



Restaurant Success Factors: A Case Study of “Mesa,” a Lebanese restaurant in Cascais

Lea Bekdash

Dissertation written under the supervision of Professor Peter V. Rajsingh

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of requirements for the MSc in International Management at CLSBE, at Universidade Católica Portuguesa and for the MSc in Management at ESCP Business School, 10th September 2025.

Sumário

Esta dissertação investiga os fatores que contribuem para o sucesso de restaurantes através de um estudo de caso único do Mesa by The Bey Cook, um restaurante libanês em Cascais, Portugal. A pesquisa aborda a questão central: Como é que as capacidades internas e as condições externas interagem para moldar o sucesso de um pequeno restaurante étnico? Foi adotado um desenho metodológico misto, combinando dez entrevistas semiestruturadas com intervenientes internos e externos, um inquérito a clientes com 117 respostas válidas e a análise de mais de 200 avaliações online e de conteúdos em redes sociais. Os resultados demonstram que o sucesso do Mesa assenta principalmente na qualidade da comida, na autenticidade, na cultura de serviço e na criação de fortes laços emocionais com os clientes. A capacidade de adaptação, o envolvimento com a comunidade e a presença digital reforçaram ainda mais a resiliência e o crescimento. Embora a literatura destaque frequentemente fatores macroeconómicos como tendências do PIB, regulamentação ou escassez de mão de obra, o caso do Mesa evidencia que os motores a nível micro em particular a autenticidade, a atenção ao detalhe e a coesão da equipa podem ser mais determinantes para pequenos estabelecimentos liderados pelo fundador. Este estudo contribui para a literatura sobre gestão de restaurantes e cozinha étnica, ao sublinhar a importância da autenticidade cultural e da criação de comunidade como fatores críticos de sucesso.

Palavras-chave: Sucesso de restaurantes; cozinha étnica; estudo de caso; Mesa; Portugal; pequena empresa; autenticidade; fidelização de clientes.

Título: Fatores de sucesso na restauração: Um estudo de caso do “Mesa”, um restaurante libanês em Cascais

Autor: Lea Bekdash

Abstract

This dissertation investigates the factors contributing to restaurant success through a single case study of Mesa by The Bey Cook, a Lebanese restaurant in Cascais, Portugal. The research addresses the central question: How do internal capabilities and external conditions interact to shape the success of a small ethnic restaurant? A mixed-method design was adopted, combining ten semi-structured interviews with internal and external stakeholders, a customer survey with 117 valid responses, and analysis of over 200 online reviews and social media content. Findings show that Mesa's success stems primarily from food quality, authenticity, service culture, and the creation of strong emotional bonds with customers. Adaptability, community engagement, and digital presence further reinforced resilience and growth. While literature often emphasizes macroeconomic factors such as GDP trends, regulation, or labor shortages, Mesa's case demonstrates that micro-level drivers particularly authenticity, attentiveness, and team cohesion may be more decisive for small founder-led establishments. This study contributes to the literature on restaurant management and ethnic cuisine by highlighting the importance of cultural authenticity and community building as critical success factors.

Keywords: Restaurant success; ethnic cuisine; case study; Mesa; Portugal; small business; authenticity; customer loyalty.

Title: Restaurant success factors: A case study of "Mesa" a Lebanese restaurant in Cascais

Author: Lea Bekdash

Table of Content

Abstract

Section 1: Introduction

Section 2: Literature Review

2.1 Overview of the restaurant industry

- i) History of the restaurant industry and evolution
- ii) Type of restaurants
- iii) Importance of restaurants
- iv) Current trends and innovation

2.2 Key factors affecting/influencing restaurant success

- i) External factors
 - (1) Economy
 - (2) Social (population growth + increase in discretionary spend)
 - (3) Regulatory
- ii) Internal factors
 - (1) Quality of food and service
 - (2) Financial control
 - (3) Team
 - (4) Operational efficiency

Section 3: Methodology

3.1 Research Design

3.2 Data Collection

3.3 Data Analysis

Section 4: Results and Discussion

Section 5: Empirical Setting

4.1 Overview of Mesa

4.2 Operational Context

Section 6: Conclusion

Section 7: Teaching Notes

References

Section 8: Appendix

Section 1: Introduction

The restaurant industry changed over time, shaped by cultural exchanges and the introduction of ethnic cuisines (Derek, 2020). According to chef Alice Waters, taste is an important part of civilization, a view that reflects how culinary diversity has influenced dining practices. While the concept of restaurants has transformed significantly from the taverns of classical societies to today's sophisticated establishments we know today, the core elements driving their success have remained consistent. Dimensions include adapting to consumer preferences, consistent quality in food quality and service, appropriate pricing, team, and responsiveness to evolving market trends (Chua et al., 2020), (Patrick, 2024).

The 19th century witnessed the rise of fine dining, setting standards that still influence us today. Then came the 20th century, when fast food and chain restaurants were introduced, driven by the growing need for quick and convenient options, reflecting societal shifts (Smith, 2006). Finally, in the 21st century, globalization and technology have further revolutionized the way we eat, introducing trends like fusion cuisine and online dining options. These historical milestones show how the food industry constantly adapts to what society wants/ values and how it evolves, and consumer changing behaviors (Hanus, 2018).

The transformation in the industry in recent years has mainly been influenced by:

- (1) Demographic and economic shifts, such as the increasing influence of millennials and Gen Z consumers who prioritize convenience and sustainability;
- (2) technological advancements mainly influenced by the pandemic leading restaurants to innovate with contactless services and ghost kitchens;
- (3) the change of consumer preferences, recently favoring eco-friendly practices and plant-based options (Louisiana Restaurant Association, 2025), (National Restaurant Association, 2024).

The restaurant industry remains one of the most competitive industries with businesses constantly vying to follow up with these changes and getting customers' attention. Globally, around 20% of new restaurants close in their 1 year and only around half of them survive after 5 years. A study tracking 81,000 restaurants confirms the percentages and calculates the restaurant lifespan to be 4.5 years. Although these numbers are lower than the myth of 60% failing in year 1 and 80% by

year 5, they still represent a high risk on entrepreneurs (Healy & Mac Con Iomaire, 2018; Luo & Stark, 2014).

Several factors contribute to this failure rate. On one hand, macro level challenges such as legislations, external economic conditions, intense competition and evolving consumer preferences. On the other hand, micro level challenges such as lack of capital, location, high operating costs, staffing issues, and concerns over quality of life add to the complexity (Parsa, Gregory, & Terry, 2010).

Despite these challenges, the restaurant industry is one of the largest private-sector employers, providing jobs for millions of people worldwide. The industry's ability to provide such vast employment opportunities shows the resilience and essential role it has in the economy (Makani, 2016; International Labour Organization, 2022). Restaurants not only offer jobs in diverse roles, from kitchen staff to management, but also support a range of other industries that are linked to it such as food production, logistics, marketing and more.

This raises the **Research Question**: How do internal capabilities and external conditions interact to shape the success of Mesa, a small ethnic restaurant in Cascais.

This thesis seeks to explore this question by conducting a case study of "Mesa," a Lebanese restaurant in Portugal that has carved a niche for itself in the competitive eat-in industry. By focusing on Mesa, the study will seek to identify dimensions that are specific to this case, as well as general factors that can be applied to restaurant startups across the board.

Section 2: Literature review

2.1 Overview of the restaurant industry

2.1.i. History of the restaurant industry and evolution

Cooking food dates back 780,000 years. Fossilized fish teeth cooked at a temperature ranging from 400–930°F were found by archaeologists in Gesher Benot Ya'aqov, Israel to prove that *Homo erectus* controlled fire to cook meat. This evidence marks the first instance of food being cooked (Zohar et al., 2022). From this basic concept of cooking, techniques have evolved gradually, shaped by changing societal needs, customs and cultural shifts to create the “restaurant” we know today.

By the Copper Age (3,500 to 2,300 BC), the first traces of eating outside the home appeared. Food was given as a source to control the poor and maintain economic control, social power, and labor dependency. Workers were given bowls of food in exchange for their labor and were compulsorily sat together to eat. Although they did not have the luxury to choose where and what to eat, or who to eat with, this communal practice hinted the possibility that food might be enjoyed beyond the home (Rawson and Shore, 2019).

In ancient Greece (800 to 146 BC), this idea of eating out became a step closer to what we might recognize today. A new concept called the “symposium” emerged, which elevated eating into an occasion where the wealthy exchanged ideas over wine mainly but also food. The word symposium was derived from the Greek words "syn", meaning together, and "posis", meaning drinking. As for the less privileged people, there were taverns, where drink and occasional food could be found (Rawson and Shore, 2019).

It took over a thousand years for the earliest form of modern restaurants, resembling today's dining experiences, to appear in China during the Song Dynasty around 1100 CE. By the end of this era, the cities of Kaifeng and Hangzhou were both home to over 1 million people. These large cities became bustling trade hubs, attracting individuals from diverse cultures. This exchange of cultures led to the introduction of regional cuisines, creating a vibrant restaurant culture where authentic dishes from different areas were available to travelers and locals alike. During this period, the largest restaurants were called “partial tea food” and were established for southern travelers who struggled with the taste of northern cuisine (Rawson and Shore, 2019).

Although restaurants in China existed centuries earlier, it took another 700 years for the concept to appear in Europe, debuting in Paris in the 1765 (Rawson and Shore, 2019). Owned by a man named Boulanger, who sold “restorative broths,” it was a place where you could eat in, where diners were shown to their tables and served by waitstaff. Customers were presented with a varied menu to choose from and paid after the meal based on a transparent menu price. Thus, name restaurant is derived from the French word “restorer” which means “restorative.” At first, “restaurant” was considered as a restorative food and not as a place. People used to go to these places to have broth for better well-being. This concept then expanded to offer a la carte menu and food at any time. There is still a debate around who the first restaurateur was. Some credit Boulanger for his restorative broths in 1765 while others argue it was Beauvilliers , who introduced a more refined restaurant experience in 1782 (Silva, 2017). Both were however known for their maisons de santé (health houses) and served soups/broth (Rawson & Shore, 2019).

Paris also saw the emergence of what were called grand restaurants: iconic venues characterized by their rich décor, including silver and mirrors, and renowned chefs that defined the modern concept of dining establishments. Antoine Beauvilliers opened La Grande Taverne de Londres in 1782, which was considered the first luxury restaurant in Paris. Between 1789 and 1793, other iconic venues like Trois Frères, Boeuf à la Mode, Cadran Bleu, Méot, and Robert opened. These Parisian restaurants played a key role in shaping the global restaurant industry moving forward. The expansion of restaurants around the world was mainly influenced by them (Rawson & Shore, 2019).

Restaurants continued evolving and the 19th century witnessed the rise of fine dining, setting standards that still influence us today. Then in the 20th century, fast food and chain restaurants were introduced, driven by the growing need for quick and convenient options. Finally, in the 21st century, globalization and technology have further revolutionized the way we eat, introducing trends like fusion cuisine and online dining options (Rawson & Shore, 2019) (Wilk, 2013). These shifts show how the food industry constantly adapts to what society wants/ values and how it evolves.

2.1.ii. Type of restaurants

Nowadays, restaurants offer a high variety of options with different styles, prices and cuisine to meet different kinds of preferences. Knowing about these helps to understand how the industry operates. According to the National Restaurant Association, restaurants are divided into two main segments: **full-service restaurants** which includes family, casual and fine dining and **limited-service restaurants** which includes quick service, fast casual, and coffee and snacks (National Restaurant Association, 2021).

Full-Service Restaurants: Full-service restaurants provide a complete sit down dining experience with table service. This segment suffered revenue losses by around 30% during the Covid pandemic as customers avoided in person dining. Although business has since rebounded, recent reports show that growth has begun to level off (National Restaurant Association, 2023).

- **Casual Dining:** Casual dining restaurants provide a more relaxed dining experience with a moderately priced menu. They offer table service and a comfortable atmosphere, often appealing to families and groups.
- **Fine Dining:** Fine dining establishments provide a high-end experience with a focus on exceptional service, premium ingredients, and elaborate presentation. These restaurants often feature renowned chefs menus and extensive wine lists. Fine dining is often associated with special occasions and affluent clientele (Harrington et al., 2017).

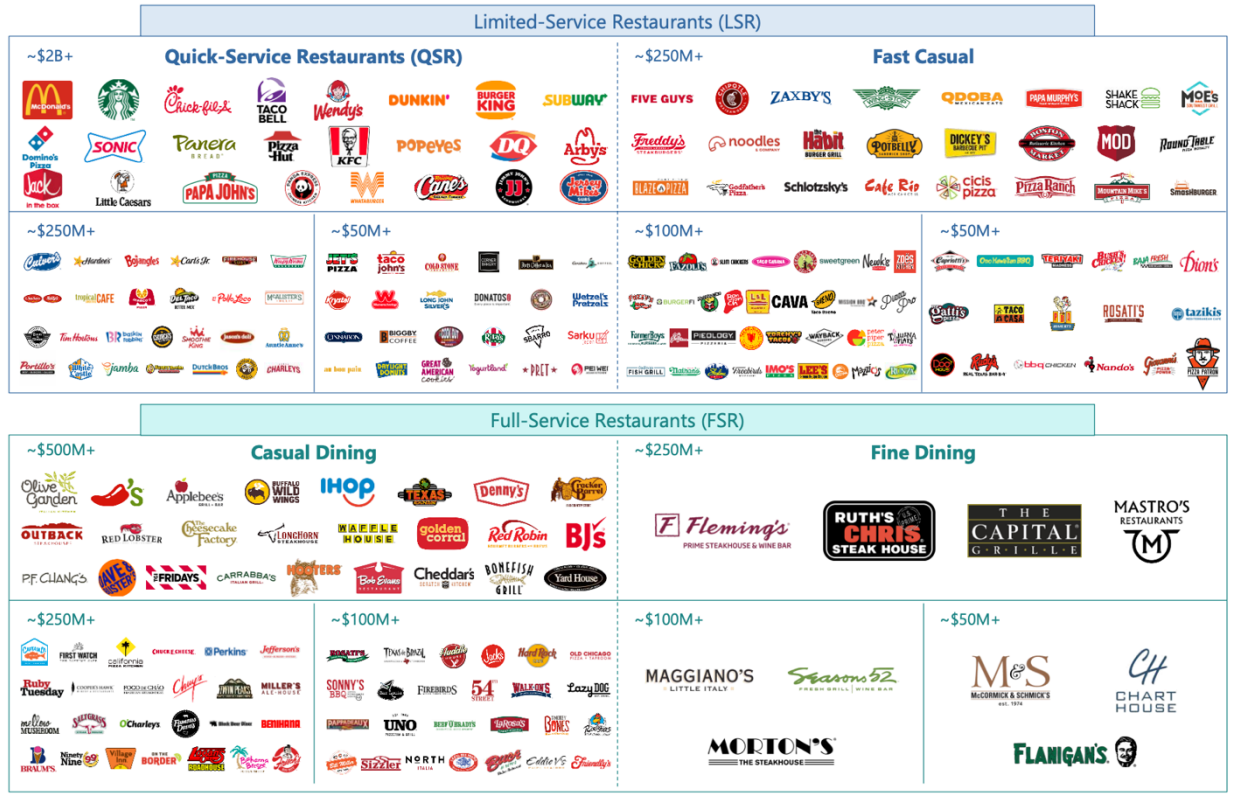
Limited-Service Restaurants:

- **Fast Food Restaurants:** These establishments offer quick service and convenience, typically focusing on low-cost, standardized menus. They are characterized by high customer turnover and often operate on a franchise model. Chains like McDonald's, Burger King, and KFC dominate this segment, offering a consistent dining experience across multiple locations. The rise of fast food has been driven by the need for convenience, especially in urban areas where time is often at a premium (Pacheco Navarro, Sandoval Godoy, & Camarena Gómez, 2018)
- **Fast Casual:** These restaurants offer higher-quality food than fast food establishments, often with a focus on fresh, healthy ingredients, while maintaining a quick service model.

This segment has grown rapidly in recent years, appealing to health-conscious consumers and those seeking convenience without sacrificing quality (Mintel, 2019). Chains like Chipotle, Sweetgreen, and Cava are examples that have boomed in recent years.

Coffee and snack:

Restaurant Industry Market Map



Source: Houlihan Lokey

2.1.iii. Importance of restaurants

Restaurants play a crucial role in the economy, having tens of millions of establishments worldwide from quick to full-service restaurants and forming a global industry valued at over 4 trillion US dollars annually (Research and Markets, 2024). Beyond its direct economic contribution, restaurants also impact different industries because of their complex value chain that begins from ingredient sourcing and food preparation to customer service and marketing. Each stage contributes to economic activity, employment, and business development that goes beyond the restaurant itself. According to the International Labor Organization, the accommodation and food service sector which includes restaurants, cafes, bars and hotels, employed approximately 144 millions jobs globally in 2019 representing 4.3% of total employment worldwide (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2021).

In addition, restaurants serve as communal spaces where people meet up to celebrate, engage in business, and socialize. The cultural significance of restaurants is evident in how they reflect and shape cultures and societal trends, from the popularity of fast food in the post-war era to the current emphasis on sustainable and organic dining options (Mintel, 2019).

Economic Impact of Restaurants

Restaurants contribute significantly to employment by creating jobs in direct and indirect sectors. These range from chefs, waitstaff, and managers to supply chain workers, food distributors, and marketing professionals. The industry also supports small businesses, such as local farms and artisan producers, by sourcing ingredients and products, fostering economic sustainability (National Restaurant Association, 2024).

Beyond employment, restaurants generate substantial tax revenue through business taxation, employee payroll, and sales taxes. A study conducted in Batu City, Indonesia, showed that restaurant taxes had an average collection effectiveness of 92.12% between 2008 and 2013, contributing approximately 3.36% annually to local own-source revenue (Rochmadika, 2015).

They also stimulate local economies by increasing foot traffic in commercial areas, benefiting nearby retail stores, entertainment venues, and transportation services (Bain, 2024).

Restaurants significantly shape a destination's attractiveness by boosting tourist satisfaction and encouraging return visits. Research involving 459 tourists found that while only 20% considered restaurants a primary factor in choosing a destination, 46% reported that positive restaurant experiences strongly influenced their decision to return, underscoring restaurants' role in fostering tourist loyalty (Sparks et al., 2003).

According to the National Restaurant Association (2024), the U.S. restaurant industry alone was projected to generate \$1,106 billion in sales in 2024 which translated into a GDP contribution of 5%. The sector employs approximately 15.7 million people, equivalent to 10% of the total job market, which makes it one of the largest private-sector employers in the country. Just the global fast-food restaurant segment accounts for over 12.5 million jobs as of 2023. Globally, the industry is equally significant, contributing over 3 trillion dollars to the world economy and providing livelihoods for millions of individuals (Fortune Business Insights, n.d.). Startups in the restaurant industry are also reshaping the economic landscape through innovation, job creation, and by catalyzing the growth of complementary sectors like logistics and food technology (Dyshkantiuk, 2024).

The Value Chain of Restaurants

The restaurant value chain begins with suppliers who provide raw materials such as fresh produce, dairy, and meats. These suppliers include farmers, fisheries, and wholesalers who rely on restaurant demand for their economic stability. Once sourced, ingredients pass through distribution networks, including transportation and storage facilities, before reaching restaurant kitchens. In-house operations, such as food preparation, menu planning, and quality control, further enhance the value of raw materials, transforming them into appealing culinary offerings (Hansen, 2024).

Additionally, restaurants depend on various outsourced services such as marketing, branding, photography, and digital media management to attract customers and maintain competitive positioning (Singh, Singh, & Dhir, 2022). Other essential elements of the value chain include facility maintenance, interior design, point-of-sale systems, and delivery services, all of which contribute to the overall dining experience (Petričić & Novak, 2014; Öz et al., 2020) (Cavusoglu, 2019).

2.1.iv. Current Trends and Innovations

The restaurant industry is continually changing influenced by consumer preferences, technological advancements, and societal trends. Several key trends and innovations are shaping the future of dining.

Technology Trends:

Technology plays a big role in how restaurants currently operate and will keep on doing so for the next 5 years at least (National Restaurant Association, 2019). In fact, from one side, it changed people's experiences and the way they eat and from another side, it improved efficiency and profitability for restaurants (McKinsey & Company, 2021).

Digital tools such as customer loyalty, online reviews and online reservations are helping restaurants to attract customers and create a stronger relationship meeting customers' expectation (TheFork Manager, 2023).

Another new trend is the growth of ghost kitchens which are deliver only kitchens with no dining area (McKinsey & Company, 2021). This helped restaurants reach more customers without having a cost to run an eat-in restaurant. This trend is expected to make up around 50% of all takeout market.

Online ordering, delivery, and digital payments have changed the way people eat. Since 2017, the food delivery market has more than tripled, and it's still growing (Ahuja et al., 2021). About half of customers now like to order using mobile apps, and delivery services bring in about 30% of a restaurant's income. In busy cities, food delivery is especially popular. In fact, the global online food delivery market was worth about \$111 billion in 2020 and is expected to keep growing (Statista, 2020).

Recent changes include using voice commands to order food, scanning QR codes for menus and payments, and using digital wallets or tap-to-pay methods.

Automation and artificial intelligence (AI) are also becoming more common in restaurants. Robots and smart machines are helping with tasks like taking orders, cooking, and managing inventory. For example, fast-food chains like McDonald's and Wendy's now have self-service

kiosks where customers can place their orders. Companies like Miso Robotics are even making kitchen robots that can flip burgers or fry food perfectly every time (Guo, 2025).

Technology has changed many parts of the restaurant business, from how menus are designed to how food is prepared and how customers interact with staff. Services like Uber Eats, DoorDash, and Grubhub allow restaurants to reach more customers and make extra income. The COVID-19 pandemic also pushed many restaurants to start using these services because dining in was limited (National Restaurant Association, 2020).

In short, the restaurant world is becoming more digital and automated. These changes help restaurants cut labor costs, enhance decision making and work more efficiently (Guo, 2024). And as technology keeps improving, we can expect even more innovations in the years to come.

Sustainability & Health Focused Practices:

Current industry trends reflect growing consumer interest in sustainability, wellness, and social responsibility. This shift is particularly pronounced among younger demographics, who increasingly favor establishments that source ingredients locally, reduce waste, and implement eco-conscious practices (National Restaurant Association, 2024). A study of “green restaurants” found that sustainable measures such as using eco-friendly ingredients, ensuring food safety, minimizing waste, and improving environmental sensitivity significantly enhanced customer satisfaction and revisit intentions, giving businesses a competitive edge in branding and loyalty (Chaturvedi et al., 2022).

Many restaurants are embracing farm-to-table models, expanding plant-based offerings, adopting recyclable or compostable packaging, and improving energy efficiency across their operations. A detailed case analysis in *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Cases* highlights how restaurants, particularly in the Quick Service Restaurant (QSR) sector, are shifting toward compostable packaging and biodegradable tableware despite economic and logistic challenges. This shift reflects broader consumer trends toward eco-conscious dining and the commercial pressure to align with green standards (Dutta & Gupta, 2024).

Health and wellness are likewise influential: there is more emphasis on offering healthy menu options (e.g. vegetarian, gluten-free, lower-calorie items) and even nutritious kids’ menus to cater to evolving consumer preferences. Research from *Hospitality Insights* talks about the growing

consumer preference especially among millennials for plant-based meat alternatives, pushing QSRs to innovate their menus in alignment with sustainability goals (Incardona et al., 2024).

Labor Challenges and Operational Adjustments

One big challenge today is hiring and keeping staff. In fact, 77% of restaurant owners say it is still very hard to find and keep good employees (National Restaurant Association, 2025).

There's a shortage of workers in the industry, and wages are going up. This is partly because minimum wages are higher now, and many businesses are competing to hire from the same pool of workers. In many cases, labor costs are rising faster than menu prices, which puts pressure on profits (Mun & Jang, 2018).

To handle this, many restaurants are changing the way they operate. They're training staff to do several types of tasks, improving staff schedules, and using technology to get more done with fewer people (Alt, 2021). Some are simplifying kitchen work or using ready-made ingredients to reduce the need for highly skilled cooks (Ahmed & Kiran, 2019). Others are redesigning their kitchens to make them more efficient, or even using robots to handle repetitive tasks like frying or washing dishes (Ji, 2010).

Keeping good employees has also become very important. Many restaurants are now offering better pay, better benefits, and a more positive work environment to attract workers and reduce turnover (Jolly et al., 2021).

By improving how they operate and how they treat their staff, restaurants hope to manage these labor challenges while still providing great service. Experts say that restaurants that become more efficient and flexible by managing costs, using technology, and developing their teams will be in a stronger position to succeed in today's economy (Fernández de Caleyá et al., 2025).

2.2. Success factors

Restaurants operate in a complex environment where their success depend on both external and internal factors. External factors can create opportunities or challenges that are not in their control of restaurants. This includes economic conditions, social and cultural trends, government regulations, and the competitive landscape. Whereas internal factors, are factors that restaurants

have control over and includes quality of food and menu innovation, service quality and customer experience, financial control, team and workplace culture, operational efficiency and consistency (Parsa, Self, Njite, & King, 2005). Understanding both elements is crucial for a restaurant's long term survival and success.

2.2.i. External factors

1. Economy

The overall state of the economy has a big effect on restaurants. How much extra money people have and how confident they feel about spending it affects how often they eat out and how much they spend when they do. When the economy is strong, specifically families, tend to dine out more often and are more willing to spend on nicer meals. The most successful restaurants are the ones that can adjust to these changes. They might change their prices, offer promotions, or find ways to better control costs to keep up with what's happening in the economy (Lee & Ha, 2012). But during times of recession or when prices are rising quickly (inflation), fewer people go out to eat, and they usually choose cheaper options. That's why restaurant owners pay close attention to things like GDP growth, job levels, and inflation. If the economy slows down or food and labor costs go up too much, profit margins get squeezed, and some smaller or less prepared restaurants might even go out of business.

A study that looked at full-service restaurants between 1971 and 2007 found a strong correlation ($r = 0.657$) between GDP growth and sales (Lee & Ha, 2012). Another study showed that even during recessions, limited-service restaurants held up pretty well and adapted to how people were spending (Lee & Ha, 2014).

2. Social (population growth + increase in discretionary spend)

Modern lifestyles and changing values shape dining demand. Busy schedules and dual-income households have fueled demand for convenient formats like delivery and takeaway (Kwok, Huang, & Hu, 2016). Alongside, growing consumer interest in health, sustainability, and ethical sourcing pushes restaurants to offer transparent nutrition, plant-based options, and eco-conscious practices (Ryu & Han, 2010; Jang, Lee, & Jung, 2022). Restaurants that align with these values tend to engage well with today's social-minded customers. Population growth and increasing

disposable income are very important drivers driving restaurant industry growth. Research shows that as populations grows in a given area, restaurant sales also tend to increase although this relationship is shaped by the specific economic conditions of that region (Shriber et al., 1995). Furthermore, Stewart and colleagues found that even small increases in income could lead to a 15–18% rise in per person restaurant spending, especially in full-service establishments. This trend is even stronger in areas with more dual-income and single-adult households (Stewart et al., 2012). A U.S.-based econometric study confirmed that changes in market size and household wealth significantly correlate with restaurant firms' growth rates, especially for public chains (Hua & Templeton, 2010). These patterns point to a stable link between consumer affluence and foodservice demand.

3. Regulatory

Restaurants must follow many government rules that strongly affect their success. Health, safety, and sanitation rules set standards for food handling and cleanliness, and breaking them can lead to fines or closing, while following them builds trust (FDA, 2022). Labor laws like minimum wage and overtime rules affect staff costs (U.S. Department of Labor, 2023). Licenses, zoning laws, and menu labeling also affect how restaurants operate (FDA, 2022). Taxes and pandemic rules, like limits on how many people can enter, also matter. Overall, simple and clear rules help restaurants do well, while complex or changing rules can cause problems, so owners must stay informed and adjust (National Restaurant Association, 2023; Parsa, Gregory, & Terry, 2011).

4. Market Competition and Consumer Trends

The competitive landscape is another external factor. A restaurant's performance is influenced by the number and quality of competitors in its area or niche. In saturated markets, winning and retaining customers is more challenging, often requiring more aggressive marketing or differentiation. Changes in consumer dining trends often driven by culture or media influence can also be pivotal. For example, if the market suddenly shifts toward preferences for fast-casual dining or plant-based cuisine, restaurants aligned with those trends gain an advantage while others must adapt or risk losing relevance (Sathish et al., 2025). Ultimately, restaurants that succeed are often those that continuously scan their external environment and proactively

respond to competitive and consumer trends whether through menu innovation, rebranding, or niche targeting to maintain a strong market position (Chamrada & Chytilová, 2024).

2.2.ii. Internal Factors

1. Quality of food and menu innovation

The core product of any restaurant is its food and beverages. Food quality including taste, freshness, consistency and presentation, is the most important driver for customers to become loyal ones (Ryu, Lee, & Kim, 2012). High-performing restaurants focus heavily on quality control: sourcing fresh and premium ingredients, maintaining recipe consistency, and delivering great flavor (Hanaysha, 2016). Successful menu innovation balances signature dishes with seasonal offerings and new items, responding to evolving dietary trends like gluten-free or plant-based options to maintain customer interest and relevance. Restaurants known for exceptional quality tend to cultivate strong customer loyalty and positive word-of-mouth that drive long-term success (Ryu, Lee, & Kim, 2012); (Harrington, Ottenbacher, & Fauser, 2017).

2. Service Quality and Customer Experience:

The level of service provided by a restaurant's staff extremely influences customer satisfaction (Yan, Wang, & Chau, 2015). Friendly, attentive, and efficient service can elevate a guest's experience, while poor service can ruin a meal regardless of how good the food is. Key elements include the promptness of seating and food delivery, server knowledge and courtesy, ability to handle issues or special requests, and overall hospitality (Sharma, Arora, & Kharub, 2021). In the hospitality literature, service quality is consistently identified as a critical factor for performance, often measured through customer reviews and ratings (Gunden, 2017). Leading restaurants invest in staff training and a customer-centric culture to ensure each patron feels valued. Consistency in service is also crucial. Customers expect the same level of care on every visit. Moreover, creating a positive overall experience extends beyond table service: it includes ambiance, cleanliness, music, and how the establishment makes people feel (Sharma, Arora, & Kharub, 2021; (Hanaysha, 2016). Successful operators pay attention to details (like remembering regulars' names or preferences) that enhance the guest experience.

3. Financial control

Managing finances properly is key to long term success, especially since profit margins in the industry are usually very tight (Parsa, van der Rest, Smith, Parsa, & Bujisic, 2014). Running a financially healthy restaurant means keeping a close eye on costs from food and labor to rent and other overheads. This includes things like managing inventory carefully to reduce waste, negotiating better deals with suppliers, and making sure staff schedules are efficient (Parsa et al., 2014). It's also important to track key financial indicators, like food cost percentage, labor-to-sales ratios, and average customer spend, to know what decisions to take daily (Mun & Jang, 2018). Many successful restaurants regularly review their financial statements and make necessary changes like adjusting menu prices or substituting ingredients when costs increase (Camillo, Connolly, & Kim, 2008).

4. Team and Workplace Culture

A restaurant's team from chefs and line cooks to servers and managers is its core. Effective human resource management and positive team dynamics and culture within the restaurant, affect productivity, service quality and stability. Successful restaurants tend to approach recruitment strategically, hiring individuals who fit well with the company's values and culture. They also prioritize training to maintain consistent service quality, and actively invest in employee engagement to boost motivation and reduce turnover (Healy, 2014).. Creating a positive workplace culture that values teamwork, respect, and growth can reduce the notoriously high turnover rates in the hospitality industry (Healy, 2014; Magnini & Honeycutt, 2005).

5. Operational efficiency and Consistency

The day-to-day execution of restaurant operations must be efficient and consistent to ensure success. This includes food preparation, order fulfillment, table turnover, and back-of-house organization. Efficient operations maximize the number of customers served and minimizing wait times (Kimes, 2008). Inefficiencies, frequent stock-outs of menu items, frustrate customers and hurt profitability (Harrington et al., 2017). Top restaurants therefore implement standard operating procedures (SOPs) often using lean management to eliminate waste.

Consistency is equally important. Customers expect the same portion sizes, taste, and service quality each visit. Achieving this requires good training and sometimes technology aids (for example, kitchen display systems to standardize orders, timers for cooking, etc.) (Parsa et al., 2005). Innovation also boosts efficiency: inventory software, kitchen automation, and data analytics help optimize prep, staffing, and reduce waste. Many operators are overhauling processes to become more efficient and data driven. Tightly managed operations maintain quality, control costs, and improve customer satisfaction and profit margins. Operational excellence is a fundamental pillar of restaurant success (Jones et al., 2002).

Management Theory

This thesis also implicated several management theories. The first is the resource-based view which explains that businesses achieve sustainable competitive advantage through resources that are valuable, rare, difficult to imitate and well organized. For Mesa, these resources are not just the recipes but also its cultural authenticity, the service and strong bond between employees and customers.

Another relevant theory is the Dynamic Capabilities theory which focuses on the ability to adapt and reconfigure resources when conditions change. Mesa does that with its flexible menu innovation, the introduction of the Saturday buffet and expansion to delivery and catering. These steps show how the restaurant uses feedback and market shifts to evolve without losing its core values.

Finally, Stakeholder theory helps explain why Mesa invests so much in relationships. The business pays attention not only to customers but also to suppliers, partners, and the local community. This close interaction with different stakeholders strengthens Mesa's legitimacy, increases loyalty and ensures resilience even in a competitive environment.

Section 3: Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This thesis uses a single case study approach to see how external and internal conditions influence Mesa's success. This design allows us to gain an understanding of a real world

situation, especially since it is difficult to separate the business itself from the environment it operates in (Yin, 2009).

To strengthen the study's insights, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected. Qualitative data was collected through 10 semi structured interviews with Mesa's founder, team members, customers and strategic partners.

Quantitative data was gathered through a structured customer survey that was distributed online and at the restaurant using Likert scales and Net Promoter Score questions to assess customer perceptions. In addition, secondary data, including online reviews and social media activity was analyzed to enrich and triangulate the findings. This mixed-method strategy increases the credibility and depth of the findings by drawing on different types of evidence (Flick, 2002).

To summarize customer responses, statistical methods were used to analyze the data from the survey. This also includes t-tests, regression analysis and cluster analysis.

3.2 Qualitative Data Collection

Ten semi-structured interviews were conducted with people that either had a first-hand experience or strong connections with Mesa, its operations and external environment. Participants were consciously chosen so they can provide insights for this research. This approach is known as purposive sampling and is commonly used when researchers need input from people who are especially knowledgeable about the topic (Palinkas et al., 2015).

The table below summarizes the interview participants:

Interview ID	Position	Type	Reason for interview
Interview 1	Founder/ executive manager	Internal	To understand Mesa's strategic vision, leadership approach, and overall business model.
Interview 2	Head Chef	Internal	To explore operational practices, food quality control, and innovation in the kitchen.

Interview 3	Front of House staff	Internal	To capture insights on customer service, team culture, and guest experience.
Interview 4	Back of house staff	Internal	To gain perspective on daily operations, workload management, and internal processes.
Interview 5	Food influencer	Internal	To assess Mesa's brand perception, digital presence, and community visibility.
Interview 6	Loyal Customer	External	To understand repeat customer satisfaction, loyalty drivers, and feedback response.
Interview 7	Occasional Customer	External	To gather views from less frequent visitors and identify barriers to repeat dining.
Interview 8	Supplier	External	To evaluate Mesa's sourcing practices, supplier relationships, and trust-building.
Interview 9	Delivery Partner	External	To examine logistics, digital ordering systems, and delivery service quality.
Interview 10	F&B consultant	External	To provide an expert industry perspective on Mesa's positioning and long-term potential.

The interview was created using the steps from Kallio et al. (2016): confirming the suitability of semi-structured interviews, reviewing existing knowledge, creating and testing the interview guide, and finalizing the questions. Interviews lasted between 30 to 60 minutes, and were conducted in person.

3.3 Qualitative Data Analysis

The interviews were analyzed using Thematic Analysis, following the method described by Braun and Clarke (2006).

3.4 Quantitative Data Collection

To capture the customer perspective, a survey was shared via Mesa's social media platforms and QR codes placed in the restaurant. A total of 117 valid responses were collected. The survey asked about demographic information, visit frequency, satisfaction with key success factors (such as food quality, service, and authenticity), and included a Net Promoter Score question.

To summarize customer responses, statistical methods were used to analyze the data from the survey. This also includes t-tests to compare satisfaction levels between different customer groups, regression analysis to identify which factors influenced satisfaction the most, and cluster analysis to group customers based on their preferences. These statistical methods complemented the themes found in the qualitative analysis of the interviews.

3.5 Quantitative Data Analysis

The survey data was analyzed using a mix of descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Average scores were calculated for each of the key satisfaction factors: food quality, service, ambiance, authenticity, and value for money alongside the Net Promoter Score (NPS) to measure customer loyalty. T-tests were used to compare satisfaction levels between different customer groups, such as loyal versus occasional visitors. Regression analysis helped identify which factors had the most influence on overall satisfaction and likelihood to recommend. Lastly, cluster analysis was carried out to group respondents based on shared preferences and behaviors. These insights were used to complement and reinforce the themes that emerged from the qualitative interviews.

3.6 Secondary Data Analysis

More than 200 online reviews from platforms like Google, Uber Eats, and TripAdvisor were analyzed, along with user-generated content from Instagram. These sources were coded thematically using the same categories developed during the qualitative analysis of the interviews. This allowed for consistency in analysis and helped validate findings from primary data.

3.7 Triangulation

Triangulation was achieved by integrating three types of data: qualitative interviews, quantitative survey responses, and secondary data (online reviews and social media). This methodological triangulation enhanced validity by allowing findings from one source to be cross-checked against others, reducing bias and increasing confidence in the results.

Section 4: Results and Discussion

4.1 Overview

This chapter presents and interprets the key findings from the survey and interviews, structured around the internal and external success factors identified in the literature. The results are organized thematically to align with the study's research questions and provide a holistic view of Mesa's operations, strengths, and challenges.

4.2 Qualitative Results

4.2.1 Internal Strengths

The interviews revealed that Mesa's main strengths are rooted in the founder's hands-on leadership, a collaborative and motivated team, and a focus on delivering high quality Lebanese cuisine. According to the Head Chef (INT02), the kitchen team shares a strong sense of purpose and alignment: "Everyone here is proud to serve food that reflects our culture. We cook like it's for our own families."

Front-of-house staff (INT03) also emphasized the family-like work environment, stating that “customers feel that warmth it’s why they keep coming back.” The founder (INT01) described Mesa’s identity as “a mix of heritage, hospitality, and hustle.”

4.2.2 Adaptability and Innovation

Mesa’s ability to adapt quickly was noted across several interviews. The founder mentioned Mesa’s early focus on delivery and takeout services as a defining element of the business strategy, especially given the competitive dining landscape. The BOH staff (INT04) explained how packaging was adjusted to preserve food quality for takeout.

Customers (INT05 and INT06) shared examples of how Mesa incorporated their feedback: “I mentioned on Instagram that I missed a seasonal dish, and two weeks later it was back,” said one respondent. Weekly staff meetings were described by employees as a routine space for continuous improvement.

4.2.3 External Relationships and Strategic Partnerships

Interviewees highlighted the importance of external relationships. Mesa’s supplier (INT07) praised the restaurant’s commitment to sourcing high-quality local ingredients. A food influencer (INT08) noted Mesa’s growing recognition in the Lisbon food scene: “They have this unique ability to stay humble while delivering a top-tier experience.”

4.2.4 Customer Experience

Mesa’s emotional resonance with customers emerged as a powerful success factor. Several interviewees described Mesa as “a second home.” According to a local hospitality consultant (INT10), “They’ve created a space that balances professionalism with familiarity and that’s rare.”

4.3 Quantitative Results

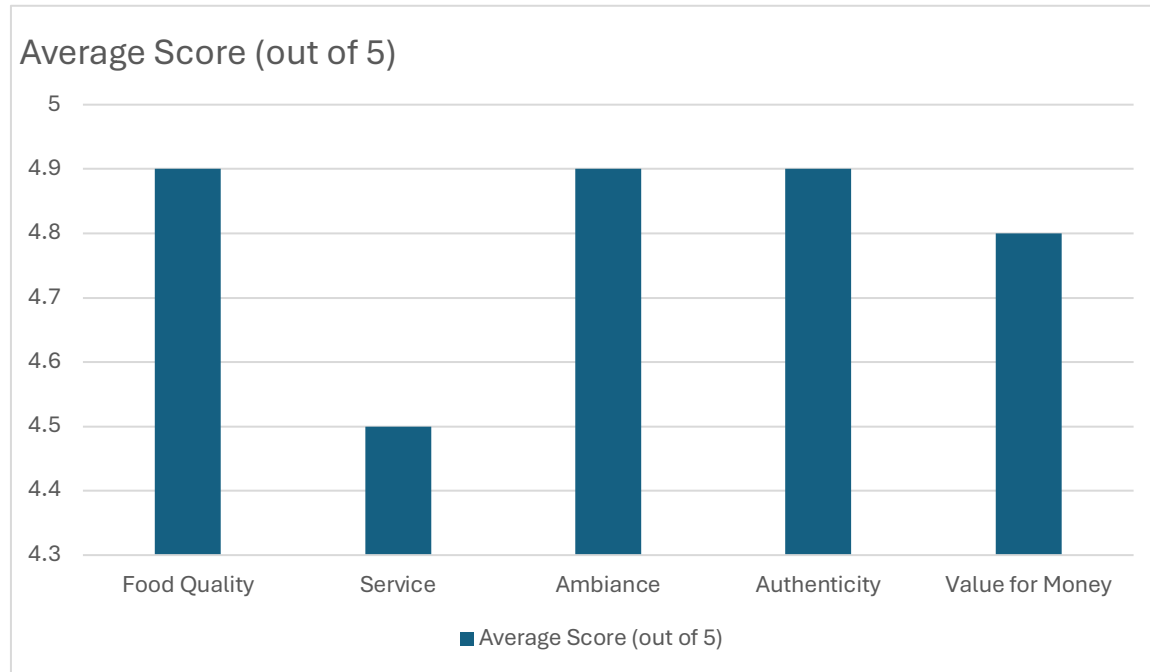
4.3.1 Demographics

A total of 117 customers participated in the survey. The majority were women (64%), with most respondents were aged between 25 and 44 years. Around 70% of participants were local residents of Cascais or Lisbon, while the remainder included tourists.

4.3.2 Customer Satisfaction

Survey results showed generally high satisfaction levels. Food quality and taste received the highest average scores, followed by service and ambiance. Authenticity and atmosphere were also highlighted as strong attributes. T-tests revealed that loyal customers rated the experience significantly higher than occasional ones ($p < 0.05$).

Figure 1. Average satisfaction ratings by factor



4.3.3 Predictors of Satisfaction

Regression analysis identified food quality, staff friendliness, and the uniqueness of the concept as key predictors of overall satisfaction and likelihood to recommend. These elements were consistent with the literature on ethnic restaurant success. The regression table is below:

Variable	Coefficient (B)	Std Error	t	p-value	
Constant	-0.55	0.93	-0.59	0.56	
Food Quality	0.39	0.08	4.64	<0.001	
Service Friendliness	0.29	0.04	7.36	<0.001	

Ambiance	0.09	0.09	1.00	0.32	
Authenticity	0.09	0.11	0.84	0.40	
Value for Money	0.03	0.07	0.43	0.67	
Concept Uniqueness	0.22	0.06	3.84	<0.001	

4.3.4 Customer Segments

Cluster analysis indicated three main customer groups: (1) Quality Seekers who valued taste and authenticity; (2) Social Diners who prioritized ambiance and service; and (3) Convenience Users who appreciated location and delivery options.

Figure 2. Net Promoter Score distribution from Survey

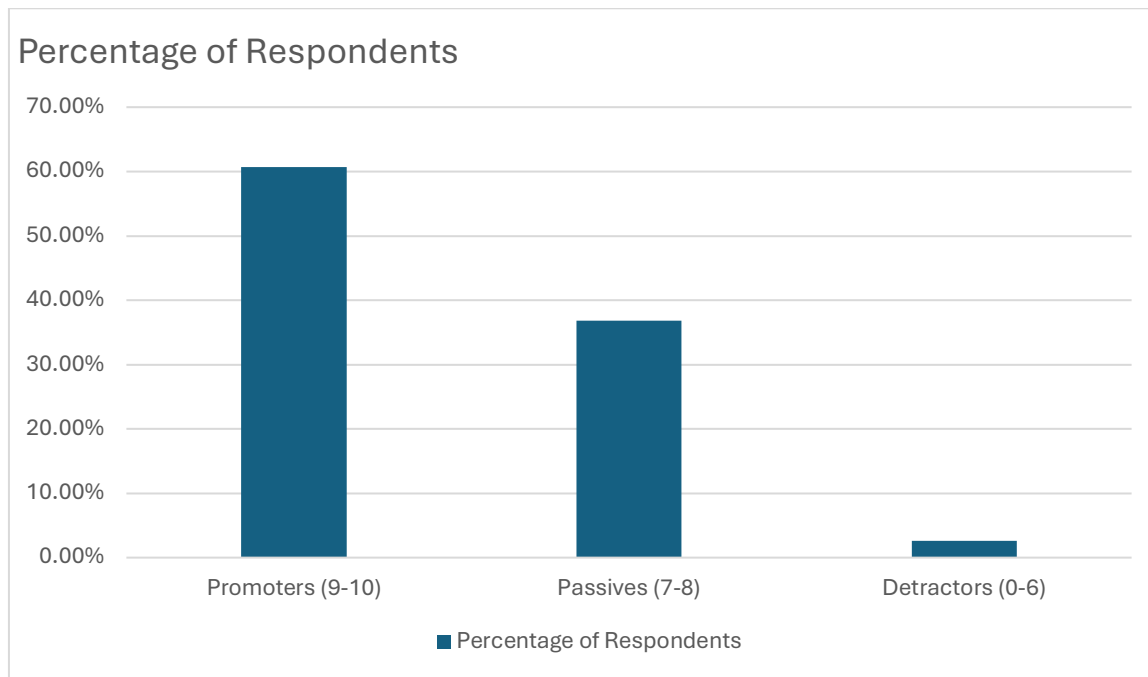


Figure 3. Average satisfaction by customer group

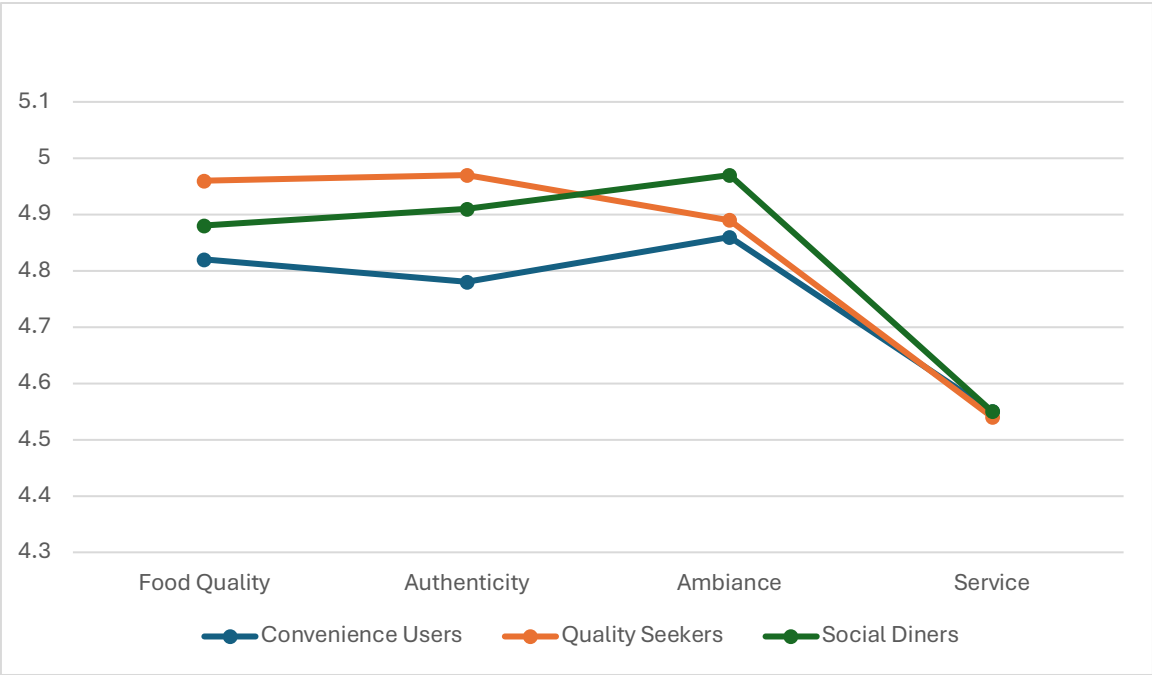
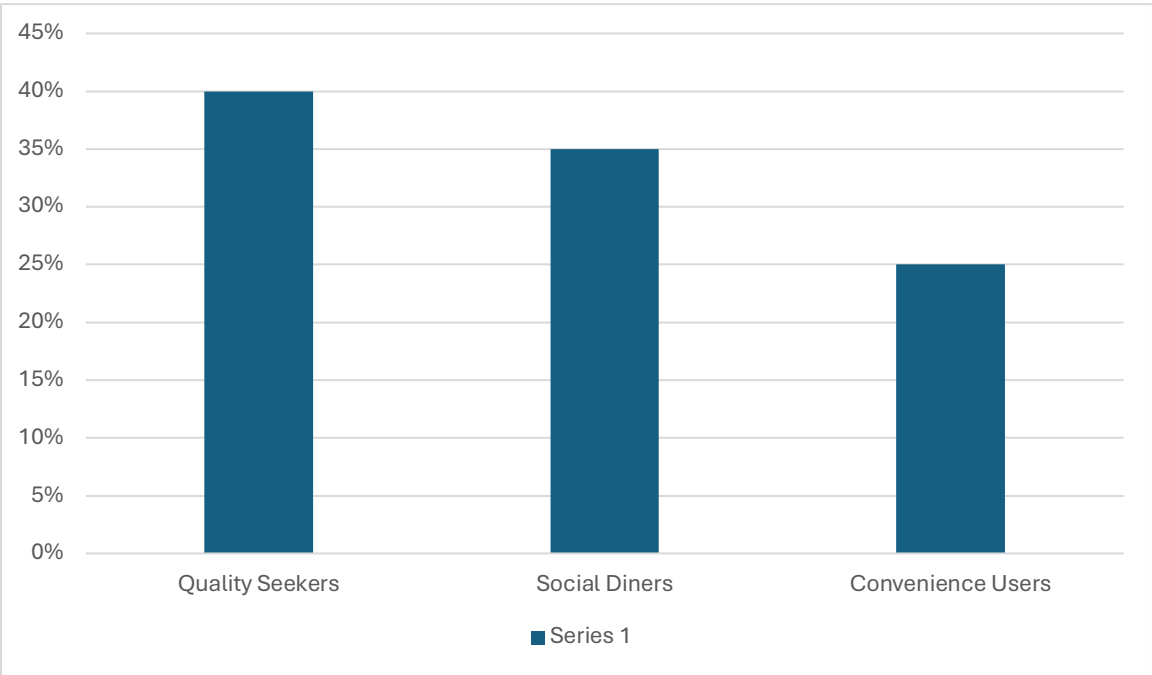


Figure 4. Customer segments identified in cluster analysis



4.4 Integration of Findings

The combination of statistical and interview data reinforced that Mesa's success stems from both tangible (food quality, service) and intangible (emotional connection, authenticity) factors. The alignment between customer satisfaction survey results and the themes emerging from interviews strengthens the reliability of these findings.

4.5 Contributions to the Literature

The findings support existing research on the importance of atmosphere, food authenticity, and personalized service in ethnic restaurant success. Additionally, this case highlights the role of adaptability and community building as differentiators in small, founder led establishments.

4.6 Limitations

The study's main limitations include its focus on a single case, which limits generalizability, and the small sample size for interviews. The survey, while informative, may reflect self-selection bias among highly satisfied customers.

4.7 Recommendations for Mesa

- Continue investing in staff development to ensure consistency in service.
- Leverage online platforms to showcase Mesa's unique story and values.
- Explore partnerships to address space constraints, such as pop-up concepts or shared kitchens.
- Enhance data collection on customer preferences for more targeted offerings.

Section 5: Empirical Setting

4.1 Overview of Mesa

Mesa By The Bey Cook is a Lebanese restaurant founded in 2022 in Cascais, Portugal. The business started with a mother daughter team, preparing meals from their private kitchen and operating as a takeaway only business. In 2023, following an increased demand and positive

outcome, the owners moved to a physical restaurant space and has currently a team of 12 employees.

The restaurant is located in a non-touristic residential area of Cascais and has established itself as a local favorite. The restaurant's identity is built around serving high quality comforting Lebanese food with focus on hospitality and authenticity.

Over time, Mesa expanded its offering to include eat-in, takeaways, delivery via platforms such as Uber Eats, Glovo and Bolt food and have worked in parallel with the fork to have an online reservation available. Besides, Mesa by The Bey Cook also caters for private and business events all over Portugal which helped them gain a very good reputation which contributed their growth. The success came mainly from customer recommendation through word of mouth and strong digital presence. Since their opening, Mesa maintained a 5 star rating on google maps and Uber Eats which significantly helped in gaining new customers.

4.2 Operational Context

The way Mesa by The Bey Cook runs its daily operations is a big part of what makes the business successful. Even though the restaurant started small, it now manages several different services at the same time: eat-in, takeaway, delivery through different platforms, catering for events.

One of the reasons Mesa has been able to grow is that it expanded slowly and carefully. First, it started with lunch service only. Then it added the Saturday brunch buffet, which quickly became popular. Delivery was introduced next, followed by early dinner service. At each step, the business made sure it could handle the extra work without affecting the quality of the food or the experience.

Another move was creating virtual restaurants using the same kitchen and ingredients. These restaurants are listed on delivery platforms under different names, allowing Mesa to reach more customers without needing a new location or more staff.

Catering is also an important part of the business. Mesa caters to private and corporate events across Portugal. Feedback plays an important role in operations too. The team pays close attention to what customers say whether through online reviews, Instagram messages, or in person comments. This helps the business make small changes and improvements over time.

Section 6: Conclusion

Mesa's success as an ethnic restaurant in Cascais can be understood as the result of a strong interaction between its internal capabilities and its ability to adapt to external conditions. Many of the drivers identified in the literature review were clearly confirmed through this study. First, the importance of food quality and authenticity was reflected in both the interviews and survey responses, supporting the view that freshness, taste, and cultural connection are central to building customer loyalty. Also, the literature's focus on service and team culture was also seen in Mesa's family like environment, where everyone works together with care and commitment affecting the overall experience of customers. Operational consistency and quality control supported by written recipes, prep checklists, and regular team meetings also matched what was found in academic research about the need for efficient and standardized processes. Mesa's ability to innovate based on customer feedback, whether through launching the Saturday buffet or adjusting the delivery packaging further supported the idea from the literature that being flexible and able to adjust is very important for restaurants today. Moreover, mesa's strong community engagement whether through its digital presence or on the ground also align with recent studies about the role of social media and authentic branding in attracting and retaining customers.

On the other hand, some external factors discussed in the literature such as national economic trends, inflation, or regulatory burdens were not identified as central influences on Mesa's trajectory. While the literature highlights the sensitivity of restaurants to shifts in GDP, consumer spending, and government policies, Mesa's case revealed that its local customer base, clear compliance practices, and modest scale allowed it to operate with relative stability in this regard. Likewise, broader industry concerns such as labor shortages or reliance on automation were not reflected in Mesa's experience. Instead, the restaurant benefits from a small, stable team with high morale and a strong sense of shared purpose, supported by the founder's close involvement in day to day operations. What emerged more clearly from the data was that Mesa's success is

less about navigating macro-level pressures and more about building emotional bonds with customers, creating a genuine sense of community, and delivering consistent value through cultural authenticity. While the literature offers valuable insight into structural and operational success factors, this case study highlights that, for small, founder-led restaurants, less tangible elements like warmth, identity, and attentiveness may ultimately carry greater weight in shaping long-term success.

Beyond confirming existing literature on food quality, service, and operational consistency, this study makes three contributions. First, it shows that for small ethnic restaurants, intangible elements such as authenticity, warmth, and cultural identity are central to long-term success. Second, it highlights the role of adaptability and customer co-creation, where direct feedback loops influence menu development and service adjustments. Third, it underscores the value of digital presence and storytelling in strengthening community ties and brand loyalty.

Limitations associated with this work are as follows:

Future research could expand this study by conducting comparative case analyses of ethnic restaurants across different cultural or geographical contexts. Longitudinal studies would also be valuable to track how small restaurants adapt to external pressures such as inflation, regulation, or technological disruption over time. Finally, integrating financial performance data could provide a more complete picture of how internal and external success factors translate into economic sustainability.

Section 7: Teaching Notes:

Synopsis

This case study looks at Mesa by the bey cook a Lebanese restaurant in Cascais, Portugal to understand what makes restaurants succeed in a tough and high risk industry. Mesa's story shows how small, founder led restaurants can grow by focusing on authenticity, food quality, and service, while also staying adaptable, engaging with the community, and building a strong digital presence.

The research is based on interviews with stakeholders, a customer survey, and an analysis of online reviews and social media. Results show that Mesa's success is not by chance, but the result of clear and consistent choices around identity, attentiveness, and responsiveness to its environment. The case invites students to reflect on how internal strengths and external conditions come together, how growth decisions should be evaluated, and how authenticity can work as a lasting competitive advantage in service businesses.

Target group

The case study is meant to use in Undergraduate and Masters program, specially in courses that deal with strategy, consulting, entrepreneurship and international management. It gives students a chance to use strategic tools and consulting methods on a real business case, while also thinking about how authenticity and cultural identity can shape success. Outside the classroom, it may also interest professionals preparing for careers in strategy consulting or those advising small, founder-led companies. It offers practical insights into both the difficulties and the opportunities of helping small businesses grow in a competitive and high-risk industry.

Learning objectives

By working on this case, students will be able to:

- 1- Use strategic tools (SWOT, Porter's Five Forces, RBV) to analyze the restaurant industry and Mesa's position.
- 2- Understand how small factors (authenticity, attentiveness, team culture) can help a business succeed despite larger challenges (economic conditions, regulations, competition).
- 3- Assess growth and scaling options for small, founder-led businesses.

- 4- Explore how consultants can support entrepreneurs—by structuring advice, identifying risks, and matching strategies to operational realities.
- 5- Think about how Mesa’s success factors might apply to other industries and locations.

Assignment Questions

The case raises a number of questions that help connect the external setting, Mesa’s internal resources, and the choices the founder now faces. These questions are meant to guide students in applying strategy and consulting tools while also thinking about the more personal factors that influence small business success:

- 1- How attractive is the restaurant industry in Cascais when seen through Porter’s 5 forces and how does Mesa manage to compete in it
- 2- What internal strengths and resources explain Mesa’s competitive edge?
- 3- Should Mesa expand into new outlets, delivery and catering only brands, or should it focus on strengthening its current niche? Which frameworks can help structure this decision?

Class Discussion

This section gives a guide for running a 90-minute class on the Mesa case. The goal is to connect strategy tools with the reality of a small, founder-led restaurant. Students should read the case before class and look at the customer survey results and online reviews in the appendix.

For the first 10–15 minutes, the instructor can introduce the challenges of the restaurant industry, focusing on its high failure rates and intense competition. A good way to trigger discussion is to ask: “What do you think are the most important reasons small restaurants succeed or fail?” This sets the stage before moving into the specifics of Mesa.

Next, students can analyze the industry context using Porter’s Five Forces. The instructor should encourage them to reflect on customer power, supplier dynamics, and the level of rivalry in Cascais. This part should take about 20 minutes and help students see why differentiation is necessary in such a market. The class can split into groups, each working on one or two forces,

then sharing their answers. This part helps students see the main challenges and how Mesa manages to find space in such a crowded and risky industry.

The focus then moves inside the company. Students point out Mesa's main strengths: food quality, authenticity, service, team culture, and online presence. These are tested with the VRIO framework to see which ones are valuable, rare, hard to copy, and well used. The instructor can ask: "Which of Mesa's strengths really give it an edge that lasts?"

Next, the class talks about Mesa's future. Should it open new outlets, add catering or delivery-only brands, or stay focused on the current restaurant? Students weigh the risks and benefits using the work they already did with Porter and VRIO. The instructor can split the room in two: one side supports expansion, the other supports consolidation, then they share their arguments.

Students take the role of consultants and give a short recommendation to the founder. The guiding question is: "If you were advising Mesa today, what would you suggest and why?" This helps them move from analysis to advice, just like in real consulting.

The instructor pulls the main points together and prepares the ground for the conclusion.

Class Conclusion and Wrap up

In the last 10 minutes, the instructor underlines the key lessons. The restaurant industry is tough, but Mesa shows that small restaurants can succeed with clear focus and consistent choices.

Internal strengths such as authenticity, food quality, and service culture are hard to copy and can become real advantages. The debate on growth versus consolidation shows that expansion may bring new chances, but it also risks losing what makes Mesa special.

The main message is that success for small, founder-led businesses depends as much on micro-level factors like loyalty and authenticity as on the bigger industry picture. For students of strategy and consulting, the lesson is that frameworks are useful but not enough. Good advice comes from mixing structured analysis with an understanding of people, culture, and identity.

References:

Derek, M. (2020). Ethnic cuisine in urban space. In A. Kowalczyk & M. Derek (Eds.), *Gastronomy and urban space: Changes and challenges in geographical perspective* (pp. 225–237). Retrieved from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338703457>

Chua, B.-L., Karim, S., Lee, S., & Han, H. (2020). Customer restaurant choice: An empirical analysis of restaurant types and eating-out occasions. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(17), 6276. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17176276>

Patrick, M. (2024). What makes a restaurant successful? [Undergraduate honors thesis, Johnson & Wales University–Providence]. ScholarsArchive@JWU. https://scholarsarchive.jwu.edu/student_scholarship/1072

Smith, A. F. (2006). *Encyclopedia of junk food and fast food*. Greenwood Press. Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/5780572/ENCYCLOPEDIA_OF_JUNK_FOOD_AND_FAST_FOOD

Hanus, G. (2018). The impact of globalization on consumer food behavior. *European Journal of Business Science and Technology*, 4(2), 141–154. <https://doi.org/10.11118/ejobsat.v4i2.138>

Louisiana Restaurant Association. (2025, February 14). *How Gen Z & Millennials are redefining dining*. Louisiana Restaurant Association. Retrieved June 29, 2025, from <https://www.lra.org/2025/02/14/how-gen-z-millennials-are-redefining-dining/>

National Restaurant Association. (2024, November 20). *Sustainability, health and variety top list of 2025 macro trends*. National Restaurant Association. Retrieved June 29, 2025, from <https://restaurant.org/education-and-resources/resource-library/sustainability%2C-health-and-variety-top-list-of-2025-macro-trends/>

Healy, J. J., & Mac Con Iomaire, M. (2018). Calculating restaurant failure rates using longitudinal census data. *Journal of Culinary Science & Technology*, 16(2), 123–141. Retrieved from

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324956304_Calculating_restaurant_failure_rates_using_longitudinal_census_data#fullTextFileContent

Luo, T., & Stark, P. B. (2014, October 30). *Only the bad die young: Restaurant mortality in the Western US*. arXiv.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/267695784_Only_the_Bad_Die_Young_Restaurant_Mortality_in_the_Western_US

Makani, F. L. (2016). *Strategies small restaurant owners use to reduce food waste and increase profits* (Doctoral dissertation, Walden University). Walden University ScholarWorks.

<https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/3176/>

National Restaurant Association. (2021). *2021 State of the Restaurant Industry*. National Restaurant Association. Retrieved from <https://go.restaurant.org/rs/078-ZLA-461/images/2021-State-of-the-Restaurant-Industry.pdf>

Ryu, K., Lee, H.-R., & Kim, W. G. (2012). The influence of the quality of the physical environment, food, and service on restaurant image, customer perceived value, customer satisfaction, and behavioral intentions. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 24(2), 200–223. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09596111211206141>

Healy, J. J. (2014). *Craving Success: Introduction to Critical Success Factors in the Restaurant Industry and an Overview of two Successful Restaurateurs*.

Magnini, V. P., & Honeycutt, E. D., Jr. (2005). Face recognition and name recall. *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*, 46(1), 69–78.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0010880404270881>

National Restaurant Association. (2022, December 20). *Association Tells DOL Changes to Independent Contractor Rule Would Create Significant Uncertainty for Industry* [Press release]. Restaurant.org.

Unalan, K. (2025, May 13). *Navigating tax & regulatory changes: Restaurant industry leaders' insight on government affairs*. GBQ. Retrieved from <https://gbq.com/navigating-tax-regulatory-changes-insight-from-the-2025-orha-government-affairs-committee-meeting/>

Sharma, A., Arora, T., & Kharub, M. (2021). *Critical success factors affecting the restaurant industry: Insights from restaurant managers*. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/355087377_Critical_Success_Factors_affecting_the_Restaurant_Industry_Insights_from_Restaurant_Managers

Gunden, N. (2017). How online reviews influence consumer restaurant selection (Master's thesis, University of South Florida). USF Tampa Graduate Theses and Dissertations. <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/etd/6707>

Harrington, R. J., Ottenbacher, M. C., & Fauser, S. (2017). QSR brand value: Marketing mix dimensions among McDonald's, KFC, Burger King, Subway and Starbucks. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 29(4), 1365–1387. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-06-2015-0300>

Yan, X., Wang, J., & Chau, M. (2015). Customer revisit intention to restaurants: Evidence from online reviews. *Information Systems Frontiers*, 17(3), 645–657. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10796-013-9446-5>

Camillo, A. A. (2008). Success and failure in Northern California: US operations. *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly*, 49(4), 364–380. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1938965508324841>

Lee, K., & Ha, I. S. (2012). Exploring the impacts of key economic indicators and economic recessions in the restaurant industry. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 21(3), 330–343. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/241744568_Exploring_the_Impacts_of_Key_Economic_Indicators_and_Economic_Recessions_in_the_Restaurant_Industry

Stewart, H., Blisard, N., Bhuyan, S., & Nayga, R. M. Jr. (2004). *The demand for food away from home: Full-service or fast food?* (Agricultural Economic Report No. 829). U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. <https://doi.org/10.22004/ag.econ.33953>

Dyshkantiuk, O. (2024). Startups in the restaurant business as a strategic tool for the development of the national economy. *Naukovij Poglâd: Ekonomika Ta Upravlinnâ*, 4(88). <https://doi.org/10.32782/2521-666x/2024-88-17>

Bain, A. (2024). Effect of Culinary Tourism on Local Economic Development in South Africa. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, 4(2), 34–44. <https://doi.org/10.47672/jht.2382>

Sparks, B., Bowen, J. T., & Klag, S. (2003). Restaurants and the tourist market. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 15(1), 6–13.

<https://doi.org/10.1108/09596110310458936>

Dutta, K., & Gupta, K. (2024). Sustainability and Green Practices in Restaurants: Dilemma in Adapting by QSRs in an Emerging Economy. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Cases*.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/21649987241297719>

Incardona, G., Gebbels, M., & Nguyen, T. H. H. (2024). Millennials' intentions to buy plant-based meat alternatives: insights for quick-service restaurants. *Hospitality Insights*, 8(1), 10–12.

<https://doi.org/10.24135/hi.v8i1.169>

Parsa, H. G., Gregory, A., & Terry, M. (2010).

Why do restaurants fail? Part III: An analysis of macro and micro factors.

International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management, 22(3), 300–320.

Ahuja, K., Chandra, V., Lord, V., & Peens, C. (2021). *Ordering in: The rapid evolution of food delivery*. McKinsey & Company. <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/technology-media-and-telecommunications/our-insights/ordering-in-the-rapid-evolution-of-food-delivery>

Statista. (2020). *Online food delivery market value worldwide from 2017 to 2020 (in billion U.S. dollars)*. Statista. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/425824/online-food-delivery-market-value-worldwide/>

Guo, Y. (2025). Successful stories on the usage of technologies in service industries. In *Technological Innovations in the Food Service Industry*

Parsa, H. G., van der Rest, J. P. I., Smith, S. R., Parsa, R. A., & Bujisic, M. (2014). Why restaurants fail? Part II – The impact of affiliation, location, and size on restaurant failures: Results from a survival analysis. *Journal of Foodservice Business Research*, 17(4), 371–399.

Wilk, R. (2013). The history of globalization and the food supply. In A. Bryant & L. Bush (Eds.), *The handbook of food research* (pp. 55–73). Bloomsbury Academic.

Research and Markets. (2024, November 5). Foodservice Global Industry Guide 2019–2028: A \$4.33 Trillion Market in 2023 – Competitive Analysis, Key Financial Metrics, and Industry Pressures to 2028. Research and Markets.

<https://www.researchandmarkets.com/reports/5998645/foodservice-global-industry-guide>

Pacheco Navarro, A. C., Sandoval Godoy, S. A., & Camarena Gómez, D. M. J. (2018). Sociedad de consumo y franquicias de comida rápida: Factores contribuyentes para las transformaciones en el consumo alimentario

ILO (2021) – International Labour Organization. (2021). World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2021. Geneva: ILO. Available at: www.ilo.org

https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_740877.pdf#:~:text=The%20accommodation%20and%20food%20services,told%20to%20stay%20at%20home

IBISWorld (2023) – IBISWorld. (2023). Global Fast Food Restaurants Industry Report. Available at: www.ibisworld.com

<https://www.ibisworld.com/global/employment/global-fast-food-restaurants/1480/#:~:text=Global%20Fast%20Food%20Restaurants%20Employment,Food%20Restaurants%20as%20of%202023>

National Restaurant Association (2024) – National Restaurant Association. (2024). State of the Restaurant Industry Report. Available at: www.restaurant.org

<https://restaurant.org/research-and-media/research/research-reports/state-of-the-industry/#:~:text=Consumers%20plan%20to%20continue%20spending,9M>

National Restaurant Association. (2024). Economic contributions of the restaurant & foodservice industry: District of Columbia. https://restaurant.org/getmedia/d18da0f6-7142-4067-96a1-26a30dddaf78/dc_econ_impact_study.pdf

<https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/technology-media-and-telecommunications/our-insights/ordering-in-the-rapid-evolution-of-food-delivery>

Zohar, I., Alperson-Afil, N., Goren-Inbar, N., Prévost, M., Tütken, T., Sisma-Ventura, G., Hershkovitz, I., & Najorka, J. (2022). Evidence for the cooking of fish 780,000 years ago at Gesher Benot Ya'aqov, Israel. *Nature Ecology & Evolution*, 6(12), 2016–2028.

<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41559-022-01910-z>

Rawson, K. and Shore, E. (2019) *Dining Out. A Global History of Restaurants*. Reaktion Books. Available at: <https://www.perlego.com/book/973238> (Accessed: 26 June 2025).

Silva, D. (2017, March 15). The first restaurant. *Today's World Kitchen*.

<https://todaysworldkitchen.com/2017/03/15/the-first-restaurant/>

Jakle, J. A., & Sculle, K. A. (2002). *Fast food: Roadside restaurants in the automobile age*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Hansen, H. O. (2024). **Megatrends in agriculture, food industry and food markets: An empirical and holistic approach**. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-58152-6>

Singh, S., Singh, G., & Dhir, S. (2022). Impact of digital marketing on the competitiveness of the restaurant industry. **Journal of Foodservice Business Research**.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/15378020.2022.2077088>

Petrotić, M., Bazdan, V., & Samardžija, J. (2014). Interior design in restaurants as a factor influencing customer satisfaction. **RIThink, 4**, 10–14. Retrieved from

<https://www.rit.edu/croatia/sites/rit.edu.croatia/files/docs/10-14.pdf>

Cavusoglu, M. (2015). **An analysis of technology applications in the restaurant industry** (Master's thesis, University of South Florida). Digital Commons @ USF.

<https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=6654&context=etd>

Restaurant Association. (2019). *Restaurant industry 2030: Actionable insights for the future*.

<https://restaurant.org/nra/media/restaurant-2030/restaurant2030.pdf>

TheFork Manager. (2023). How new technologies impact restaurants.

<https://www.theforkmanager.com/en/blog/restaurant-management/how-new-technologies-impact-restaurants>

Section 8: Appendix

Appendix A – Interview Guide (Semi-Structured)

To explore Mesa's internal strengths, external challenges, and key drivers of success, ten semi-structured interviews were designed and conducted. The interview guide was informed by prior literature and aligned with the study's research question: How do internal capabilities and external conditions interact to shape the success of Mesa?

Each interview lasted between 30 to 60 minutes, was conducted in-person, and followed the ethical protocol of informed consent and confidentiality. The questions were tailored by interviewee type (Internal vs. External).

Interview Structure

- 1. Warm-Up and Context Setting (All participants)

Could you tell me a bit about your relationship with Mesa?

How long have you been involved with or aware of the restaurant?

What do you believe makes Mesa stand out?

Section A: Internal Stakeholders

A.1. Restaurant Vision and Strategy

- What inspired the creation of Mesa, and how has that vision evolved over time?

- What do you think is Mesa's core identity or mission?

- How would you define success for Mesa?

A.2. Team and Culture

- Can you describe the team dynamic and culture here?

- How do you onboard and train new staff?
- What practices are in place to ensure motivation and staff retention?

A.3. Operations and Quality Control

- What steps are taken to ensure food quality and consistency?
- How do you manage service during peak times?
- Are there any SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures) in place?

A.4. Innovation and Adaptability

- Can you share a recent change Mesa implemented based on customer feedback or market trends?
- How did you adapt to the challenges brought by delivery platforms or digital reservations?

A.5. Reflection

- What are the biggest challenges you currently face?
- What support or resources would help Mesa grow further?

Section B: External Stakeholders

B.1. Experience with Mesa

- How did you first come across Mesa?
- How often do you interact with them (as a diner / partner / observer)?
- What keeps you coming back or recommending Mesa?

B.2. Perceived Strengths

- What aspects of Mesa's food, service, or atmosphere do you find unique?
- How does it compare to other restaurants you know?

B.3. Market and Community

- How would you describe Mesa's role in the local dining scene?
- Are there any collaborations or community events you've seen them participate in?

B.4. Feedback and Engagement

- Have you provided feedback to Mesa before? If yes, how was it received?
- How do you perceive their engagement on social media or digital platforms?

B.5. Future Outlook

- In your opinion, what should Mesa continue doing to grow and succeed?

- Are there any areas where they could improve?

Closing Questions (All Participants)

- What three words would you use to describe Mesa?

- Is there anything else you'd like to share that you think is relevant to understanding Mesa's success?

Development of the Guide

This guide was created using the framework by Kallio et al. (2016), which includes:

1. Assessing the appropriateness of the method
2. Reviewing existing literature
3. Drafting and refining the guide
4. Piloting with one internal and one external participant
5. Finalizing the structure and wording

Appendix B – Interview Transcripts (Selected Extracts)

Interview 1 – Founder (INT01)

Type: Internal

Position: Founder & Executive Manager

Date: January 15, 2025

Duration: 52 minutes

Interview Format: In-person, semi-structured

Q: What inspired you to create Mesa, and how would you describe its mission?

A: Mesa actually started from our home kitchen. At the time, I just wanted to cook food that felt like home. Not just for us, but for other Lebanese people living in Portugal who missed that connection to our culture. I would cook for friends, and they started telling others... orders started coming in through word of mouth, and it grew faster than we expected. That's when we realized it was more than just food, it was a feeling people were craving. The mission has always

been simple: to share the warmth, generosity, and flavors of Lebanese home cooking in a space that feels like family.

Q: What would you say are Mesa's core internal strengths?

A: Definitely the team culture. We're not just coworkers, we're a family. Everyone respects the kitchen, respects the ingredients, and takes pride in what we serve. I think that shows in the food and in the service. We hold a team meeting every week where we go over feedback, try new ideas, and even talk about customer comments from Instagram or Google reviews. Everyone feels heard, and that builds commitment.

Q: How does Mesa handle quality control and consistency?

A: Even though we're a small team, we've put a few systems in place to make sure everything stays consistent. Every recipe is written down. Not just ingredients, but exact portions and how each plate should look when it's served. We have a prep checklist for each shift so nothing gets missed in the kitchen. We also do regular taste checks during service, and at least once a week we review what's working and what's not with the team. On top of that, we're really strict about freshness. If an ingredient isn't perfect, we don't use it, no exceptions.

Q: Can you share a time Mesa adapted quickly to market feedback?

A: Our Saturday brunch buffet came out of customer requests. People wanted a way to try more dishes in one sitting. We ran a small test at first, and it got such great feedback we launched it weekly.

Q: What are Mesa's biggest current challenges?

A: One of our biggest challenges right now is managing growth without losing our identity. As more people discover Mesa, expectations grow. Whether it's around service speed, menu variety, or availability for catering. We want to keep improving and evolving, but always in a way that stays true to our values: home cooked food, personal service, and authenticity. Finding the right balance between scaling up and staying grounded is something we think about a lot. Also, staying

ahead of fast-changing customer preferences like dietary needs or digital convenience means we're constantly adapting how we do things.

Interview 6 – Loyal Customer (INT06)- Lebanese

Type: External

Profile: Local resident, regular customer since 2023

Date: January 27, 2025

Duration: 33 minutes

Interview Format: In-person, semi-structured

Q: How and when did you first discover Mesa, and what made you return?

A: A friend posted about it on Instagram. The food looked incredible and I'm Lebanese, so I was curious if it was the real deal. I went with my wife and we were blown away. The flavors were even better than the good places in Lebanon. Whenever I travel and come back from Lebanon or Dubai, the first thing I do is order from Mesa as I crave it even after having authentic Lebanese in my home country.

Q: What aspects of Mesa do you value most?

A: Three things: authenticity, warmth, and consistency. The food is always fresh. You can tell they care.

Q: Have you ever provided feedback?

A: Yes! Once I mentioned that it is better to separate the nuts on the side for the Quinoa salad for the byffet as some people have issues with nuts. Next Saturday, it was already kept on the side.

Q: What improvements would you suggest?

A: expanding dinner hours and adding a waiter maybe.

Q: What three words best describe Mesa?

A: Warm. Delicious. Genuine.

Interview 8 – Supplier (INT08)

Type: External

Position: Local Produce Distributor

Date: February 2, 2025

Duration: 28 minutes

Q: How would you describe your partnership with Mesa?

A: They're one of the few clients that truly care about what they buy. They ask where things come from, who grew them, how they were picked. It's rare to see that level of detail in a small operation.

Q: What do you think sets Mesa apart from other clients?

A: Their consistency and respect for local produce. They're loyal to small scale farms and we've never had payment issues or misunderstandings. That builds trust.

Appendix C – Customer Survey Questionnaire

The customer survey was designed to collect feedback on demographic details, frequency of visits, satisfaction across various success factors, and likelihood of recommending Mesa.

It was distributed in person via QR codes in the restaurant and digitally on Mesa's social media platforms.

Survey Questions

Section 1: Demographics

1. Age group (Under 18, 18–24, 25–34, 35–44, 45–54, 55+)

2. Gender (Female / Male / Prefer not to say)

3. Are you a local resident or tourist?

Section 2: Visit Frequency

4. How often do you visit Mesa? (Weekly / Monthly / Occasionally / First time)

5. What service do you typically use? (Eat-in / Takeaway / Delivery)

Section 3: Satisfaction (5-point Likert scale: Very Dissatisfied – Very Satisfied)

6. Quality of food

7. Service and friendliness of staff

8. Ambiance and atmosphere

9. Value for money

10. Authenticity of dishes

Section 4: Loyalty and Feedback

11. How likely are you to recommend Mesa to a friend? (0–10 scale)

12. Please share any suggestions or comments.

Appendix D – Survey Summary Table

<u>Category</u>	<u>Average Score (/5)</u>
<u>Food Quality</u>	<u>4.9</u>
<u>Service</u>	<u>4.5</u>
<u>Ambiance</u>	<u>4.9</u>
<u>Authenticity</u>	<u>4.9</u>
<u>Value for Money</u>	<u>4.8</u>

Net Promoter Score (NPS): +58

Top Comment Themes: Friendly service, comforting food, family atmosphere, consistent quality.

Appendix E – Secondary Data and Digital Presence

More than 200 online reviews were analyzed from Google Maps, Uber Eats, Glovo, and TheFork. Most reviews rated Mesa at 5. Frequent compliments included the warmth of service, consistency of food, and authentic Lebanese atmosphere.

Mesa's Instagram had over 3,000 followers, with frequent engagement. Stories and posts featuring customer reviews, behind-the-scenes kitchen content, and cultural trivia contributed to a strong digital presence.

Sample online review (Google, April 2025):

" Absolutely incredible, divine food! Love this place. Such sweet, kind people also. Highly recommended for eat-in (simple, welcoming nice space in a quiet location, with a terrace) or to order take-away. With advance notice they can cook for your party or dinner party. Simply amazing ."