

## INNOVATION PRACTICES IN RESTAURANT BUSINESS: A STUDY ON LOCAL FISH RESTAURANTS<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

The rapid change in the current century creates an intense competitive environment, which necessitates businesses to offer different goods and services to their customers in order to survive. While some industries easily adapt to change, it is very difficult to catch up with change and innovation, especially in restaurant businesses that meet similar needs and produce similar products with their raw materials and services. In the literature reviewed on the subject, it is seen that innovation researches on food and beverage businesses generally focus on restaurants that are located in cities and serve for twelve months. There are no studies on seasonal fish restaurants in the summer areas. For this reason, the study is important. For this reason, the study was carried out in order to reveal the current situation of local fish restaurants operating seasonally in the summer resorts regarding innovation practices and to make suggestions to restaurant managers about innovative practices based on the results obtained.

The study is carried out on seasonal local fish restaurants in Silifke and Erdemli, which are developing small summer tourism destinations in Mersin Province on the Eastern Mediterranean coast. In the study, the data were obtained by survey technique, which is one of the quantitative research methods. The obtained data were evaluated by percentage frequency analysis, interpreted with the help of tables and the results were reached. As a result of the research, businesses do not work with professional managers, they are mostly young, high school graduates and have not received tourism education. It has been concluded that business owners undertake managerial duties and business managers work with fewer and unqualified personnel compared to their capacities in their businesses. In addition, the study showed that managers made more innovations in areas such as sinks, food and beverage, order delivery time, billing time, service time, lighting, service and security, use of liquid gas, environmental awareness, communication systems, personnel training, career opportunities for personnel, uniforms. It is concluded that they do not invest sufficiently in internet use and technological innovations, and they do not have quality documents such as HACCP 22000 and ISO 9000.

**Keywords** : Fish restaurant, seafood, restaurant business, innovation, local restaurant

<sup>1</sup> The summary was presented at the congress called "International Conference on the Global Application of Multidisciplinary Scientific Studies" held in 2022.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, one of the characteristics imposed on contemporary individuals by developments such as industrialization and urbanization is the increasing trend of eating out due to the intense work pace. In parallel with this situation, there has been a significant increase in the volume of the food and beverage industry within the service sector, and consequently, the number of businesses is also growing day by day. At the same time, people's needs such as having a good time, relaxing and socializing, as well as their nutritional needs, also differ, and the expectations and preferences of the guests also change (Akın, 2012: 8).

In today's world, the fish market is steadily growing. In this rapidly growing sector, in the dynamic business environment where the complexity of the products, increasing costs and constant change occur, it becomes inevitable to produce by making innovations in line with the changing personal and social needs and demands of potential customers, along with not only technological but also social and environmental changes (Silva & Bjondal, 2013: 161).

Today, although guests prefer restaurant businesses in international markets, with innovative, special themes and innovative designs, serving the cuisines of different countries, where special menus are prepared for guests (Durna & Babür, 2011: 89-90) they also prefer local restaurants due to their habits or to taste different flavors (Cömert & Özata, 2006;1963). For this reason, local restaurateurs in tourist resorts also need to constantly produce special products/services to attract and retain customers (Yüksel & Yüksel, 2002, 327). The vast majority of the studies conducted in Turkey on innovation practices in restaurants have been carried out on first-class restaurants that serve for twelve months and are located in urban centers. For this reason, the study was carried out on local fish restaurants that are located in the summer resorts of Mersin province, where touristic enterprises are concentrated, and operate seasonally.

In the first part of the survey, there are questions about the demographic characteristics of the participants, in the second part, there are questions about the characteristics of restaurant businesses, and in the third part, there are questions about the areas where innovation is made.

## 2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The concept of "Innovation", which has started to gain importance today, is named with words such as "innovation", "renewal" and "innovation" in Turkish (Şahin, 2009: 260). The concept of innovation is about change and development (Yıldırım, 1998). Innovation is both a process of creating something new and a special function of entrepreneurship (Higgins, 1995: 31). Innovation is one of the tools by which the entrepreneur produces new products or uses existing products to create new products (Drucker, 2002:5). According to another definition, innovation is "the creation of activities necessary to satisfy the entrepreneur and the enterprise and to provide new value to customers" (Buckler, 1997:43). According to Kuczmarski (1996: 3), innovation is defined as "a common attitude that allows businesses to see beyond time and create a vision of the future". At the same time, innovation is a prerequisite for competitiveness. Global competition ceases to be price and cost-centered and becomes innovation-based. For this reason, in the globalizing world and increasing competitive environment, businesses have to innovate in order to survive, maintain and increase their competitiveness (Birdir & Yıldız, Kale: 2015; Lendel & Varmus, 2011). Businesses that cannot innovate may face the situation of being eliminated from the market in the medium and long term.

When implemented correctly, innovation is the most powerful competitive weapon for a business (Kuczmarski, 1996:3-10). Innovation is the best way to leapfrog the competition and get ahead in the industry by increasing profitability (Deutch, 2018: 37-38) by creating new ideas and developing new technologies (Terzioğlu, Avcı & Gökovaı, 2008: 378). A company must have innovation as the core of its business strategy. Marketing strategies, capital investments, production plans and R&D expenditures should be developed and built within the framework of innovation. Innovation is an outcome, a process, and a mindset.

Innovation as a process deals with how innovation must be organized so that outcomes can vary. While similar, the two definitions of novelty represent important distinctions. These are the presentation of innovation as a result and as a process (Kahn, 2018: 453-454).

Innovation is both the way businesses gain an advantage in today's rapidly changing competitive environment and the process of creating significant value for industry or society. In the process, inefficient and obsolete structures become more efficient through innovation. In today's world, where a new business is opened every day, businesses are trying to innovate in their products and services and to be different from others due to high competition conditions. Although the word innovation seems to be identified with the industry, innovation can be applied to both the product and the service (Babür, 2011: XI).

Innovation manifests itself in many sectors in business life, including the service sector. Competition, especially in the service sector, depends on the quality of the service understanding. With this feature, the effects of innovation are increasing day by day in the competitive environment of the service sector. Restaurant businesses, which have an important place in the food and beverage sector, have to constantly renew themselves in the competitive environment and offer different services to their customers. Restaurant businesses are differentiating in order to satisfy their customers and gain new customers. This differentiation is made possible by innovation (Özdokur & Ege, 2019:279). At the same time, restaurant management differs from other sectors in the service sector. Competition in restaurants comes from other local restaurants with similar characteristics, trying to attract a limited number of potential guests. As the number of restaurants with similar characteristics increases, the income levels of the restaurants begin to decrease (Rahman, 2010: 322). For this reason, the importance of innovation practices in restaurant businesses is increasing day by day.

Restaurants are accessible gastronomy establishments for all consumers. Consumers can taste special dishes, have fun and receive services in a relaxing atmosphere in these establishments. The development of restaurant businesses is also related to the social and economic changes that have occurred in recent years. New trends and activities are developing rapidly day by day in the restaurant business and new concepts and different methods are emerging every day (Gheribi, 2017:153). For this reason, restaurant managers should take into account the expectations of potential customers, differentiate their services and activities, focus on new products and services, and implement innovative approaches as soon as possible in order to increase sales and competitiveness. Innovation in restaurant businesses; It is about multidimensional product, service and organizational innovation, including human and organizational capabilities as well as technological innovation, to ensure customer satisfaction and create competitive advantage. Although there are generally four types of innovation: product innovation, process innovation, marketing innovation and management innovation, the innovations applied in restaurants vary (Higgins, 1995: 33-34; Oslo Klavuzu, 2005: 50-52). Innovation in restaurant businesses, in general; It is classified as "product/service, marketing, process innovation, innovation in management and social responsibility innovation" (Albayrak, 2017: 56-57; Cankül, 2019: 229-230).

Even if it is short, people prefer businesses that offer services in natural, historical or artificial attractions according to their personal choices during the 'holiday' process. One of the most important service sectors is the rapidly growing food and beverage sector in the world and restaurant businesses, which have a great importance in this sector. Within the scope of innovation types, guests attach importance to the atmosphere, product quality, taste and safety of food and beverage establishments (Yüksel and Yüksel, 2002, 327; Taşdağıtıcı and Güçer, 2016: 1121-1124) take into account many factors such as the quality and richness of innovative products and services (İlbağ, 2021: 1360), the attractiveness of the service, the waiting time, the presentation of the food, the interest of the service personnel (Liu & Jang, 2009: 340), activity areas, animation and music activities, and children's menus (Birdir & Kale, 2014: 58).

Therefore, restaurant business managers have to differentiate their services by constantly developing and implementing new ideas in order to satisfy their customers and gain new customers in line with rapidly changing demands (Doğruyol, 2014: VII). For this reason, in Turkey, where one of the important attractions is culinary culture (Taşpınar, 2017: 47-49; Erdem, Mızrak, & Kemal, 2018: 47) it is thought that it is important to determine how and to what extent restaurant businesses fulfill innovation practices and how much they can adapt to innovation practices. Studies on the subject in Turkey have generally been carried out for city restaurants and first-class restaurants that serve for twelve months. Some of these studies are as follows;

Sahilli Birdir and Yıldız Kale (2014) in their study on innovation practices in 92 restaurants in Mersin and Adana, found that the most common problems in restaurants are "wireless internet connection", "food", "order delivery time", "service innovations", "security systems". It has been determined that it has made innovations in the fields of "customer waiting time", "account taking time", "sinks", "environmental awareness" and "order taking time". At the same time, it is seen in the study that they attach more importance to the issues of garbage separation, waiter service time, bill taking time, order taking time, customer waiting time, order delivery time and innovation in the services of cuisines of different countries, compared to others. It is also seen that restaurant businesses do not widely use the customer registration card system, most of them do not have the opportunity to make online reservations, they do not have innovation teams and they generally cater to Turkish Cuisine.

Erkus - Oztürk & Terhorst (2016) conducted a research on innovative restaurants in Antalya, a rapidly developing city of sun-sea and mass tourism in the last twenty years, interviewed 54 managers in total and concluded that high-quality restaurants were the most innovative.

Albayrak (2017) researched the innovation implementation status of first-class restaurant establishments in Istanbul and conducted a survey with 77 first-class restaurant officials. As a result of the study, "providing free wireless network service", "menu change at least twice a year", "local menu changes" They reached the conclusion that they have achieved significant innovation in the areas of "availability of national dishes and national dishes" and "presence of descriptive writings in foreign languages". It is seen that some of the restaurant establishments included in the study are inadequate in terms of "availability of organic and vegetarian products" and "serving different portion sizes". It has been observed that businesses cannot keep up with the innovation in "having whole wheat products in the menu", "indicating allergens in the menu", having a children's menu", "including diabetic products", "including calorie values in the menu", "preparing and presenting gluten-free products".

Cankül (2019) conducted a research on innovation practices in 21 restaurant establishments in Eskişehir and found "financing cultural/sports activities", "Use of QR code application and E-Tablet menus", "online ordering and takeaway applications", "gluten-free menus". It was concluded that the practices of "having products available", "using the customer registration card system", "having diabetic products on the menu" and "indicating allergenic foods" were not realized very often.

Özdokur & Ege (2019) conducted a research on 61 first-class certified restaurant managers with a tourism business certificate in Istanbul. It was investigated whether there was a connection between demographic characteristics and managers' opinions about innovation, and they concluded that there was no difference between demographic characteristics and opinions about innovation.

### 3. METHOD

The importance of the study, its purpose, data collection methods and data analysis are discussed.

#### 3.1. Importance and Purpose of the Study

According to literature research on the subject, innovation research on restaurant businesses in Turkey in the past years has generally focused on restaurants located in city centers and are busy for twelve months.



It has been concluded that no studies on the subject have been carried out in fish restaurants located in resort areas, which are only busy during the summer season. This is why the study is important. The study was conducted for the managers of local fish restaurants operating seasonally in Silifke and Erdemli, two of the developing summer resort destinations in the west of Mersin province, and it was aimed to determine the innovative services implemented in these restaurants. Due to the seasonal nature of the restaurants, the exact number could not be reached from the competent authorities, but the business managers were reached based on the information received from the local people and other tourism businesses.

### 3.2. Data Collection Method and Data Analysis

In the study, data were collected using the survey technique, one of the quantitative research methods. In preparing the survey used, the relevant literature was primarily reviewed, making use of the studies conducted by Öztürk (2006), Kale & Birdir (2010), McConnell Freeman (2011), Birdir & Kale (2014), Tekin & Durna (2012), a survey form was created based on the scale developed by Birdir & Yıldız Kale (2014).

An attempt was made to interview the managers face to face, and since the majority of the managers were busy at work or did not want to have an interview for different reasons, the survey questions were asked to the managers by the drop-and-collect method (between June and September 2023). The data obtained from the surveys were analyzed with the help of a tested package program with descriptive statistics (percentage – frequency) and the results were reached by interpreting the findings with the help of tables.

## 4. FINDINGS

Demographic findings for restaurant managers and businesses are included.

### 4.1. Findings Regarding the Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Findings regarding the demographic characteristics of the participants are given in Table 1

**Table 1:** Findings regarding the demographic characteristics of restaurant managers

<b>Your gender</b>	<i>f</i>	%	<b>Educational status</b>	<i>f</i>	%
Male	24	72,7	Primary education	3	9,1
Woman	9	27,3	High school	17	51,5
<i>Total</i>	33	100	Vocational School	7	21,2
<b>Your age</b>	<i>f</i>	%	College - faculty	6	18,2
20 years and under	2	6,1	<i>Total</i>	33	100
Between 21 and 30 years old	14	42,4	<b>Have you received training/courses related to tourism?</b>	<i>f</i>	%
Between 31 and 40 years old	7	21,2	No	26	78,8
Between 41 and 50 years old	6	18,2	Yes	7	21,2
50 years and above	4	12,1	<i>Total</i>	33	100
<i>Total</i>	33	100			

According to Table 1, the participants are mostly male (72.8%), between the ages of 21-30 (42.4%) and high school graduates (51.5%). According to Table 1, the majority of the participants (78.8) have not received any tourism-related training/course.

#### 4.2. Findings on Restaurant Businesses

Findings regarding restaurant businesses on the subject are given in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Findings on restaurant businesses

<b>Managing the restaurant</b>	<i>f</i>	%	<b>Capacity of the business</b>	<i>f</i>	%
Owner	27	81,8	50 people and below	13	39,4
Professional manager	6	18,2	Between 51-100 people	14	42,4
<i>Total</i>	33	100	Between 101-150 people	5	15,2
<b>Ownership status</b>	<i>f</i>	%	Between 151-200 people	<i>f</i>	%
Person	32	97,0	<i>Total</i>	33	100
Company	1	3,0	Number of people working in your business	<i>f</i>	%
<i>Total</i>	33	100	10 people and under	30	90,9
<b>Operating period of the restaurant</b>	<i>f</i>	%	Between 11-15 people	3	9,1
less than a year	5	15,2	<i>Total</i>	33	100
1-5 years	14	42,4	<b>Certificate/award held by the restaurant</b>	<i>f</i>	%
6-10 years	2	6,1	NO	29	87,9
11 years and above	12	36,4	HACCP 22000	2	6,1
<i>Total</i>	33	100	ISO 9001	1	3,0
<b>Do you have a website?</b>	<i>f</i>	%	All	1	3,0
No	20	60,6	<i>Total</i>	33	100
Yes	13	39,4	<b>Is it possible to make reservations online?</b>	<i>f</i>	%
<i>Total</i>	33	100	No	21	63,6
<b>Do you usually make innovations in your menus?</b>			Yes	12	36,4
Yes	24	72,7	<i>Total</i>	33	100
No	9	27,3			
<i>Total</i>	33	100			

According to Table 2, the majority of participants are business owners (97.0%), and It is found that business management is done by business owners (81.8%).

According to Table 2, the majority of restaurants have been operating for 1-5 years (42.4%) and 11 years or more (36.4%) and It is found that restaurant capacities are mostly below 100 people (81.8%) and the number of employees is below 10 (90.9%).

In addition, according to table 2, it is found that the majority of restaurants (87.9%) do not have a document (HACCP 22000, ISO 9001, etc.) and reservations are not taken online (63.6%). Additionally, according to Table 2, menu innovations are made in the majority of restaurants (72.7%).

### 4.3. Findings on areas of innovation in restaurant processing

Areas of innovation in restaurant businesses are given in Table 3

**Table 3:** Findings on areas of innovation in restaurant businesses

Innovation areas	Yes		Sometimes		No		Total	
Foods	28	84,8	2	6,1	3	9,1	33	100
Beverage	28	84,8	2	6,1	3	9,1	33	100
Kitchen	29	87,9	1	3,0	3	9,1	33	100
Decoration	27	81,8	3	9,1	3	9,1	33	100
Floors	25	75,8	4	12,1	4	12,1	33	100
Following technological innovations	16	48,5	10	30,3	7	21,2	33	100
Architectural	15	45,5	7	21,2	11	33,3	33	100
Uniform	2	6,1	5	15,2	26	78,8	33	100
Music and soundscape	15	45,5	6	18,2	12	36,4	33	100
Service innovations	22	66,7	6	18,2	5	15,2	33	100
Environmental awareness	22	66,7	9	27,3	2	6,1	33	100
Security systems	25	75,8	1	3,0	7	21,2	33	100
Animations	10	30,3	1	3,0	22	66,7	33	100
Lighting	26	78,8	2	6,1	5	15,2	33	100
Sinks	30	90,9	1	3,0	2	6,1	33	100
Accessories	27	81,8	3	9,1	3	9,1	33	100
Garbage separation	12	36,4	4	12,1	17	51,5	33	100
Communication systems	22	66,7	3	9,1	8	24,2	33	100
Order taking technique	21	63,6	5	15,2	7	21,2	33	100
Waiter service time	23	69,7	8	24,2	2	6,1	33	100
Account retrieval time	25	75,8	4	12,1	4	12,1	33	100
Order receiving time	24	72,7	6	18,2	3	9,1	33	100
Customers waiting time	25	75,8	6	18,2	2	6,1	33	100
Order delivery time	24	72,7	6	18,2	3	9,1	33	100
Use of liquefied natural gas	14	42,4			19	57,6	33	100
Connecting wastewater to the central treatment system	19	57,6	2	6,1	12	36,4	33	100
Offering career opportunities to employees	17	51,5	6	18,2	10	30,3	33	100
Providing training opportunities to staff	14	42,4	6	18,2	13	39,4	33	100
Wireless internet connection	21	63,6			12	36,4	33	100
Suppliers	26	78,8	2	6,1	5	15,2	33	100

According to Table 3, the innovation areas in which the most answered "yes" answers to the relevant questions regarding the areas of innovation in restaurant businesses are as follows; Sinks (90.9%), kitchen (87.9%), food (84.8%), beverages (84.8%), decoration and activities (81.8%), suppliers and lighting (78.8%) , flooring (75.8%), security systems (75.8%), customer waiting time and account taking time (75.8%), order taking time (72.7%), order delivery time (72.7%).

According to Table 3, waiter service time (69.7%), service innovations (66,7%), environmental awareness and communication systems (66.7%), order taking technique (63.6%) and wireless internet connection (63.6%), connecting wastewater to the central treatment system (57.6%), offering career opportunities to employees (51.5%), following technological innovations (48.5%), architecture (45.5%), innovation in the fields of music and sound system (45.5%) providing training opportunities to staff (42.4%).

Restoran işletmelerinde inovasyon alanlarına ilişkin en sık "hayır" yanıtı verilen sorular şöyle: üniformalar (%78,8), animasyonlar (%66,7), sınıvlaştırılmış doğal gaz kullanımı (%57,6).

## 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

According to Table 1, the majority of restaurant managers are male (72.8%), young people between the ages of 21-30 (42.4%) and high school graduates (51.5%), they do not have tourism education (78.8%), and the majority of businesses are managed by business owners (81.8%), not professional managers. In addition, according to Table 2, it was found that the enterprises were operating mostly between 1-5 years (42.4%), the restaurant capacities were mostly below 100 people (81.8%), and the number of employees was below 10 (90.9%). In addition, according to Table 2, it is found that the majority of restaurants (87.9%) do not have a document (HACCP 22000, ISO 9001, etc.), do not take reservations over the internet (63.6%) and generally do not innovate their menus (72.7%).

According to Table 3, based on the answers received from the questions about the areas where innovation is made in restaurant businesses; sinks, kitchen, food, beverages, decoration and activities, suppliers and lighting, flooring, security systems, waiting time and account time of customers, time to take orders, time to forward orders, waiter service time, service innovations, environmental awareness and communication systems; It is found that they do not innovate much in areas such as order taking technique, wireless internet connection, providing career opportunities to employees, architecture, technological innovations, personnel training, use of liquid gas, separation of garbage, animation.

Based on the findings, it is concluded that young business owners who are high school graduates, who have not received tourism education, operate local fish restaurants operating seasonally in the region subject to the research, while the businesses have mostly been operating for a short time, they work with few personnel despite their low capacity, they do not have any quality certificates, they do not use the internet for reservation purposes and they do not innovate much in their menus.

In addition, based on the findings obtained, restaurant managers made more innovations in areas that they thought were only essential needs such as sinks, food and beverage, order delivery time, service time, service and security; It is concluded that they have made less innovations in the use of liquid gas, personnel training, and environmental awareness. In general, most of the areas in businesses are innovating. This situation is similar to the works of Sahili Birdir & Yıldız Kale (2014). In the research, it is also concluded that they do not make sufficient innovation applications for the use of the internet for reservation purposes and technological innovations. This situation is in parallel with the works of Sahili Birdir & Yıldız Kale (2014) and Cankül (2019). In short, not enough attention is paid to technological innovations in enterprises.

According to Table 3, the fact that the majority of managers (81.8%) answered "yes" to the question "Innovation in general" shows that they think they have made sufficient innovations. For this reason, it is concluded that managers do not have enough information about the subject and importance of innovation.



In his study, Weiss (2003: 307) stated that managers generally support innovations when competition is intense and innovation costs are low, and managers attach less importance to innovation when competition decreases. In the region where the research was conducted, during this period, when the enterprises work intensively only in the summer seasons, the short season, the competitive effect is felt less than in the low seasons and the innovation costs are high, the guests do not innovate except for their daily needs (toilets and sinks, lighting, flooring, security, etc.), and due to the intense work, food and beverage, service time, It is concluded that they attach importance to issues such as service speed, order taking, order forwarding technique, and that they do not innovate because they think that it will constitute costs in other periods. In addition, the fact that there are not many career opportunities for the personnel, that they are not given adequate training, and that they do not attach importance to the personnel clothes suggest that they prefer to work with unqualified personnel who will work at a low price.

Restaurant managers; It is recommended that institutions such as the Ministry of Tourism, universities, etc. provide trainings on the following innovation-related issues.

- Benefits of innovation and innovation practices for businesses
- Relationship between innovation and cost
- The relationship between innovation and guest satisfaction
- Technological innovation applications
- Innovation practices that can be made in terms of quality and hygiene
- Innovation applications that can be made regarding personnel
- Innovation applications that can be made for the extension of the season

As stated in the method part of the study, it cannot be said that the data obtained fully reflect the general picture, since only seasonal fish restaurants in Silifke and Erdemli are considered in the scope of the study. Therefore, in the studies to be carried out in the coming period, a larger sampling can be reached and results that will better reflect the general population can be reached. On the other hand, the results obtained in the study are limited to the answers given by the restaurant managers to the questions prepared by the researcher. In the coming periods, different questions can be asked about the innovation practices of restaurants and answers can be obtained on a wider scale about the innovation practices of restaurants. In addition, the study can be carried out in different parts of the country and the region, and the reasons why restaurant managers do not innovate can be investigated in the future.

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