

Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on the Food Service Establishments in Sorsogon City

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Abstract— This study determined the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the food service establishments in Sorsogon City in terms of products and services, supplies, manpower and revenue. It also includes the common problems encountered by the food service establishments regarding production, service delivery, marketing, staffing and workforce and safety measures implementation. The coping mechanisms employed by the food service establishments and the business activities that the food service establishments will give importance to, in the post pandemic period, were also tackled.

The sample size consisted of 30 food service establishment owners/ managers in Sorsogon City whose establishment started operating for at least a year prior to the pandemic. Descriptive research design was used. Results revealed that the pandemic has impacted the food service establishments both positively and negatively based on different factors. Coping mechanisms have been implemented to solve the problems encountered. The management of the food service establishments will give importance to various marketing strategies in preparation for the post-pandemic period.

The researcher recommends that the food service establishments management's efforts be focused on dealing with the negative impacts brought about by the pandemic and partnerships and collaboration with other food service establishments, government agencies and non-government agencies be formed. New marketing strategies and business activities focusing on creating and implementing standard operating procedures anchored on safety, hygiene and sanitation be prioritized and the proposed action plan focusing on recovery activities of the food service establishments be adapted and implemented.

Keywords— COVID-pandemic, impact, food service establishments, recovery strategies.

I. INTRODUCTION

As people queue up in fast-food center, cafeterias, school canteens, restaurants or even in small eateries, one would think that food or eating is considered as the all-time favorite pastime. The food service industry, as this organized venture has come to be known, is more than a pastime though. It has become a flourishing business, catering to millions of people all over the world every day. The food service industry includes all of the services, activities and business functions involved in preparing, handling and serving of food to people eating away from home. All types of restaurants, from fine dining to fast food establishments, institutional food operations, catering businesses are included in this industry. 1

The main contributors to the food service industry's growth include busy and increased mobile life, socio-economic conditions, such as high disposable income, rise in outsourcing of non-core activities by companies and market expansion into new areas such as transport and retail. Other factors such as tourism, immigration, food variety, access to food service places and

technological advancements contribute to its growth as well.

The Food Service Industry had an estimated global market worth \$3 Trillion USD in year 2020. The global food service market size is estimated to reach \$4.1 Trillion USD by the year 2026 growing at a compound annual growth rate of 5.4% over the analysis period. Making up more than 4% of the world's gross domestic product, the industry is a major contributor to economic development worldwide. Across all continents, food service establishments are part of the daily lives of billions of customers as a place for them to get food or simply spend some quality time with their friends and family.2

Food service is a booming industry in the Philippines. Its market is highly driven by the rise in value-conscious consumers willing to try new restaurants with a wide range of menu options, as well as interesting international and local cuisines, which also cater to increasingly busy lifestyles. According to the data published by the United Nations, the average age of the

population in the Philippines in 2015 was 24.1 years, and in 2020, it was expected to be 25.2 years.³ The majority of its population includes millennials and they are known to be the biggest spenders. In relation to this, most food service players focus on attracting this consumer group in the country.

The food service industry in the Philippines has continued to improve over the past years because of the stronger consumers' purchasing power that has also been influenced by today's fast-paced lifestyle due to the growing urbanization across the country, that pushed them to buy cooked foods or simply dine out. Furthermore, those who are residing or working in key cities are also facing a worsening traffic and transportation issues which resulted to the growth of home delivery or takeaway outlets. Food service establishments are increasing their network to cater to more Filipinos who demand for more convenience.

Sorsogon City, a city in the southernmost province in Luzon has a profitable food service industry as well, where dining at budget restaurants is considered as a family-bonding activity or a time for celebration for Sorsogonans. These establishments are located anywhere in the city but most of which can be found in the downtown area and Rompeolas Baywalk. Various food service establishments keep on emerging as a result of the increasing demands from locals and tourists. However, this sector suffered immensely due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The food service establishments in Sorsogon City were majorly hit by the strict lockdown measures introduced nationwide, to limit the spread of the novel coronavirus. The pandemic not only changed the dining habits of Sorsogonans but affected the revenue and sales of food service sector immensely. Prolonged lockdowns and hesitations in dining outside the home by consumers were among the significant challenges food service establishments had to face during the pandemic. Unfortunately, this led to an unprecedented shutdown of several food establishments in the city and declining on-premises sales for those that remained in business.

To cope and to offset losses, food establishments were forced to innovate to continue serving their customers. Some full-service restaurants started offering takeaway options and devised ready-to-cook or ready-to-eat meals that their customers can enjoy in the comfort of their homes. Limited-service establishments or fast-food chains continued maximizing delivery, pick-up, and

drive-thru services, which allowed them to have better sales performance than the other segments.

With the global health crisis experienced, the researcher who is a Hospitality Management instructor, observed the need to conduct a research related to food and beverage since these are our major physiological needs, a huge contributor to our economy and a sector in the hospitality industry. This study determined the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on the food service establishments in Sorsogon City in terms of various variables and the common problems they encounter in time of pandemic to come up with ways that may help alleviate the situation.

Statement of the Problem

The study determined the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on the food service establishments in Sorsogon City. Specifically, it answered the following sub-problems:

1. What is the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on the food service establishments of Sorsogon City in terms of:
 - products and services
 - supplies
 - manpower
 - revenue
2. What are the common problems encountered by the food service establishment owners and managers in time of pandemic in terms of:
 - production
 - service delivery
 - marketing
 - staffing and workforce
 - safety measures implementation
3. What are the coping mechanisms employed by the food service establishments amidst the pandemic?
4. What are the business activities that the food service establishments will give importance to, once the pandemic is contained or has ended?
5. What activities and course of action may be proposed to survive in the food service industry?

II. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study determined the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the food service establishments in Sorsogon City as assessed by the food service establishment owners/ managers in terms of various variables, the common problems they encounter in the

operation of business in time of pandemic and their coping mechanisms and strategies.

The research method utilized in this study was descriptive survey. It was utilized to gather the needed data through survey questionnaire and unstructured interview. The gathered data were analyzed and interpreted using appropriate statistical tools.

The Respondents

Purposive sampling was employed by the researcher in choosing the respondents. This method of sampling is a non-probability sampling wherein samples are selected based on the characteristics of a population and objective of the study.

The respondents of this study were thirty (30) food service establishment owners/managers in Sorsogon City whose establishment started operating for at least a year prior to the pandemic. Distribution of the respondents per category is shown in Table 1.

Research Instrument and Sources of Data

The main instrument that was used in this study was a survey questionnaire prepared by the researcher. It also included a cover letter to provide information to the respondents regarding the research problem and the objectives of the study as well as the significance of its results.

The questionnaire made use of a checklist and was composed of seven questions. The first question identified the type of the food service establishment. The second question identified the food service establishments' length of operation before the pandemic. The third question sought information about the impacts of Covid-19 pandemic that were felt or noticed on the food service establishments by the owners/managers as to products and services, supplies, manpower and revenue.

The fourth question included the common challenges affecting the food service establishments in the time of pandemic as to production, service delivery, marketing, staffing and workforce and safety measures implementation.

The respondents were asked to rank them, 4 as the most serious and 1 as the least serious. The fifth question determined the coping mechanisms and strategic actions employed by the management in the food service industry amidst the pandemic. The sixth question

identified the expected time frame that the establishments need to recover and recoup any losses after the pandemic has ended or has been contained. The seventh question sought information about the business strategic activities that the respondents will give importance to, once the pandemic is contained or has ended. The responses followed the scale: not important, slightly important, moderately important, important and very important.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher conducted the survey in Sorsogon City. The researcher followed the appropriate procedures in gathering the data. A letter was given to the food service establishments owners/managers to request for their help and support in answering the survey questionnaire to let the researcher gather the needed data and information for her study.

The researcher also explained the details and objectives of the study to the respondents prior to the distribution of the questionnaires for clarity and better understanding of the contents.

Enough time were provided to the respondents in answering the questionnaire. An unstructured interview was also done to support the reliability of the responses. This was conducted from August 10, 2022 to September 04, 2022. The researcher was able to retrieve 94% of the survey questionnaire on September 07, 2022. The gathered data were tabulated and tallied for its analysis and interpretation.

Statistical Treatment of Data

The collected data were tallied, analyzed and interpreted with the use of appropriate statistical measures such as frequency, ranking and weighted mean.

To identify the number of respondents based on the food service establishment that they manage, the length of operation of their business before the pandemic, the coping mechanisms being employed to survive in the food service industry and the time frame to recover and recoup any losses after the pandemic has ended, frequency count and weighted mean were utilized.

To determine the impacts of Covid-19, the challenges affecting the food service establishments in time of pandemic and the business strategic activities that the management will give importance to, once the pandemic is contained or has ended, ranking and frequency count were used.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on the Food Service Establishments

TABLE 1.1
IMPACT OF COVID 19 PANDEMIC ON THE FOOD SERVICE ESTABLISHMENTS IN TERMS OF PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

IMPACTS	FREQUENCY	RANK
Product display counter and storage area have been subjected to constant hygiene and sanitation check.	23	1
Variety of products and service offerings have been reduced.	16	2.5
Products are mostly availed by the customers through pick-up and delivery.	16	2.5
Products and services offered by the establishment turned to be unsellable.	15	4
Products and services offered have been offered in reduced prices.	14	5

As shown in Table 1.1, the most common impact of Covid-19 pandemic on the food service establishments in Sorsogon City is that the product display counter and storage area have been subjected to constant hygiene and sanitation check. It got a frequency count of 23. It was followed by products are mostly availed by the customers through pick-up and delivery and variety of products and service offerings have been reduced, both got the same frequency count of 16.

The results implied by Table 1.1 is supported by the Memorandum Circular No. 2020 -004 issued by the Department of Tourism or the Guidelines Governing the Operations of DOT-Accredited Restaurants. According to Section 8, the restaurant proprietor must ensure cleanliness within all its premises. The guidelines also contain a comprehensive list of food safety and conduct standards, and disinfection and sanitation protocols for different areas, furniture, wares, and surfaces within the restaurant, which employees are expected to follow. The

maximum customer capacity was also reduced to 50 percent of the restaurant's seating or venue capacity to observe proper social distancing while dining. This resulted to reduction of the variety products and service offerings of the establishments since the demand lessen.

As shown in Table 1.2, Covid-19 has also impacted the food service establishments in terms of supplies. The impact- essential kitchen supplies have been frequently sanitized ranked 1st, it got a frequency count of 29. This result implied that majority of the establishments adhere to the safety protocols and guidelines given by the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF), Department of Health (DOH) and Department of Tourism (DOT) about strictly implementing good sanitation and hygienic practice to avoid SARS-CoV-2 transmission and comply with at least the minimum requirements of the food safety system.

TABLE 1.2
IMPACT OF COVID 19 PANDEMIC ON THE FOOD SERVICE ESTABLISHMENTS IN TERMS OF SUPPLIES

IMPACTS	FREQUENCY	RANK
Essential kitchen supplies have been frequently sanitized.	29	1
Raw materials and ingredients of food products have been scarce.	12	2
Procurement of supplies to sustain operation has been costly.	9	3
Limited access to basic supplies.	7	4
Basic food supply chains relative to food service establishments have been disrupted.	5	5

The impact raw materials and ingredients of food products have been scarce ranked 2nd, it got a frequency count of 12. The result shows that the pandemic caused shortage of raw materials and scarcity in food ingredients. These were caused by the movement restrictions of workers, closure of food production facilities, restricted food trade policies, financial pressures in food supply chain, freight problems or the significant difficulties in sea and land transport for the supplies to be delivered.

Food processors and slaughterhouses which are crucial to the food supply chain, were greatly affected by the pandemic. These facilities put workers at higher risk of contracting coronavirus due to shoulder-to-shoulder, indoor working conditions.

The managements of this plants attempted to reduce the added risk to workers by assigning workers to groups, implementing social distancing whenever possible, quarantining work groups infected with the coronavirus, and temporarily closing plants if an outbreak occurred.

In the United States of America, many food processing facilities and plants were forced to shut down because the preventative measures failed and outbreaks among workers became widespread (Birch and Tyler 2020).⁴ Quarantining large portions of the labor force had sizable implications and revealed vulnerabilities in the food supply chain. In addition to sudden shift in demand from food service to retail, the closures of slaughterhouses and processing facilities created further setbacks and obstacles for livestock farmers, leading to culling of hogs and chickens which resulted to meat shortage.

Meanwhile, in the Philippines many farmers and fisherfolk had reported struggles in securing inputs owing to the closure of agro-trading shops. The closure of banks and non-operation of financing agencies also affected some farmers and fisherfolk. Across the supply chain, workers have had a hard time reporting to the place of work as they adhere to local government unit (LGU)-level quarantine regulations partnered with the suspension of public transport. This scenario played a huge impact in the scarcity of raw material ingredients.

TABLE 1.3
IMPACT OF COVID 19 PANDEMIC ON THE FOOD SERVICE ESTABLISHMENTS IN TERMS OF MANPOWER

IMPACTS	FREQUENCY	RANK
Adoption of alternative work arrangement and job rotation/ enlargement/ multi-tasking.	24	1
The development of fear among employees to be contaminated by the virus.	22	2.5
Manpower mobility has been restricted.	22	2.5
Manpower requirement of the establishment has been reduced.	16	4.5
Job losses to some employees/ staff.	16	4.5

Table 1.3 shows that the pandemic has a huge impact on the manpower of the establishments. The impact-adoption of alternative work arrangement, job rotation, job enlargement and multi-tasking got the 1st rank since it got a frequency count of 24 among the 30 respondents. This implies that the pandemic resulted to major adjustments and additional workloads. Most of these tasks are related to the mitigation of the spread of Covid-19 by means of cleaning thoroughly and sanitizing the facilities and the supplies and equipment being used in the business operation. The employees also adopted alternative work arrangement.

The impact- manpower mobility has also been restricted and the development of fear among employees

to be contaminated by the virus ranked 2.5th since both got a frequency count of 22. These imply that the continues lockdowns and travel restrictions have affected the mobility of the staff and employees of the food service establishments in Sorsogon City. Some employees also chose not to report to work because of the fear of catching the virus, considering that the food service industry employees are prone to health risks because of its constant exposure to customers, whether it be for dine-in or take out services. The damage to the food service industry in the Philippines caused by this pandemic is immense that's why there were also some establishments which laid off employees to save costs. Such actions resulted to job enlargements to those employees who stayed.

A report given by Nika Lazo and Bruce Rodriguez from ABS-CBN News in December 2020 states that around 10.9 million Filipino workers lost their jobs and had lower incomes and working hours as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic's negative impact to our economy.

High-risk sectors with most displacements include manufacturing, transportation and storage, accommodation and food service activities, as well as arts, entertainment, and recreation.

TABLE 1.4

IMPACT OF COVID 19 PANDEMIC ON THE FOOD SERVICE ESTABLISHMENTS IN TERMS OF REVENUE

IMPACTS	FREQUENCY	RANK
Reduced earnings/ profits on the part of the establishment.	29	1
Partial payments to the supplies purchased.	4	2
Unpaid rentals and utilities.	3	3
Underpaid employees.	0	-
Failure to pay taxes due.	0	-

As shown in Table 1.4, the results implied that 29 out of 30 respondents experienced reduced earnings or profits on the part of the establishment which also led to two other negative impacts- partial payments of the supplies purchased which got the 2nd rank with a frequency of 4 and unpaid and late payments of rentals and utilities which got the 3rd rank with a frequency of 3. Despite the increase in pick-up and delivery orders, it still cannot compensate the revenue loss brought about by the limited dining capacity of the establishment.

The food service industry contributed to the creation of wealth and employment until the end of 2019, when it reached maximum values. However, with the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, this sector suffered a very serious economic and employment crisis. The global

crisis caused by COVID-19 in 2020 seriously damaged the profitability of restaurants and other foodservice establishments, increased their indebtedness, and put several jobs at risk. The food service industry is labor-intensive with a lot of small companies. They are known to operate in a constantly competitive environment and are easily sensitive to crises.

The Department of Trade and Industries (DTI) reported that 26% of businesses were forced to stop operating due to bankruptcy, low number of customers, lack of means, and the likes. The year 2020 recorded the largest decline of sales of major food service establishments nationwide, dropping to only 1 Billion USD which pales in comparison to the combined sales back in 2019, which totaled up to 2.55 Billion USD. 6

Problems Encountered by the Food Service Establishments in time of Pandemic

TABLE 2.1

PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED BY THE FOOD SERVICE ESTABLISHMENT OWNERS AND MANAGERS IN TIME OF PANDEMIC IN TERMS OF PRODUCTION

PROBLEMS	SUM OF RANK	FINAL RANK
Difficulty in food handling/ preparation.	87	1
Higher cost of raw ingredients.	83	2
Limited supplies of raw ingredients.	66	3
Spoilage of prepared food products.	65	4

Based from the data shown in Table 2.1, The 1st major problem that the food service establishments have experienced is difficulty in food handling and menu preparation in time of pandemic which got 87 sum of

rank. Hand washing has always been a strict standard to meet and achieve food safety compliance, but it doubled when the pandemic started. Kitchen staff were obliged to wear proper protective equipment (PPEs). Some staff

said that they're uncomfortable to wear and sometimes suffocating since it's usually hot inside the kitchen.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, disposable face masks have also been widely used, especially in the foodservice industry. They do not offer protection from inhaling particles and pathogens, but they act as a protective barrier to stop large droplets from entering or exiting through the nose and mouth. Some businesses rearranged their workstations and put floor markings to comply with the IATF guidelines which required a heightened hygiene process.

The 2nd major problem encountered by the food service establishments in terms of production are higher cost of raw ingredients and their limited supplies as well which got a sum of rank of 83. These results are supported by the Law of Supply and Demand, a theory of Alfred Marshall (1890).⁷ According to his theory, prices are determined by the relationship between supply and demand. If the supply of a good or service outstrips the demand for it, prices will fall. If demand exceeds supply, prices will rise. There's a scarce and limited supplies of some raw materials and ingredients needed by the food service establishments and the demands are also high which led to their higher costs as well.

TABLE 2.2

PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED BY THE FOOD SERVICE ESTABLISHMENT OWNERS AND MANAGERS IN TIME OF PANDEMIC IN TERMS OF SERVICE DELIVERY

PROBLEMS	SUM OF RANK	FINAL RANK
Dealing with hard to please customers who availed take away orders and food delivery services.	97	1
Absence of service delivery teams.	82	2
Poor internet connectivity which is necessary for remote orders of products and services.	76	3
Failure to fetch the ordered products by the customers.	42	4

As shown on Table 2.2, the main problem encountered by the food service establishment owners and managers in terms of service delivery is dealing with hard to please customers who availed take away orders and food delivery services which got a sum of rank of 97. Some customers often complain about the late time of delivery. The management responded that it usually happens during rush hours or during days with special occasions or holidays wherein bulk orders are expected.

Even before the pandemic, there are already cases of customer's complaint, the number just doubles in time of pandemic because of various reasons.

There were reported manifestations of distress, anxiety, depression, and insomnia in general populations (Salari, 2020).⁸ The coronavirus pandemic changed every aspect of our life and disrupted many of our everyday tasks and not everyone is ready to process these uncomfortable feelings, so they may rely on defense mechanisms. In this case, displacement may be responsible for some of the outbursts that we're seeing from customers. Displacement is a psychological defense mechanism wherein a person redirects a negative emotion from its original source, in this case

it's the Covid-19 pandemic, to a less threatening recipient like the food service staff.

Another problem encountered by food service establishment owners and managers in terms of service delivery is the absence of service delivery teams which ranked 2nd and got a sum of rank of 82.

Delivery drivers and riders have emerged as front-line workers, akin to doctors and nurses. Their services have sustained businesses like in the food service industry while allowing people to self-isolate at home and lower the general risk of exposure to the virus.

Yet, the health and safety concerns of delivery workers themselves have received little consideration and support (Ortiz-Prado et al., 2021).⁹ On the contrary, their work conditions have deteriorated substantially, with workloads increasing, and pay remaining stable or declining.

Some were also exposed to the virus and needed to stay at home for a while. These are some of the reasons for the absence of service delivery teams specifically in the first two quarters of 2020.

TABLE 2.3

PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED BY THE FOOD SERVICE ESTABLISHMENT OWNERS AND MANAGERS IN TIME OF PANDEMIC IN TERMS OF MARKETING

PROBLEMS	SUM OF RANK	FINAL RANK
Improving sales.	93	1
Difficulty in transitioning to online marketing due to poor internet connection or limited access to technology.	80	2
Forced to give discounts on menu items.	64	3
Expensive marketing promotions.	63	4

Table 2.3 shows that the main problem encountered by the food service establishments' management in terms of marketing is improving sales which got a sum of rank of 93. It has been greatly affected by the continuous lockdowns, travel bans, border closure and limited dining capacity as per Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) guidelines. Before the pandemic, some establishments also offer parties and gatherings and catering services which has a huge contribution in terms of sales, but it lessened because of the ban for unessential mass gatherings such as parties and reunions specifically in areas under Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ).

The food service industry in the Philippines, statistically, has an estimated sales of USD14.9 billion reported in 2019 (Fairlie, 2020). It shows that the food industry specifically restaurant businesses specifically play a vital part in the thriving economy. But from being a busy place where people dine, meet, and celebrate, restaurants became quiet places because of the effects brought by the Covid-19 pandemic. In the food industry, the restaurant business is one of the sectors that were heavily affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic has affected its operations with the protocols, which then affected its profitability.

TABLE 2.4

PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED BY THE FOOD SERVICE ESTABLISHMENT OWNERS AND MANAGERS IN TIME OF PANDEMIC IN TERMS OF STAFFING AND WORKFORCE

PROBLEMS	SUM OF RANK	FINAL RANK
Limited number of employees.	99	1
Employees' exposure to Covid-19.	95	2
Additional workload related to combating the spread of the virus in the workplace.	58	3
Refusal of staff to report to work due to fear of Covid-19 virus.	46	4

Another problem encountered by food service establishments is difficulty in transitioning to online marketing due to poor internet connection or limited access to technology which ranked 2nd and a frequency count of 80. Before the pandemic, business environment in the Philippines, as pointed out earlier, has been accustomed mostly to cash-centric transactions and brick-and-mortar stores. The COVID-19 pandemic has pushed existing businesses towards digital operations (Phillipneris,2021).¹¹ However, another problem encountered mostly by small local food service establishments in Sorsogon City is the difficulty in transitioning to online marketing since it is very different from how they operate the business before the pandemic. It is also caused by poor internet connection and limited access to technology. They also find it challenging since this transition also requires capital in

terms of the device or gadgets to be used and training for the staff or person who would operate it.

As shown in table 2.4, it can be observed that the 1st major problem encountered by the food service establishment owners and managers in time of pandemic in terms of staffing and workforce is the limited number of employees which got a sum of rank of 99. It has been followed by employees' exposure to Covid-19 which got a sum of rank of 95.

The pandemic has been a challenging time for the entire food service industry. It has affected many, most especially the staff who were laid off brought about by Covid-19. The global pandemic have cost the food service industry 5.9 million jobs for the first half of the year 2020. Reducing the number of employees affects

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the day-to-day operation of the business since it resulted to job enlargement to the remaining employees.

Another common problem encountered by the food service managers and owners in time of pandemic in terms of staffing and workforce is employees' exposure to Covid-19. Some respondents shared that during the

time when one of their employees tested positive in Covid, they were forced to close their business for a week since majority of their staff were quarantined because they were primary contacts of the employee. Another respondent also shared that their sale lessens when a rumor has spread out that one of their employees got infected by Covid-19.

TABLE 2.5
PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED BY THE FOOD SERVICE ESTABLISHMENT OWNERS AND MANAGERS IN TIME OF PANDEMIC IN TERMS OF SAFETY MEASURES IMPLEMENTATION

PROBLEMS	SUM OF RANK	FINAL RANK
Contact tracing is considered as a tedious process.	91	1
Difficulty in profiling of guests (filling up health declaration form).	90	2
Purchasing costly hygiene and essential kits.	60	3
Sanitation of the establishment facilities is found to be tiresome.	59	4

It can be observed from the results shown in Table 2.5 that the main problem encountered by the food service establishment management in terms of safety measures implementation is contact tracing which got a sum of rank of 91. Majority of the respondents find it tiresome and would require a particular staff to check the logbook entries once in a while, especially those small establishments that does not have their own security guards, since some customers does not put complete information, some penmanship aren't readable and some write incorrect information. Another major problem encountered is the difficulty in profiling guests or customers which is also connected to contact tracing process.

Contact tracing is the process of collecting information regarding individuals to stop the spread of disease by contacting exposed parties. In food service industry, this has amounted to taking customer's name, address and phone number so that they can be notified and informed of proper quarantine procedures in the event of an exposure.

Another problem encountered by the food service establishments in terms of safety measures implementation is the difficulty in profiling of guests which ranked 2nd and got a frequency count of 90. In the ongoing effort to improve safety during the pandemic, contact tracing has emerged as a mandatory policy in many communities. Many establishments have been forced to attempt to collect information from their customers and guests. But like any similar measure, such practices received mixed responses. Some view it as an invasion of privacy since it requires data collection, while others are thankful for the steps being taken to better their safety.

Coping Mechanisms Employed by the Food Service Establishment Owners to Sustain the Business Operation Amidst the Pandemic.

Table 3.1 shows the different coping mechanisms employed by the food service establishment owners to sustain the business operation amidst the pandemic. Providing take-out and delivery options ranked 1st with a frequency of 30.

COPING MECHANISMS EMPLOYED BY THE FOOD SERVICE ESTABLISHMENTS

COPING MECHANISMS	FREQUENCY	RANK
Providing take-out and delivery options.	30	1
Offering promos.	28	2
Accepting online orders and transactions.	27	3
Limited business operations.	17	4
Laying off employees and maximizing performance of retained employees.	12	5
Temporary or momentary closure of the establishment.	6	6
Products and services price reduction.	3	7

It became more convenient to the customers to just order the food for take-out than risk their health for dine-in option or just have their foods delivered just by using their smartphones since over the past year, the popularity of online food delivery (OFD) has been on the rise worldwide which is an innovative way which enables the costumers to purchase a wide range of food selection via different platforms. This also opens up new opportunity for food service establishments to reach new market while increasing their revenues and consumers the convenience of having food delivered to their home.

There is indeed a bright future for the online food delivery. Its global market size was valued at USD 221.65 billion in the year 2022 and is expected to expand at a compound annual growth rate of 10.3% for 7 years from 2023 to 2030. The growth is mainly driven by the rising internet penetration coupled with the proliferation of smartphones, growing technology advancement (Grand View Research, 2022).¹² This has also opened a new business opportunity for food delivery service providers in Sorsogon City such as FoodPanda, Toktok Delivery and Pasabuy which can be accessed using smartphones or computers. They just

charge a minimal service charge and you'll get your ordered food right at your doorstep, hassle free.

The 2nd major coping mechanism employed by the food service establishments in Sorsogon City is offering promos, which got a frequency count of 28. A sales promotion is a marketing strategy wherein a business will use short-term campaigns to spark interest and create demand for a product, service or other offers. For food establishments, the common promos offered are discounts, buy one take one options, loyalty cards, pay it forward campaign and a lot more.

On the second quarter of 2021, majority of the food service establishments started offering discounts and promos to their vaccinated customers. They can avail it by just presenting their vaccination cards before paying their bill. This marketing strategy has also helped encourage the Sorsogonans to get vaccinated against Covid-19. Other coping mechanisms and strategies adapted by these establishments include: accepting online orders and transactions, limited business operations, laying off employees and maximizing the performance of the retained employees, temporary closure of the establishment and products and services price reduction.

Business Activities that the Food Service Establishments will give importance to, once the pandemic is contained or has ended.

TABLE 4.1

BUSINESS ACTIVITIES THAT THE FOOD SERVICE ESTABLISHMENTS WILL GIVE IMPORTANCE TO, ONCE THE PANDEMIC IS CONTAINED OR HAS ENDED

STRATEGIC ACTIVITIES	WEIGHTED MEAN	INTERPRETATION
Creating standard operating procedures anchored on safety, hygiene and sanitation.	4.93	Very Important
Winning back foot and dine-in traffic with promotions.	4.83	Very Important
Continuing to streamline takeout and delivery options.	4.63	Very Important
Continuing social distancing by updating Front of House floor plans and layouts.	4.63	Very Important
Digitalizing services through the use of technology.	4.56	Very Important
Hiring & employee retention.	3.66	Important

Presented in Table 4.1 are the food service establishments' business strategic activities that they will give importance to, once the pandemic is contained or has ended. It is interpreted from the table above that almost all of the respondents' main priority is to create standard operating procedures anchored on safety, hygiene and sanitation which got a weighted mean of 4.93 and interpreted as very important.

Standard operating procedures or commonly known as SOPs, provide the policies, processes and standards needed for the organization to succeed. It is beneficial for the business because it reduces manpower errors, increase efficiencies and profitability, creates a safe work environment and also include guidelines for how to resolve issues and overcome obstacles.

Another priority of the food service establishments in Sorsogon City is to win back foot and dine-in traffic with promotions which got a weighted mean of 4.83, interpreted as very important. Executing the right marketing strategy is a must in order encourage the customers to engage in dine-in experience which will help to boost sales and recoup from the businesses' financial losses brought about by the pandemic since on-premise dining sales are the considered to be the bread and butter of most food service establishments and it's important for the management to ensure that their dine-in business remains a strong income source, even though delivery orders soar. Dine-in visits tend to account for the most positive customer experiences because the establishment is able to provide the highest level of service, food, and atmosphere. Unlike delivery or takeout orders, owners and managers are able to address any negative issues that arise during a customer's meal in real time. Not only that, it's easier to boost margins through upsells when patrons dine in.

Continuing to streamline takeout and delivery options will also be given priority which got a weighted mean of 4.63, interpreted as very important.

The internet and technological advancements are having a great impact on food service operations. With most people spending a big part of their day on the internet, it provides a huge market potential for food service establishments and the demand for online food ordering continues to grow among consumers.

Food delivery services also has many advantages which include: increased check sizes since restaurants see a 20% increase in check sizes from online and delivery orders versus dine-in orders alone (Keeble, 2020). It also offer more business opportunities because sometimes customers want their food paired with the comfort of their own home.

Delivery can also help in reaching new customers outside of the regulars, locals, and other customers from surrounding neighborhoods. Plus, it's even more important in urban locations, where potential customers may not have access to a car or vehicle.

Proposed Action Plan for the Recovery of the Food Service Establishments in Sorsogon City from the Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic

The proposed measure served as the output of the study which contained the Key Result Area (KRA),

activities/strategies, person involved, time frame, resources needed and expected output outlined in matrix form shown in Table 5.

Rationale

Food Service Industry plays an important part in the community as it provides one of the basic physiological need of a person which is food. It also serves as a major contributor in the economic success of a certain place provides a lot of job opportunities. This industry includes restaurants, cafes, bars, bistro, eateries etc.

Sorsogon City has a lot to offer in terms of food service establishments which offer variety of options for different target markets and age groups.

This industry was booming and progressing with the patronage of the people in the locality and by the tourist who visit the city not until the first and second quarter of 2020 happened, when we were the height of the pandemic.

This health crisis has also caused an economic crisis because of the lockdowns and IATF safety protocols. Some food service establishments have ceased to operate while the others struggled to survive even the key players in the food service industry.

According to the World Health Organization, the end of the covid pandemic is already in sight, but the damage that it has done to the food service industry still needs a lot of time to heal. It is very evident that Sorsogon City has also suffered damages from this pandemic which greatly affected its way of operation and delivery of food services.

To address these challenges, five aspects have been identified that is in need of careful strategic planning and action: production, service delivery, marketing, staffing and workforce, and safety measures implementation.

Prioritizing these aspects will help in the fast recovery of the food service establishments and recoupment of losses.

Objectives

1. To help the food service establishments recover from the aftermath of the pandemic.
2. To strengthen and promote the products and services offered by the food service establishments in Sorsogon City.
3. To ensure that safety measures are implemented while conducting this course of action.

TABLE 5
PROPOSED ACTION PLAN

KRA (KEY RESULTS AREA)	OBJECTIVES	ACTIVITIES/ STRATEGIES	PEOPLE/ AGENCIES INVOLVED	TIME FRAME	RESOURCE NEEDED	BUDGETARY REQUIREMENTS	EXPECTED OUTPUTS
PRODUCTION	<p>To meet the demands of customers.</p> <p>To create an affordable product.</p> <p>To use low cost materials but with quality.</p>	<p>Coordinate with local producers/suppliers</p> <p>Conduct research and surveys of in demand products.</p> <p>Create or build garden facility.</p>	<p>Staff</p> <p>FSE Management</p> <p>Department of Trade and Industry (DTI)</p> <p>Department of Agriculture (DA)</p> <p>Local Government Unit(LGU)</p> <p>Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR)</p> <p>Customers/Consumers</p>	3 months	<p>Fuel or Gasoline for vehicles</p> <p>Printers, Bond paper, Inks, and other research materials to be used.</p> <p>Farming tools and Equipment, seedlings</p>	Php. 100,000.00	<p>Have contract with local producers or suppliers</p> <p>Find out what products should be in the market</p> <p>Harvest goods and raw materials</p>
SERVICE DELIVERY	<p>To provide food service delivery the fastest possible time and convenience to customers</p> <p>To lessen fuel consumption</p>	<p>Checking, repairing, and inspecting of service delivery vehicles</p> <p>Use bikes as service delivery vehicles for short range distances</p> <p>Have partnership with other service delivery company</p>	<p>Customers</p> <p>Food staff</p> <p>Delivery crew</p> <p>Department of Transportation(DOT)</p> <p>Mechanics and technicians</p>	2 months	Mechanics supplies, tools, equipment	Php 50,000.00	<p>Fixed vehicles with no fuel leaking issues and less fuel consumption</p> <p>Monthly reports of the establishment fuel consumption</p> <p>Have signed contracts with partnered services delivery company</p>
MARKETING	<p>To generate reasonable profit and target sales within the given time frame</p> <p>To introduce products in the market</p>	<p>Create accounts in social media platforms for advertisement</p> <p>Create posters, fliers, promotional videos, brochures Having negotiation with local radio stations to</p>	<p>Customers</p> <p>Social Media Users</p> <p>Communication Advertisements Staff</p> <p>Committee on Design and Layout</p>	1 month	<p>Video making tools and equipment</p> <p>Computers, printers, and bond paper</p> <p>Marketing tools</p>	Php 10,000.00	<p>Introduce business' product and to be famous</p> <p>Achieved target sales and must meet the expected profit</p>
	and to the public.	<p>introduce products</p> <p>Create short clips videos about the products and post them on social media platforms</p>	<p>Marketing department</p> <p>Department of Trade and Industry</p> <p>Social media platforms</p>				
STAFFING AND WORKFORCE	<p>To employ and hire efficient and competent staff</p> <p>To ensure productive service and output of the staff</p>	<p>Seminar and/or training</p> <p>Team building activities</p> <p>Conduct regular meetings</p> <p>Weekly reporting</p> <p>Assessment</p> <p>Having additional benefits to the staff</p>	<p>Human Resource Department</p> <p>Applicants</p> <p>Staff</p>	1 week	<p>Funds on seminar and training</p> <p>Expenses in team building activities</p> <p>Printers, ink, markers</p>	Php. 50,000.00	Produce well trained, productive, and competent staff

SAFETY MEASURES IMPLEMENTATION	To ensure the safety of customers and staff	Installation of CCTV cameras	National Disaster Risk Reduction Management Council (NDRRMC)	1 month	Cleaning materials	Php \$0,000.00	Clean, safe and comfortable environment for all Having costumers' trust and loyalty
	To maintain cleanliness and sanitation	Daily removal of waste or garbage	Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP)		Computer		
	To strengthen and tighten security	Daily inspection, maintenance specially cleaning and sanitizing floors, equipment, etc.	Department of Health (DOH)		CCTV camera		
	Installation of fire emergency tools and equipment	World Health Organization (WHO)	Fire emergency tools and equipment				
	Putting up Signage, warning, reminders, and Do's and Don'ts	Staff Customers	Maintenance Department				

IV. FINDINGS

Based from the data gathered and unstructured interview, the following findings were revealed:

1. The impact of Covid-19 pandemic on the food service establishments of Sorsogon City in terms of:

1.1 In Products and Services

The impact - product display counter and storage area have been subjected to constant hygiene and sanitation check ranked 1st. It got a frequency count of 23 out of the 30 chosen respondents. These are followed by the impacts- products and services offered have been offered in reduced prices and products are mostly availed by the costumers through pick-up and delivery. Both got a frequency count of 16.

1.2 Supplies

The impact- essential kitchen supplies have been frequently sanitized ranked 1st since it got a frequency count of 29. The impact -raw materials and ingredients have been scarce ranked 2nd since it got a frequency count of 12. Procurement of supplies to sustain operation ranked 3rd with a frequency count of 9.

1.3 Manpower

The impact- the staff have adopted alternative work arrangement and job rotation got the first rank, it got 24 frequency count. The impacts manpower mobility has been restricted and the development of fear among employees ranked next and both got the same frequency count of 22.

It's followed by the impacts- manpower requirement of the establishment has been reduced and job losses to some employees/ staff which has the same frequency count of 16.

1.4 Revenue

The impact- reduced earnings and profits on the part of the establishment ranked 1st as responded by 29 food service establishment owners/ managers. It's followed by the impact- partial payments to the supplies purchased, it got a frequency count of 4. Unpaid rentals and utilities ranked 3rd and got a frequency count of 3.

2. The common problems encountered by the food service establishments in time of pandemic in terms of:

2.1 Production

Ranked 1st is the impact- majority of the food service establishments have difficulty in food handling and preparation which got 87 sum of rank. Higher cost of raw ingredients ranked 2nd since it got a sum of rank of 83.

2.2. Service Delivery

The major problem encountered by the food service establishments in terms of service delivery is - dealing with hard to please customers who availed take away orders and food delivery services. It ranked 1st and got a sum of rank of 97. Another problem encountered is the absence of service delivery team. It ranked 2nd and got a sum of rank of 82.

2.3 Marketing

As to marketing, the major problem encountered by food service establishments is improving their sales. It ranked 1st and got a sum of rank of 93. Second in rank is the difficulty in transitioning to online marketing due to poor internet connection or limited access to technology. It got a sum of rank of 80.

2.4 Staffing and Workforce

In terms of problems encountered in staffing and workforce, the limited number of employees ranked first. It got a 99 sum of rank. It's followed by some

employees' exposure to Covid-19 which got a 95 sum of rank.

2.5. Safety Measures Implementation

The major problems by the food service establishment's owners and managers in time of pandemic in terms of safety measures implementation are contact tracing, which ranked 1st and got sum of rank of 91; followed by difficulty in profiling of guests in filling up health declaration form which ranked 2nd and got sum of rank of 90.

3. Coping mechanisms are employed by the food service establishments in order to keep the business operational despite the economic and health crisis. Ranked 1st providing take-out and delivery options; followed by offering promos which ranked 2nd. It also includes accepting online orders and transactions which ranked 3rd and limited business operations, ranked 4th.

4. Once the pandemic is contained or has ended, the major business activity that the food service establishments will give importance to is to create standard operating procedures anchored on safety, hygiene and sanitation. It got a weighted mean of 4.93 which is interpreted as very important. Another top priority is to win back foot and dine-in traffic with promotions which got a weighted mean of 4.83, interpreted as very important. It's followed by -continue to streamline takeout and delivery options with a weighted mean of 4.63, continue social distancing by updating front of house floor plans and layouts with a weighted mean of 4.63 as well and digitalize services through the use of technology, which are all interpreted as very important.

5. An action plan was proposed focusing on recovery strategies of the food service establishments in terms of production, service delivery, marketing, staffing and workforce and safety measures implementation.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

- 1 The common problems encountered by the food service establishment owners and managers in the operation of their business in time of pandemic are related to production, service delivery, marketing, staffing and workforce and safety measures implementation.
- 2 Coping mechanisms have been implemented by the management of the food service establishments to solve the problems encountered.
- 3 The management of the food service establishments will give importance to various marketing strategies

once the pandemic is contained or has ended in preparation for the post-pandemic period.

- 4 An action plan was proposed to help further lessen the negative impact of Covid-19 pandemic on the food service establishments.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of the study, the following are recommended:

1. The food service establishments management's efforts be focused on dealing with the negative impacts of Covid 19 pandemic specifically about dealing with scarce ingredients and costly supplies and issues about manpower.
2. Partnerships and collaboration with the other food service establishments, government agencies and non-government agencies be formed and forged.
3. New marketing strategies be created and implemented by the management of food service establishments specifically in the post pandemic period.
4. Strategic actions focusing on creating and implementing standard operating procedures anchored on safety, hygiene and sanitation be the top priority of the food service establishments.
5. The proposed action plan focusing on recovery activities of the food service establishments in Sorsogon City be adapted and implemented.

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