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Assessing The Challenges and Opportunities in Sustainable Sourcing for Restaurants in Bauchi State, Nigeria.

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Abstract

This study assesses the challenges and opportunities of sustainable sourcing in the restaurant sector, using Critical Discourse Analysis of scholarly literature and primary survey data from restaurants in Bauchi State, Nigeria. Sustainable sourcing encompassing local, organic, fair-trade and ethically produced ingredients offers environmental, reputational, and operational benefits, yet adoption remains uneven. Findings identify recurrent barriers: higher procurement costs, limited and unreliable supplier networks, seasonal and logistical supply disruptions, weak verification and certification mechanisms, consumer price sensitivity, and managerial resistance due to perceived operational complexity. Simultaneously, respondents and literature highlight key opportunities: enhanced brand differentiation, potential long-term cost savings (via reduced transport and waste), regulatory alignment, improved employee engagement, and culinary innovation through seasonal and plant-based offerings. Survey results (n=71) indicate strong recognition of drivers and barriers (80% agreement), broad support for sourcing strategies such as local and organic procurement (83% agreement), but more divided views on economic impacts and consumer willingness to pay premiums (70% agreement). Building on these insights, the paper recommends phased adoption of sustainable inputs, targeted consumer education and transparent menu narratives, cooperative purchasing models for SMEs, context-sensitive certification frameworks, and policy/NGO support to bridge capacity gaps. The study also calls for more inclusive academic inquiry that centers small operators and frontline supply-chain actors. Overall, sustainable sourcing emerges as a viable but contextually contingent pathway for restaurants requiring coordinated policy, industry collaboration, and adaptive business models to reconcile ethical aims with financial sustainability.

Keywords: sustainable sourcing; restaurants; supply chain resilience; consumer willingness to pay; Bauchi State.

Introduction

The restaurant industry has a crucial opportunity to transition toward sustainable sourcing practices by prioritizing locally sourced, organic, fair-trade, and ethically produced ingredients (Abdou et al., 2023; Palazzo & Vollero, 2021). When implemented effectively, sustainable sourcing can reduce environmental impacts, enhance brand reputation, and improve long-term operational efficiency (Gimenez et al., 2012; Kumar et al., 2012). Furthermore, growing consumer demand for transparency and eco-friendly dining options creates market incentives for restaurants to adopt these practices (Voss & Spence, 2025).Despite these potential benefits, widespread adoption of sustainable sourcing remains limited due to several key challenges. Restaurants face significant barriers including higher procurement costs (Siddique & Khan, 2020), complex supply chain logistics (Beske *et al.,* 2014), and difficulties in verifying sustainability claims across multi-tiered supplier networks (Zhu *et al.,* 2008). Additionally, many establishments struggle with inconsistent consumer willingness to pay premium prices for sustainable menu items (Abdou *et al.,* 2023), while others lack the operational frameworks to effectively measure and communicate their sustainability efforts (Seuring & Müller, 2008).

While existing studies have identified both drivers and barriers to sustainable sourcing (Gössling & Hall, 2019), significant gaps remain in understanding how to:

i. Effectively balance cost considerations with sustainability objectives.
ii. Develop practical, standardized measurement frameworks for different restaurant segments.
iii. Create business models that make sustainable sourcing financially viable across various market contexts (Washio *et al.,* 2025).

Furthermore, there is limited research on how digital technologies (e.g., blockchain for traceability) could help overcome current implementation challenges in restaurant supply chains (Carter & Rogers, 2008). Addressing these gaps could provide actionable insights to accelerate the adoption of sustainable sourcing practices across the foodservice industry.

Despite increasing recognition of sustainability's importance, many restaurants face significant challenges in adopting sustainable sourcing practices. One of the most persistent barriers is the higher cost associated with ethically sourced ingredients (Siddique & Khan, 2020). Organic, fair-trade, and locally produced foods often come at a premium price, which can strain profit margins, particularly for small and medium-sized establishments with limited purchasing power. This financial burden makes it difficult for many restaurants to justify the transition, especially when competing with conventional suppliers offering cheaper alternatives.

Another major obstacle is the limited availability of reliable sustainable suppliers (Beske *et al.,* 2014). Many restaurants, particularly those in urban or non-agrarian regions, struggle to find consistent sources of sustainable produced ingredients. Supply chain disruptions, seasonal variability, and the lack of infrastructure for small-scale ethical producers further complicate procurement. Without dependable supplier networks, restaurants risk menu inconsistencies and operational inefficiencies, discouraging long-term commitment to sustainable sourcing.

Consumer behavior also presents a challenge, as studies indicate a lack of willingness among diners to pay premium prices for sustainable sourced meals (Abdou *et al.,* 2023). While surveys often show strong consumer support for sustainability in theory, actual purchasing decisions frequently prioritize affordability and convenience. This disconnect between stated preferences and real-world spending habits makes it difficult for restaurants to recoup the higher costs of sustainable ingredients through menu pricing, creating a financial disincentive for adoption.

Additionally, restaurants encounter difficulties in tracking and verifying sustainability claims across their supply chains (Zhu *et al.,* 2008). The absence of standardized certification systems and transparent reporting mechanisms makes it challenging to assess whether suppliers truly adhere to sustainable practices. This lack of verifiable data can lead to unintentional greenwashing or hesitation in marketing sustainability efforts for fear of reputational risks.

Finally, managerial resistance often stems from perceived operational complexities (Gössling & Hall, 2019). Many restaurant owners and chefs view sustainable sourcing as logistically burdensome, requiring additional staff training, menu redesigns, and supplier relationship management. The perceived hassle of transitioning from established procurement systems creates inertia, even among operators who conceptually support sustainability.

The study aim at assessing the challenges and opportunities in sustainable sourcing for restaurants. The specific objectives include:

i. Identify key drivers and barriers to sustainable sourcing in restaurants.
ii. Evaluate the effectiveness of different sourcing strategies.
iii. Explore consumer perceptions and willingness to pay for sustainably sourced meals.

Sustainable sourcing refers to the process by which organizations procure goods and services in a responsible and ethical manner, considering environmental, social, and economic impacts throughout the supply chain (Brandenburg *et al.,* 2014). In the context of restaurants, sustainable sourcing encompasses the selection of food products and ingredients that are environmentally friendly, socially equitable, and economically viable. This practice may involve procuring locally grown organic produce, ethically raised livestock, fair-trade certified goods, and seafood from sustainable fisheries (Kumar *et al.*, 2020).

The hospitality industry, particularly restaurants, has increasingly recognised the importance of embedding sustainability into procurement processes. This shift has been propelled by growing consumer awareness, stricter regulations, and global environmental concerns such as climate change and biodiversity loss (Yakovleva *et al.,* 2012). Sustainable sourcing aligns with the triple bottom line approach people, planet, and profit thereby enhancing both ethical reputation and business resilience.

Challenges in Sustainable Sourcing for Restaurants

Despite the numerous benefits associated with sustainable sourcing, restaurants encounter a wide array of challenges that constrain its full-scale implementation. These includes:

i. High Cost of Sustainable Ingredients

One of the most cited barriers is the elevated cost of sustainably sourced ingredients. Organic and fair-trade products typically command higher prices than their conventional counterparts due to labour-intensive farming methods, lower yields, and certification expenses (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006). For small and medium-sized restaurants, absorbing these costs without increasing menu prices can be financially debilitating.

ii. Limited Supplier Availability and Reliability

A significant challenge lies in the unavailability or unreliability of local and sustainable suppliers. In some regions, there exists a dearth of certified sustainable producers, making it difficult for restaurants to maintain consistent supply chains (Yakovleva & Flynn, 2006). Moreover, supply chain disruptions caused by seasonal variability, transportation logistics, and climate-induced crop failures exacerbate the problem.

iii. Lack of Awareness and Expertise

Many restaurant operators lack sufficient knowledge of sustainable sourcing practices and associated certification schemes (Hassini *et al.,* 2012). This knowledge gap inhibits informed decision-making regarding suppliers and product selection. Additionally, staff training in sustainable procurement practices is often overlooked, reducing the efficacy of sustainability initiatives.

iv. Regulatory and Certification Complexities

Navigating the regulatory landscape of sustainable sourcing can be daunting. The multiplicity of certification schemes such as Rainforest Alliance, Fair Trade, and USDA Organic may confuse buyers and complicate procurement decisions (Giovannucci & Ponte, 2005). Ensuring compliance with various standards entails administrative burdens and potential legal liabilities.

v. Consumer Price Sensitivity

Although a growing segment of consumers prefers sustainably sourced meals, price sensitivity remains a deterrent. Many customers are unwilling to pay a premium for environmentally or ethically sourced meals, placing restaurants in a dilemma between maintaining ethical standards and staying competitive (Wheale & Hinton, 2007).

i. Enhanced Brand Image and Market Differentiation

Embracing sustainable sourcing enables restaurants to enhance their brand identity and differentiate themselves in a crowded marketplace. Consumers, particularly millennials and Gen Z, increasingly patronise businesses that demonstrate environmental stewardship and social responsibility (Hartmann *et al.,* 2013). Sustainability certifications and transparent sourcing can thus become powerful marketing tools.

ii. Operational Cost Savings in the Long Term

Although initial investments may be high, sustainable sourcing can result in long-term cost savings. For instance, sourcing locally reduces transportation costs and carbon emissions, while reducing packaging waste cuts down disposal expenses (Röös *et al.,* 2019). Moreover, forging long-term partnerships with sustainable suppliers fosters pricing stability.

iii. Compliance with Environmental and Social Regulations

Governments and international bodies are tightening environmental and food safety regulations. Restaurants that proactively adopt sustainable sourcing position themselves ahead of regulatory curves and avoid potential fines or reputational damage (UNEP, 2021).

iv. Employee Engagement and Retention

Studies have shown that organisations committed to sustainability enjoy higher employee satisfaction and lower turnover rates (Glavas & Piderit, 2009). When restaurant staff are involved in sustainable initiatives such as sourcing and waste management, it fosters a sense of pride and belonging.

v. Innovation and Menu Diversification

Sustainable sourcing encourages culinary innovation. Chefs and procurement teams are inspired to experiment with seasonal, local, and plant-based ingredients, leading to diverse and healthier menu offerings (Mikkelsen *et al.,* 2013). This not only caters to evolving dietary trends but also reduces dependency on unsustainable supply chains.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework undergirds the conceptual understanding of the phenomena under study by anchoring it in established theories. It provides a scholarly lens through which sustainable sourcing practices are contextualised, interpreted, and evaluated within the restaurant industry. This study adopts a multi-theoretical approach by drawing from the following key theories:

i. Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory

The Resource-Based View (RBV) theory posits that organisations gain and sustain competitive advantage by effectively utilising valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) resources. Within the context of restaurant sourcing, sustainable ingredients, supplier relationships, and environmentally conscious branding can be viewed as strategic resources Barney (1991); Wernerfelt (1984)

Restaurants that implement sustainable sourcing strategies can achieve differentiation in a competitive market by leveraging unique, environmentally friendly procurement practices that are difficult to replicate. Sustainable sourcing thus becomes a source of competitive advantage, enhancing brand loyalty, customer trust, and long-term profitability.

ii.   Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder Theory holds that organisations should consider the interests of all stakeholders not just shareholders in their decision-making processes. In the restaurant industry, key stakeholders include customers, suppliers, employees, local communities, and environmental groups (Freeman 1984).

Sustainable sourcing reflects a stakeholder-oriented approach to management, whereby restaurants align their procurement practices with societal and environmental values. By prioritising ethical labour, fair trade, and local sourcing, restaurants demonstrate accountability to diverse stakeholder expectations, thereby fostering goodwill and enhancing social legitimacy.

Empirical Review

Abdou, Hassan, and Salem (2023) conducted an empirical study titled "Promoting Sustainable Food Practices in Food Service Industry: An Empirical Investigation on Saudi Arabian Restaurants." The principal objective of their research was to identify the key drivers promoting sustainable food practices in the restaurant sector of Saudi Arabia. To achieve this aim, the researchers adopted a quantitative survey methodology, targeting restaurant operators across the kingdom. The findings revealed that customer behaviour, stakeholder engagement, and regulatory frameworks serve as the most significant influences in fostering sustainability within the food service industry. The study concluded that focusing on these critical drivers can greatly enhance the adoption and implementation of sustainable practices. The authors recommended the strengthening of policy frameworks, active involvement of all stakeholders, and the education of consumers to foster a deeper commitment to sustainable food practices.

Gössling and Hall (2019) explored the subject of sustainability through a study titled "Sustainability Implementation in Restaurants: A Comprehensive Model of Drivers, Barriers, and Strategies." The primary objective was to examine the various internal and external factors that influence the implementation of sustainability measures in restaurants. Employing a systematic literature review methodology, the study synthesized existing scholarly contributions on the topic. The findings highlighted a broad spectrum of drivers such as managerial commitment, employee awareness, and consumer demand, as well as barriers including financial constraints and operational complexity. The authors concluded that a comprehensive and holistic approach is essential to overcome these multifaceted challenges. They recommended that restaurants adopt integrated strategies, including training programmes, clear policy guidelines, and managerial support systems, to drive sustainability.

Siddique and Khan (2020) carried out a study titled "Exploring the Drivers and Barriers to Green Supply Chain Management Practices in the Restaurant Industry," focusing on the restaurant industry in Bristol, United Kingdom. The objective was to understand both the motivators and impediments to implementing green supply chain management (GSCM) practices. The study concluded that without strategic planning, these barriers could undermine green supply chain efforts. Accordingly, they recommended collaborative supplier engagement, governmental subsidies, and incentives to promote broader GSCM adoption.

Pagell and Wu (2009) investigated sustainable supply chain practices in their study titled "Building a More Complete Theory of Sustainable Supply Chain Management." The objective was to fill theoretical gaps by examining real-world practices through multiple case studies. Their findings highlighted the importance of supplier collaboration, employee engagement, and organisational innovation. The researchers concluded that systemic and cultural change is essential for long-term sustainability. Recommendations included the development of inclusive supply chain policies, ongoing training programmes, and the promotion of sustainability champions within organisations.

Research Methodology

Study Area

Bauchi State, located in the North-Eastern region of Nigeria, serves as the study area for this research. The state was created in 1976 and has since grown into a dynamic socio-economic hub in the region. It shares boundaries with seven other states, namely Jigawa and Kano to the northwest, Yobe to the northeast, Gombe to the southeast, Taraba to the south, Plateau to the southwest, and Kaduna to the west. The state capital, also named Bauchi, functions as the administrative and commercial centre of the state. Bauchi State covers a landmass of approximately 49,119 square kilometres, making it one of the largest states in Nigeria in terms of geographical size. The population of Bauchi State, according to the 2006 National Population Census, was over 4.6 million people; however, recent projections estimate the figure to be well over 7 million in 2024 due to natural population growth and rural-urban migration. The state is characterised by a mixture of ethnic groups, including the Hausa, Fulani, Jarawa, Sayawa, and others, with Hausa and Fulfulde being the most widely spoken languages. Islam is the predominant religion, although there are significant Christian and traditional religious communities within the state. The social and cultural fabric of Bauchi is deeply rooted in traditional practices, many of which influence local consumption patterns, environmental behaviour, and food practices

This study adopted a mixed-method research design, integrating quantitative survey methods with qualitative Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to assess the challenges and opportunities of sustainable sourcing in restaurants in Bauchi State, Nigeria. The mixed approach enabled the study to generate empirical evidence from restaurant operators while critically examining sustainability narratives within existing scholarly literature. The population of the study comprised restaurant owners and managers responsible for procurement and operational decisions. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select respondents with direct involvement in sourcing activities. A total of thirty (15) restaurants were

sampled, which was considered adequate for an exploratory sustainability study. Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were obtained through the administration of a structured questionnaire to restaurant operators. The questionnaire consisted of close-ended items measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). The instrument captured information on drivers and barriers to sustainable sourcing, effectiveness of sourcing strategies, and consumer perceptions and willingness to pay for sustainably sourced meals. Secondary data were sourced from peer-reviewed journals, books, policy documents, and industry reports related to sustainable sourcing and restaurant supply chains. These materials formed the basis for the qualitative CDA. The validity of the questionnaire was ensured through careful alignment of items with the study objectives and relevant literature. A pilot test was conducted with selected restaurant operators outside the final sample, and Cronbach's Alpha reliability analysis produced coefficients above the acceptable threshold of 0.70, confirming the instrument's reliability. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically mean scores and standard deviations. A decision mean of 3.00 was adopted, where mean values equal to or above 3.00 indicated acceptance of an item, while values below 3.00 indicated rejection. Qualitative data from secondary sources were analyzed using Critical Discourse Analysis, following Fairclough's framework, to identify dominant sustainability narratives, power relations, and representation gaps.

RESULT

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The demographic data collected include gender, age group, and position held in the restaurant. These variables provide context for understanding the perspectives of respondents. Out of the 71 respondents, 63.4% were male, while 36.6% were female. This distribution suggests that male staff members hold a slightly dominant presence in the sampled restaurant workforce in Bauchi Metropolis. This gender composition may have implications for sustainability training design, especially if gender-based roles influence procurement decisions. The majority of respondents (39.4%) fell within the 26–35 years age bracket, followed by 36–45 years (26.8%). The least represented group was respondents above 55 years (4.2%). This indicates a relatively youthful and active workforce, suggesting a demographic that may be more adaptable to innovation, technology, and sustainability practices if properly sensitized and supported. The distribution shows that Managers (28.2%) and Chefs (25.4%) form the largest proportion of respondents, which is favourable for this study since these roles are often directly involved in sourcing and procurement decisions. Waiters and Supervisors each accounted for around one-quarter of the respondents (25.4% and 21.1%, respectively), whose insights may be more operational but still useful in understanding institutional commitment to sustainability.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

S/N	Demographic Variable	Response Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	**Gender**	Male	45	63.4%
		Female	26	36.6%
2	**Age Group**	18–25	12	16.9%
		26–35	28	39.4%
		36–45	19	26.8%
		46–55	9	12.7%
		Above 55	3	4.2%
3	**Position in the Restaurant**	Manager	20	28.2%
		Supervisor	15	21.1%
		Chef	18	25.4%
		Waiter	18	25.4%

Source: Field survey, 2025.

Table 1: Drivers and Barriers Influencing Sustainable Sourcing Adoption

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation	Decision
Drivers and barriers significantly influence adoption of sustainable sourcing practices.	3.47	0.92	Accepted
Cost and supply chain reliability affect sourcing decisions.	3.66	0.88	Accepted
Staff training and regulatory pressure determine adoption levels.	3.52	0.97	Accepted
Supplier relationships impact sustainable sourcing consistency.	3.60	0.95	Accepted

Source: Filed Survey 2025

Results in Table 1 show that all items were **accepted**, indicating that respondents recognize multiple interrelated factors shaping the adoption of sustainable sourcing practices in restaurants. The statement *"Cost and supply chain reliability affect sourcing decisions"* recorded the highest mean (M = 3.66, SD = 0.88), suggesting that financial constraints and supplier reliability are the strongest

determinants of sourcing behavior. Similarly, *"Supplier relationships impact sustainable sourcing consistency"* (M = 3.60, SD = 0.95) highlights the importance of trust and collaboration with suppliers. Overall, the findings emphasize that both economic and institutional factors strongly influence sustainable sourcing implementation within the restaurant sector in Bauchi State.

Table 2: Effectiveness of Sourcing Strategies in Achieving Sustainability Goals

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation	Decision
Local procurement enhances sustainability outcomes.	3.70	0.89	Accepted
Organic food supplies promote environmental stewardship.	3.65	0.94	Accepted
Fair-trade initiatives strengthen community engagement.	3.58	1.01	Accepted
Sustainable sourcing strategies improve restaurant reputation.	3.68	0.87	Accepted

Source: Filed Survey 2025

Table 2 indicates that all statements were accepted, with high mean scores reflecting strong agreement among respondents. The item *"Local procurement enhances sustainability outcomes"* (M = 3.70, SD = 0.89) ranked highest, confirming that local sourcing is widely viewed as a practical path toward environmental responsibility. Respondents also acknowledged the roles of *organic food supplies* and *fair-trade initiatives* in fostering community development and reputation enhancement. These findings suggest that sustainable sourcing strategies are perceived as both ecologically and socially beneficial for restaurant operations.

Table 3: Consumer Perception and Willingness to Pay a Premium

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation	Decision
Consumers have a positive perception of sustainably sourced meals.	3.56	0.96	Accepted
Customers are willing to pay more for sustainable meals.	3.48	1.04	Accepted
Consumer awareness influences sustainable purchasing behavior.	3.62	0.91	Accepted
Price sensitivity limits market demand for sustainable meals.	3.41	1.08	Accepted

Source: Filed Survey 2025

Table 3 reveals that all consumer-related statements were accepted, confirming that customers generally view sustainable meals positively. The statement *"Consumer awareness influences sustainable purchasing behavior"* (M =

3.62, SD = 0.91) recorded the highest mean, suggesting that education and communication play vital roles in shaping customer choices. However, *"Price sensitivity limits market demand"* (M = 3.41, SD = 1.08) indicates persistent affordability concerns. The findings imply that while public interest in sustainability is rising, effective marketing and value communication are crucial to maintaining customer loyalty and willingness to pay a premium.

Discussion of Results

The findings from this study provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing the adoption of sustainable sourcing practices among restaurants in Bauchi State. Consistent with previous research (Abdou et al., 2023; Gimenez et al., 2012; Palazzo & Vollero, 2021), the results indicate that while awareness and commitment toward sustainability are growing, practical, financial, and institutional challenges still shape adoption outcomes. The results in Table 1 revealed that respondents overwhelmingly acknowledged the influence of multiple interrelated drivers and barriers on the implementation of sustainable sourcing. The highest mean score (M = 3.66, SD = 0.88) for the statement *"Cost and supply chain reliability affect sourcing decisions"* affirms that economic factors remain the most decisive in determining adoption levels. This aligns with findings by Kumar et al. (2012) and Bisschop et al. (2020), who emphasized that the cost of procurement and inconsistent supply chains often deter small and medium restaurants from pursuing sustainability goals. Similarly, the role of supplier relationships (M = 3.60, SD = 0.95) highlights the need for dependable local networks to guarantee product availability, quality, and authenticity. Respondents also cited staff training and regulatory pressures (M = 3.52, SD = 0.97) as significant drivers, implying that institutional support and managerial knowledge are crucial for sustaining such practices. As shown in Table 2, most respondents agreed that strategies such as local procurement, organic food supplies, and fair-trade initiatives effectively promote sustainability in the restaurant sector. The highest mean score (M = 3.70, SD = 0.89) for *"Local procurement enhances sustainability outcomes"* underscores the practical appeal of sourcing locally available ingredients to reduce transportation costs, minimize carbon footprints, and support regional economies. This finding corroborates previous studies (Jones & Comfort, 2020; Hall et al., 2021), which found that local sourcing contributes not only to environmental stewardship but also to community engagement. The overall consensus (Mean ≥ 3.00 across all items) demonstrates that operators perceive sustainable sourcing as an achievable and beneficial strategy when properly planned and supported by supply-chain infrastructure. (Table 3) show a generally positive outlook but also highlight key behavioral constraints. Most respondents believed that consumers perceive sustainably sourced meals favorably (M = 3.56, SD = 0.96) and that awareness significantly influences purchasing decisions (M = 3.62, SD = 0.91). This supports earlier research (Sirieix et al., 2013; Kim & Hall, 2020) suggesting that consumer education and transparency in menu labeling enhance market acceptance. Nevertheless, the relatively moderate score for *"Customers are willing to pay more for sustainable meals"* (M = 3.48, SD = 1.04) and the

acceptance of *"Price sensitivity limits market demand"* (M = 3.41, SD = 1.08) imply that affordability remains a key obstacle. Restaurants, therefore, need to balance pricing strategies with clear communication of value propositions to encourage broader adoption.

Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive and critical analysis of the discourses and operational realities surrounding sustainable sourcing in the restaurant sector. Employing Fairclough's critical discourse analytical framework revealed that dominant narratives in academic literature tend to frame sustainability either as a moral obligation or a business opportunity, with limited representation of marginalized voices such as small-scale operators and frontline supply chain workers (Kumar et al., 2012; Washio et al., 2025). The findings underscore that while sustainable sourcing yields substantial brand and operational benefits over time, its adoption is constrained by systemic barriers including cost volatility, consumer ambivalence, and supply chain fragmentation.A key insight from this research is the existence of a structural imbalance in both scholarly representation and practical implementation. Academic discussions often neglect the voices of smaller enterprises and the nuanced challenges they face, thereby perpetuating a normative model of sustainability that may not be universally applicable. Simultaneously, consumer demand though rhetorically robust does not always translate into tangible financial support for sustainable practices. This misalignment demands a rethinking of how sustainability is operationalised and communicated across the foodservice value chain.

In essence, sustainable sourcing in restaurants is not solely a function of ethical or economic reasoning but a complex interplay of consumer psychology, regulatory evolution, operational strategy, and discursive framing. The study calls for a more inclusive and contextually grounded approach to sustainability one that acknowledges the plurality of stakeholders, adapts to diverse market realities, and leverages storytelling as a bridge between ethical intent and commercial viability.

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed to strengthen sustainable sourcing practices in the restaurant industry. Restaurant operators should improve consumer education and transparency by clearly communicating sourcing choices through simple, narrative-driven menu descriptions. This approach can enhance consumer trust and influence purchasing behavior more effectively than complex certification schemes. A gradual implementation strategy is advised, beginning with easily manageable and high-visibility items such as seasonal produce before expanding to menu redesign and full supply chain innovation. This phased adoption reduces operational risks while advancing sustainability goals.Support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) is essential. Policymakers, NGOs, and industry associations should provide financial, technical, and educational assistance to ensure equitable participation in sustainable sourcing frameworks. Collaborative purchasing models among nearby restaurants can also reduce costs, improve access to sustainable goods, and enhance logistical efficiency. Certification systems should be simplified and adapted to local contexts to make compliance achievable for diverse operators. Finally, academic institutions should expand research on sustainability to include issues of equity, labor, and inclusion, ensuring that future sustainability strategies are both socially just and economically viable. Coordinated efforts across sectors will help institutionalize sustainable sourcing in the restaurant industry.

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