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ANTI-CRISIS DESIGN FOR OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT OF THE RESTAURANT BUSINESS IN UKRAINE

The object of this research is the impact of the crisis caused by military actions in Ukraine on the restaurant business. The study aims to examine the adaptation strategies that restaurants use for survival and development in the face of sudden economic changes and increasing uncertainty. The problems addressed in the study include responding to the loss of customers, rising food prices, decreasing cash flows, and a shortage of qualified workers.

The main findings of the study showed that restaurants that successfully adapt implement comprehensive changes: from digitalizing ordering and delivery processes to revising menus and optimizing resource use. These steps not only reduce costs but also improve operational efficiency, which is crucial for maintaining customer loyalty and attracting new customers. Specifically, restaurants that invested in digitalization (e. g., electronic menus, online ordering, and inventory management systems) reported a 30–40 % increase in sales compared to those that did not implement such changes. Restaurants that implemented strategies for staff retention and cost optimization reduced staff turnover by 25 % and increased productivity by 20 %.

The results are explained by the implementation of innovative approaches and strategic rethinking of business models, which allow quick responses to changing market conditions and consumer needs. Effective use of digital technologies and optimization of internal processes have become key success factors.

The data obtained have significant theoretical and practical value, as they can be used to develop recommendations aimed at improving the resilience and adaptability of the hospitality industry in crisis conditions. These results help understand how managers can use strategic planning to optimize business processes and ensure enterprise stability. The importance of the research is also highlighted by identifying future research directions that can help the restaurant business more effectively adapt to changing market conditions and global crises.

Keywords: restaurant business, crisis management, digital innovations, business process optimization, effective communications, efficiency management, business model flexibility.

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1. Introduction

The restaurant business in Ukraine is experiencing new, untested challenges due to the long military crisis that began in 2022. This situation imposes unique conditions on restaurant management, requiring profound changes in strategies and approaches to work.

The restaurant business, which always requires significant efforts due to intense competition, great dependence on external conditions and the need for active management involvement, faces complex challenges. The industry has recently been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, and is now facing new challenges related to the military conflict in Ukraine, exacerbating the need for adaptation and innovative change.

The relevance of the scientific study of the restaurant business in Ukraine during the military conflict is particularly important for several reasons:

1. *Uncertainty in conflict conditions:* The restaurant business as a sector that is significantly affected by socio-economic

changes, in particular military conflicts, requires special attention. The war in Ukraine is affecting supply chains, consumer behavior, investment climates, and overall economic stability. Examining these aspects can help understand how businesses can adapt and survive in a crisis.

2. *Application of innovations:* War stimulates innovative approaches in business, in particular in the restaurant business. Researching the possibilities of introducing new technologies, adapting services, and developing new business models are critical to understanding how businesses can not only survive, but also thrive during and after a crisis.

3. *Implications for management practice:* The findings of the study have practical implications for restaurant business managers, helping them to formulate strategies that take into account the risks and opportunities associated with military conflicts. In particular, this applies to cost optimization, diversification of supply, development of crisis communication strategies, and personnel management in conditions of uncertainty.

This study fills a gap in the literature by offering an in-depth analysis of the impact of military action on one of the key sectors of the economy, and reveals how business can adapt to extreme conditions, with both theoretical and practical implications.

Scientific literature devoted to the restaurant business in conditions of political conflicts, wars and other crises reveals that such events radically change not only the economic environment, but also business strategies [1]. Research in the field of hospitality shows that enterprises that quickly adapt to the changed market environment, using flexible approaches and innovative technologies, have a better chance of survival [2, 3]. These studies emphasize the importance of a deep understanding of local conditions and cultural characteristics in shaping successful strategies.

According to the literature review, the implementation of digital tools and online food ordering platforms is becoming a critical success factor, allowing restaurants to stay in touch with customers and optimize costs during the constraints caused by crises [4–6].

It is observed that restaurants that actively implement socially responsible practices, for example, supporting local producers or working for the benefit of the community, gain higher customer loyalty and improve their competitive positions [7, 8].

These and other scientific works highlight the need for further research on the impact of protracted military conflicts on restaurant business models, in particular, how they can effectively adapt to ongoing uncertainty and resume their operations after the end of conflicts [9–11].

The purpose of the research is focused on studying the impact of the military conflict on the restaurant business in Ukraine and analyzing innovative strategies that can contribute to the adaptation and survival of restaurants in these conditions. The scientific part of the research is focused on the development and implementation of management models that will help improve the operational efficiency and sustainability of restaurants. The practical part is aimed at developing recommendations for restaurants that will allow them to optimize costs, improve service quality and strengthen respect among customers and ensure stable income in conditions of uncertainty.

Such an approach will allow not only to better understand the specifics of the restaurant business in Ukraine during military operations, but also to develop effective strategies for its support and development in the future.

2. Materials and Methods

This study focuses on the restaurant business in Ukraine during the military conflict that began in 2022. It includes an analysis of the adaptation of restaurant business models to the conditions of war, including the study of their survival strategies and innovative approaches to crisis management.

The study is based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods that allow for an in-depth analysis of the interaction between various variables and their impact on the restaurant business in wartime.

Data collection was carried out with the help of surveys among owners and managers of restaurants throughout Ukraine. The survey was conducted online using the Google Forms platform, which made it possible to quickly collect a large amount of data from different regions of the country.

In-depth interviews were conducted with several key informants with significant experience in the restaurant industry. The interviews helped to gain a detailed understanding of internal processes, crisis adaptation strategies, and the impact of military operations on operational activities.

The research includes the application of systems theory, business process modeling and risk analysis. These methods make it possible to determine the key factors that affect the efficiency of the restaurant business in the conditions of war.

3. Results and Discussion

In times of crisis, the restaurant business faces complex challenges, including the loss of customers, rising product prices, reduced cash flow, staff shortages, and changes in partnerships, accompanied by increasing stress and uncertainty. Many restaurants are responding to this by cutting operating costs:

- reduce the number of employees;
- strengthen control over costs of ingredients and waste;
- optimize the menu, removing expensive dishes or dishes that are difficult to deliver;
- reduce energy costs by replacing lighting devices and optimizing refrigeration spaces.

Experienced restaurateurs use strategic management by analyzing changes in behavior and the needs of their remaining customers. They are adapting their marketing strategies, rethinking their offerings and marketing tools to meet the new reality of the crisis, including building new customer bases and lowering prices.

Personalization of appeals to different customer segments:

1. *Loyal customers*: Effectively use personalized messages through contacts and mobile applications, informing about updates and special offers.

2. *Former customers*: This segment includes customers who switched to competitors or started cooking at home due to the pandemic. Using loyal prices and simple dishes can attract them back.

3. *Potential customers*: The growth of the crisis opens opportunities to attract new customers, especially among those who are not used to independent cooking.

Cooperation with third parties: In a difficult environment, many restaurateurs turn to cooperation with e-commerce platforms, logistics companies and banks to improve the sustainability and efficiency of their operations. This includes the use of QR codes for contactless menu browsing, customer loyalty platforms, and improved service levels.

Trends and strategies for the future: Trends such as increased food delivery, digitalization of processes and menu optimization are expected to remain relevant in the future. Restaurants seeking to survive and thrive in the new environment must integrate these trends into their strategy to meet changing consumer needs and optimize their resources.

This updated and expanded section will help to analyze and uncover the essence of current trends and strategies in the restaurant business, especially in the context of crisis conditions.

On the basis of a survey conducted among restaurateurs of Ukraine, it is possible to identify critical aspects affecting their activities in crisis periods. Important positive points are the flexibility of business models and innovation in the use of technology for customer service. However, dependence on external supplies and high sensitivity to changes in consumer attitudes remain weaknesses.

Based on the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the survey, it is possible to develop a SWOT analysis of the restaurant business in a time of crisis (in the conditions of war 2022–2024), Table 1.

Table 1

SWOT analysis of the restaurant business in Ukraine 2022–2024

Strengths	Weaknesses
Adaptation to online services, increased efficiency, use of local products	High dependence on imported products, shortage of qualified personnel due to emigration
Opportunities	Threats
Market expansion through online platforms, partnerships with local manufacturers, innovative delivery methods	Political instability, economic recession, changes in legislation

The obtained data show that despite the great challenges, some restaurants have adapted to the new conditions, integrating innovative technologies and optimizing their menus. Reducing the cost of imported products and switching to digital platforms for ordering and delivering food allowed them not only to survive in crisis periods, but also to increase customer loyalty.

Based on the results of the SWOT analysis, it is possible to recommend restaurants:

1. Focus on developing and implementing flexible business models that can quickly adapt to changing conditions.
2. Intensify the use of local products to reduce dependence on imports.
3. Expand the use of digital technologies for ordering and delivery, which will increase the availability of services and expand the customer base.
4. Improve staff qualifications and create motivational programs to reduce staff turnover.

Given the relevance and necessity of restaurant business adaptation to crisis conditions, this study focuses on the importance of business process efficiency, which becomes critical during crises. Significant improvements in efficiency not only allow businesses to survive during crises, but also to thrive when the odds seem to be going against them.

In the context of the crisis, the restaurant business in Ukraine faced significant challenges, such as a decrease in the number of customers, an increase in product prices, a decrease in cash flows, and a shortage of qualified personnel. The conducted research confirms that restaurants that quickly adapted, focusing on optimizing operations and introducing new technologies, were able not only to survive, but also to expand their activities.

According to the analysis, restaurants that invested in digitization (electronic menus, online ordering and inventory management systems) saw a 30–40 % increase in sales compared to those that did not implement such changes.

Restaurants that implemented staff retention and cost optimization strategies (for example, switching to flexible work schedules and paying wages for actual time worked) reduced staff turnover by 25 % and increased productivity by 20 %.

The study of restaurant operations revealed that immediately after the crisis, many managers are in a hurry to reduce costs, which often leads to a reduction in staff and a deterioration in the quality of service. However, experience shows that maintaining quality and investing in the development of business processes can ensure not

only survival, but also development. In particular, saving on product quality can negatively affect the long-term perspective of the brand. Actions such as the introduction of a performance-based pay system or assessing the importance of each employee individually can help increase efficiency without sacrificing quality.

Modern technologies provide restaurants with opportunities to optimize many processes. Investments in digitalization, such as the implementation of order management systems, electronic menus, platforms for maintaining customer loyalty and delivery services, significantly increase productivity and allow more flexible response to changes in consumer requirements and market conditions.

The influence of martial law. The situation with martial law in Ukraine significantly complicated business conditions, but it also showed that restaurants that quickly adapted to new conditions (for example, by switching to delivery or changing the assortment) could not only survive, but also increase their market share. Responding to dynamic changes in consumer preferences helps maintain a high level of service and customer satisfaction, even in the most difficult periods.

Practical significance of the research. The obtained results have important practical implications for the restaurant business, as they demonstrate how adaptation to changing conditions and the introduction of innovations can contribute not only to survival during a crisis, but also to achieving sustainability and development. Investments in technology and human capital development are key factors that allow to remain competitive and respond to rapidly changing market needs. According to the research, restaurants that actively applied technological innovations and maintained a high level of service quality could not only retain their customers, but also attract new ones, even in difficult conditions.

Limitations of research. The study had several limitations, including the difficulty of assessing the long-term impact of pandemic measures and martial law on consumer behavior. Also, data collection was carried out in conditions where many restaurants were closed or operated in a limited mode, which could affect the objectivity and completeness of the obtained results.

Prospects for further research. Future research could be aimed at analyzing the impact of post-crisis recovery on the restaurant business and examining long-term trends in consumer behavior. It is also important to examine the effectiveness of various crisis recovery strategies, including technological innovation and human resource management techniques.

These research findings will help restaurateurs and business analysts understand how to adapt to changing market conditions, use innovation to improve efficiency and ensure high levels of customer satisfaction. According to the results of the study, active implementation of changes and optimization of business processes can significantly increase the efficiency of the restaurant business even in times of crisis. It has been found that companies that focus on improving the quality of their services and maintain investments in the development of their operations and personnel achieve better financial results. At the same time, special attention is paid to such aspects as ensuring the unchanged quality of products and services, even when costs are reduced.

The integration of digital technologies is also becoming relevant, which allows not only to optimize internal processes, but also to better respond to the changing demands

of consumers. The positive impact of automation on the ability to quickly adapt to crisis changes in the market environment was noted, in particular due to the ability to quickly reorient the assortment and services in accordance with current market needs.

In terms of practical significance, the results of this study can serve as a basis for strategic management planning in the restaurant business, helping managers to identify critical areas for investment and development. This study also points to the importance of preparing for potential crises, particularly through the creation of flexible operational models that can quickly adapt to changing conditions.

These findings will become the basis for further research in this field and will help form strategies that will allow the restaurant business to adapt more effectively to changes in the market environment and global crises.

4. Conclusions

Research has confirmed that restaurants that have invested in digitalization and strategic planning have achieved significant cost reductions and increased efficiency, leading to increased customer loyalty and market share. Implementation of flexible business models, optimization of internal processes and use of local products were especially important.

The results can be explained by appropriate response to crisis challenges through innovation and adaptation to new market realities. Digitization helped to compensate for the decrease in physical visits to institutions, and the focus on quality and flexibility of operational management contributed to maintaining a high level of customer satisfaction.

Theoretically, the results emphasize the importance of innovation and strategic management in the survival and development of the restaurant business in crisis conditions. Practically, they provide restaurateurs with recommendations on optimizing business models, effective use of technology, and resource management to maximize profits and attract customers.

Restaurants that have integrated digital solutions have seen increased sales compared to those that have not implemented such changes. In addition, restaurants that have implemented retention strategies have reduced attrition and increased productivity.

These findings can serve as a basis for further strategic decisions in the restaurant business, helping to adapt to changing market conditions and use the crisis as an opportunity for growth and development.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest in relation to this study, including financial, personal, authorship, or any other, that could affect the study and its results presented in this article.

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Data availability

The manuscript has no associated data.

Use of artificial intelligence

The authors confirm that they did not use artificial intelligence technologies when creating the presented work.

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