

**Title: Strategic Adaptation and Resilience in the Food Industry During COVID-19 and
Beyond: Focusing on Costa Coffee
Research Project**

Abstract

The current research explores Costa Coffee's strategic adjustments and resilience measures during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The study seeks to analyse how food industries managed operational disturbances, emphasising digital innovation, customer behaviour changes, supply chain resilience and human capital management. With a qualitative method, semi-structured interviews were carried out among Costa Coffee staff to understand the business's response to crises. The results indicate that Costa Coffee sped up its digitalisation through mobile ordering, contactless payment and delivery collaborations. Consumer behaviour changes encouraged the company to increase drive-thru operations and ready-to-drink product offerings. Supply chain disruptions required centralisation of inventories, local sourcing and automation of procurement to ensure product availability. Resilience in the workforce was facilitated through mental health programs, training initiatives, and restructuring processes. The research contributes to academic and theoretical context by showing how businesses can integrate technological innovation, supply chain flexibility and workforce support to enhance crisis preparedness. Recommendations include industry-wide investment in AI-driven operations, Costa Coffee's expansion of data analytics and localisation strategies and government policies favouring SMEs' digital adoption and supply chain stability. These lessons provide valuable insights for improving business resilience in future crises.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Background Information

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted the global food industry, causing widespread operational challenges, shifts in consumer behaviour and long-term strategic realignments (United Nations Trade and Development (UNCTAD), 2021; Das, Sarkar and Debroy, 2022). Government-imposed lockdowns, social distancing measures and supply chain disruptions led to an unprecedented decline in revenue for restaurants, coffee chains and fast-food establishments (Wahab, 2021). This claim was supported by statistics revealed by Statista Research Department (2023), showing that seated diners in UK restaurants dropped nearly 100% in April 2020. These fluctuations continued into 2021 and 2022, indicating the prolonged impact of the pandemic on the food service industry (Figure 1).

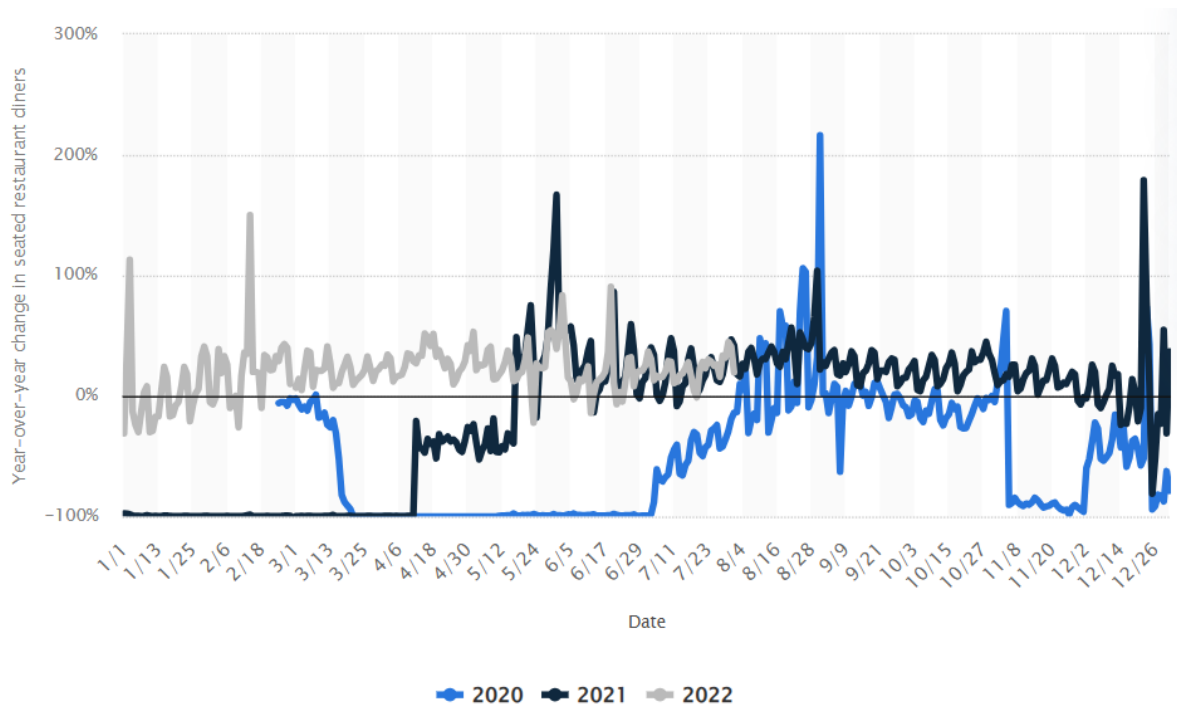


Figure 1 – Fluctuation in food industry dining in the UK (Source: Statista Research Department, 2023)

Additionally, the UK hospitality sector experienced severe revenue losses due to COVID-19, with business turnover dropping to £1.2 billion in May 2020 before gradually recovering to £6.9 billion by May 2021, though still 25% below 2019 levels (Office for National Statistics, 2021) (Figure 2).

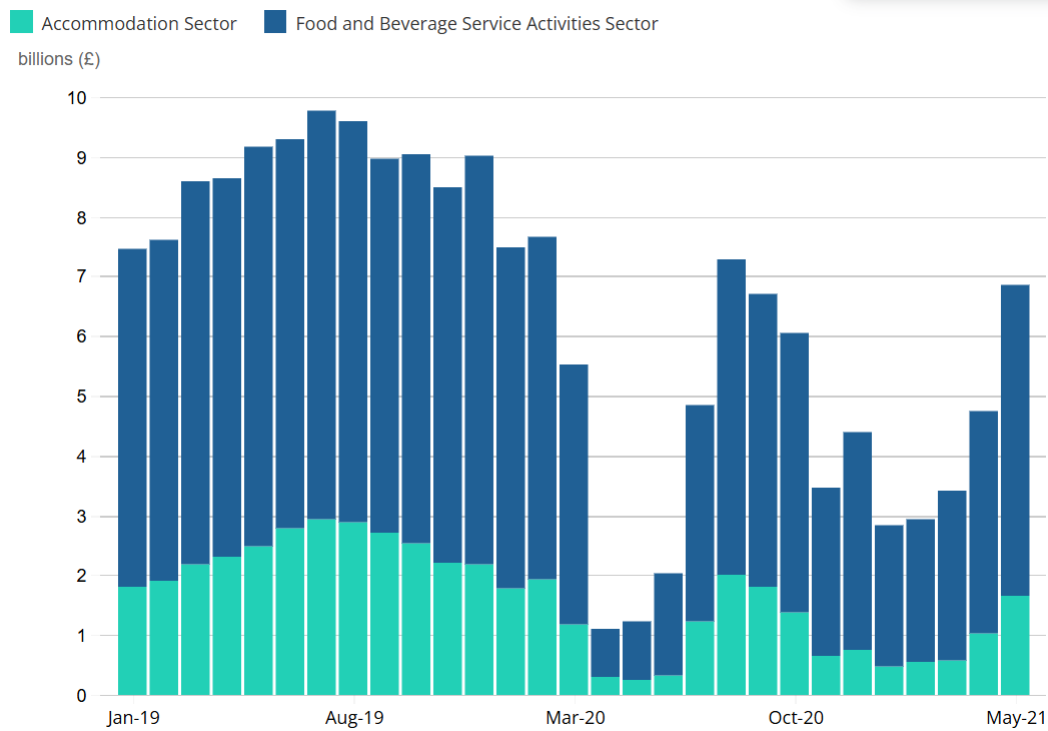


Figure 2 - UK hospitality turnover trends (2019–2021) (Source: Office for National Statistics, 2021)

Among the hardest-hit segments were coffeehouse chains, which relied heavily on in-store experiences, facing an 86% drop in out-of-home coffee sales during the first UK lockdown in 2020, forcing many to diversify into online and subscription models (British Coffee Association, 2022). With dine-in restrictions and changing consumer habits, companies had to adapt rapidly toward digital solutions, delivery services and enhanced hygiene protocols. Digital transformation became a survival strategy, with mobile ordering, drive-thru services, and contactless payments accelerating in all industrial sectors like food, healthcare, etc. (Modgil et al., 2022).

Costa Coffee, the UK's largest coffeehouse chain, as per Dixon (2023), serves as an ideal case study for examining strategic adaptation and resilience in the food and beverage sector (Figure 3).

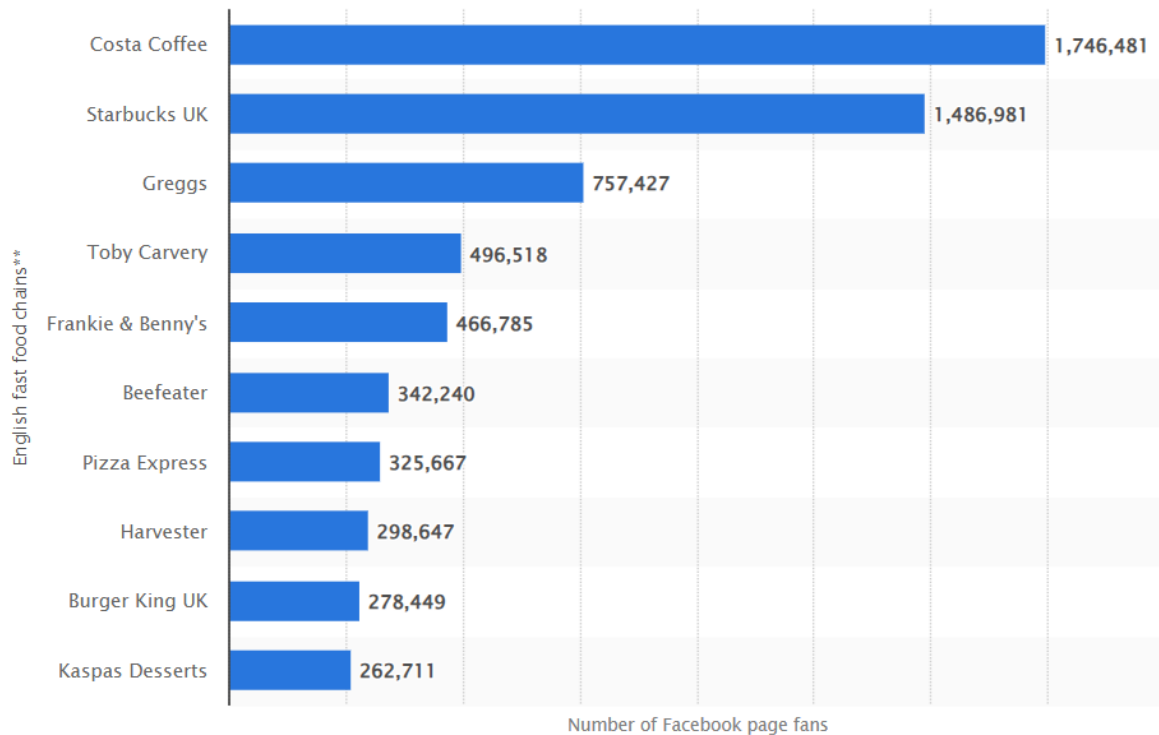


Figure 3 - Top 10 UK fast food chains (Source: Dixon, 2023)

Costa Coffee, owned by The Coca-Cola Company, closed nearly all 2700 UK stores for six weeks in 2020, significantly impacting revenue (The Coca-Cola Company, 2020). Although 2400 stores later reopened, ongoing uncertainty led to 1650 job cuts and cost-saving measures, including the removal of assistant store manager roles (Butler and Partington, 2020). However, The Coca-Cola Company (2020) further highlighted that despite government support, such as VAT reductions and furlough schemes, Costa struggled to restore pre-pandemic trade levels.

To navigate these challenges, Costa Coffee adopted strategic adaptation measures, primarily through digital transformation, focusing on mobile app enhancements, contactless payment options, and partnerships with Uber Eats and Deliveroo for home delivery (Sheridan, 2025a). The pandemic also triggered a shift in consumer behaviour, with increased preference for drive-thru services and at-home coffee consumption, prompting Costa to expand its ready-to-drink product range and vending machine networks (Lim, 2023). These efforts enabled Costa to enhance customer convenience, adapt to evolving consumer preferences, and sustain business resilience throughout and beyond the pandemic.

1.2.Problem Statement and Rationale

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the food sector severely, with coffee shop chains such as Costa Coffee experiencing operational closures, revenue decline and changing consumer behaviour (UNCTAD, 2021; Wahab, 2021; Butler and Partington, 2020). The 86% drop in out-of-home coffee sales during the initial UK lockdown in 2020 compelled businesses to quickly make adaptations (like digital improvisation, etc.) (British Coffee Association, 2022). In this context, digitalisation and delivery alliances turned out to be central survival plans but their long-term viability remains in question (Modgil et al., 2022). This study, therefore, became necessary to understand the ways Costa Coffee, the biggest UK-based coffee chain overcomes pandemic-triggered problems through strategic changes like digitalisation, supply chain innovation and shifting models of service. Through an analysis of Costa's resilience measures, this study offered insightful lessons for the food and beverage industry on crisis management, consumer behaviour changes and sustainable business operations in the post-pandemic world.

1.3.Research Aim and Objectives

This study will aim to explore how the food industry adapted its business strategies to enhance resilience during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on Costa Coffee. The key research objectives are:

- To examine the resilience strategies that food industries use to deal with disruptions in operations.
- To assess the different strategic adaptations between different market segments.
- To analyse the strategic adaptation and resilience in the food industry during COVID-19 and beyond, focusing on Costa Coffee.

1.4.Research Question

How did Costa Coffee adapt its strategies to enhance resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Significance of the study

This research is of great significance as it examines Costa Coffee's strategic improvisations in the context of COVID-19, offering business resilience insights in the food sector. Through examining digital transformation, changes in consumer behaviour and adjustments in operations, the research provides industry stakeholders with useful lessons on crisis management. The findings will help companies formulate resilient strategies for future

disruptions to remain stable in the long term. In addition, it makes a contribution to the academic literature on crisis management, resilience and digital innovation in the hospitality industry.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

This literature review will explore the strategic adaptations and resilience measures employed by the food industry during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. It will also examine key theoretical frameworks, such as resilience theory, and investigate empirical studies on the impact of the pandemic on the food service sector. The review will further explore the shifts in consumer behaviour, digital transformation and operational changes that were essential for food and beverage businesses to navigate the crisis. Furthermore, it will identify research gaps that this study aims to address, contributing to the understanding of resilience in the food industry.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

Resilience Theory, which was first presented by psychologist Michael Rutter in the late 1970s, is focused on the explanation of the factors that allow individuals and organisations to positively adapt to adversity and stress (VicHealth, 2015). Rutter's Resilience Theory, as outlined by Van Breda (2018), highlighted how certain individuals, despite experiencing severe adversities, are able to retain or recover psychological well-being (Figure 4).

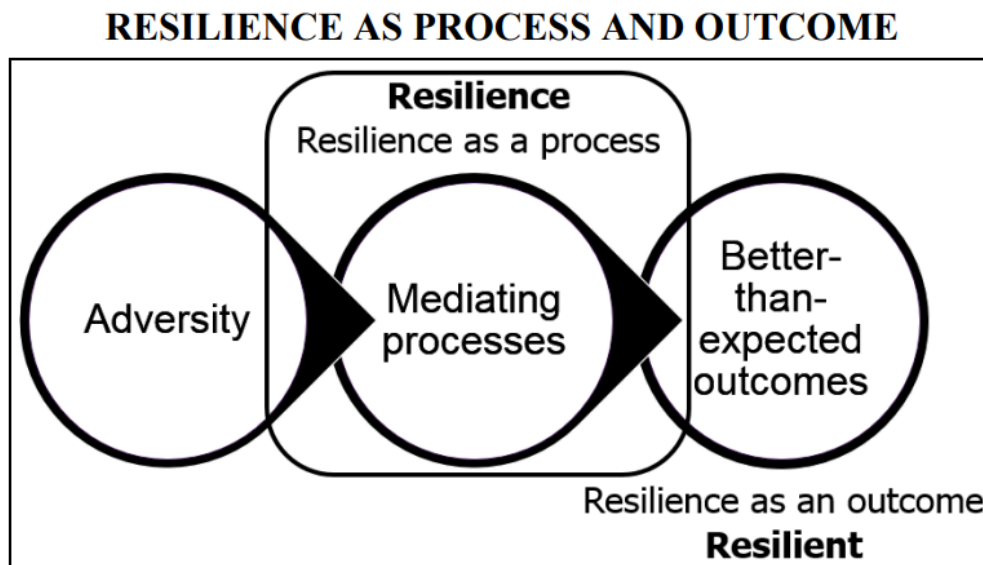


Figure 4 – Resilience Theory (Source: Van Breda, 2018).

The strength of Resilience Theory lies in its characteristics including adaptability, focusing on how entities adjust to challenging circumstances. Lewis (2023) stated that Resilience Theory develops a sense of optimism by emphasising strengths and adaptive capabilities, supporting positive problem-solving. Edwards (2020) further stated that the theory's wide scope enables linking across disciplines, such as business, education, and disaster management, to offer an adaptive framework for explaining and encouraging resilience. However, one of the main criticisms is that models of resilience tend to concentrate on individual characteristics and may neglect organisational or community-level systemic and structural factors impacting resilience (Vella and Pai, 2019). In addition, Jones and Tanner (2017) suggested that measuring resilience can be complicated because it has a dynamic quality, involving emotional, cognitive and behavioural aspects which are hard to standardise. You (2023) also criticised that an overemphasis on resilience might cause overlooking systemic problems, excessive adaptation pressure on people and organisations and neglecting structural factors inhibiting real adaptive capacity.

This research will explore how Costa Coffee, a top UK coffee chain, dealt with the challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic through strategic adjustment. Resilience Theory is an appropriate framework to use when analysing such adjustments because it assesses adaptation strategies, explores organisational flexibility and determines strengths and weaknesses. Through the application of Resilience Theory, this study seeks to enhance the knowledge of how companies can build and execute strategies that not only resist crises but offer even more resilient operational models and long-term sustainability, making significant contributions to both scholarly research and business practices.

2.3. Empirical Findings

2.3.1. Impact of COVID-19 on the Food Industry

COVID-19 has drastically impacted the international food sector, causing universal operating issues (such as supply chain disruptions, labour shortages, etc.) and a major change in consumer habits (including a shift towards online food delivery, preference for contactless transactions, etc.) (Gangitano, 2022; Statista Research Department, 2025; MacDonnell, 2022). Governments around the globe enacted regulations like the closing of restaurants and bars to prevent the spread of the virus, which led to a sudden decrease in customer traffic and revenue for food establishments. According to Gangitano (2022), in the United States, for instance, the National Restaurant Association estimated that the industry would face direct losses of \$225

billion, with a total economic impact of \$675 billion when considering related sectors. In the United Kingdom, the branded coffee shop market's value declined from £10.1 billion in 2019 to £5.3 billion in 2023, reflecting the pandemic's impact (Statista Research Department, 2025). Moreover, coffeehouse chains faced unique challenges during this period. With in-person dining restrictions and health concerns, many consumers shifted to at-home coffee consumption. MacDonnell (2022) indicated that over 50% of Brits drank more coffee while working from home during the pandemic. This shift led to decreased foot traffic in coffee shops, compelling businesses to adapt by enhancing online sales and introducing subscription models.

Operationally, coffee chains such as Starbucks were severely affected by the pandemic; for example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Starbucks UK saw its revenue fall by 32.7% to £243 million, mainly as a result of store closures and lower footfall (Starbucks, 2021). Júnior et al. (2022) highlighted that to counter these issues, food chains were under pressure to upgrade their digital platforms, focusing on delivery and mobile ordering to address shifting consumer needs. Moreover, consumer preferences also changed, with most customers preferring drive-thru facilities for their convenience and safety. Supporting this claim, Trangle (2025) reported that chains such as Dutch Bros and Tim Hortons took advantage of this by focusing on drive-thru operations and recording high growth. This change focused attention on the importance of coffeehouse chains adjusting quickly to changing consumer needs and operational issues.

Aside from company-level experiences, the pandemic revealed that the supply chain of the food service industry has weaknesses, as Massoud and Zoghi (2024) identified interruptions that caused a decline in food imports and exports and impacted the global food markets. Moreover, the crisis underscored the importance of systemic support mechanisms, as many establishments struggled without adequate assistance. For example, Katib (2025) indicated that the shutdowns of notable food chains, like Three Joes Sourdough Pizza in the UK, because of rising operational expenses, serve as the vulnerability of the sector.

Whereas the literature was extensive in reporting on the short-term effects of the pandemic on the food service industry; however, literature specifically concentrating on Costa Coffee's strategic long-term adjustments and measures for resilience was scarce. Ghaly (2021) analysed Costa Coffee's business in the UAE during 2020-2021, highlighting the economic impact of COVID-19 and discussed managerial decisions in response to these challenges. Moreover, the Coca-Cola Company (2020) also revealed Costa Coffee shutting nearly its 2,700

stores for six weeks as a measure during the spread of the COVID-19 outbreak. However, comprehensive research specifically examining Costa Coffee's strategic responses and adaptations in the post-pandemic landscape remained scarce.

2.3.2. Strategic Adaptations in the Food Industry

The COVID-19 pandemic forced food companies across the world to evolve to meet challenges and bring changes in their business strategies. Júnior et al. (2022) stated that the majority of the shift was towards digital transformation, as companies incorporated technologies to preserve customer interaction during physical distancing practices. For example, Haddon (2025) reported that most venues improved their digital ordering systems and added contactless payments to help allow secure transactions. This digital transition not only maintained business continuity but also addressed changing consumer preferences for convenience and safety. Chan et al. (2023) pointed out that delivery services became a pandemic opportunity with several food companies venturing out through collaborations with third-party platforms and investing in internal delivery capabilities. This growth served to address the increased demand for meals delivered to homes because consumers turned towards dining experiences that limited exposure risk.

In the same manner, Dsouza and Sharma (2021) established that the alliance of delivery services emerged as a vital element of business models, affecting revenue streams and customer loyalty. On the other hand, Quansah and Hartz (2021) indicated that product diversification also emerged as an important aspect of the strategic responses of food businesses. Yuan and Lai (2023) also pointed out that businesses expanded menus to a range of offerings, including meal kits, ready-to-eat foods, and health-focused options, in line with shifting consumer tastes throughout the pandemic. This diversification not only catered to the immediate convenience of consumers but also set up businesses for long-term relevance in a competitive environment. In this context, McGuire (2025) found that Costa Coffee, a leading operator in the UK coffeehouse industry, was an example of such strategic adjustments. The firm spent on digital technologies, upgrading its mobile app to provide functionalities such as contactless payments and individualised customer experiences (Sheridan, 2025b).

In 2023, Costa Coffee partnered with GEP to automate its procurement processes, streamlining operations and reinforcing its digital infrastructure (McMillan, 2024). Additionally, Ghaly (2021) highlighted that Costa expanded its ready-to-drink product range

and entered into delivery partnerships, ensuring product availability and convenience for consumers during lockdowns. These initiatives underscored Costa Coffee's commitment to leveraging digital technologies and strategic partnerships to navigate the pandemic's challenges. While the aforementioned literature extensively documented the pandemic's immediate impacts on the food service sector, there was a gap in research focusing on the long-term strategic adaptations of specific companies like Costa Coffee. There is a need for studies to investigate how such establishments are navigating the post-pandemic landscape, emphasising innovations in service delivery, consumer engagement strategies and supply chain resilience.

2.3.3. Consumer Behaviour Changes During the Pandemic

The pandemic had a deep impact on consumer behaviour, resulting in significant changes in purchasing habits, eating habits and health awareness. The changes have been extensively reported, with numerous studies reporting both common trends and country-specific differences (Bender et al., 2022; Bazzoni et al., 2022; Gligorić et al., 2022). Bender et al. (2022) noted that in the United States, more than 80% of households adapted their food and eating habits during the pandemic. This included greater home cooking and changes in grocery shopping behaviour, reflecting a general trend towards self-reliance in food preparation. In the UK, Bazzoni et al. (2022) noted increased consumer doubt over economic recovery, with almost half of consumers reporting negative views. This economic uncertainty led to more cautious spending behaviours, influencing both dining out habits and grocery shopping preferences.

In contrast, a report by Mori and the Food Standards Agency (2020) suggested a positive movement, with significant numbers of UK consumers adopting improved food habits, including greater home cooking and a focus on diet. This trend was found to increase stay-at-home time and increased awareness of health issues throughout the pandemic. At the global level, Gligorić et al. (2022) noted an increase in the interest in calorie-intense, carbohydrate-based foods like bakery products and pastries during the pandemic. Increased home time and attention to comfort foods were attributed to this trend. Nevertheless, the influence of the pandemic was not consistent across all sections, as Gathergood et al. (2020) pointed out that consumer recovery in the UK differed greatly depending on the location, with places around London being more resilient to recovery. Such differences were impacted by whether an individual could work from home or not and economic conditions in each region. While the

existing literature widely addressed the short-term impact of the pandemic on consumer behaviour, there is a significant lack of longitudinal studies that analyse the sustainability of such behavioural changes.

2.4. Research Gap

Despite the wide range of literature on the short-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the food sector, there seems to be a considerable lack of studies on long-term strategic responses, especially for coffee shop chains such as Costa Coffee (Statista Research Department, 2025; Gangitano, 2022). Although there are studies that have recorded short-term responses, few have investigated how these responses maintained post-pandemic resilience (Ghaly, 2021; McGuire, 2025). The current research aims to fill this gap by examining Costa Coffee's digital transformation, service diversification, and supply chain innovation, contributing valuable insights into resilience strategies in the food industry.

2.5. Chapter Summary

This chapter presented an extensive review of the strategic modifications and resilience strategies utilised by the food sector during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. This chapter introduced Resilience Theory as one of the prominent frameworks for analysing how organisations, especially Costa Coffee, responded to the pandemic's challenges. The chapter underlined the global effect of COVID-19 on the food industry, noting operational disruptions, changes in consumers' behaviour and the intensified digitalisation of businesses. Empirical evidence showed the remarkable changes in consumer behaviour with the shift to online food ordering, contactless payments and in-home consumption. The chapter also explained how food businesses, such as Costa Coffee, altered their strategies with an emphasis on digital platforms, delivery services and product diversification. Even though much research has focused on immediate pandemic responses, existing literature lacks examining thoroughly long-term strategic adjustments, stressing the necessity of this research to look into Costa Coffee's resilience and post-pandemic sustainability strategies.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will describe the research methodology used to investigate Costa Coffee's strategic adaptations during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. It will outline the research design, data collection methods, ethical considerations and measures of reliability which were utilised to ensure methodological rigour.

3.2 Research Philosophy

The current study adopted an interpretivist philosophy, which focused on understanding human experiences, perceptions and social constructs. Interpretivism assumes that reality is subjective and shaped by individuals' interactions with their environment (Acharya, 2024). The rationale for selecting interpretivism was its suitability for exploring how Costa Coffee's management perceived and responded to pandemic-induced challenges. This approach enabled in-depth insights into strategic decision-making, customer behaviour shifts and organisational resilience, which cannot be quantified effectively. Positivism could have been selected because it relies on objective reality, emphasising quantifiable data and statistical analysis, which can provide generalisable insights into industry-wide trends (Figure 5).

	Positivism	Interpretivism
Advantages	Efficient collection of a large amount of data Clear theoretical focus for the research from the beginning Easily to compare data Easier for the researcher to retain control of the research process	Facilitates understanding of the how and why Good at appreciating social processes Enables researcher to be active to changes which occur Allows for complexity and contextual factors
Disadvantages	Inflexible – difficult to change direction when data collection has started Weak at appreciating social processes May not uncover the meanings attached to social phenomena	Data collection may be time consuming Data Analysis can be challenging and complex Researcher has to live with the uncertainty that clear patterns may not emerge May be perceived as less credible by non-researchers

Figure 5 – Interpretivist Philosophy (Source: Hogain, 2018)

However, positivism was not chosen because it does not consider subjective experiences and interpretivism was utilised as it allowed researchers to appreciate social processes and contextual factors, which are crucial for understanding managerial experiences and adaptations. Hence, this choice ensured a richer understanding of Costa Coffee's crisis adaptation strategies through qualitative inquiry.

3.3 Research Approach

A research approach provides the essential framework for managing data collection and analysis processes in a study. Three fundamental research approaches include inductive and deductive and abductive (see Fig 1).

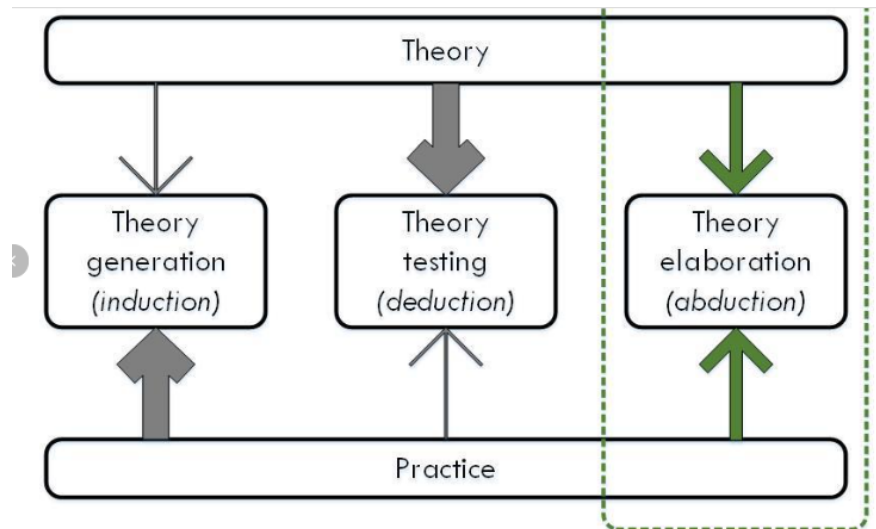


Figure 1 - Research Approaches (Source: Costa et al., 2017)

Professional research based on an inductive approach builds theories through generalising from detailed observations when current knowledge remains insufficient (Azungah, 2018). The testing process for existing theories through hypothesis formation represents the deductive reasoning method (Pandey, 2019). On the other hand, abductive reasoning functions as a mix of deductive and inductive methods by connecting theories to data to discover the most appropriate explanation (Haig and Haig, 2018).

The present research employed an inductive research design to analyse strategic changes Costa Coffee made during and after COVID-19. Limited theory about coffeehouse chain resilience and digital transformation post-COVID in UK-based businesses motivated the researcher of the present study to use an inductive path that produced insights from real-world observations. The research approach proved effective in revealing Costa Coffee's service innovation efforts along with its consumer adaptation strategies since previous academia did not fully address these phenomena. A deductive research approach was inappropriate since the investigation did not require hypothesis testing. Moreover, the research was also incompatible with an abductive approach because it failed to execute the methodological stage of alternating between theory and data collection. The research problem suited the inductive method because it followed an exploratory path among changing contextual factors.

3.4 Research Design

A research design creates an organised system to gather and examine data which links methodology to research goals (Abutabenjeh and Jaradat, 2018). Researchers typically utilise

three main design approaches namely qualitative, quantitative and mixed-methods designs (see fig 2).



Figure 2 - Research Designs (Source: Leavy, 2022)

The testing of statistical hypotheses forms the foundation of quantitative designs, while qualitative designs concentrate on understanding both experiences and meanings (Leavy, 2022). Lastly, the mixed-methods research design unite both qualitative and quantitative designs for more complete comprehension (Hafsa, 2019). This research used a qualitative approach to study Costa Coffee's pandemic responses in adapting strategic approaches that increased organisational resilience. The current study required a deep understanding of how Costa's managers handled operational disruptions and digital transformation alongside changing consumer behaviour which made interviews the most suitable qualitative research method. Additionally, qualitative research method allowed the present study to obtain detailed information that statistics could not fully reveal. Quantitative methods were inappropriate because the research lacked measurable quantifiable elements and examined an exploratory topic. Since there was no need to apply mixed-methods to achieve generalisation among wider populations the researcher found no requirement for this approach because the study focused on specific business contexts rather than population-wide applications. Hence, the qualitative design proved most appropriate for the study because it fulfilled the interpretive and exploratory research aims.

3.5 Data Collection Method

Semi-structured interviews with 10 study participants were conducted across a span of two weeks. The research participants consisted of store managers and frontline employees from Costa Coffee, the researcher selected using purposive sampling techniques. Participants received in advance appointment times for interviews which were held at London and Manchester Costa locations or through Zoom as per participant availability and location restrictions. Participants spent about 30 minutes in each session while the audio recordings

maintained consent permissions from all participants. Interview questions explored both operational difficulties and digital transformation initiatives and customer experience throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.5.1 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Table 1 - Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Individuals who worked at Costa Coffee (managers or frontline staff) between 2020–2024	Individuals who have never worked at or engaged with Costa Coffee
Aged 18 years or older	Individuals under 18 years of age
Able to communicate effectively in English	Non-English speakers unable to participate in an English-language interview
Available and willing to participate in a 30-minute interview in January 2025	Individuals unavailable during the data collection period or unwilling to participate
Provided informed consent	Declined or unable to provide informed consent

3.6 Sampling Strategy

Research participants are chosen through specific selection procedures which form the basis of sampling strategies (Etikan and Bala, 2017). Three common methods of sampling exist such as random sampling for achieving generalisability, convenience sampling for available access and purposive sampling for relevance selection (Etikan and Bala, 2017). Purposive sampling was employed by the present research to focus on Costa Coffee employees and customers who have experienced the COVID-19 pandemic first-hand. The selected sampling method allowed the researcher to collect detailed information that was in line with the study objectives. Purposive sampling proved to be the more appropriate technique since random or convenience strategies would potentially admit subjects who lacked sufficient understanding regarding the topic. Purposive sampling ensured depth, credibility, and contextual relevance which is critical for qualitative, exploratory research of this nature.

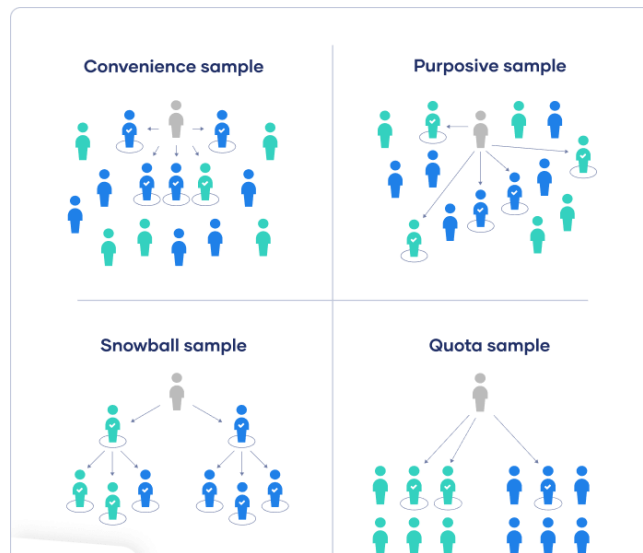


Figure 3 - Sampling Techniques (Source: Etikan and Bala, 2017)

3.6 Data Analysis Technique

Research data analysis requires a systematic approach to review gathered data to find patterns or discover relationships or obtain insights. There is a wide range of data analysis techniques that are being used in research. The most common techniques are thematic analysis, content analysis, SPSS analysis and narrative analysis. The researcher of the present study used thematic analysis because it helped in finding dominant patterns in Costa Coffee's pandemic business adjustments. The research design of thematic analysis provides appropriate strategies to study new phenomena because it matches the analysis of complex, qualitative information (Clarke and Braun, 2017). Content analysis was eliminated because its strict coding approach did not suit the research and narrative analysis was unsuitable because storytelling was not the primary focus.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Research ethics need to be strictly enforced because they safeguard participant rights and dignity while maintaining their physical well-being. Before initiating data collection, this research followed ethical guidelines from the university by obtaining proper ethical approval. The research participants received comprehensive information regarding the study goal and maintained their full rights to withdraw at any time without consequences while learning data usage procedures. All participants provided written consent for participation before the interview began. Moreover, the researcher protected participant privacy by replacing names with codes and implemented strict data access protocols granting themselves exclusive access to stored information. The interviewer used audio recordings to document interviews but

deleted these files following transcription to safeguard participant privacy. The study maintained both principles of non-maleficence and voluntariness which protected participants from all physical and psychological harm during their voluntary participation.

Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will present the key findings from the qualitative data collected on Costa Coffee's strategic adaptations during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings will be structured into four main themes aligned with the research objectives including digital transformation as a resilience strategy, consumer behaviour shifts, supply chain adaptations and workforce resilience. The analysis will highlight how Costa Coffee navigated operational disruptions, adjusted to evolving market demands and implemented innovative strategies to ensure long-term sustainability. These insights will provide a deeper understanding of the resilience strategies within the food industry, offering valuable lessons for businesses facing similar crises in the future.

4.2 Overview of Data Collection

To investigate how Costa Coffee adapted its business strategies to enhance resilience during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 participants from various roles within the company, which lasted for 30 mins. This qualitative data collection method was chosen for its effectiveness in exploring individual experiences and perspectives. During the interview, all the included participants were asked the following questions;

1. What is your current role at Costa Coffee?
2. How many years of experience do you have in the food and beverage industry?
3. How did Costa Coffee integrate digital solutions during the pandemic?
4. What challenges did you face in adopting these digital tools?
5. What shifts in customer preferences did you observe during the pandemic?
6. How did Costa Coffee adapt to these changing consumer behaviours?
7. What supply chain disruptions did Costa Coffee encounter during the pandemic?
8. How did the company adjust its procurement and inventory management strategies?
9. How did store closures and restructuring impact your role?
10. What measures were taken to support employees during the pandemic?

4.3 Participant Demographics

The study included a diverse sample which provide a comprehensive understanding of Costa Coffee's strategic adaptations from both frontline operations and corporate perspectives. Table 1 highlighted the demographic details including along with maintaining ethical standards like anonymity and confidentiality.

Table 1 – Demographic Details

Participant No.	Role	Experience (Years)
1	Store Manager	10
2	Assistant Manager	7
3	Barista	5
4	Corporate Strategist	12
5	Regional Manager	15
6	Barista	4
7	Supply Chain Officer	8
8	Operations Manager	11
9	Drive-Thru Supervisor	6
10	Customer Service Lead	9

4.4 Thematic Analysis

To analyse the qualitative data collected from the semi-structured interviews with Costa Coffee personnel, the thematic analysis was utilised which was a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. This approach allowed to systematically interpret the rich, detailed accounts provided by participants.

4.4.1. Step 1: Familiarisation with the Data

The analysis began with transcribing the interviews verbatim, followed by repeated readings to understand the content and gain a comprehensive understanding.

4.4.2. Step 2: Generating Initial Codes

Significant phrases and sentences were systematically highlighted and labelled to capture key concepts. This data-driven process allowed codes to emerge from the participants' narratives.

4.4.3. Step 3: Searching for Themes

The codes were then examined to identify patterns and grouped into potential themes. For instance,

- Codes related to “mobile ordering,” “contactless payments,” and “digital loyalty programs” were clustered under the theme “Digital Transformation and Innovation.”
- Codes such as “shift to take away,” “increased drive-thru usage,” and “preference for contactless interactions” were grouped under “Changes in Consumer Behaviour”
- Codes including “supply chain disruptions,” “inventory shortages,” and “alternative suppliers” were categorised as “Supply Chain Adaptations and Operational Adjustments.
- Codes like “staff training,” “health and safety protocols,” and “remote work implementation” were organised under “Workforce Resilience and Organisational Adjustments.”

4.4.4. Step 4: Reviewing Themes

Preliminary themes were reviewed against the coded data and the entire dataset to ensure they accurately represented the participants' perspectives. This iterative process involved refining themes by combining, splitting or discarding them as necessary.

4.4.5. Step 5: Defining and Naming Themes

Each theme was clearly defined and named to summarise its central idea. Detailed analysis defined the scope and focus of each theme, ensuring they provided meaningful insights into Costa Coffee's strategic adaptations.

4.4.6. Step 6: Producing the Report

The findings were compiled into a coherent narrative, integrating direct quotations from participants to illustrate each theme. This report not only presented the themes but also explored the interrelationships between them, offering a clear understanding of the strategies employed by Costa Coffee during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.

Hence, this rigorous thematic analysis facilitated the extraction of valuable insights, contributing to a deeper comprehension of organisational resilience in the food industry context.

4.5. Extracted Themes

4.5.1 Digital Transformation and Innovation

The COVID-19 pandemic forced Costa Coffee to accelerate its digital transformation to maintain operations and adapt to new consumer behaviours. Employees across various roles provided insights into these changes, highlighting both the successes and challenges of integrating digital solutions. In response to Question 3, how did Costa Coffee integrate digital solutions during the pandemic, Participant 10 emphasised the rapid adoption of mobile ordering, contactless payments and digital loyalty programs.

“The mobile app was enhanced significantly, allowing customers to order ahead and minimise in-store interactions.”

Participant 2 pointed out,

“Contactless payment became the norm, and we even had to train customers who were used to cash transactions.”

The partnership with Uber Eats and Deliveroo also played a key role in maintaining revenue, with Participant 5 explaining,

“Home delivery wasn't a major focus before, but it became essential during lockdowns.”

Regarding Question 4, What challenges did you face in adopting these digital tools?, some employees reported difficulties in adapting to the new systems. Participant 5 stated,

“Initially, there were a lot of bugs in mobile orders, and we had to handle frustrated customers who faced delays.”

Additionally, training employees to use new technology posed hurdles. Participant 4 remarked,

"Older staff members were slower to adapt to digital tools, which required additional training sessions."

Despite these challenges, digital transformation helped Costa Coffee align with changing consumer preferences, as discussed further in the next section.

4.5.2 Changes in Consumer Behaviour

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly altered consumer preferences and purchasing habits, compelling Costa Coffee to adapt its service models. Insights from employees revealed key shifts in consumer behaviour and the company's strategic responses. When asked question 5, what shifts in customer preferences did you observe during the pandemic, participants highlighted a strong decline in in-store dining and a growing preference for drive-thru, takeaway, and home delivery services. Participant 9 explained,

"Before the pandemic, most of our customers preferred sitting in and enjoying their coffee. That completely changed—people wanted quick service with minimal contact."

Moreover, Participant 10 reinforced this, stating,

"We saw an increase in mobile app orders, and many customers started using our loyalty program more frequently because it made transactions smoother and faster."

In addition, Participant 8 added,

"At-home coffee consumption increased, with more consumers purchasing our ready-to-drink products rather than going to the stores."

Additionally, with regard to Costa Coffee's adjustment to consumer behaviour shifts, answering question 6, how did Costa Coffee respond to these shifting consumer behaviours, participants outlined strategic innovations introduced to accommodate new needs. Participant 5 highlighted,

"The drive-thru trade took precedence. Increasing numbers of stores were geared to manage more traffic, and people were trained for faster speed of service."

Moreover, Participant 7 detailed product offerings evolution with the assertion,

“Costa extended its store coffee offer within supermarkets and convenience stores, making it possible for customers to get Costa in their own home.”

Costa Coffee's capacity for quick response in meeting changing customers' expectations helped maintain operations despite the crisis. The following discusses how supply chain disruptions affected the adaptations.

4.5.3 Supply Chain Adaptations and Operational Adjustments

The COVID-19 pandemic led to significant supply chain disruptions for Costa Coffee, affecting product availability, logistics and inventory management. Employees highlighted key challenges and the strategies implemented to maintain business continuity. In response to Question 7, what supply chain disruptions did Costa Coffee encounter during the pandemic, several participants pointed to delayed deliveries, supplier shortages and fluctuating demand. Participant 7 explained,

"Delays in international shipping caused essential ingredients such as coffee beans and packaging to arrive late and stores were compelled to change menus at short notice."

Moreover, Participant 8 added,

"Store managers often had stock shortages, particularly for high-use items such as oat milk and takeaway cups, because of unexpected supply chain breaks."

Participant 5 also explained,

"With some suppliers closing down, we needed to source alternative vendors very quickly, and that sometimes impacted product consistency."

Besides, when answering Question 8, participants described several adaptations made by the company to alter its procurement and inventory management practices. Participant 4 said,

"Costa centralised inventory tracking across stores to ensure efficient stock redistribution and minimise product shortages in high-demand areas."

Participant 1 pointed out the relocation of sourcing locally, and he explained,

"We began working with local suppliers for perishables, lessening reliance on foreign shipments and guaranteeing fresher products."

Costa Coffee also streamlined procurement operations to maximise efficiency. Participant 7 said,

"The company teamed up with GEP to automate procurement, decreasing manual labour and enhancing supply planning."

These preventive supply chain and operational changes kept Costa Coffee in a strong position amid global disturbances so that stores were able to serve customers successfully. The following section will look into how the resilience of the workforce supported business continuity during the pandemic.

4.5.4 Workforce Management and Organisational Resilience

The COVID-19 pandemic severely affected Costa Coffee's staff, resulting in store closures, restructuring and operations disruption. Employees stated their experiences with such disruptions and the support initiatives used to ensure organisational resilience. When responding to Question 9, how did store closures and restructuring affect your role, employees indicated job uncertainty and operation difficulty. Participant 1 mentioned,

"The closure of shops for a short while resulted in decreased hours for many workers, but others were made redundant as cost-cutting procedures."

Participant 2 emphasised that it was difficult to cope with lower staff levels,

"After reopening, stores operated with fewer employees, increasing workload and stress for those who remained."

Despite these issues, Costa Coffee launched several initiatives to help its employees. In response to Question 10, what steps were implemented to assist employees in the pandemic? Respondents listed several measures. For instance, respondent 10 reported,

"Costa launched mental health care initiatives and wellbeing check-ins to assist employees with pandemic stress."

Respondent 3 commented,

"New training programs were implemented to enable staff to adapt to digital ordering systems and increased hygiene procedures."

Participant 4 continued,

"Furlough schemes and temporary financial support were put in place to help staff during store closures."

These steps enabled Costa Coffee to plan its strategy through workforce disruptions while maintaining business continuity.

4.6 Summary of Findings

This chapter introduced the primary findings from qualitative interviews carried out with Costa Coffee employees to assess how the company transformed its business strategies to improve resilience during and post the COVID-19 pandemic. The results were organised into four major and repetitive themes consisting of digital transformation and innovation, shifts in consumer behaviour, supply chain modifications and operational changes and labour management and organisational resilience. Costa Coffee improved its operations with digitalisation, mobile ordering, contactless payment and delivery alliances to help keep stores operating. Staff highlighted the effectiveness of digital technology in enhancing customer ease but also complained about technical complications and training demands on staff. Consumer habits evolved completely, including a decrease in eating out and a rise in demand for drive-thru, takeaway and home delivery offers. Costa Coffee evolved by refining its drive-thru format and increasing ready-to-drink retail offerings.

Costa Coffee also experienced supply chain disruption, such as inventory shortages and delays from suppliers. To reduce these problems, Costa Coffee diversified suppliers, improved inventory management and automated procurement processes to ensure product availability. Lastly, restructuring the workforce and support measures contributed significantly to business continuity. Employees experienced job insecurity and heavier workloads, but Costa Coffee had mental health programs, training schemes and holiday arrangements to support staff. These observations highlighted the firm's strategic agility and yielded interesting lessons about food industry crisis management.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1. Introduction

This chapter will critically discuss the findings in relation to existing literature on business resilience and strategic adaptation in the food industry during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. The discussion will examine whether the results align with or challenge previous studies on digital transformation, consumer behaviour shifts, supply chain resilience and workforce adaptation. The chapter will evaluate how the company's strategies compare with broader industry trends, highlighting areas of alignment and contrast and providing insights into the long-term viability of these adaptations in a post-pandemic landscape.

5.2. Objective 1

The COVID-19 pandemic posed severe challenges (such as supply chain disruptions, operational restrictions and shifts in consumer behaviour) to the food industry, requiring businesses to implement resilience strategies to sustain operations. According to Resilience Theory, organisations must adapt and innovate in response to crises to maintain long-term viability (Van Breda, 2018). One key resilience strategy was digital transformation, which enabled food businesses to continue serving customers despite restrictions. Júnior et al. (2022) noted that many companies adopted mobile ordering, contactless payments and third-party delivery partnerships to enhance service accessibility and revenue streams. Another crucial adaptation was supply chain restructuring to manage inventory shortages and distribution challenges. Massoud and Zoghi (2024) highlighted that food companies diversified suppliers and automated procurement processes to mitigate risks. Moreover, operational adjustments and workforce resilience also played a significant role. Dsouza and Sharma (2021) emphasised how businesses redesigned staffing models and enhanced employee support programs to maintain service efficiency.

These strategies demonstrated that successful resilience in the food industry relies on technological adaptation, supply chain flexibility and workforce support, aligning with broader industry trends observed during the pandemic. The current study findings supported existing literature on digital transformation, consumer behaviour shifts, supply chain resilience and workforce management as key resilience strategies. However, while the literature highlighted general industry adaptations, Costa Coffee's case provided specific insights into localised supplier partnerships, centralised inventory tracking and targeted workforce support, demonstrating a more structured crisis response than some competitors.

5.3. Objective 2

The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated varied strategic adaptations across different market segments in the food and beverage industry. While coffee chains, fast-food restaurants, and fine dining establishments faced common challenges, their responses differed based on customer expectations, operational models and digital capabilities. Considering coffee chains, such as Costa Coffee and Starbucks, prioritised digital transformation and delivery partnerships to sustain operations. Costa Coffee enhanced mobile ordering, expanded drive-thru services, and partnered with Uber Eats and Deliveroo to cater to changing consumer preferences (Sheridan, 2025a). Similarly, Starbucks invested in digital loyalty programs and AI-driven ordering systems to personalise the customer experience (Júnior et al., 2022). In addition, fast-food chains, such as McDonald's and KFC, leveraged their well-established drive-thru networks to maintain customer engagement. Many reduced in-store seating and focused on self-service kiosks and contactless payment systems (Haddon, 2025). Unlike coffee chains, fast-food businesses experienced faster recovery rates due to their pre-existing takeaway and delivery models.

Moreover, luxury and fine-dining restaurants faced greater challenges due to their reliance on in-person dining experiences. Some adapted by introducing gourmet meal kits, virtual dining experiences, and premium home delivery services (Chan et al., 2023). However, labour shortages and high operational costs hindered their recovery compared to fast-food and coffee chains. These findings highlight the importance of industry-specific adaptations in ensuring post-pandemic resilience. The current study findings aligned with the literature on digital transformation and consumer behaviour shifts, emphasising Costa Coffee's mobile ordering, contactless payments and drive-thru expansion. However, unlike fast-food chains that relied on existing drive-thru models, Costa faced greater supply chain challenges requiring inventory centralisation and local sourcing.

5.4. Objective 3

The food sector including Costa Coffee needed to transform its strategies because of the COVID-19 pandemic which affected operations and customer preferences. The adjustments made by businesses during the pandemic find explanation through Resilience Theory which focuses on two key elements including adaptability with anticipatory problem-solving, as explained by Lewis (2023). Costa Coffee demonstrated resilience through its investments in digital transformation, the development of its mobile app for contactless payment features and its business partnership with delivery platforms (McGuire, 2025). The business industry

experienced similar trends in which businesses implemented technological solutions to maintain consumer interest (Júnior et al., 2022). The strategic move to product diversification stood as the main corporate shift. Food industry companies expanded their product lines with meal boxes and ready-to-drink solutions, according to Yuan and Lai (2023). Costa Coffee went along with this trend by expanding its ready-to-drink product line and automating procurement processes through its partnership with GEP, enhancing supply chain efficiency (McMillan, 2024). This change was important in addressing pandemic-caused supply chain dislocation, which Massoud and Zoghi (2024) recognized as one of the key weaknesses in the food industry.

Changes in consumer behaviour also influenced Costa Coffee's strategies. Online food ordering and drive-thru services emerged as a priority, as evident with companies such as Tim Hortons (Trangle, 2025). Costa Coffee's rollout of drive-thru services and online ordering is an indication of the wider industry shift towards convenience and security. Though these short-term shifts were well reported, little has been found regarding their long-term effects. The present research attempts to fill this void by investigating Costa Coffee's post-pandemic strategic resilience and its relevance to the overall food sector. Costa Coffee's digitalisation, adaptation of consumer behaviour, supply chain resilience and management of human resources fit within the current literature on crisis-driven innovation. Issues such as technical glitches, adaptation of staff and supply chain disturbances differ from earlier research highlighting sustained digital uptake. Despite hurdles, Costa Coffee's strategic agility ensured operational continuity and customer satisfaction.

5.5. Chapter Summary

This chapter critically evaluated Costa Coffee's resilience strategies during COVID-19, comparing findings with existing literature. It highlighted digital transformation, consumer behaviour shifts, supply chain resilience and workforce management. While aligning with industry trends, Costa faced unique challenges like supply chain disruptions and staff adaptation, showcasing a structured crisis response and strategic agility.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1. Introduction

This chapter will provide the main findings and implications from the research on Costa Coffee's strategic responses to and out of COVID-19. The conclusion will provide an overview of important insights against research aims, whereas recommendations will provide actionable

strategies for Costa Coffee, the broader food industry and policymakers to improve crisis resilience in the future.

6.2. Summary of Key Findings

Costa Coffee implemented strategic changes that ranged across and further into the COVID-19 pandemic. This research followed a structured format which included major resilience strategies, general industry adaptations and exclusive Costa Coffee methods for dealing with disruptions.

6.2.1. Objective 1: Examining Resilience Strategies in the Food Industry

Food businesses used numerous resilience strategies (like digital transformation together with supply chain restructuring and workforce management practices). Costa Coffee developed mobile ordering, enabled contactless payment options and established partnerships with delivery services to carry on with business activities. These technologies received positive feedback from workers at Costa although they encountered technical problems and training needs for employees. The disruption in supply chains made companies adopt multiple suppliers and strengthen inventory monitoring capabilities through automated procurement methods to prevent product stockouts. The ability of Costa Coffee to maintain employee resilience became essential as they adopted mental health services backed by furlough systems and employment shifts.

6.2.2. Objective 2: Assessing Strategic Adaptations Across Market Segments

Different food industry segments adopted varying strategies. The coffee market expanded its digital capabilities through partnerships with delivery services and Starbucks and Costa Coffee simultaneously increased their drive-thru access alongside automated order processes. Education establishments in fine dining faced hardship because their traditional dine-in business model became nearly impossible thus they started offering meal kit boxes and digital dining experiences. Costa Coffee followed fast-food chain trends by developing ready-to-drink store products and drive-thru but needed additional changes to its supply chains.

6.2.3. Objective 3: Analysing Costa Coffee's Strategic Resilience

Costa Coffee's managed crisis response combined technology, supply chain flexibility, and employee adaptation. The company's investment in automation, local partner suppliers, and customer-centric innovations made it an example of resilience in the food sector. Despite challenges like staffing shortages and demand volatility, Costa Coffee's adaptability and anticipatory measures ensured long-term viability.

6.3. Research Contributions and Theoretical Implications

This research added to strategic management and crisis resilience research by offering empirical evidence of Costa Coffee's COVID-19 pandemic adaptation strategies. The results supported Resilience Theory, illustrating that companies that insert digital transformation, supply chain adaptability and workforce resilience are better positioned to respond to crises. In contrast to existing research that is concerned with mass industry trends, the present study provided company-level, precise insights on how Costa Coffee utilised mobile technology, supply chain automation and worker support initiatives to keep businesses running. Strategically, the findings were a roadmap for food industry executives, highlighting the value of localised supplier alliances, data-informed decision-making and consumer-led innovations. This study also educated policymakers on how to support enterprises with digitalisation incentives, supply chain stability initiatives and workforce resilience policies for future crisis preparedness.

6.4. Recommendations

6.4.1 Industry-Level Recommendations

The food sector needs to focus on digitalisation through investment in AI-based personalisation, mobile ordering and automated logistics. These technologies increase efficiency, enhance customer experience and allow companies to dynamically react to disruptions in operations. In addition, diversification of the supply chain is needed to avoid dependence on one supplier. Building relationships with several vendors, both local and foreign, guarantees stability in the supply chain and lessens the risk of inventory shortage during crises. Moreover, ethical sourcing and sustainability are now central consumer demands. Companies need to enhance Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) programs, such as responsible sourcing, waste minimisation and carbon footprint management. These activities boost brand reputation and long-term sustainability. Additionally, resilience in the workforce is essential for business continuity. The introduction of employee well-being programs, mental

health assistance and flexible working arrangements can improve staff retention and productivity. Investing in training programs for digital tools and crisis management keeps workers flexible in changing circumstances.

6.4.2 Costa Coffee-Specific Recommendations

Costa Coffee must incorporate sophisticated data analytics, utilising AI and big data to forecast demand fluctuations, optimise stock levels and streamline supply chain operations. Predictive analytics can be used to enhance decision-making and reduce operational interruptions. Moreover, increased delivery and subscription schemes can drive customer engagement and revenue predictability. Enhancing alliances with delivery operators like Uber Eats and Deliveroo and adding coffee subscription schemes, can respond to shifting consumer tastes for convenience. In addition, increased localisation strategies will allow Costa Coffee to cater to diverse regional markets. Menu and marketing strategy adjustments according to local consumer tastes can improve customer satisfaction and brand loyalty. Furthermore, to build long-term customer relationships, gamification and loyalty programs must be utilised. Improving the Costa Coffee app with rewards, personalised offers, and interactive elements can promote repeat purchases and customer retention in a highly competitive market.

6.4.3 Policy and Government-Level Recommendations

Governments ought to offer funding and grants to facilitate digital uptake for SMEs in the food industry. Capital aid will allow companies to invest in technology and sustain competitiveness in changing market environments. In addition, a preparedness framework for crises must be formulated to inform companies on how to develop operational resilience. This encompasses supply chain management, workforce stability, and readiness in digital during upcoming crises. Furthermore, public-private partnerships can be enhanced in order to create stability in supply chains. Inter-agency coordination among government and companies can enhance effective resource allocation, regulatory agility, and improvements in infrastructure that help the long-term stability of the food industry.

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