

# ADMINISTRATION STRATEGIES – A COMPETITIVENESS FACTOR IN THE TRADITIONAL RESTAURANT MARKET IN ROMANIA

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**Abstract:** *Over the last decade, the restaurant market in Romania has developed strongly, with the traditional ones at the top. This development is mainly due to the successful implementation of management strategies. Consumers are becoming more knowledgeable and demanding. The paper aims to identify the main management strategies used in Romania's traditional restaurant market and determine consumers' perceptions. To this end, an exploratory analysis combined with quantitative market research was performed.*

**Keywords:** *administration, quality, strategy, restaurants, market research.*

## 1. Introduction

The restaurant market in Romania has developed enormously over the last decade due to the current trends of serving lunch or dinner in the city and the home delivery system. The focus has also shifted from quantity to quality, and local and fresh ingredients are increasingly popular in the Romanian market.

A restaurant is successful only when it aims to satisfy guests' wishes for products and services (Almohaimmeed, 2017; Bujisic et al., 2014); this is why the process of managing a restaurant plays a key role. This is a set of interrelated activities and actions to ensure an optimal balance of human, material, and financial resources (Stranciulescu and Micu, 2012; Medeiros et al., 2012). The restaurant's administration also provides specific skills necessary for organizing and driving the material values of a restaurant (Sirghi, 2019).

Ensuring food security is an essential activity in any restaurant. It covers food hygiene, quality control, and managing biological, chemical, and physical risks associated with food (Almanza et al., 2014). Food security is an essential pillar of restaurant administration, responsible for providing safe and healthy food to customers (Kwon et al., 2014). The fundamental principles guiding food security cover various issues, from choosing raw material sources to properly managing stocks and safe food handling.

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Romanians often dine in the city, and they generally prefer traditional food.

The paper aims to identify the main management strategies applied to the traditional restaurant market in Romania and to determine consumers' perceptions of them. To this end, an exploratory analysis combined with quantitative market research was carried out.

## **2. Analysis of Management Strategies Applied in the Traditional Restaurant Market in Romania**

The diversification and increase in the number of traditional restaurants have led customers to appreciate the quality of services, the atmosphere, and the design of restaurants more. A study conducted in 2018 (Oprea, 2019) shows that respondents equally appreciate the quality of services (speed, kindness), cleanliness and atmosphere in the restaurant, and the quality of the dishes (taste, freshness, and diversity of the menu). According to the same study, traditional Romanian dishes remain in the public's attention, with Romanian cuisine preferred by most Romanians.

Digitization, the preference for traditional and fresh local dishes, and expanding delivery services will significantly influence the restaurant industry in the next 15 years.

The success of traditional Romanian restaurants can be attributed to implementing various management strategies, such as using local and fresh ingredients, delivering to customers' homes, and offering a special menu to customers.

A management strategy applied by traditional restaurants is based on **the quality of the products, which are based on local ingredients**, while the current preparation techniques are perfectly combined with the inherited habits. This strategy is successfully used by the Sergiana restaurant chain in Brasov. They protect the traditions of the old butchery craft and thus provide raw and finished materials of the highest quality. The raw material from Sergiana restaurants is local, more precisely from its own farm in Sercaia, where the animals are raised in the most modern conditions on unspoiled pastures.

Another restaurant that applies this strategy is Bistro de l'Arte in Brasov. That is why the daily menu is different, fixed, and limited in quantity. Raw materials are sourced directly from local producers, markets, or even peasants' yards, so the taste is genuine.

La Ceau Restaurant in Brasov implemented this strategy. Thus, it offers fresh daily dishes using ingredients from local producers. The menu is designed and reinterpreted to satisfy any culinary desire. It is aimed at both vegetarians and people who have various allergies.

Another management strategy is based on a **special menu** made available to customers who want culinary experiences. In the case of Sergiana restaurants, the menu is varied, traditional, and fair, as it is presented on its website. The cookbook is the restaurant's star for the authentic humor and the consecrated dishes. The recipes from the menu are old recipes in which the taste of the past can be found. The menu varies depending on the season, so in autumn, customers can order from their production besides all the goodies.

For example, the menu of the Bistro de l'Arte restaurant features authentic Romanian cuisine reinterpreted by the chefs, which ranks it as a top local uniqueness.

Another management strategy in traditional restaurants is keeping customer loyalty by stimulating them to use their own **restaurant application**. In the case of Sergiana

restaurants, this application offers the patrons a visual card through which they are offered monthly vouchers and prizes in loyalty points. The card is also available in physical format in the restaurant for those who do not have a smartphone. You can quickly book a table through the application and access exclusive offers and surprises on the patron's anniversary or name day. This card can be used in all locations affiliated with the Sergiana group.

Another strategy is **home delivery** to the customer. Products are delivered by the restaurants' own fleet of couriers and through the platforms Glovo, TakeAway, and Tazz by Emag. Payment can be made in cash or by bank card.

### 3. Material and Methods

This quantitative research aims to understand consumer perceptions of the traditional restaurant market in Romania. The research aims to achieve the following objectives:

**O1** – Identification of consumers' perception of traditional restaurants;

**O2** – Determination of consumer opinions on the strategies used in the management of traditional restaurants;

**O3** – Determination of consumer opinions on practices that ensure food security in traditional restaurants.

The goal was to gather as many completed questionnaires as possible. The study, conducted in November and December of 2023, involved a sample of 824 participants. The demographic breakdown was 54% female (445 participants) and 46% male (379 participants), with 71% (585 participants) residing in urban areas and 29% (239 participants) in rural areas.

Due to the wide geographical spread of the population surveyed, the questionnaire was distributed using the Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI) technique via the Google Forms application. The questionnaire consisted of 22 questions. Of these, 17 focused on gathering information relevant to the topic under investigation, while the final five questions sought to characterize the respondents. The data were analyzed using IBM SPSS.

### 4. Results and Discussion

The most important research results are structured on the three specific objectives pursued.

**O1** – *Identification of consumers' perception of traditional restaurants*

To begin with, the research aimed to identify the frequency with which respondents eat at a restaurant. A large part of the respondents (34%) eat in the city 1-2 times a week, usually on weekends; 27.3% of the respondents eat at the restaurant occasionally (several times a year at events and holidays), 32.7% of the respondents go out to the restaurant a few times a month, and only 6% eat at the restaurant almost every day. Most respondents (61.8%) chose to dine at a traditional restaurant.

Another aspect that was intended to be identified was the reasons why the respondents chose a restaurant with traditional cuisine (fig.1).

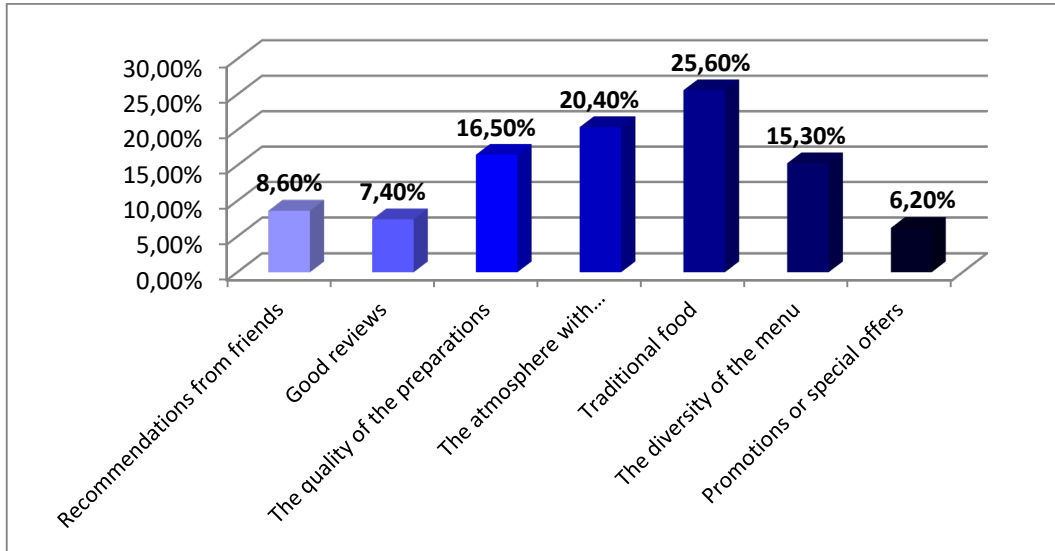


Fig. 1. *The reasons that led the respondents to serve a meal at a restaurant with traditional cuisine*

Source: *Own research of the author*

The top reasons for choosing traditional restaurants were traditional dishes (25.60%), followed by the traditional atmosphere of these restaurants (20.40%), the quality of the food prepared from local ingredients (16.50%), and then the diversity of the menu (15.30%). The least influential factors were promotions and special offers (6.20%), recommendations from friends and acquaintances (8.60%), and positive reviews (7.40%).

#### ***O2 – Determination of consumer opinions on the strategies used in the management of traditional restaurants***

The research aimed to discover which was the most appreciated administration strategy by the subjects. When asked about various aspects related to the management of a traditional restaurant, the majority of respondents (80.58%) said that for them the quality of the products, their authenticity, that they were prepared from fresh, natural ingredients from local producers mattered most.

The respondents were asked which aspects they considered to determine the quality of a restaurant with traditional cuisine (fig. 2). Thus, the variety of the menu (28.76%) and the quality of the dishes (28.16%) came first, followed by the behavior of the staff (20.02%), the authentic atmosphere in the restaurant (19.23%), while the promotional offers came last (3.83%).

Thus, the subjects appreciate that the menu is complex and well structured, so that it satisfies their culinary appetite, and the experiences lived in the restaurant are unique every time.

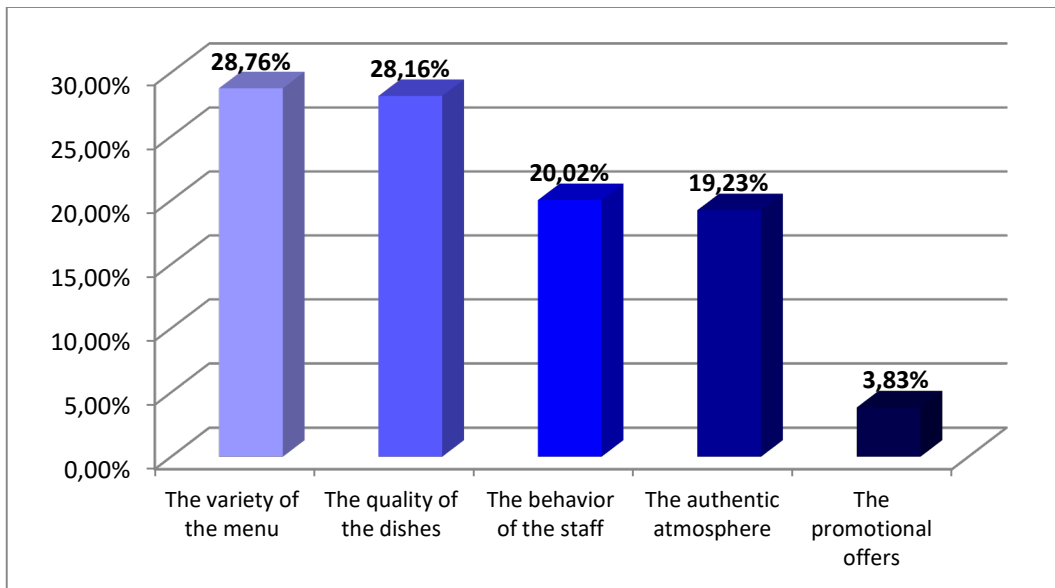


Fig. 2. The aspects that determine the quality of a traditional restaurant

Source: Own research of the author

### ***O3 – Determination of consumer opinions on practices used to ensure food security in traditional restaurants***

This objective aimed to determine the respondents' opinions on food security and what they consider the leading food security practices that restaurants implement.

Only 40.5% of respondents said that this concept referred to safe and compliant foods, while 21% said they did not know the details of this term. Respondents consider it practical to ensure food security: quality raw materials, freshness of food consumed, hygiene in the restaurant kitchen, and detailed presentation of nutrition information in the menu. Most subjects (85.2%) consider that restaurant staff are sufficiently well-trained to comply with hygiene rules and ensure food security.

## **5. Conclusions**

Adequate management strategies and investments in modern equipment and technologies determine the guarantee of superior quality.

Customers appreciate the use of local ingredients and sustainable products in the dishes offered (Cantele and Cassia 2020, Kristiawan et al, 2021). The concern for food provenance and the respect for the environment are key aspects in choosing the menu, and restaurants that integrate these principles can earn extra points in customers' eyes.

Restaurants must anticipate and respond to changing customer preferences and adopt strategies to improve the service experience.

Traditional restaurants in Romania outline their culinary identity through menus and concepts celebrating Romanian gastronomic traditions. These restaurants often serve traditional dishes highlighting the richness and diversity of local cuisine.

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I mention that some of the data presented in this article are not accurate. They are estimates and come from the exploratory research conducted by the author.

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