepting more types of vegetables. For example, when talking about Vietnamese herbs, there are over 20 types, Thai and Lao are close to us, most of them use coriander,... not as diverse as us.

CO1: Vietnam has many types of medicinal herbs used in dishes. Especially, raw vegetables, some are considered medicinal herbs to treat colds, some support the treatment of some common diseases.

The Vietnamese restaurant industry menu has a variety of ways to prepare dishes. It has both traditional and modern features.

M6: Dishes originating from France, Europe, Asia, ... some dishes are reprocessed to suit the taste of the

Vietnamese market, creating a good experience for customers.

The diversity in the adaptation of dishes in restaurant menus in different regions. The diversity in the adaptation of dishes in restaurant menus in different regions. Dishes in each region will be adapted to suit that region. This adaptation reflects the available ingredients in each region and increases the experience for customers.

C2: *The side dishes are used in a variety of ways. The South often uses perilla, basil leaves, etc. In the North, there are also ginseng leaves and fig leaves, for example, some vegetables such as stone sprouts are also delicious vegetables in the Northwest.*

CO1: *It is also an adaptation, from available products to regions, the North - Central - South, the West all have Pho, but Pho from Hanoi to Sa Dec is different, Northern pho: no raw bean sprouts, green onions are added, in Saigon: raw bean sprouts, Pho in Sa Dec is sweet like sweet soup, but that bowl of Pho goes to Korea: at Incheon airport, there is a Saigon Pho restaurant that serves Kimchi, no raw vegetables.*

Vietnamese restaurant menus are not only simple in terms of dishes but also diverse in the flexibility of serving customers. This flexibility has met the diverse needs of many customers from many different countries.

M1: *... always care about service, products are always improved to serve the customers they focus on... FnB Vietnam is also tending to focus more on the service chain and customer experience rather than just coming to eat and then going home.*

Depending on the nature of each customer, Vietnamese dishes will be adjusted in both processing and flavor according to their personality and culture.

CO2: *It is not only about changing ingredients, but also about the delicate seasoning to create a dish that is harmonious in flavor, and has a cultural connection, satisfying international diners.*

C1, M6: *From European or Asian customers, what are their culinary characteristics, Vietnamese restaurants always meet their characteristics.*

Vietnam has a diversity and richness in restaurant menus thanks to the diverse culinary culture of the regions. Culinary culture is skillfully integrated into the restaurant menu, creating a diverse picture of culinary culture for diners to choose from.

M6: *It can be said that Vietnamese cuisine is very developed, because we have a very diverse range of traditional culinary quintessence. Specifically, Vietnam is diverse in culinary culture... it is a style Vietnamese.*

Culinary culture has contributed to the diversity of Vietnamese cuisine. The three regions (North - Central - South) in general and in each locality in particular, each region has its own culinary culture.

E2: *You can learn more about Vietnamese dishes as the multiculturalism of cuisine. For example, Nam Vang noodles are cooked with different flavors, Ba Ma noodles, My Tho are the same. Pho is originally from Hanoi, but I don't have a root to feel the exact taste.*

The core factor that creates unique culinary cultures in dishes or restaurant menus is history. Dishes and ways of eating are passed down from previous generations to the next generation.

CO2: *Special dishes of people with a history of pioneering, Saigon has a history of only 300 years, raw vegetables are medicinal herbs for treating colds, in the central region, there is a royal influence.*

F1: *Vietnamese people often eat the dishes they have eaten since childhood. That is, they are familiar with the taste they eat during the development process. Therefore, dishes in different regions must be adapted to suit each locality.*

Natural differentiation has contributed to the diversity of dishes to suit the weather and climate of the regions. Hot and cold climates each have their own dishes. These dishes are not only suitable but also good for health.

CO2: *Also, a dish, but related to the climate issue, helping people to be in harmony with the weather, to maintain health. In the South, the hot season lasts long, so there are usually water dishes such as vermicelli, glass noodles... in which Hu Tieu is prominent, hu tieu will have seafood and pork. In the North, in the summer, there are duck vermicelli and pho. In the cold, long winter, there is chicken and beef pho, but no pork. In the Central region, there is beef and pork leg vermicelli. The above dishes are suitable for the climate and maintain your health.*

In addition, thanks to the rapid acceptance of international food trends, the restaurant industry's menu has become more diverse with dishes of foreign origin. The already diverse Vietnamese menu is now even more diverse thanks to this diversity.

CI: Indian customers eat vegetarian food, so we also make it, Asians like fried food, so we also make fried food.

M1: Foreigners come to Vietnam to travel or live and work, they will bring their culinary culture. However, the dishes are not kept intact but are re-prepared by Vietnamese restaurants to suit Vietnamese people.

Finally, the diversity in the menu of Vietnamese restaurants has a great contribution from the market. The Vietnamese food market accepts and integrates foreign culinary cultures selectively.

M1: The strength of Vietnamese restaurants is that they adapt quickly to integration, ... invest more in space to enjoy the product and it creates its own characteristics for the product received.

M4, M6: Vietnamese consumers are very easy-going, willing to try new dishes, the market is tolerant (easy-going market). Koreans and Chinese people rarely eat foreign food. Japan is a very traditional country if Vietnam often drinks tea and they consider tea as a main drink. And they have difficulty accepting new cultures, especially new foods.

2. The second competitive advantage: Human resources are highly appreciated for their service attitude

This study also agrees with the study of Megdad & Onbasioglu (2024) that human resources play an important role in competition. And each restaurant establishment having a skilled workforce contributes significantly to increasing competitiveness (Wati et al., 2023).

In the context of restaurant services in Vietnam, the quality of service of the staff is often highly appreciated compared to other countries. Thanks to that, Vietnamese restaurant services are increasingly improved, serving more attentively, so customers really enjoy the experience.

CO1: The quality of restaurants is improved every year, with more style, modernity and professionalism in all aspects (From chopsticks, decoration, regional decoration style). Food safety and hygiene issues are improved from clothing, supporting equipment thanks to the staff.

Restaurants in Vietnam have a long-standing and experienced staff. Many members of this team not only stay with the business for a long time but also contribute years of experience to the development process of the restaurant. Even reaching retirement age, but still continue to support the prosperity of the business.

M7: There are people who have decades of experience in the profession, and there are people who work until retirement. And when they retire, they continue to contribute their experience to the development of the restaurant.

CI, C2: Awareness, attentive service, which group of guests to bring, what cuisine to serve, ... We build a good service style, clean and delicious food, attentive service staff, customers really like it.

The quality of service of the staff is often highly appreciated with the outstanding feature of modesty. The staff always put themselves a little lower than the customers to create a comfortable feeling for the customers. Putting themselves lower is not about class but showing respect.

E1: They have a smaller perspective, that is why they have more respect for customers, making it easier for customers to come and experience more. Foreign staff have an equal view of each other, unlike Vietnamese staff who always bow down a little to customers.

Hospitality is shown through smiles and words that create a friendly feeling for customers. Smiles and words that create a friendly feeling not only come from the profession but also from the Vietnamese people themselves.

E1, E2, M5: The hospitality of Vietnamese people is shown through conversations, instructions and cooking with customers. That's why it creates friendliness.

M7: Almost all of us are willing to serve others in the period after the epidemic. Although the situation at that time was facing many difficulties and shortcomings.

The chef team learns and grasps the needs of dinners quickly. The adaptability of the restaurant industry cannot be ignored without mentioning the level of the chef team. The level of the chef is no less important than other departments in the restaurant business.

C2: Currently, when talking about Vietnamese chefs, they learn very quickly. In, foreign dishes are quickly received and processed to suit Vietnamese people or keep the original flavor to serve foreign guests.

E2: Vietnamese dishes are complex and use a lot of spices, but Vietnamese chefs are very good

3. The third competitive advantage: Rapid adaptation to the market

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. Meanwhile, previous studies in other countries have not found that the ability to adapt quickly in normal conditions creates a significant competitive advantage.

The restaurant industry in Vietnam has shown good performance in accepting and integrating world trends into the domestic market context. With a market that is quite easy to eat, accepting world dishes is extremely fast.

M3: Our strength compared to other countries is that our acceptance is very fast, our assimilation is very fast, extremely fast compared to the world. The world's countries are very even.

The Vietnamese restaurant industry has demonstrated the ability to recognize and promptly grasp international culinary trends. The restaurant industry in Vietnam is often flexible in the way it organizes and serves customers, can change the menu or provide new services based on customer feedback and reactions.

F1: Large chains focus on service and the Vietnamese restaurant industry is also tending to focus on service chains and customer experience...

M7: For customers, there is luxury in service, luxury in products, luxury in direction to push their competitiveness up.

The Vietnamese restaurant industry has shown its sustainability in quickly adapting to fluctuations and changes in the business environment. This flexibility shows the ability to grasp trends and adjust business strategies effectively.

M3: Vietnam adapts well to change quickly, and always cares about services and products. Always improving to serve the customers they focus on,... Especially, with the competition from outside competitors.

The cultural exchange of cuisine between countries is a special feature of the Vietnamese restaurant industry's ability to quickly adapt, reflected in the dishes.

M7: Vietnam has begun to develop strongly and stably the type of buffet restaurant with both Western and domestic dishes.

M6: Street food has similarities with China and Thailand. Although there are more dishes, there are fewer delicious dishes than Vietnam according to tourists.

The dishes are specially combined with Vietnamese elements with other countries in the world. Shown through the combination of processing methods, marinades, decoration, service and enjoyment. This point has contributed to the development of the country's cuisine and created a picture of cultural exchange between Vietnam and international friends.

CO2: Besides the taste, there is also the feeling of cultural lessons. Evoking the emotions of diners increases the perception of meeting the high demands of customers, making customers want to experience more. The restaurant industry in Vietnam has shown good performance in receiving and integrating world trends into the domestic market context. With a market that is quite easy to eat, the reception of dishes from around the world is extremely fast.

4. The fourth competitive advantage: Affordable prices without compromising on service quality

This result is similar to the studies of Arimbawa et al. (2022), Barachnea et al. (2022), Kurniawan et al., (2020) and Rubihanto (2021). Price is also important to create competitive advantage in the restaurant industry. Price must reflect the quality of the customer experience.

The price of food and drinks at restaurants is considered reasonable, even quite cheap compared to other countries in the world. Compared to the quality of the dishes, the price is still quite low and not commensurate with its real quality.

M7: ... the price is also very competitive, I think our price is also very good, as well as other food service businesses. Compared to the dishes, food hygiene and safety, and the price is relatively competitive, not sky-high. Now, going to Sheraton to eat for 1.8 million, going to Nikko to eat for 1.7 million, going to New World to eat for 1.6 million, it's all lobster, crayfish, seafood, why now in Go Vap, the newly opened food is only 200, some places have crayfish, lobster, ...

Vietnamese dishes are prepared quite complicatedly with the combination of many different ingredients, and the processing techniques are not easy. Originating from the diversity of ingredients, the dishes are seasoned and marinated with many different spices. The harmonious combination of spices has created a dish that is elaborately prepared and delicious.

M6, M4: Vietnamese food is marinated with many different spices and presented attractively...

Vietnamese dishes are highly appreciated compared to other countries. However, the price is not commensurate with the quality of the dish. The price is still cheap compared to what customers feel.

C2: Some sites are evaluating Vietnamese cuisine as very developed, some sites are evaluating it one level above Thailand, which is exciting and good news for Vietnamese cuisine.

The salary of workers in the restaurant industry is still low compared to other countries in the world. Thanks to that, restaurants can reduce the cost of food without spending much on labor.

E1: Salary, currently the salary of the tourism industry in Vietnam is low and the salary for senior staff is quite high, but the foundation for building a high level is not enough.

Thanks to the diversity of ingredients and ingredients. With diversity and availability, the cost of food is also relatively low, reducing the cost of food.

CO2: Diverse dishes from North to South, clearly diverse. The diversity of Vietnamese dishes is shown in the diversity of ingredients, number of dishes, names of dishes, ... a lot.