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COVID-19 Recovery Challenges for the Restaurant Industry among other Global Challenges

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Abstract

The available literature on restaurant recovery prospects fails to rise above COVID-19 and also considers the implications of other global challenges for the recovery trajectory of the industry. As a result, the proposed models for the recovery and future resilience of the sector are narrower and, therefore, unsatisfactory. This article explores how global challenges other than COVID-19 present challenges that are slowing down the recovery trajectory of the restaurant industry from COVID-19. Underpinned by critical document analysis, this semi-systematic qualitative study explores the challenges of the global restaurant industry's recovery from the pandemic amidst other global challenges. The study found climate change, increased labour costs, labour shortages, funding and operational costs, the global energy crisis, and political challenges among the problem factors. The study recommends that restaurant businesses seek context-specific recovery and resilience mechanisms for the pandemic and other global challenges because this process has no one-size-fits-all strategy.

Keywords: *Restaurant industry, World economy, COVID-19, Recovery, Resilience*

• Introduction

Global industries' recovery trajectory from the COVID-19 pandemic remains uneven, unpredictable, and uncertain. One of the industries severely affected has been the tourism and hospitality industry (Dube et al., 2021). This industry is highly vulnerable and fragile such that any slight disruption can result in enormous negative impacts. While the COVID-19 pandemic has been a public health issue, it has also produced considerable changes to the world economy, with substantial negative implications for restaurants. Within this broad industry, the current study focuses on the restaurant sub-industry. Studies on this sub-industry are either still evolving or in their embryonic stages. Most of the available studies do not rise above COVID-19 and consider the implications of other global challenges for the recovery trajectory of the industry. As a result, the proposed models of recovery and resilience are narrow and unsatisfactory due to too much focus on COVID-19.

Existing studies include a generic assessment of how COVID-19 crippled the global restaurant and hospitality industry (Dube et al., 2021); an abstraction of the effects of epidemic disease outbreaks on the financial performance of restaurants (Kim et al., 2020); a non-specific evaluation of the challenges of fast-food establishments during a pandemic (Lazaro, 2022); descriptions of the impact of COVID-19 on restaurants (National Restaurant Association, 2020); explorations of the state of the restaurant industry; and also case study-based explorations of the pandemic on the ten largest restaurant companies (Reiff, 2020). Therefore, there have yet to be any specific studies that have broken the crux of COVID-19 and further explored and problematised the existence of a dirty mixture of other factors outside the pandemic that now present challenges to the recovery process.

With COVID-19 infection rates having slowed down (World Health Organisation (WHO), 2022), possibly due to the discovery and vaccine roll-outs, and also with considerable sections of the world population having received at least a single dose (Dzinamarira et al., 2021), studies that provide concrete evidence and pathways through which rapid recovery can be achieved should be pursued. Provoked by this scholarly gap, this article (i) explores the challenges of the global restaurant industry's recovery from the pandemic amidst other global challenges and (ii) proposes additional recovery strategies to those identified in the existing literature. The study has the potential to stimulate further research by scholars, ignite abstraction by policymakers, and provoke action by businesses to break the

COVID-19 veil and problematise the existence of other factors that have now slowed business recuperation rates even though COVID-19 infections have slowed down and the transmission curve has flattened globally (WHO, 2022).

In the following sections, the article first reviews the literature on COVID-19 implications for businesses globally, focusing on the restaurant industry. The materials and methods for the research are then outlined. A presentation and discussion of the results follows this. After that, potential recovery strategies for the restaurant industry are proposed. Lastly, concluding remarks are made.

• Literature Review

The advent of COVID-19 in December 2019 and the subsequent declaration of the virus as a pandemic by the WHO on March 11, 2020, generated substantial socio-economic challenges for humanity and businesses (Kim et al., 2020; Ndhlovu, 2022). No therapeutics existed for the virus then (Ndhlovu, 2020). As a result, the response by countries has been to institute stringent lockdown restrictions on economic activities, movements, gatherings, and mandatory self-isolations and quarantines, among others (Dube et al., 2021; Khambule, 2020). The aim was to control the rate at which the virus would spread (WHO, 2022). Governments' stringent restrictions worldwide disrupted supply and demand within the tourism industry (Dube et al., 2021; Lin & Zhang, 2020; Thulare & Moyo, 2021). The restrictions affected the activities of various businesses in the industry, including accommodation (Sucheran, 2022); transportation and travel services (Bama & Nyikana, 2021); food and beverages; recreation and entertainment (Dube, 2021; Lazaro, 2022); and events and conferences (Dube et al., 2021). The disruption resulted in job layoffs, reduced workdays, company liquidity, and closures (Sucheran, 2022; Thulare & Moyo, 2021).

Acknowledging the pandemic's toll on the industry, several governments adopted and implemented numerous market and fiscal initiatives. In South Africa, the government provided relief funds and wage support to small businesses through the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) (Sucheran, 2022). The government also provided funds to companies (or directly to employees) to pay wages through its Temporary Employer/Employee Relief Scheme facility (Asmal & Rooney, 2021). In the UK and Germany, governments provided relief aid to the TUI Group, a multinational company in the field of tourism, as part of state

interventions, thereby enabling the company to reduce costs in its operations worldwide (Sharma et al., 2021). In New Zealand, the government introduced a worker wage subsidy to businesses, including the tourism industry, to provide stimulus packages to ensure the industry would not collapse completely (Carr, 2020). The restaurant sector is one of the most battered sectors by the pandemic.

The data from OpenTable (2020, 2021, 2022), an online restaurant reservation company that, since February 18, 2020, has been collecting data on the performance of restaurants during the COVID-19 pandemic using online, phone, and walk-in reservations, shows that the pandemic did not spare the industry. Even the most developed countries and countries where the restaurant business is flourishing have suffered. Countries such as Australia, the USA, Canada, Germany, Ireland, Mexico, and the UK, reputable for a flourishing restaurant industry, experienced massive rapid declines as restrictions were rolled out worldwide (Dube et al., 2021). The OpenTable data show that by June 30, 2020, when the global average performance was -62.74%, the UK had already recorded a worrisome -99.34% drop below the global average. Mexico followed this at -87.52%, Australia at -75.10%, and the USA at -62.47% (OpenTable, 2020). While there were moments of recovery at some points, the surfacing of new variants and the renewal of restrictions in response often hampered a quick recovery trajectory. As a result, for the entire 2020, 2021, and part of 2022, the global average remained negative until around March 25, 2022, when it started to record a positivity of 4.60%.

Overall, the OpenTable data show that the restaurant industry has been struggling, operating below the 0% mark since the advent of COVID-19. Most restaurants only began to recover around August 31, 2021, although there remained turbulence in the recovery trajectory (Ndhlovu & Dube, 2023a, b). However, since December 31, 2021, most restaurants have surpassed the 0% mark, which signifies some recovery. April 30, 2022, however, saw renewed rapid declines across countries except Australia, which experienced stagnation (OpenTable, 2020). Therefore, with the discovery of COVID-19 vaccines, the vaccination of the broader public, and the easing of restrictions worldwide, the sudden underperformance since April 30, 2022, could result from factors other than COVID-19.

The restaurant industry is labour-intensive and is, thus, an essential source of socio-economic activities for the majority of people, particularly in developing countries (Lazaro, 2022). Governments cannot, therefore, afford to have the industry collapse. As a result, understanding its challenges and successes is vital for policy planning. All stakeholders must

rise above COVID-19 and problematise other factors that pressure the industry's operations. According to Dube et al. (2021), such an understanding is indispensable for informing and influencing recovery and future planning. As a fragile and highly susceptible industry, the restaurant industry requires considerable intellectual and practical support that can enable it to recover from COVID-19 and be resilient to either existing and/or future disruptions, whether natural or human-made.

The existing debates on the global status of restaurants emphasise the need for resilience and recovery strategies (Sharma et al., 2021; Sucheran, 2022). Resilience and recovery strategies for future challenges, whether pandemics, natural, or human-initiated disasters, such as wars, require a systematic review of the resilience adaptive cycle in tourism. Among other contributions, Lew et al. (2020) posit that an industrial reorganisation predicated on innovation and inventiveness is critical to ensure a resilient and sustainable tourism industry. According to Sharma et al. (2021), four vital transformational elements—sustainable tourism, societal well-being, climate change, and local communities as the centre of transformation—are critical to ensure the tourism industry's resilience and recovery post-COVID-19.

• **Materials and Methods**

This article utilises the critical document analysis approach in which academic documents (journals and books), public documents (government and research policy reports), and personal documents (blogs and newspapers) were studied and interpreted to flag the challenges of restaurants' recovery from COVID-19 amidst other pressing global challenges. The search was done on the Web of Science and Google Scholar, some leading research databases where all critical information is likely to be found. Using keywords such as COVID-19, restaurant resilience, restaurant recovery from COVID-19, and global business challenges, a total of 96 articles were identified. The articles were filtered again to exclude those not written in English, the language in which the article would be written. A total of 16 articles were eliminated using this criterion, leaving 80 articles. The authors searched for key terms in the titles or abstracts of the remaining articles. This resulted in eliminating 47 articles to remain with only 33. The remaining papers were subjected to content analysis—a study of what is contained in a text. Content analysis enabled the authors to inspect what was contained in existing studies as the challenges faced by restaurants. In coding the texts, the authors used latent

content coding and focused on the underlying message communicated by each text. This involved reading all the texts that had been identified and then making sense of them rather than depending on the recurrence of words in the text(s), as in manifest coding. Latent coding was followed by thematic analysis – a method in which key themes are identified from the available data. Five themes were established. The papers identified for analysis were then grouped according to the theme they tended to support most.

Table 1: Themes and papers identified for analysis

| Theme | Author(s) | Paper Type |
|-------------------------------|--|------------|
| Global energy crisis | Odeku (2018) | Academic |
| | Turiel (2022) | Personal |
| | Ozili (2021) | Academic |
| | Mhaka et al. (2020). | Academic |
| | Meidan & Andrews-Speed (2021) | Academic |
| | Fishman (2021) | Personal |
| | Anandan et al. (2022) | Academic |
| Political factors | Ehsas (2022) | Academic |
| | Mhlanga & Ndhlovu (2023) | Academic |
| | Ndhlovu & Dube (2023b) | Academic |
| | Kagan et al. (2022) | Personal |
| | Uwa et al. (2022) | Academic |
| | Sen (2022) | Personal |
| | Tosun & Eshraghi (2022) | Academic |
| Climate change | Grimm et al. (2018). | Personal |
| | Ishak (2021) | Academic |
| | WMO (2022) | Public |
| | Hallegatte et al. (2020) | Person |
| | EM-DAT (2021) | Public |
| | Dube et al. (2020) | Academic |
| | Miranda et al. (2020) | Academic |
| Labour costs and shortages | Smith (2022) | Personal |
| | Eurostat (2022) | Public |
| | Kate (2018) | Personal |
| | Mun & Jang (2018) | Academic |
| | ILO (2022) | Public |
| | Kaya et al. (2015) | Academic |
| | Nga et al. (2021) | Academic |
| Funding and Operational costs | Bhorat et al. (2018). | Academic |
| | Maglakelidze & Erkomaishvili (2021) | Academic |
| | Parsa et al. (2011). | Academic |
| | Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) (2014) | Public |
| | Wheaton & Montazer (2020) | Academic |
| | Khan (2022) | Academic |

Source: Author

Using the researcher's judgment, seven papers were selected for analysis per each identified theme. Thus, a total of 34 papers served as the sources of information in this study. About 21 papers were selected from the Web of Science and 13 from Google Scholar. These articles are listed in Table 1. Complete details are provided in the reference list. The key question to which all the articles were subjected was: What challenges do restaurants face besides COVID-19?

- **Findings and Discussion**

Based on the data sources consulted for the study, this section discusses how the identified factors present challenges for the recovery and resilience of the restaurant industry, which is still recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic.

- ***Global Energy Crisis***

One of the challenges that restaurants face is the global energy shortage (Ozili, 2021; Turiel, 2022). Restaurants use various types of energy to power equipment and facilities to offer patrons maximum comfort (Odeku, 2018). The rising energy prices in recent decades pose an insurmountable challenge for the industry. The rise in energy prices is driven by increasing demand and consumption (see Figure 1). The price of crude oil, which is needed to produce diesel and petrol, for instance, has been rising rapidly, leading to rising costs for sea and land transport (Turiel, 2022). For the first time in three years, the price of Brent oil soared above \$80 a barrel in September 2021, signifying a global demand rising faster than supply.

In Europe, electricity prices increased by over 200% in Spain, with comparable upsurges recorded across the EU (Ozili, 2021). This was attributed to numerous factors, such as low natural gas stockpiles and reduced overseas shipments. In the UK, factors such as Brexit also contributed indirectly to the energy crisis, as it was now difficult for the country to import cheap gas from neighbouring European countries (Turiel, 2022). Thus, power shortages have been to blame since June 30, 2021, although the main culprit could have been COVID-19 (OpenTable, 2022). To reduce the impact of the energy crisis, the UK, Italy, Greece, and Spain, among others, imposed price caps and offered subsidies to energy providers to safeguard citizens and businesses from rising electricity costs as they recovered from COVID-19 impacts (Ozili, 2021). In Asia, where

China and India experienced massive power shortages, the Chinese government responded by rationing power supply to businesses and factories since June 2021 (Meidan & Andrews-Speed, 2021). Over 20 factories and businesses across China witnessed unanticipated incidents of stoppage and slowdown due to loss of power (Fishman, 2021). Restaurants were also disturbed, going for hours without power to resume their activities. The same challenge is experienced in South Africa, where load-shedding has become the norm, and in Zimbabwe, where load-shedding can last up to 12 hours a day (Mhaka et al., 2020).

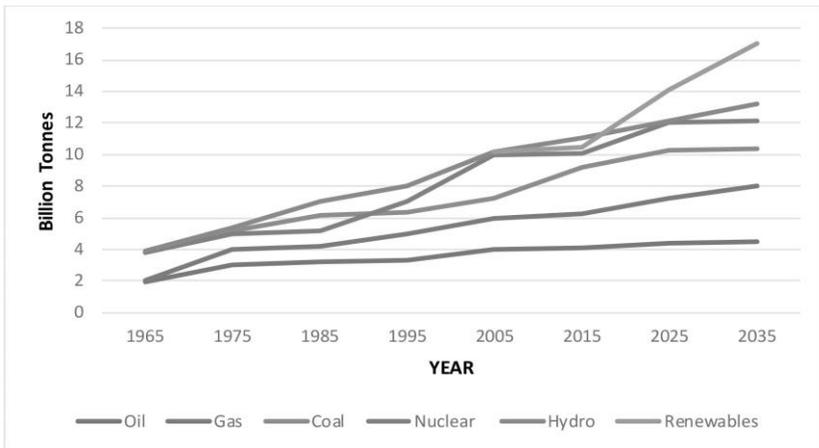


Figure 1: Primary Energy Consumption by Fuel in Billion Tonnes (Tonne of Oil Equivalent)

Source: Author's, Data from Blend Petroleum (2017)

In India, where over 70% of power is generated from burning coal, the government responded by diverting coal away from non-power uses so that coal supply was only available for power (Anandan et al., 2022; Ozili, 2021). Thus, non-power users of coal, including restaurants, were barred from accessing coal energy (Anandan et al., 2022). When demand for cooking gas, petrol, and diesel increased by about 11% in August 2021 (Anandan et al., 2021), Indian restaurants also felt the effects of the rise in the price of global oil products. In the Middle East, the energy crisis hit countries such as Lebanon, with its imported fuel reserves drying up by mid-2021 (Ozili, 2021). This led to load-shedding across the country, with businesses, including restaurants, having to close for certain hours due to a lack of power.

The global energy crisis could result in the closure of many small businesses, including restaurants, because many of them depend on

electricity to do business. In most countries, the government often subsidises the energy used to run small businesses and households, making it affordable for entrepreneurs such as restaurant owners. Nevertheless, protracted power outages can force these businesses to remain closed until power is restored. In an era where businesses are only now recovering from COVID-19, the resulting economic losses of prolonged power outages could be severe for restaurants that operate within slim profit margins.

The potential of a global crisis to trigger inflation and drive commodity prices up was witnessed during the 2007–2008 global financial crisis. The crisis manifested in numerous forms, including high food import bills, food price hikes, and an energy crisis that swept across the US, Western Europe, and some Arab countries (Edelman et al., 2016). It worsened the existing vulnerability of small businesses, including restaurants, which traditionally face inadequate access to financial resources. The rise in inflation in 2008 was particularly related to oil price hikes (Benmelech et al., 2017), as has been the case in 2021 due to supply challenges as the global economy recuperates from COVID-19 (Pettinger, 2021). Thus, the rise in inflation, unless measures are taken to stabilise it, will continue to undercut the efforts by small businesses such as restaurants to recover from the ravages of COVID-19.

- ***Political factors***

Political factors are also one of the significant determinants of businesses worldwide' recovery rate from COVID-19. The Russo-Ukrainian war that broke out on February 24, 2022, provides a good and recent example of how political factors can frustrate business recovery and growth. Since the beginning of the war, commodity prices have surged to historic heights (Ehsas, 2022), thus affecting how restaurants operate and the spending behaviour of patrons who eat in restaurants. With most countries worldwide, particularly in Africa and parts of Asia, depending on both Russia and Ukraine for commodity imports (Kagan et al., 2022), the closure of critical port operations in the Black Sea and the sanctions on Russian products have disrupted supply chains, thereby driving the prices of commodities up. This eventually affects restaurants, which rely on commodities from these two countries to do business. Besides wheat and sunflower, Russia also exports fertilisers, which farmers need to grow the food sold and consumed in restaurants. It is also the world's third-largest oil producer (Ndhlovu & Dube, 2023b). As a result, wheat, sunflower oil,

and fuel prices have been rising due to the disruption in the supply chain of these commodities and the rising cost of fertilisers. This continues to negatively impact the recovery of the restaurant industry from COVID-19.

The Russo-Ukrainian war arrived when the restaurant industry worldwide was gradually recovering from the pandemic, thus destabilising its chances for a leap forward, especially in the face of limited financial support. The disturbance in global supply chains has further convoluted recovery prospects for businesses (Tosun & Eshraghi, 2022). According to Ozili (2022), the Russo-Ukrainian war has only worsened the existing distortions and disruptions to global logistics and supply chains, resulting in additional challenges across the global sea transportation system specifically (Sen, 2022; Uwa et al., 2022). The war has also resulted in high freight costs, which have raised consumer prices and import costs beyond what small businesses like restaurants could bear (Ehsas, 2022). These businesses now bear the brunt of the supply chain disruptions, as they now have to spend more than they can afford on the transportation of commodities (Ndhlovu & Dube, 2023b). Ultimately, restaurants will merely become businesses focused on survival instead of emerging as profitable businesses. Faced with uncertainty regarding the recovery trajectory of restaurants from the pandemic, it is necessary to revise existing survival, resilience, and recovery frameworks in the spirit of inserting new categories of knowledge on how this industry can flourish as a lucrative and prestigious business.

- ***Climate Change***

One of the most significant challenges the restaurant industry faces, detailed in the articles used in this study, is climate change. Santos (2000, p. 66) defines climate change as "...all forms of climatic inconstancy, regardless of its statistical nature or physical causes, and can be analysed at various time and spatial scales." Climate change was reported as disrupting not only restaurant operations (Ishak, 2021) but also the movement of employees (Hallegatte et al., 2020) and products to businesses and customers (Grimm et al., 2018; Hallegatte et al., 2020; Ishak, 2021). In 2014, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report reiterated that climate change was rapidly unfolding and would affect both lives and livelihoods, including business operations. The restaurant industry is affected by extreme weather events, causing power outages, road blockages, and movement disruptions (The Emergency Events Database (EM-DAT), 2021; Grimm et al., 2018; Thulare & Moyo, 2021).

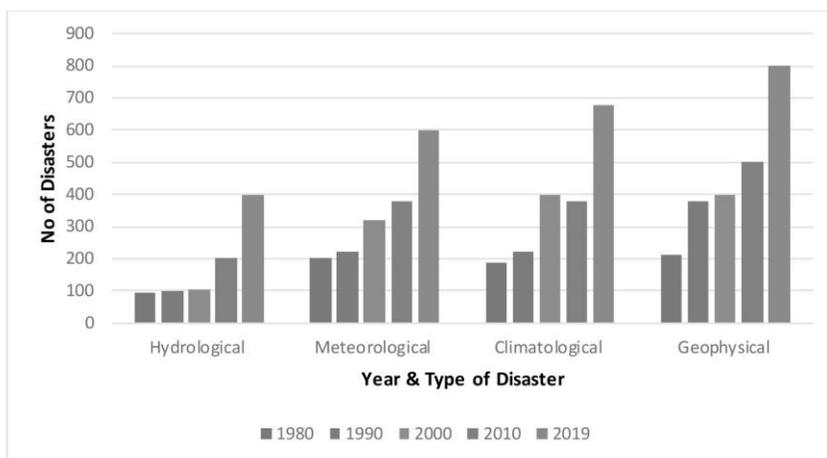


Figure 2: Global State of Natural Disasters

Source: Author's, Data from Statista (2022)

Since the Industrial Revolution in the 18th century, the use of fossil fuels, like coal and petroleum products, has increased (EM-DAT, 2021), thereby altering the composition of the atmosphere and increasing the amount of gases, especially carbon dioxide (World Meteorological Organisation (WMO), 2022). The increasing number of natural disasters has equally matched the increasing global temperature (see Figure 2), which challenges how tourism businesses, including restaurants, operate (Grimm et al., 2018). Figure 2 shows that between 1980 and 2019, geophysical disasters, such as earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and landslides, among others, have been the most prevalent. Climatological, meteorological, and hydrological disasters follow this.

Climate change is associated not only with the loss of biodiversity and an escalation in natural hazards (WMO, 2022) but also with socio-economic impacts as it threatens countries' economic growth and political stability (Grimm et al., 2018). The reality of climate change is that it directly affects the fabric of the restaurant business, namely water access, food, health, and the environment, thus impacting the business's profitability (Hallegatte et al., 2020). As a result, the reviewed articles concur that extreme weather events generate challenges and opportunities for the tourism industry.

Dube et al. (2020) observed that extreme weather events came at a high cost to the tourism industry as they impeded the businesses' ability to expand their corporate social investment and address the challenges of poverty and hunger. Thulare and Moyo (2021) note that climate change

affects social and economic sectors by generating extreme events such as severe droughts, floods, and increased temperatures. As a result, scholars agree that the future of the tourism industry, as a whole, hinges on climate and environmental conditions because they can have a dramatic effect on both the attractiveness and sustainability of climate-sensitive destinations (Hallegatte et al., 2020).

Climate is one factor that determines how people decide on their holiday destinations (Hallegatte et al., 2020). For instance, recurrent incidents of hurricanes and cyclones in the Caribbean, along the coast of South Africa, and also North America, as well as earthquakes and floods in several countries, have impacted the number of tourist arrivals in those areas (Grimm et al., 2018; Thulare & Moyo, 2021). Other devastating events for the tourism sector in recent decades include cyclones in Bangladesh (2009), Zimbabwe (2019), Mozambique (2019), and Madagascar (2019); earthquakes in Nepal (2015) and Ecuador (2016); and a tropical storm in South Africa (2022). These events caused massive destruction of infrastructure and disruption of services. While the industry is a victim of climate change and often struggles to navigate its associated challenges, it is also essential to note its role in accelerating the challenge. In Toronto, Zeuli et al. (2016) found that flood infrastructure failures impacted all food restaurants. Floods also resulted in road closures, thereby disrupting commodity deliveries from suppliers. Kunze (2021) observed that floods affected workers' commutes and prevented some customers from patronising the restaurants globally. In Central America, Miranda et al. (2020) found that storms caused power outages, affecting refrigerators and freezers and resulting in food losses. Berlemann and Wenzel (2018) posit that power outages and communication network disruption failed payment and ordering systems. Zeuli et al. (2018) found that most restaurants in Canada did not have backup generators due to a lack of financial resources or insurance and often struggled to deal with extreme weather events.

Although energy use is not a problem, its source might be detrimental. For example, energy from fossil fuels is harmful as it produces greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change. Restaurants and other tourist businesses often use fossil fuels to generate electricity, power their apparatuses and devices, and emit substantial greenhouse gases, which cause climate change (Miranda et al., 2020). The complexity of restaurants, therefore, lies in how they can continue to operate profitably while also making efforts to move to sustainable renewable energy sources.

- ***Labour Costs and Shortages***

Over the years, tourism has faced global reputational issues concerning its work labour: low salaries and wages, intensive work, instability due to seasonality, no need for a trained workforce to perform specific tasks, and low sectoral digitalisation (Kate, 2018; Mun & Jang, 2018). In addition to adding to the increasing need for staff trained in soft skills for other sectors outside tourism, diminishing attractiveness and lack of qualifications explain the labour challenges in the sector. Increasing labour costs have been one of the challenges the restaurant industry has faced in recent decades (Mun & Jang, 2018). This is supported by the data produced by Grant Thornton and Econometric Research Limited (2016), which observed that between 2013 and 2014, the demand for workers in the British-Columbia tourism industry had already surpassed supply considerably. In the US, Smith (2022) also reported labour shortages in the tourism industry and that increasing labour costs had resulted in labour shortages, thereby eventually negatively impacting the quality of customer service, worker exhaustion, lost proceeds, missed business opportunities, increased business costs, increased overtime, and reduced business hours of operation (Kate, 2018; Mun & Jang, 2018). With the COVID-19 effects still being experienced, labour costs and shortages represent one key factor that could frustrate the rapid recovery agenda of the restaurant industry since many restaurants could not afford to hire additional and more experienced labour.

The challenge of rising labour costs has been building up steadily. For instance, Eurostat (2022) found that in Europe and in the Eurozone (which is one of the most affluent regions in the world), labour costs have been rising since 2012 with only brief moments of recovery (Figure 3). While a significant drop was once experienced in the second quarter of 2016, rapid and turbulent labour costs for wage and salary increases resumed in the third quarter of the same year. In 2022, hourly labour costs reached 3.8% in the Eurozone and 4.2% in Europe in the year's first quarter, compared to 2021. When COVID-19 struck in 2019, labour costs and shortages were already challenging in Europe, especially in the tourism industry (ILO, 2022).

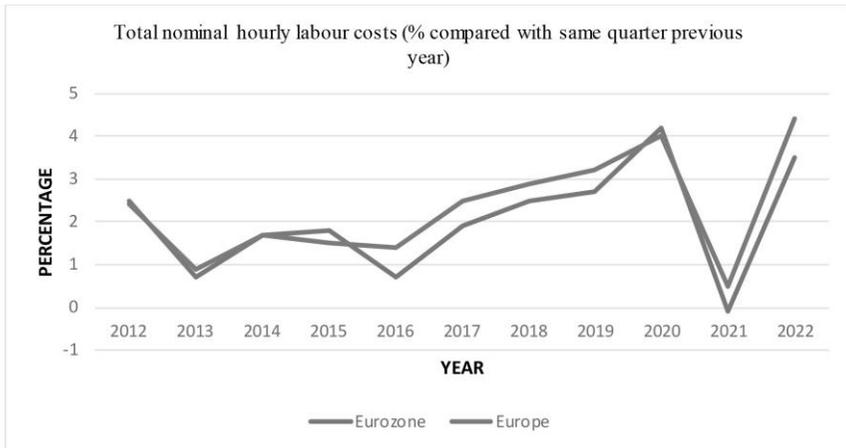


Figure 3: Labour costs status in Europe and the Eurozone

Source: Author's, Data from Eurostat

In the USA, labour costs for civilian workers jumped to 4% in 2020 as companies tried to lure workers into a highly competitive market (Smith, 2022). Businesses in the services industry experienced the highest increases, with total payments rising by 7.1%. In contrast, the service businesses, such as restaurants, experienced an 8% increase as most workers switched to or left for other sectors (Smith, 2022). This heightened the competition to attract new talent and retain workers (International Labour Office, 2022).

In Malaysia, the restaurant sector has been rapidly losing skilled and experienced staff (Nga et al., 2021). Kaya et al. (2015) observed a relatively high restaurant staff turnover rate between 40 and 49% in the US. Mun and Jang (2018) report that most restaurants experienced product inconsistency and deteriorating service quality due to labour shortages.

When a worker leaves a company, the company also bears some labour costs in replacing the worker. Nga et al. (2021) report that the turnover cost for a restaurant with 30 workers is about \$18,200. Thus, with considerable numbers of workers switching sectors towards the more lucrative ones (Smith, 2022), the survival woes of the restaurant industry in the post-pandemic period could be worsened by increasing labour costs (ILO, 2022). Furthermore, due to high labour costs, Kaya (2015) found that some restaurants settle for untrained and readily available staff. For businesses to flourish, there is a crucial need for a well-trained and well-qualified workforce. To achieve good customer perception, restaurants need workers who perform various duties, including advertising, preparing, and serving food, with professionalism. A well-trained and well-qualified

workforce will help the business realise its goals and make profits. With such a workforce, businesses can adapt easily and in a timely manner to challenges, including pandemics and natural disasters. In order to avoid labour costs, a considerable shortage of marketing skills within the restaurant industry has been observed (Nga et al., 2021). The lack of adequately skilled staff could also slow restaurants' recovery rate.

In the post-COVID-19 period, when all businesses are planning for recovery, the advertising challenges for restaurants will be more daunting and costly. The restaurant industry competes with other businesses that provide food and beverages. These include hotels and other food outlets, both public and private. Thus, in the post-COVID-19 period, such competition could increase, exerting additional labour and operational costs. Advertising generates restaurant sales (Mun & Jang, 2018). However, even before the pandemic, a lack of adequate advertising had already been identified as negatively affecting the intangible value of restaurants, such as profitability and financial power (ILO, 2022). Restaurants face challenges in making attractive and consistent advertisements due to lacking trained personnel and funding (Mun & Jang, 2018). Altogether, labour costs result in labour shortages as these restaurants avoid a trained workforce, which they consider costly for their meagre profits. As a result, restaurants will likely struggle to bounce back after the COVID-19 pandemic due to a lack of adequate funding and adequately trained personnel that can positively respond to the various challenges spewed by the market.

- ***Funding and Escalating Operational Costs***

Financial issues are the biggest challenge for most independent restaurants, and they could slow or even hold back recovery from COVID-19. This has been an ongoing challenge (Bhorat et al., 2018). The reviewed articles reveal that lack of adequate funds constrains most independent restaurants from accessing the best infrastructure needed to perform at their maximum (Khan, 2022; Wheaton & Montazer, 2020). For instance, Parsa et al. (2011) observed that between 25% and 49% of restaurants in the USA failed in their first year of operation because of financial challenges. In South Africa, Bhorat et al. (2018) observed that approximately 40% of new business ventures, including restaurants, failed within their first year, about 60% in their second year, and 90% in their first 10 years due to financial challenges. A report by the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) (2014) also revealed that insufficient funds and poor profitability were the critical causes of failure by small businesses, including restaurants, in South

Africa. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2020a) found that high prime costs (food and energy costs and salary expenses) were responsible for lower profitability in full-service restaurant businesses. As a result, low profitability and poor cash management often led restaurants to dilute their initial concepts to meet the basic needs of survival rather than profitability (Bhorat et al., 2018; Wheaton & Montazer, 2020). Maglakelidze and Erkomaishvili (2021) found that the financial and operational challenges that restaurants faced principally resulted from the nature of their business, such as low entry barriers (e.g., a small start-up capital), high operational expenses (e.g., food costs, labour costs, and rent expenses), and the existence of numerous substitutions in the market.

It is also observed that in most countries, small businesses, such as restaurants, did not have adequate opportunities to approach financial sector institutions for funding (Maglakelidze & Erkomaishvili, 2021). Most of these financial institutions remain very conformist and traditional. They are only ready and happy to assist small businesses with funding in the later stages when the prospect of success is certain. As a result, restaurants are unlikely to find funding from banks. This could be worse in the post-COVID-19 period when even financial institutions were also affected by the pandemic and are now likely to be stricter about whom they lend money to (Wheaton & Montazer, 2020). Where this obtains, the recovery rate of restaurants will be slow, thereby continuing to negatively impact the vast majority of people who work in the industry.

- **Prospects for Resilience and Recovery**

While national and international efforts are underway to deal with the various global challenges flagged above, the restaurant industry, like other industries, needs to put in place some mechanisms by which they can both recover from COVID-19 and be resilient, both now and in the future. There is no one-size-fits-all strategy by which restaurants can speed up their recovery rate or design their resilience potential. Therefore, with the support of both the state and interested private actors, businesses in the industry should invest in research and development efforts that can unravel context-specific recovery and resilience mechanisms for the pandemic and other global challenges. This is because, while generic response mechanisms exist, they do not guarantee effective solutions. After all, they do not speak to the context of business situations.

In responding to extreme weather events and challenges spewed by climate change, such as floods, landslides, and other extreme events that disrupt the transportation and movement of food, employees, and even potential patrons, restaurants must make informed choices in choosing their locations. While coastal areas and riversides provide a lucrative location, flooding incidents are high (Khambule, 2020), thereby heavily impacting businesses, especially independent restaurants, which lack adequate resources, most of which are without insurance (Ishak et al., 2021). In addition, local and national governments must address business exposures through infrastructural and strengthening development as a key disaster risk mitigation response for reducing the disruption of activities by extreme weather events.

Furthermore, restaurants can also help deal with climate change weather events by adopting tools from the fourth industrial revolution (4IR), which include artificial intelligence, robotics technology, and 3D printing based on the Internet of Things. These tools have been observed to wield the potential to reduce food waste, increase energy and water use efficiency, facilitate a circular model, and reduce travel and transport (Pressa et al., 2022). Therefore, these tools can substantially impact the efficient use of these restaurants in the restaurant sector.

The 4IR tools, although costly for small businesses such as restaurants, can also be deployed to deal with labour costs and shortage challenges in the sector. Although it might be expensive to install, in the long term, using 4IR tools is cost-effective and efficient. However, this requires restaurants to be able to attract and retain the best workforce that can operate these smart tools.

Restaurants also face funding and operational cost challenges. To grapple with these challenges, restaurants could engage in joint ventures and business partnerships. This will enable them to acquire additional funds, resources, and expertise that can be used to recover from COVID-19 challenges and deal with other global challenges. In engaging in joint ventures and partnerships, caution is, however, needed to monitor the opportunistic inclinations of private capital, which often seek to participate in partnerships on unequal terms to benefit more than the other party.

Regarding the energy crisis, restaurants can install solar systems and generators during power outages. Solar energy has become one of the most affordable energy sources and is easy to harness using panels. It is also widely recommended for its capacity to contribute to climate change mitigation efforts. While it is also vital that restaurants have generators that they can place on standby to respond to power outages, the equipment is

criticised for producing carbon monoxide, which contributes to global warming.

Political factors affect businesses, including restaurants that utilise commodities imported from both countries. Price shocks and supply chain disruptions often ensure this, as has been the case with the Russo-Ukrainian war (Kagan et al., 2022). To deal with the challenge, the restaurant industry could engage in collective innovativeness, combining resources and skills to buy in bulk and, thus, receive huge discounts. They can also engage in contract farming partnerships with local farmers to avoid or minimise dependence on imported food products. Contract farming is when farmers and buyers agree on producing and marketing particular products (Mujere, 2021). In this partnership, the farmer agrees to provide a particular product to a buyer while the buyer commits to buying the products. Issues of quality, quantity, delivery dates, and prices make up the centre of contract farming.

• Conclusion

This study explored the challenges of the global restaurant industry's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic amidst other global challenges. The study identified some global challenges that could negatively impact the restaurant industry's recovery rate from the COVID-19 disruption. These challenges include climate change, increased labour costs, labour shortages, funding and operational costs, the global energy crisis, and political challenges. It concludes that restaurants must deal with these global challenges while battling to recover from the pandemic. The study proposed several potential resilience and recovery pathways. However, it is recommended that restaurant businesses seek context-specific recovery and resilience mechanisms for both the pandemic and other global challenges because there is no one-size-fits-all strategy for this process.

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