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Factors Contributing to Competitive Advantage: A Study of Homegrown Restaurant Businesses in General Santos City

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ABSTRACT

This study examined factors contributing to the competitive advantage of homegrown restaurants in General Santos City, focusing on the relationship between business strategy implementation and performance. Using a quantitative design, data were collected from 106 restaurant owners and managers through a structured questionnaire assessing restaurant profile, business strategies (operational cost leadership, differentiation, niche market focus), and competitive advantage (customer retention and brand reputation). Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Spearman's rho correlation, and non-parametric tests. Results show most restaurants are city-based, operate as sole proprietorships, employ 1–5 staff, and have 6–10 years of operation. Differentiation was the most implemented strategy, while niche focus was lowest. Competitive advantage was very high, led by brand reputation. A weak but significant positive correlation ($\rho = 0.262$, $p = 0.007$) indicates strategy implementation contributes modestly to performance. Strategy implementation differed significantly only by years in operation, emphasizing experience. The study recommends focusing on experience-based learning, niche targeting, service quality, and innovation to enhance competitive advantage.

Keywords: Homegrown restaurants, Competitive advantage, Business strategy implementation, General Santos City

INTRODUCTION

The growth of locally owned restaurants after COVID-19 has contributed to the local economy through job creation and support of local food systems. Homegrown restaurants have helped boost the local economy by creating new jobs and providing support for local food systems while affording customers with healthier, affordable, home-cooked meal options than fast food. The growth of homegrown restaurants also corresponds to increasing consumer demand for locally produced products (Anas, 2025), which is consistent with Sustainable Development Goal 8, Decent Work and Economic Growth. However, many small restaurants face challenges to sustainability, with approximately 60% closing within their first year and only about 80% surviving after five years (Nguyen, 2023).

Some of the most common reasons that businesses fail are due to high operational costs, competition, and a lack of customer loyalty (Mehta, 2024). The primary issues leading to failure will be vision, leadership, and technology (Augurian, 2024). A clear vision helps provide an organization with direction (Hogarty, 2022) whilst strong leadership is critical to motivating employees and helping achieve goals (Beato, 2023). Additionally, not adopting digital tools such as online ordering and cashless systems results in a business being less competitive as digital markets become the norm (Chandler, 2025).

In the Philippines, homegrown restaurants compete against larger, more established brands with stronger advertising capabilities, making strategy and the ability to differentiate themselves necessary (De Castro, 2024; Par, 2024). Local restaurants in-general Santos City place high value on their cultural impact and family ties (EatsmeJax, 2024), but continue to have difficulty maintaining their operation due to market factors as well.

This study investigates those factors that impact the success rate and sustainable competitive advantages of homegrown restaurants in General Santos City. The results of this study can give insights to improve the long-

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term viability of locally owned restaurants, as well as how these restaurants strengthen local economies by maintaining local food culture through providing a social place to dine within the community.

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to determine the factors that contribute to the competitive advantage of restaurant businesses in General Santos City focusing on homegrown restaurants. Hence, this study will specifically address the following questions:

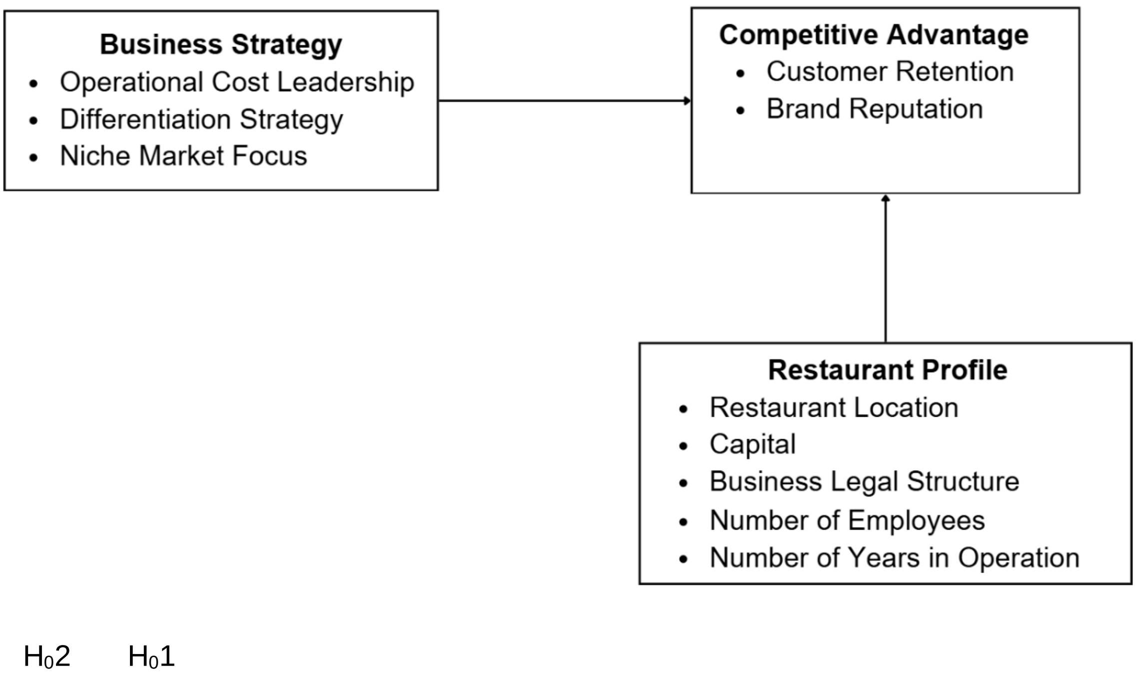
1. What is the restaurant profile in terms of Restaurant location, Capital, Business legal structure, Number of employees, and Number of years in operation?

2. What is the level of implementation of business strategies of restaurants in terms of Operational Cost Leadership, Differentiation Strategy, and Niche Market Focus?

3. What is the level of competitive advantage in terms of Customer Retention and Brand Reputation?

4. Is there a significant relationship between the implementation of business strategies and competitive advantage of homegrown restaurant businesses in General Santos City?

5. Is there a significant difference in the level of implementation of business strategies when grouped according to restaurant profile?



Hypothesis:

H01: There is no significant relationship between implementation of business strategies and competitive advantage of homegrown restaurant businesses in General Santos City.

H02: There is no significant difference in the level of implementation of business strategies when grouped according to restaurant profile in terms of:

H02a: Restaurant Location

H02b: Capital

H02c: Business Legal Structure

H02d: Number of Employees

H02e: Number of Years in Operation

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Homegrown Restaurants

Over the last few years, there has been remarkable development in home-grown restaurants, especially since the COVID-19 epidemic broke out in 2020 (Savellano, 2023). This development has been aided by rising disposable income and shifting consumer behaviors toward dining out for reasons convenience, time savings, and opportunities to socialize with family, friends, and clients (Mangotara & Jegonia, 2025). Homegrown restaurants are restaurants that serve dishes with cultural significance and use locally-produced foods. This supports the local farmers within the community, while providing healthier food options for customers. Despite growth, independent restaurants continue to encounter difficulties in sustaining operations due to competition from larger, established brands (Nguyen, 2023). This research will look at how home-grown restaurants located in General Santos City are able to adapt their business practices to survive post-pandemic and continue to operate amid intense competition from other businesses.

The operational practices and overall long-term success of homegrown restaurants in General Santos City differ according to the various types of business profiles associated with these restaurants; as previous studies have determined that a restaurant’s type of business model has an impact on its growth and sustainability. Previous studies support the belief that a restaurant's characteristics are related to its growth and long-term sustainability. For example, Savellano (2023) states that many of the restaurants in Nueva Ecija have gone through a period of growth and have been able to open up multiple locations over the years. All of these businesses have operated for at least ten years, which would suggest that these restaurants have effective management practices in place. Additionally, majority of these restaurants were owned by sole proprietorships or corporations.

Likewise, Bayaua and Gonzales (2024) found most restaurants within the city of Santiago, Isabela, operate for at least 3 years even though many start with very little capital and are registered as sole proprietors. These results demonstrate that Filipino home-grown restaurants typically differ from one another based on how long they’ve been in business, how much money they have to invest, and what type of company structure they use (e.g., corporation or limited liability company). These differences may indicate varying degrees of management ability and long-term viability of the restaurants.

Business Strategy Implementation

Cost leadership as a strategy involves balancing operational efficiency and value delivery to the customer. An excessive focus on cost reductions can create low profit margins and cause price competition (Thomran, et al., 2022). In the case of a company trying to enter the local market, a focused or niche strategy may be more practical than trying to serve a relatively large number of customers, because it allows the company to focus on specific customer needs and/or wants (Takawira & Mutambara, 2023).

The targeted approach will enhance customer loyalty through its emphasis on unique product offerings as well as the overall dining experience of the customer, rather than simply focusing on price as the primary factor in competing. Furthermore, by incorporating cost leadership with both differentiation and niche market strategies, it may give support to the creation of a sustainable competitive advantage because of the better co-ordination of human, financial, and technological resources (Wallace 2022).

Operational Cost Leadership

An entrepreneur's level of technical knowledge and ability to perform in finance, marketing, operations, and human resources form part of the foundation required for the business to operate successfully (Savellano, 2023).

Food pricing has a major influence on customer purchasing decisions in the restaurant industry because customers will switch to another restaurant with the same food at a lower price (McCrary, 2026; Salsabila et al., 2026). Because of the impact of food pricing on customer purchasing behaviour, many restaurants employ a cost leadership strategy by processing their food in a consistent manner and sourcing their food locally to cut their food costs without reducing the value of their service to their customers.

Cost optimization is a way for companies to increase their profits by efficiently managing their expenses rather than raising their prices or compromising the quality of their food (Kankam-Kwarteng et al., 2018). In addition to increasing an organization's profits, effective cost optimization provides a competitive advantage through lower costs (Bayaua & Gonzalez, 2024). As a result, restaurant managers must be able to optimize operations and reduce costs while maintaining the integrity of the food they serve, thus helping their organizations stay competitive and profitable.

Differentiation Strategy

With a low start-up cost and growing demand for fresh, local food, home-grown-type restaurants have the potential to grow quickly. However, as consumer tastes change and the market becomes more saturated, these restaurants will need to continue innovating both their products and their service models if they wish to remain competitive (Savellano, 2023). Several studies have demonstrated that product innovation has a major influence on companies being able to achieve sustainable competitive advantage and enabling companies to adapt to changing market conditions (Farida & Setiawan, 2022; Digdowiseiso & Lestari, 2021).

Providing a consistent quality of product and a unique offering creates a distinct brand image and independent product offering from larger competitors (Geovany et al., 2026). By continuously innovating their products and services, businesses create an advantage over their competitors, especially if they can use customer feedback and market trends to provide value to the consumer (Digdowiseiso & Lestari, 2021; Ibrahim & Ali, 2023). In addition, using technology gives a company an advantage over competitors and helps them gain market share (Safitri & Miranda, 2024). At the same time, by innovating new products or services, businesses are able to increase their brand image because those brands show that they are committing themselves to providing what consumers want (Açikgöz et al., 2024). Therefore, differentiation Marketing Strategy is critical for companies to be able to adapt to changes in consumer demand, create a good brand reputation, and maintain their competitive edge.

Niche Market Focus

In general, starting a homegrown restaurant requires less money than opening a franchise. For instance, a franchise requires the payment of a franchise fee, male.com royalties, and advertising expenses (Hamfif, 2925). Therefore, it is less costly to expand the food industry than to expand the marketplace of fast food businesses capable of producing similar products and offering similar services. Additionally, to create a competitive advantage in the marketplace for homegrown restaurants, homegrown restaurants must promote local food, preserve their cultural identity and provide a distinctive service experience according to the characteristics of their target markets.

Nevertheless, it is still difficult to market products prior to opening (Savellano, 2023). If a business can identify what their customers want, they will have a better chance of connecting with their customers through both marketing and operations (Sharma et al., 2021). In addition, being able to provide customers with new ideas that reflect their market will encourage them to return and build a long-lasting relationship (Bayaua & Gonzales, 2024). The fact that relatively low set up costs promote new businesses, but at the same time create increased competition in the market. Prior research indicates the need to segment markets and examine niche preferences in order to assess unmet customer demand for products & services based. Investigating how local restaurants do business in General Santos, using a niche market focused approach is an example of obtaining a sustainable competitive advantage.

Competitive Advantage

Due to the shifting needs of consumers, as well as growing competition from other restaurants, it has become necessary for restaurants to adjust their business practices to enhance their competitive edge. To do this, restaurant owners need to identify the distinct characteristics of their business in order to draw in customers and grow their market share (Savellano 2023). Competitive advantage can be established by creating value for customers through various business strategies such as cost leadership, differentiation, and/or a targeted approach; thus, giving companies an opportunity to be ahead of their competitors in the marketplace (Farida & Setiawan 2022).

Digdowiseiso and Lestari (2021) provide evidence that firms competing with one another have a better chance of maintaining their market position and achieving their long-term (strategic) goals if they have established a competitive advantage over their rivals. Strategic planning, in conjunction with ongoing adjustments, is therefore necessary to maximize competitiveness in a changing marketplace. This research will evaluate how restaurant owners and managers view their companies' competitive advantages, as well as identify potential areas where they could improve their competitiveness through strategy.

Customer Retention

Meeting customer needs, wants, and demands is crucial. If a customer feels that a business does not anymore fulfill their expectations, they might look for other brands that will satisfy their demands (Farida & Setiawan, 2022). Identifying critical factors that could meet customer demands and ranking it based on priority is also important to strategically design initiatives that will satisfy the customers.

Brand Reputation

In a competitive environment, creating a strong brand reputation helps to shape how customers view a company, and also distinguishes a company from its competition (Srikanth & Singh, 2023). A brand's reputation is indicative of the customer’s overall experience with the brand’s products and services, while an effective branding strategy creates a strong brand image that influences consumer perceptions (Açikgöz et al ., 2024; Jahan et al ., 2024).

Consistently serving customers beyond their expectations, as well as providing reliable quality for an extended period of time, are core elements in creating a solid reputation (Makatita et al., 2022; Açikgöz et al., 2024). In addition, a strong brand develops positive emotional relationships with customers, as well as increases their level of purchasing behavior and trust in the company; thus, providing a competitive benefit and fostering long-term loyalty (Jahan et al., 2024; Srikanth & Singh, 2023).

Brand reputation represents how well a business meets its promise(s) made to customers regarding the quality and level of service delivered by that business, whether that promise was fulfilled consistently or not, as well as its willingness to create long-lasting and memorable customer experiences.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Porter's Generic Strategies

In 1985, Michael Porter developed the concept of Porter's Generic Strategies, as set out in his book "Competitive Advantage: Creating and Sustaining Superior Performance." These Generic Strategies can be described as approaches used by businesses to create a competitive advantage in an industry that may be saturated or highly competitive. The three Generic Strategies of Porter are Cost Leadership; Differentiation; and Focus or Niche Market strategies. The use of one of these Generic Strategies will allow a firm to build a stronger position in the marketplace while failure to adopt any of the strategies may result in being "stuck in the middle" (Bruin, 2021). Research has demonstrated that all three Porter's strategies contribute positively towards enhancing the success of a firm. Specifically, Islami et al. (2020) indicated that differentiation affects firm performance more than any other type of strategy, whereas Ali and Anwar (2021) established that cost leadership serves as the greatest predictor of a company's competitive edge compared to differentiation or focus strategy. This research study will evaluate the extent to which Porter’s strategies have been implemented by homegrown restaurants in General Santos City as well as determine if these strategies have affected competitive advantage and ultimately business success to some degree. Additionally, this research study will explore which one of the three types of Porter's strategies has influenced homegrown restaurants in General Santos City most significantly.

Reputation Management Theory

The Reputation Management theory explains the power of reputation in providing company a competitive edge. However, this also comes with fragile qualities that companies must be aware of. It is important to note the in building positive reputation, the brand image portrayed to the public must align to the brand identity and personality across all communications and interactions (Campbell & Campbell, 2025). Building reputation must not be seen as a single effort or one single tactic that is to be implemented once, but an ongoing and lifetime efforts that supports company overall growth, attracting not just customers but also investors (Edsall, 2021). This study will understand how homegrown restaurants in General Santos City manage their reputation. This will also determine the importance of maintaining brand reputation as a powerful tool against fierce competition and changing customer preferences.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, a quantitative research design was used that consists of descriptive, correlational and comparative methodologies. As for the descriptive methodology, it was used to establish the implementation level of business strategy and competitive advantage. With the correlational methodology, the relationship between business strategy implementation and competitive advantage was studied. Finally, with the comparative methodology, the differences between restaurant profile characteristics regarding business strategy implementation were analyzed.

The research took place in the country of The Philippines, specifically in General Santos City that has a well-known seafood industry along with many successful homegrown restaurants. All respondents included were owners or managers working at established homegrown restaurants, classified as Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). To be included in this study, the participant's establishment must be located within General Santos City, have existed as a homegrown restaurant for 5 years or more and been operating continuously during that period. Restaurants that closed; newly started businesses; and are either licensed or franchised at both the national and international level were excluded from this study. Of the 365 restaurants on the registry, 142 qualified for inclusion. A minimum sample size was determined using Slovin’s formula, with purposive sampling yielding responses from 106 restaurant owners or managers.

The process of collecting data followed the institutional and the ethical procedures. The proposal for the research underwent panel evaluation and revision prior to it being sent to the IERC. The study was assigned a protocol code no. 2026-252-SR and was given a Certificate of Exemption from Ethics Review (Approval no: 245-2026-MSUGSC-IERC). Once the approval and notification to proceed was obtained the questionnaire was validated by three experts and was pilot tested on twenty-five respondents. Permission letters were sent to the restaurants that had been chosen, and data collected from the106 respondents were collected, according to confidentiality, anonymity and voluntary participation.

RESULTS

Table 1. Restaurant Location

Restaurant Location	Counts	% of Total
In the city	81	76.4%
In the outskirts	25	23.6%
Total	106	100%

The distribution on the restaurant location shows that most of the homegrown restaurant business are located within the city of General Santos, with 81 counts equivalent to 76.4%. While the rest of restaurant owners chose to establish their restaurant businesses in the outskirts of General Santos City, with 25 counts or 23.6%. The high distribution of homegrown restaurant in the urban areas indicates the likelihood of owners to establish business where foot traffic is high, with higher accessibility and visibility to target consumers. While restaurants who are operating in the outskirts of General Santos City may be experiencing less strategic positioning and struggles with lower demand.

Additionally, the high number of restaurants within the city center agrees with Savellano (2023) and Mangotara & Jegonia (2025) who mentioned that strategic site selection is important for better visibility and reach and overall performance of the restaurants. This is crucial especially in an with a saturated market of restaurant businesses like General Santos City. Selecting an area with better foot traffic helps in reaching out target market easily.The result suggests the strategic site location play a role in the selection of restaurant locations, as this would create better opportunities for a restaurant business. This implies that entrepreneurs planning to start a restaurant business should considering establishing business around city centers to enhance visibility. Additionally, those who are considering establishing restaurant business within the outskirts should plan for innovative strategies to increase visibility and attract the market.

Table 5. Capital Category

Capital Category	**Counts**	**% of Total**
₱101,000 to ₱150,000	4	3.8%
₱151,000 to ₱200,000	9	8.5%
₱201,000 and above	76	71.7%
₱50,000 and below	11	10.4%
₱50,000 to ₱100,000	6	5.7%
Total	106	100%

The result on restaurant profile in terms of capital category shows that majority of the homegrown restaurant business in General Santos City have a capital of ₱201,000 and above, with 76 respondents or 71.7%. This is followed by restaurant businesses with a capital of less than ₱50,000, with 11 responses or 10.4%, 9 restaurants or 8.5% with a capital ranging between ₱151,000 to ₱200,000, and 6 restaurants or 5.7% with a capital between ₱50,000 to ₱100,000. While the least in number are restaurants with a capital ranging from ₱101,000 to ₱150,000, with 4 responses or 3.8%.

The high distribution of restaurant businesses with a capital of more than ₱201,000 indicates that they are eager to compete as new entrants in the market to give customers with quality experience and products. This implies that these restaurants with higher capital are capable of hiring competent staff and skilled staff to manage the operation, invest for marketing initiatives to attract customers in the market, purchase better equipment for improved efficiency, and procure high quality ingredients to meet customer expectations. While restaurants with capital below to ₱200,000 shows that the distribution restaurant profile in terms of capital is clustered, suggesting that not all homegrown restaurants begin with large amount of capital. While restaurants with lower capital needs to apply strategies to effectively maximize their resources and introduce unique offerings to attract customers and gain competitive advantage.

These findings are consistent with Savellano (2023) who mentioned that higher capital helps with the operational success and competitiveness of a business. Especially, for a homegrown business that competes not just with other local companies, but also with national brands that have established brand reputation in the market. Additionally, Bayaua and Gonzales (2024) highlights the advantage of having higher capital as owners can leverage resources which helps in improving the business operations and market reach.

Table 6. Business Legal Structure

Business Legal Structure	**Counts**	**% of Total**
Corporation	27	25.5%
Partnership	1	0.9%
Sole Proprietorship	78	73.6%
Total	106	100%

The result in business legal structure of homegrown restaurant businesses in General Santos City shows that majority of these restaurants operates as a sole proprietorship, with 78 responses of 73.6%. This is followed by restaurants established as corporation, with 27 counts or 25.5%. While there is only 1 restaurant or 0.9% operates as a partnership. This result demonstrates that majority of the restaurant owners in General Santos City preferred to easy to establish business with less paper works and full control over decision making. While the presence of corporation and partnership indicates that these types of ownership is less practiced among homegrown restaurant businesses in General Santos City.

Sole proprietorship business allows for a more flexible business operation and faster decision making which does not have to undergo long discussions and approval. This is especially important for circumstances that needs immediate solution and action especially when responding to market changes. However, this type of ownership bears risk as the full accountability and responsibility lies in the hand of the sole owner such as financial issues since sole proprietorship may indicate limited capital compared to partnership and corporation. Hence, venturing partnership or incorporating may help with increased access to capital, better legal structures, and more innovative approaches to market changes and customer needs.

These findings support the studies of Savellano (2023) and Bayaua & Gonzales (2024), who reported that small-scale restaurant businesses in the Philippines are dominated by sole proprietorship type of business due to its simplicity in establishment and license compliance. This type of business structure also allows for easier management and faster decision making with single owner who decides with the day-to-day operation.

Table 7. Number of Employees

Number of Employees	Counts	% of Total
1-5	56	52.8%
11-15	9	8.5%
16-20	17	16.0%
6-10	24	22.6%
Total	106	100%

The result on the number of employees shows that majority of homegrown restaurant businesses in General Santos City employed around 1 to 5 employees with 56 counts or 52.8%. This is followed by restaurants that operates with around 6 to 10 employees, with 24 counts or 22.6%. There are also 17 restaurants or 16% who have employees ranging from 16 to 20. While the least in number are restaurants with 11 to 15 employees, with 9 counts or 8.5%. This result shows that majority of the homegrown restaurant businesses belongs to the micro to small business category with direct involvement in the restaurant operations.

This implies that restaurant owners in General Santos City are hands-on with their day-to-day business operations. Direct involvement helps in ensuring quality across restaurant operations especially with the quality of products and service provided to customers. However, limited number of employees may have an impact on the efficient service delivery during busy hours or with larger customer base. To counter this challenge, restaurant must optimize workforce productivity and provide training on multiple roles to improve workforce flexibility and efficiency and ensure that operations continue even during peak hours.

These findings are consistent with Savellano (2023) who emphasized that small-scale restaurants rely on hands-on management of the owner with limited number of employees to control quality and maintain the operational efficiency of the business.

Table 8. Number of Years in Operation

Number of Years in Operation	Counts	% of Total
11 to 15 years	30	28.3%
16 years and above	24	22.6%
6 to 10 years	52	49.1%
Total	106	100%

The majority of homegrown restaurant businesses in General Santos City have been in business for 6 to 10 years, with 52 responses or 49.1%. This is followed by those in business for 11 to 15 years, with 30 counts or 28.3%. While the lowest in proportion are those who have been in business for 16 years and above, with 24 counts or 22.6%. This indicates that most homegrown restaurant businesses have survived the challenges of the early years in operations. While the small proportion of business who have been operating for more 10 years demonstrates that these businesses are already established and have maintained a loyal customer base.

This implies that restaurants who are in their 6 to 10 years of busines operations must maintain introducing new ideas and continue to be adaptable to the changing market trends and customer needs. This will help to survive the competitive restaurant industry in General Santos City most especially with the growing number of restaurant businesses around the city. While restaurants that operates for more than 10 years may benefit from strong customer loyalty and reputation to gain competitive advantage.

These findings are consistent with Savellano (2023), who emphasized that longevity in business contributes to stability and provides opportunities to build loyal customer relationships, while also highlighting the importance of adaptability for mid-stage businesses to remain competitive.

Level of Implementation of Business Strategies of Restaurants

This section discussed the result on the level of implementation of business strategies of homegrown restaurants in General Santos City. This variable was measured using three indicators namely: operational cost leadership strategy, differentiation strategy, and niche market strategy.

Table 9. Operational Cost Leadership Strategy

Statements	Mean	Description
1. Frequently uses low prices for its products to remain competitive in the market.	3.65	High
2. Enhances its market share by charging lower price.	3.24	Moderate
3. Accumulate knowledge to assist in reducing its production cost.	4.12	High
4. Employs cost leadership strategy to compete with competitors.	3.82	High
5. Employs lower cost strategy to help gain a competitive advantage by reducing its operating costs below its competitors.	4.25	Very High
6. Offers services in a broad market at the lowest prices. (Serve many different customers and keep prices low to attract more people).	3.15	Moderate
7. Always look for economic scale that helps the firm to remain competitive in terms of cost. (Try to buy or make things in larger amounts so the business can save money and keep prices low).	3.26	Moderate
8. Always look for means in reducing operating costs that helps the firms to adopt cost leadership strategy.	4.25	Very High
Weighted Mean	**3.72**	High

The level of operational cost leadership strategy received an overall mean score of 3.72, described as high. The highest rated statements refer to reducing operating costs below their competitors and searching for initiatives to reduce cost in adopting cost leadership strategy, with M = 4.25, described as very high. This is followed by statement with high rating which include gaining knowledge to reduce production cost M=4.12, applying cost leadership strategy to compete with competitors M=3.82, and using low prices for the products to stay competitive M=3.65. While the statements that received moderate ratings refers to buying ingredients in large amount or making products in bulk to save on expenses and keeping the prices low M=3.26 and offering low prices to improve market share M=3.24. While the lowest rated statement refers to serving many customer segments M=3.15, described as moderate.

This indicates that restaurant strategies involve reducing operating costs and adopting cost leadership strategy to minimize product associated expenses. However, offering low prices are not emphasized which shows that these restaurants balances cost leadership and operational considerations. Overall, the result shows that homegrown restaurant businesses practice operational cost leadership strategies.

The results are consistent with Bayaua & Gonzales (2024) and Kankam-Kwarteng et al. (2018), who emphasize that effective cost leadership, including standardizing operations and optimizing production costs, contributes to competitive advantage in the restaurant industry. Similarly, Savellano (2023) highlighted that operational cost management, combined with value-for-money offerings, helps restaurants survive in a saturated and competitive market.

This implies that many homegrown restaurants view that effective cost management can lead to competitive advantage. Therefore, restaurant businesses must minimize product cost but still ensuring value-for-money pricing by maintaining quality of products and services to retain customers. Restaurant that practices cost leadership strategy gain the edge of surviving market competition and dominate the industry.

Table 10. Differentiation Strategy

Statements	Mean	Description
9. Introduce unique products in the market.	3.73	High
10. Maintains high innovation adoption.	3.62	High
11. Focus on continuous improvement of products.	3.75	High
12. Engage highly skilled staff.	3.73	High
13. Ensures customer satisfaction.	4.72	Very High
14. Focuses on value-added services.	3.75	High
15. Sets the prices based on the segmentation of the customer.	3.16	Moderate
16. Maintains high retention through the continuation of service quality.	4.71	Very High
Weighted Mean	3.90	High

The result on differentiation strategy received a high mean score of 3.90, with statements receiving moderate to very high ratings. The highest rated statements refer to ensuring customer satisfaction M=4.72 and maintaining high retention by emphasizing service quality M=4.71, both described as very high. These are followed by high rated statements refer to the continuous improvement of the product M=3.75, providing value-added services M=3.75, introducing unique products M=3.73, engaging highly skilled staff M=3.73, ad maintaining high innovation adoption M=3.62. While setting the prices based on customer segmentation received a moderate rating with M=3.16. This shows that homebased restaurants in General Santos City focuses on providing quality service, unique product, and the added value rather than price differentiation.

This aligns with the studies of Farida & Setiawan (2022), Digdowiseiso & Lestari (2021), and Geovany et al. (2026), which emphasize that product innovation, service quality, and brand identity contribute significantly to sustainable competitive advantage.

This implies that restaurant business that offers unique products in the market, emphasizing excellent customer services, and hiring skilled employees helps in improving competitive advantage by attracting customers and retaining customers. Their positive and meaningful experience will also encourage them to recommend through social media and peers which helps in building a positive brand image for the business. Adopting differentiation strategy in terms of product and experience provides better positioning in the business competition rather than just competing with price.

Table 11. Niche Market Focus Strategy

Statements	Mean	Description
17. Selects particular market segments for some of its products.	3.26	Moderate
18. Concentrates on specific market segments to allow the company to deliver high-quality products.	4.08	High
19. Emphasizes differentiating its products from competitors.	3.25	Moderate
20. Emphasizes competitive pricing to maintain competitiveness.	4.02	High
21. Emphasizes innovation to maintain competitiveness.	3.92	High
Weighted Mean	3.71	High

The result on niche market strategy shows a high level of rating with an overall score of 3.71. The highest rated statement refers to the company focusing on specific segment to deliver high quality product with a mean score of 4.08, described as high. This is followed by using competitive pricing to maintain competitiveness, M=4.02, emphasizing innovation, M=3.92, and selecting particular segment for some of the products, M=3.26. While the lowest rated statement refers to practicing product differentiation to compete with a mean score of 3.25, described as high.

This shows the homegrown restaurants in General Santos City implement niche targeting aside from incorporating differentiation and innovation strategy. Focusing and tailoring products and services to specific segments helps restaurants attain competitive advantage, rather than serving the general market. Targeting a specific segment helps identifying the innovation and pricing strategies that will best fit the specific market which minimizes cost and time for differentiated marketing strategies. Entrepreneurs should consider identifying the segment they aim to target and develop products and services that will attract new customer while retaining loyal customer base. This will help in building brand recognition and market differentiation that will lead to competitive advantage.

Table 12. Overall Result for the Implementation of Business Strategies

Indicators	Mean	Description
Operational Cost Leadership	3.72	High
Differentiation Strategy	3.90	High
Niche Market Focus	3.71	High
Overall Weighted Mean	3.77	High

The overall result for the implementation of business strategies revealed a high rating across all dimensions. The result shows that the highest rated dimension was the implementation of differentiation strategy with a mean score of M=3.90. This is followed by the implementation of operational cost leadership M=3.72, and niche market focus strategy M=3.71. While all the dimensions received a high rating, there is still a need to improve to achieve the highest rating possible.

This indicates the homegrown restaurants businesses in General Santos City focuses on offering differentiated products and services, employing skilled and provide customer satisfaction. Aside with offering differentiated products and services, the restaurants also implement cost management and targeted segment in their business strategies to ensure balance approach and gain competitive advantage. Entrepreneurs may consider investing in research and development to introduce new products and give customers something new to look forward to.

This is consistent with Takawira & Mutambara (2023), who highlighted that focusing on niche markets builds customer loyalty that extends beyond price-based decisions. It also aligns with Bayaua & Gonzales (2024), emphasizing the importance of identifying and addressing local customer preferences to achieve competitive advantage.

Level of Competitive Advantage

This section discussed the result on the level of competitive advantage among homegrown restaurant businesses in General Santos City. This variable is measured using two dimensions which are customer retention and brand reputation. The tables below present the result for each dimension.

Table 13. Customer Retention

Statements	Mean	Description
1. The unique menu offerings of our restaurant play a significant role in retaining customers.	4.23	Very High
2. The business focus on providing a distinct dining experience, which encourages repeat visits from our customers.	3.22	Moderate

3. The restaurants personalized service for regular customers helps in maintaining long-term relationships and retention.	3.66	High
4. The restaurants' ability to offer affordable pricing without compromising quality contributes significantly to customer retention.	3.96	High
5. By maintaining low operational costs, we are able to offer competitive pricing that encourages repeat business.	4.41	Very High
6. The restaurant consistently provide value-for-money offerings that encourage customers to return.	4.56	Very High
7. The restaurant effectively targets a niche market, and this focus has helped us retain loyal customers.	4.68	Very High
8. By focusing on specialized menu items for a specific customer group, we ensure high retention rates within that market.	3.63	High
Weighted Mean	4.04	High

The data on table 10 shows the practices of homegrown restaurant businesses in General Santos City that helps in retaining loyal customers. The overall result shows a mean score of 4.04, described as high, with statements receiving a rating ranging from moderate to very high. The data shows that the most effective strategy for retaining loyal customers was on focusing on specific niche with a mean score of 4.68. This is followed by offering value-for-money M=4.56, offering competitive pricing by lowering operational cost M=4.41, and offering unique menu offerings M=4.23. While other practices received a high rating such as offering affordable pricing without compromising the quality M=3.96, providing personalized services for regular customers M=3.66, and focusing on specialized menu for specific customer group M=3.63. While the lowest rated item receiving a moderate rating refers to the practice of providing a unique dining experience M=3.22. This indicates that restaurants strategies are focused on gaining and retaining loyal customers with emphasis on niche targeting and value that customers get for the price paid.

This means that homegrown restaurant businesses gain competitive advantage by focusing on specific niche while ensuring that customers feel valued by offering competitive pricing and unique product offerings. This aligns with Takawira & Mutambara (2023), who emphasize that focusing on niche markets fosters loyalty that extends beyond price-based decisions, and with Farida & Setiawan (2022), who highlight that creating value for customers enhances sustained competitive advantage.

Focusing on specific niche and emphasizing value for money helps in maintaining strong market presence and building brand image which are crucial for sustaining revenue and business sustainability. Hence, entrepreneurs can further improve customer retention by continuously improving service quality and aligning offerings to the need of their targeted segment.

Table 14. Brand Reputation

Statements	Mean	Description
1. Our restaurant's unique identity and menu offerings contribute to its strong brand reputation in the community.	4.42	Very High
2. We have established a premium brand reputation by offering high-quality, distinctive products and services.	4.52	Very High
3. The quality of our food and service has helped us build a positive brand reputation among our customers.	4.89	Very High
4. Our ability to maintain a strong brand reputation is driven by offering affordable food without sacrificing quality.	4.46	Very High
5. Our brand is known for providing excellent value at competitive prices, which strengthens our reputation.	4.15	High
6. The consistency of our food quality and service at affordable prices has built a reliable brand reputation.	4.77	Very High
7. We have built a strong brand reputation by specializing in specific types of cuisine or customer service.	4.75	Very High
Weighted Mean	4.57	Very High

The result on table 11 shows that homegrown restaurants businesses in General Santos City have established a strong brand reputation with an overall mean score of 4.57, described as very high. Additionally, most of the statements under this dimension received a very rating with only one item that was rated high. The highest rated items that contribute to brand reputation refers to the quality of food and service provided to customers M=4.89, offering consistent quality of food and service at affordable prices M=4.77, specializing on types of cuisine and customer service M=4.75, offering high quality unique products and services M=4.52, offering affordable food without sacrificing quality M=4.46, and focusing on unique identity and menu offerings M=4.42. While the only items that received a high rating with a mean score of 4.15 refers on competing on pricing strategies. This means that while pricing is important is important for restaurant businesses, yet the factors that contributes best in brand reputation are consistent and quality products while providing specialized menu to customers.

The result suggests that homegrown restaurants in General Santos City gain strong brand reputation by offering consistent, quality products with a focus on specialized menu. These practices encourage repeat customers trust and loyalty as they expect that they will get the same kind of experience of products and service always. This also leads to strong market differentiation which are crucial for long term business success and sustainability. Entrepreneurs must maintain these practices balancing quality and competitive pricing to maintain brand reputation.

This aligns with Srikanth & Singh (2023) and Açikgöz et al. (2024), who highlight that positive brand reputation built on consistent quality and reliability enhances customer loyalty and contributes to long-term competitive advantage. Additionally, the results support Jahan et al. (2024), emphasizing that strong brand identity and specialized services differentiate small businesses from competitors in saturated markets.

Table 15. Overall Result for the Level of Competitive Advantage

Indicators	Mean	Description
Customer Retention	4.04	High
Brand Reputation	4.57	Very High
Overall Weighted Mean	4.30	Very High

The overall result shows that homegrown restaurant businesses in General Santos City demonstrates a very high level of competitive advantage with a mean score of 4.30, described as very high. The highest rated dimension for competitive advantage is Brand Reputation with a mean score of 4.57, described as high. On the other hand, the lowest rated dimension is customer retention with a mean score of 4.04, described as high. This indicates the restaurant businesses are effective with sustaining their brand reputation by offering quality and consistent products while also applying strategies on retaining customers.

The findings align with Srikanth & Singh (2023) and Jahan et al. (2024), who emphasize that positive brand reputation and consistent customer experiences are crucial drivers of long-term competitive advantage.

The result implies that restaurants are positioned to withstand the competition and lead the market. The high brand reputation enhances trust and credibility which are crucial for attracting and maintaining loyal customers. This also contributes to long-term business profitability and sustainability. Hence, entrepreneurs are encouraged to improve product innovation while ensuring quality, and improve customer engagement to retain loyal customers and to increase competitive advantage.

Relationship Between the Implementation of Business Strategies and Competitive Advantage

This section discussed the result on the correlation between the implementation of business strategies and competitive advantage. Spearman's rho was used for computing the relationship between the two variables as the result of the Shapiro–Wilk tests revealed a p-value of < .001 across items, indicating that the data is not normally distributed.

Table 16. Correlation Matrix Between Business Strategies and Competitive Advantage

	Spearman's rho	p-value	Remarks	Decision
Implementation of Business Strategies And Restaurant Competitive Advantage	0.262	.007	Significant	Reject H_0

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Table 13 shows the correlation between implementation of business strategies and competitive advantage. The Spearman's rho correlation coefficient is 0.262 which indicates a weak but positive relationship between the two variables. While the p-value of .007 confirms that the observed relationship is statistically significant. This indicates that as the level of business implementation increases, restaurant competitive advantage also slightly increases. However, even though the observed relationship is weak, factors such as cost leadership, differentiation, and niche market strategies still contribute to the overall competitive advantage of homegrown restaurant business particularly in retaining customers and building brand reputation.

These findings are consistent with Wallace (2022) and Takawira & Mutambara (2023), which suggest that integrating multiple strategic approaches contributes to sustaining competitive advantage. However, the weak strength of the relationship highlights the importance of enhancing strategic planning, operational efficiency, innovation, and customer engagement to further strengthen competitive advantage. This implies the need to improve strategic planning particularly in cost management, product and service differentiation, customer retention initiatives, and innovation and adaptability to improve overall competitive advantage of homegrown restaurant business.

Significant Difference in the Level of Business Strategies Implementation

This section discussed the difference in the implementation of business strategies based on the restaurant profile when grouped according to the restaurant location, capital, business legal structure, number of employees, and years in operations. Since the Shapiro–Wilk test for normality yielded a p-value of < .001, violating the assumption of normality, the use of ANOVA and t-tests was not appropriate. To determine the difference for variables consisting of two groups, Brunner–Munzel test was used. While for variables with three of more groups, Kruskal–Wallis H test. Furthermore, for variables showing significant difference, Dunn's pairwise post hoc test was used. This allows to identify where the differences occurred.

Table 17. Test of Difference in The Level of Implementation of Business Strategies

Profile	**Group**	**Mean**	**Statistic Value**	**P**	**Interpretation**
Restaurant Location	In the city	3.78	BM = –0.539	.593	Not Significant
	In the outskirts	3.76			
Capital	101,000 to 150,000	3.83	χ^2=1.04	.904	Not Significant
	151,000 to 200,000	3.80			
	201,000 and above	3.77			
	50,000 and below	3.78			
	50,000 to 100,000	3.76			
Business Legal Structure	Corporation	3.81	χ^2=4.34	.114	Not Significant
	Partnership	3.47			
	Sole Proprietorship	3.76			
Number of Employees	1-5	3.76	χ^2=2.78	.427	Not Significant
	11-15	3.85			
	16-20	3.78			
	6-10	3.77			
Years in Operation	11 to 15 years	3.84	χ^2=20.9	<.001	Significant
	16 years and above	3.82			
	6 to 10 years	3.71			
Significant	*11 to 15 vs 6 to 10*			*<0.001*	
Pair Groups	*16 years and above vs 6 to 10 years*			*.002*	

The test of difference based on restaurant location yielded a Brunner- Munzel statistic of BM = –0.539 which shows a small negative difference in the implementation of business strategies between restaurants in the city center and in the outskirts. However, the p-value of .593 indicates that this difference is not statistically significant. Therefore, there is no difference on how business strategies are implemented regardless of the restaurant location. This implies that owners between two locations adopt similar approaches which further emphasize that there could be other factors that influences business implementation of strategies.

These findings contradict the study of Mangotara and Jegonia (2025), which emphasizes that urban location, with its higher foot traffic and visibility, significantly impacts business performance. In contrast, this study shows that competitive strategy implementation is not automatically enhanced by being situated in city centers.

The test of difference in terms of capital revealed Kruskal–Wallis H statistic of $\chi^2=1.04$ which is very low. While the p-value of .904, which is greater than the standard threshold of 0.05, indicates that the observed difference in terms of capital is not statistically significant. This suggest that the size of capital does not significantly influence the implemented business strategies. This indicates that both small scale and large restaurant have similar business approaches regardless of initial capital invested by the owners. This indicates that there could be other factors crucial for business implementation strategies. Entrepreneurs should not assume that higher capital leads to better strategy implementation but should still focus on effective planning and execution.

These findings are consistent with the study of Bayaua & Gonzales (2024), which found that the amount of starting capital does not significantly determine how restaurants implement business strategies, as both small- and large-capital businesses may adopt similar operational approaches. However, these findings contradict the study of Kankam-Kwarteng et al. (2018), which posited that higher capital allows restaurants to invest in skilled personnel, better equipment, and marketing initiatives, thereby enhancing strategy implementation.

The result on business legal structure revealed a Kruskal–Wallis H statistic of $\chi^2=4.34$ and a p-value of .114, which indicates that there is no significant difference in the level of implementation of business strategies among homegrown restaurants regardless of their legal structure. This means that a particular business legal structure whether sole proprietorship, partnership, or corporation does not essentially provide an advantage in strategy implementation.

These findings are consistent with Savellano (2023), which noted that the type of legal structure whether sole proprietorship, partnership, or corporation does not significantly influence how small restaurants implement business strategies. However, these findings contradict the study of Bayaua and Gonzales (2024), which suggested that corporations or partnerships, by virtue of greater access to capital and formal governance structures, could have an advantage in implementing business strategies compared to sole proprietorships.

The result on the test of difference in terms on the number of employees shows Kruskal–Wallis H statistic of $\chi^2=2.78$ which shows a minimal difference. However, the p-value of .427 indicates that the observed difference is not statistically significant. Therefore, whether a restaurant has 1-5, 6-10, 11-15, or 16-20 has no significant influence on the strategy implementation of business strategies.

These findings are consistent with Savellano (2023), which indicated that the size of the workforce does not significantly affect how homegrown restaurants implement their business strategies, as even small teams can apply effective cost, differentiation, and niche strategies. However, these findings contradict the study of Kankam-Kwarteng et al. (2018), which proposed that larger employee sizes allow for greater task specialization and operational capacity, potentially leading to more effective implementation of business strategies.

The test of difference based on the years of operation revealed a different result among restaurant profile. The Kruskal–Wallis H statistic of $\chi^2=20.9$ shows a difference in the implementation of business strategies, while the p-value of <.001 further confirms that the observed difference is statistically significant. Furthermore, the Post-hoc pairwise comparisons revealed that the observed difference is evident in restaurants operating 11 to 15 vs 6 to 10 and 16 years and above vs 6 to 10 years. This indicates that restaurants who have been in operation for more than 10 years are more effective with the implementation of their business strategies. This can be attributed to the accumulated knowledge and experience all throughout the years of dealing with the market. For restaurants that are new to the business, this emphasized the importance of learning from the business practices of established restaurants to improve strategy adoption.

These findings are consistent with Savellano (2023) and Bayaua & Gonzales (2024), which emphasize that accumulated experience and years in operation positively influence the effective implementation of business strategies in homegrown restaurants. However, these findings contradict studies that suggest strategy implementation is largely independent of experience or tenure such as some earlier assumptions by Kankam-Kwarteng et al., 2018, and Mangotara & Jegonia, 2025, which posit that small or newer businesses can implement strategies as effectively as established ones if resources and planning are sufficient.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the competitive advantage of homegrown restaurants in General Santos City is largely driven by the deliberate and consistent implementation of business strategies rather than by structural characteristics such as location, capital, legal structure, or number of employees. The absence of significant differences across these profile variables suggests that competitive success is not determined by the amount of resources possessed by the business, but by how effectively those resources are utilized through strategic management.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that differentiation strategy serves as the primary source of competitiveness among homegrown restaurants. Rather than competing mainly on price, these businesses rely on customer satisfaction, service quality, innovation, and value-added offerings to distinguish themselves from competitors. This explains why brand reputation emerged as a stronger component of competitive advantage than customer retention, implying that long-term success in the restaurant industry depends more on establishing a trusted and recognizable brand than merely encouraging repeat purchases.

Although the relationship between business strategies and competitive advantage was found to be weak, its statistical significance demonstrates that strategic practices remain essential in building and sustaining competitiveness. The significant difference observed according to years in operation further suggests that strategic effectiveness is strengthened through accumulated experience and market learning. Therefore, sustainable competitive advantage among homegrown restaurants is not achieved through isolated strategies or resource superiority alone, but through continuous adaptation, innovation, and the integration of cost leadership, differentiation, and niche market focus in responding to changing customer preferences and market conditions.

RECOMMENDATION

Restaurant Owners and Managers

Restaurant owners and managers may focus on experience-based learning, as years in operation significantly influence the implementation of business strategies. Newer restaurants can benefit from observing established businesses to enhance strategy adoption. To improve customer retention, homegrown restaurants may focus on niche targeting and providing personalized services especially for regular customers who are anticipated to have special needs. Staffs must be trained to be proactive in situations that needs special assistance particularly for elderly, PWD, and pregnant customers. These actions will create a positive experience that will not just help in building strong brand reputation will also in encourage customer intention to revisit.

Customers

Customers are encouraged to explore the variety and specialization offered by homegrown restaurants and take an active role in providing feedback on service quality, menu offerings, and pricing. Constructive feedback can help restaurants refine their strategies, improve customer experiences, and maintain or enhance competitive advantage.

Policy Makers and Business Support Organizations

The study recommends that the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) work with Local Government Units (LGUs) to create greater targeted support for homegrown restaurant businesses in General Santos City, particularly for start-up and micro-enterprises. These support programs might include: structured training in financial management; creating a business plan; digital marketing; food safety compliance; and how to provide good customer service. In addition, the study recommends that the DTI continue to increase its existing initiatives focused on helping SMEs grow by offering guided mentorship through its Negosyo Centers, specifically focused on food-based businesses.

The study encourages Local Government Units to organize food business forums, trade shows, and networking opportunities on a regular basis to facilitate the exchange of information between local restaurant operators regarding best practices as well as promote partnerships among local businesses. The study recommends that the local government develop better access to funding assistance and business advisory services to increase the long-term viability and competitiveness of the restaurant industry. Together, these coordinated actions will enhance entrepreneurship capabilities, foster inclusive economic growth, and improve the long-term survival rate of homegrown restaurants throughout General Santos City.

Future Researchers

Future researchers are encouraged to further examine other factors influencing strategy implementation and competitive advantage in homegrown restaurant businesses, including market demand, technology adoption, and supply chain efficiency. Longitudinal studies may also be conducted to assess changes in strategy effectiveness over time, particularly in relation to evolving consumer behavior and market conditions.

In addition, future studies may further analyze the specific components of the level of implementation of business strategies by identifying which indicators or statements most strongly contribute to competitive advantage. This may involve examining differences in responses when grouped according to business profile variables such as business size, years of operation, or type of ownership, using appropriate statistical tests such as comparison of means, ANOVA, or non-parametric tests like Kruskal-Wallis. Such analysis may provide a more detailed understanding of which strategic practices are most effective in strengthening competitive advantage.

Furthermore, research focusing on digital transformation strategies, including digital marketing, online ordering systems, and social media presence, may provide deeper insights into improving customer retention, brand visibility, and long-term sustainability of homegrown restaurants.

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