

# **Innovative Changes in Restaurant Operations to Cope with COVID-19: A Study of Upscale Restaurants in Colombo, Sri Lanka**

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## **Abstract**

COVID-19 has not only been a devastating public health crisis, but has also been the restaurant industry's greatest challenge to date. The present study attempts to evaluate the impact of COVID-19 on the restaurant industry and restaurant innovations. The study considers new products, services and methods used in the restaurant operation in order to secure its customers and employees involved in the business. The researcher followed the qualitative research approach for the thesis due to a lack of appropriate variables. The semi-structured interview method was selected to collect data from a convenient sample of 13 participants from fine dining restaurants, family restaurants, food courts and casual dining restaurants. The thematic analysis technique was used to analyze the primary data. The key purpose of this study is to identify the changes that have been made in restaurants, especially during the COVID-19 outbreak. The findings indicate that there are excellent innovations that will help to develop the restaurant industry in Sri Lanka. Menu innovation, new services, changes in management decision making, new technologies introduced to restaurants, the legal background of the changes during the pandemic period and inconveniences faced after changes were made to the general operation were thoroughly discussed in the content. The findings identified QR codes, usage of sanitary methods, high discounts, splitting employees into groups, ghost kitchen, online ordering systems and usage of traditional ingredients for the menu as major innovations which were implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic. The overall research concluded that there is a strong impact from COVID-19 on changes in restaurant operations and innovations. The new technology and concepts which are adopted will be helpful for restaurants to operate with higher safety and quality standards. Furthermore, researcher recommend that customers should be motivated to adopt innovative changes. Employers should develop new products and new concepts and increase customer and employee collaboration towards innovative changes.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, innovations, restaurant operations, safety standards