



## Marketing strategies in the restaurant sector during a global crisis: A case study of Restaurant Kampo, Madeira

[10.29073/jer.v4i1.63](https://doi.org/10.29073/jer.v4i1.63)

**Received:** January 9, 2026.

**Accepted:** February 2, 2026.

**Published:** February 9, 2026.

**Author:** Carla Basílio, University of Madeira, Portugal, [basilio.andreia007@gmail.com](mailto:basilio.andreia007@gmail.com).

### Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic triggered an unprecedented global crisis that profoundly disrupted tourism systems and the restaurant sector, exposing the structural vulnerability of hospitality businesses to external shocks. In response to mandatory closures, mobility restrictions, and rapidly changing consumer behaviour, restaurants were compelled to redesign their business models, operational processes, and marketing strategies in order to ensure survival and long-term viability. Within this context, marketing emerged not merely as a promotional tool, but as a strategic mechanism for organizational adaptation and resilience.

This study analyses the marketing strategies adopted by Restaurant Kampo, an author-driven restaurant located on Madeira Island (Portugal), using an in-depth qualitative case study approach. The research examines strategic decisions implemented across three distinct phases: pre-pandemic, lockdown, and post-lockdown, focusing on strategic positioning, marketing mix adaptation, customer relationship management, and the preservation of experiential value under crisis conditions. Data were collected through document analysis, direct observation, digital communication review, and strategic analysis tools, allowing for methodological triangulation.

The findings indicate that strategic flexibility, strong brand identity, and customer-oriented communication played a critical role in maintaining operational continuity and reinforcing brand positioning during the crisis. Experience-based marketing, transparency, and the strategic management of people, processes, and physical evidence emerged as key drivers of customer trust and loyalty. By providing empirical insights into crisis-driven marketing adaptation within a tourism-dependent island destination, this study contributes to hospitality and marketing literature and offers practical implications for restaurant managers seeking to enhance resilience in turbulent environments.

**Keywords:** COVID-19; Crisis Management; Experiential Marketing; Hospitality Strategy; Restaurant Marketing.

### 1. Introduction

The restaurant industry plays a central role within tourism systems, contributing not only to economic performance but also to destination image formation, cultural representation, and visitor satisfaction. Gastronomy has progressively evolved from a complementary tourism service into a strategic experiential asset, influencing destination choice, length of stay, perceived authenticity, and tourist loyalty. Contemporary tourists increasingly seek food-related experiences that combine local identity, storytelling, and emotional engagement, positioning restaurants as key interfaces between visitors and destinations.

Prior to 2020, the global tourism and hospitality sectors were largely shaped by sustained growth and increasing concerns regarding overtourism, market saturation, and pressure on local resources. In this context, restaurants faced intense competition, rising customer expectations, and the need for constant innovation in order to differentiate themselves in experience-driven markets. However, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 abruptly disrupted this trajectory, generating an unprecedented global crisis that profoundly affected tourism-dependent industries, particularly restaurants.

Mandatory closures, mobility restrictions, capacity limitations, and health regulations dramatically altered both supply and demand conditions. In tourism destinations such as Portugal and especially in island regions with strong dependence on external markets, the pandemic replaced previous debates on overtourism with a scenario of “non-tourism,” characterized by economic paralysis, uncertainty, and abrupt demand collapse. Restaurants, traditionally reliant on social interaction, physical presence, and experiential consumption, were suddenly forced to operate under conditions fundamentally incompatible with their core business models.

In this environment, marketing emerged as a critical strategic function, extending far beyond its traditional promotional role. Rather than focusing solely on sales stimulation, marketing became a mechanism for crisis adaptation, resilience, and survival. Restaurants were required to rapidly reassess their value propositions, communication strategies, service processes, and customer relationships in response to shifting consumer priorities, heightened risk perception, and evolving expectations regarding safety, trust, and convenience.

Recent research suggests that organizations capable of strategic agility and customer-oriented adaptation were better positioned to mitigate the negative impacts of the pandemic. In the restaurant sector, this involved the rapid implementation of take-away and delivery services, menu simplification, digital communication intensification, and the reinforcement of hygiene and safety practices. Nevertheless, such operational adjustments alone were insufficient to guarantee long-term viability. The ability to preserve brand identity, experiential value, and emotional connection with customers emerged as a decisive factor in sustaining loyalty and reinforcing competitive positioning during and after the crisis.

Despite the growing body of literature addressing tourism and hospitality responses to COVID-19, empirical research focusing on crisis-driven marketing adaptation in small and medium-sized, author-driven restaurants remains limited particularly in island destinations. Many existing studies adopt macro-level or quantitative approaches, offering limited insight into the strategic decision-making processes and contextual dynamics shaping individual business responses. This gap is particularly relevant given the structural vulnerability of island economies, where tourism disruptions tend to have amplified economic and social consequences.

Against this backdrop, this article analyses the marketing strategy applied in the development and adaptation of Restaurant Kampo, a restaurant located in Funchal, Madeira Island (Portugal). Using an in-depth qualitative case study approach, the research examines how marketing strategies were designed and implemented before, during, and after the COVID-19 lockdown period. Particular attention is given to strategic positioning, marketing mix adaptation, customer relationship management, and experiential value preservation under crisis conditions.

The central objective of this study is to identify and evaluate the role of marketing as a strategic management function in supporting operational stability and brand reinforcement during a period of extreme uncertainty. By providing empirical insights from a real-life case, this research contributes to hospitality and marketing literature by enhancing understanding of crisis-induced strategic adaptation in small restaurant enterprises. From a practical perspective, the findings aim to inform restaurant managers and destination stakeholders seeking to build resilient, experience-oriented business models capable of responding to future disruptions.

---

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Marketing in the Service and Restaurant Context

Marketing in service industries differs fundamentally from product-based marketing due to the inherent characteristics of services, namely intangibility, inseparability, variability, and perishability (Grönroos, 2003; Lovelock & Wirtz, 2011). In the restaurant sector, these characteristics are particularly pronounced, as value is co-created in real time through interactions between customers, employees, physical environments, and symbolic elements such as brand narratives and culinary identity.

Rather than being limited to food quality alone, the restaurant experience encompasses a complex set of tangible and intangible dimensions, including atmosphere, service performance, social interaction, emotional engagement, and symbolic meaning (Yrjölä et al., 2019). Consequently, marketing in restaurant contexts must be

understood as a holistic value-creation process, where functional benefits coexist with experiential and emotional dimensions.

Kotler and Keller (2013) conceptualize marketing as a strategic process aimed at creating, communicating, and delivering value to customers while fostering long-term relationships. This relational perspective is particularly relevant in hospitality, where customer satisfaction and loyalty are strongly influenced by service encounters and employee behaviour (Alhelalat et al., 2017). Employees thus become central brand ambassadors, reinforcing the role of internal marketing and service culture in shaping customer perceptions.

The extended marketing mix for services the 7Ps framework (product, price, place, promotion, people, process, and physical evidence) has been widely adopted as an analytical lens for understanding service differentiation and competitive positioning (Wirtz & Lovelock, 2016). In restaurant settings, effective coordination among these elements is critical to delivering consistent and meaningful experiences. Recent research suggests that, in the post-COVID-19 context, customers place increased emphasis on people, process, and physical evidence, particularly in relation to safety, transparency, and trust (Kukanja, 2022).

Moreover, contemporary restaurant marketing increasingly aligns with experiential marketing paradigms, which emphasize sensory stimulation, emotional resonance, and memorable experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Schmitt, 2011). Restaurants are no longer perceived merely as places to consume food but as experiential spaces where customers seek authenticity, social connection, and symbolic value. This shift reinforces the need for marketing strategies that integrate storytelling, atmosphere design, and customer engagement into a coherent brand narrative.

## **2.2. Gastronomy, Tourism, and Regional Identity**

Gastronomy has progressively emerged as a strategic tourism resource, contributing to destination differentiation, place branding, and regional development. Food-related experiences play a central role in shaping tourists' perceptions of authenticity and cultural immersion, often functioning as gateways to local heritage and identity (Bessi re, 2013; Richards, 2015).

Empirical studies indicate that gastronomic experiences significantly influence tourist satisfaction, destination image, and revisit intentions (Knollenberg et al., 2020). As a result, gastronomy has become an integral component of tourism competitiveness, particularly in destinations seeking to differentiate themselves in saturated markets. The integration of local products, culinary traditions, and storytelling enables destinations to reinforce their uniqueness while supporting local economies and sustainable practices (Sims, 2009).

Island destinations present a particularly relevant context for gastronomic tourism. Their geographic isolation, limited resources, and strong cultural identities amplify both opportunities and vulnerabilities. On the one hand, islands can leverage distinctive culinary traditions to enhance authenticity and experiential value; on the other hand, their dependence on tourism flows exposes them to heightened risk during external shocks. Consequently, restaurants operating in island destinations must balance innovation with cultural continuity, positioning gastronomy as both a commercial offering and a symbolic representation of place.

Madeira Island exemplifies this dynamic. Its gastronomic identity has been shaped by historical trade routes, agricultural practices, and cultural exchanges, resulting in a diverse and evolving culinary landscape (Vieira, 1998). The expansion of tourism has stimulated growth in the restaurant sector, increasing competition and driving the emergence of author-driven and experience-oriented concepts. In this context, restaurants increasingly function as mediators between local culture and global tourism markets, translating regional identity into curated experiences.

From a marketing perspective, gastronomy thus operates not only as a product but as a narrative device that communicates authenticity, sustainability, and belonging. Restaurants that successfully integrate local identity into their value propositions can strengthen emotional connections with both tourists and residents, enhancing brand differentiation and long-term loyalty.



### **2.3. Marketing Strategies in Times of Crisis**

Crisis situations challenge traditional marketing assumptions and compel organizations to rethink their strategic priorities. According to Kaplan and Norton (2008), strategy must align organizational vision with rapidly changing external environments, particularly under conditions of uncertainty. Crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic disrupt established market structures, alter consumer behaviour, and expose organizational vulnerabilities, demanding rapid and adaptive responses.

The literature on crisis management emphasizes the importance of strategic agility and dynamic capabilities defined as an organization's ability to sense opportunities and threats, seize resources, and reconfigure operations in response to environmental change (Teece, 2014). In service industries, where value creation depends heavily on human interaction and experiential delivery, such capabilities are especially critical.

Recent studies examining hospitality responses to COVID-19 highlight a range of adaptive marketing strategies, including digital communication intensification, take-away and delivery services, menu simplification, and enhanced hygiene protocols (Fabius et al., 2020; Seyitoğlu & Ivanov, 2020). These strategies addressed immediate operational challenges while also reshaping customer perceptions of safety, reliability, and trust.

However, scholars argue that crisis-driven adaptation should not be limited to short-term tactical adjustments. Maintaining brand consistency and experiential value is essential to avoid long-term erosion of brand equity (Keller, 2013). Restaurants that rely excessively on price reductions or radical repositioning risk undermining perceived quality and brand meaning. Instead, marketing strategies that emphasize transparency, empathy, and continuity are more likely to foster customer loyalty during periods of disruption.

Furthermore, crises can act as catalysts for innovation, accelerating digital transformation and encouraging new forms of customer engagement. In the restaurant sector, social media platforms became central communication channels during the pandemic, enabling businesses to sustain emotional connections with customers despite physical distancing. This shift reinforces the role of marketing as a strategic management function that integrates communication, experience design, and operational adaptation.

Collectively, the literature suggests that effective crisis marketing in hospitality contexts requires a balance between flexibility and coherence. Organizations must adapt to evolving conditions while preserving core brand values and experiential promises. Understanding how small and medium-sized restaurants operationalize this balance in real-life contexts remains an important area for empirical investigation.

---

## **3. Methodology**

For analytical purposes, the pre-COVID-19 phase refers to the period prior to March 2020; the lockdown phase corresponds to the period of mandatory restaurant closures and mobility restrictions in Portugal (March - May 2020); and the post-lockdown phase encompasses the gradual reopening and adaptation period from mid-2020 onwards.

This study adopts a qualitative research approach based on an in-depth single case study design. Qualitative methodologies are particularly suitable for exploring complex, context-dependent phenomena and for gaining rich insights into strategic processes and managerial decision-making within real-life settings (Yin, 2018). Given the unprecedented nature of the COVID-19 crisis and its uneven impact on hospitality businesses, a case study approach allows for a nuanced understanding of how marketing strategies were adapted under extreme uncertainty.

### **3.1. Research Design**

The research follows an exploratory and interpretive design, aiming to analyse how marketing functioned as a strategic management tool rather than as a purely promotional activity. The case study method enables the examination of strategic responses across different temporal phases pre-COVID-19, lockdown, and post-lockdown capturing both continuity and change in organizational behaviour.

Single case studies are particularly appropriate when the case represents a revelatory, critical, or information-rich example (Yin, 2018). In this research, Restaurant Kampo constitutes a relevant case due to its strong brand identity, experiential positioning, and proactive response to crisis conditions.

### 3.2. Case Selection

Restaurant Kampo, located in Funchal, Madeira Island, was selected using purposive sampling criteria. The restaurant exhibits several characteristics that make it analytically valuable: (i) it operates within a tourism-dependent island destination; (ii) it is an author-driven restaurant with a strong experiential focus; (iii) it demonstrated rapid strategic adaptation during the COVID-19 crisis; and (iv) it maintained operational continuity without compromising brand positioning.

These attributes position Kampo as an information-rich case capable of generating insights transferable to similar small and medium-sized restaurant enterprises operating in vulnerable tourism contexts.

### 3.3. Data Collection

Data collection relied on multiple qualitative sources in order to ensure triangulation and analytical robustness. The primary sources included:

- **Document analysis**, encompassing internal strategic documents, menus, communication materials, and operational guidelines before and during the pandemic;
- **Direct observation** of service processes, spatial layout, customer interaction, and experiential elements of the restaurant concept;
- **Digital communication analysis**, focusing on social media content and messaging strategies used during lockdown and post-lockdown phases;
- **Secondary data**, including online customer reviews (e.g., TripAdvisor and TheFork), press articles, and industry reports.

The combination of these sources enabled a holistic understanding of both managerial intent and customer-facing outcomes.

### 3.4. Data Analysis

Data analysis followed a thematic and interpretive approach. Strategic analysis tools commonly used in hospitality management were applied to structure and interpret the findings, including SWOT and PESTEL analyses, benchmarking against comparable restaurants, and marketing mix analysis based on the 7Ps framework.

Themes related to strategic adaptation, customer orientation, experiential preservation, and brand coherence were identified and analysed across different crisis phases. This analytical process allowed for the identification of patterns linking marketing decisions to organizational resilience and brand reinforcement.

SWOT and PESTEL analyses were applied as interpretive tools to structure and synthesise qualitative data collected from documents, direct observation, and digital communication analysis. SWOT analysis supported the identification of internal strengths and weaknesses and external opportunities and threats across different crisis phases. PESTEL analysis enabled the examination of macro-environmental factors shaping strategic constraints during the pandemic. Benchmarking was conducted through qualitative comparison with similar author-driven restaurants operating in Madeira, focusing on service adaptation, communication practices, and experiential positioning.

## 4. Case Study: Restaurant Kampo

### 4.1. Concept, Brand Identity, and Experiential Positioning

Restaurant Kampo is a neighbourhood restaurant located in the historic centre of Funchal, characterized by an author-driven culinary concept, an open kitchen design, and an informal yet highly professional service style. The restaurant positions itself as an accessible fine-dining experience, emphasizing authenticity, product quality, and emotional engagement rather than luxury or exclusivity.

Central to Kampo’s value proposition is the notion of transparency and human connection. The open kitchen allows customers to observe the preparation process, fostering trust and reinforcing perceptions of quality and craftsmanship. The “chef’s table” further enhances this experiential dimension by enabling direct interaction between chefs and guests, transforming the meal into a shared narrative rather than a purely transactional exchange.

This experiential orientation aligns with contemporary consumption patterns in which customers seek meaningful, memorable, and socially engaging dining experiences. Kampo’s brand identity is thus constructed around values of honesty, proximity, and conviviality, which resonate strongly with both local customers and tourists seeking authentic encounters.

### 4.2. Strategic Environment Analysis

The internal and external strategic environment of Restaurant Kampo was analysed using SWOT and PESTEL frameworks. Internally, key strengths included a strong brand reputation, the professional recognition of the chef, a cohesive service culture, and an active digital presence. These factors contributed to high levels of customer loyalty and positive word-of-mouth.

Identified weaknesses primarily related to physical constraints, such as limited seating capacity, and a strong dependence on skilled human resources, which increased vulnerability during periods of operational disruption.

From an external perspective, opportunities were associated with growing interest in author cuisine, local products, and experiential dining, particularly among post-pandemic consumers seeking quality and authenticity. Conversely, threats were amplified by regulatory restrictions, demand volatility, increased operational costs, and intensified competition within the restaurant sector.

The PESTEL analysis highlighted the dominant influence of political and legal factors during the pandemic, including health regulations and capacity limitations. Economic uncertainty, accelerated digital adoption, and rising environmental awareness further shaped consumer behaviour and strategic priorities.

**Table 1:** SWOT analysis of Restaurant Kampo during the COVID-19 crisis.

Strengths		Weaknesses	
Strong author-driven brand identity		Limited seating capacity	
Open kitchen and experiential concept		High dependence on skilled human resources	
Loyal customer base and local recognition		Reduced operational flexibility during lockdown	
Active digital communication		Dependence on tourism flows	
Opportunities		Threats	
Growing demand for authentic dining experiences		Regulatory restrictions and capacity limits	
Strengthening of local market demand		Abrupt demand volatility	
Increased value placed on quality and trust		Rising operational and compliance costs	
Digital communication and proximity marketing		Uncertainty regarding tourism recovery	



### 4.3. Marketing Mix Adaptation Across Crisis Phases

Marketing strategy at Restaurant Kampo evolved dynamically across three distinct phases: pre-COVID-19, lockdown, and post-lockdown.

**Pre-COVID-19**, the marketing mix emphasized experiential differentiation through product quality, informal service, transparent processes, and physical evidence aligned with rustic and cosmopolitan aesthetics. Pricing strategies reflected value-based positioning rather than discount-driven competition.

**During the lockdown**, rapid adaptation became essential. Kampo implemented take-away and delivery services while redesigning menus to prioritize comfort food and family-oriented consumption. Communication efforts intensified through social media platforms, focusing on empathy, continuity, and community support. Importantly, price integrity was maintained, reinforcing perceived quality and brand consistency.

**Post-lockdown**, the marketing mix was recalibrated to address heightened customer concerns regarding safety and trust. Physical evidence and processes gained increased relevance, with visible hygiene practices and controlled service flows. The people dimension employees’ communication, reassurance, and professionalism—played a critical role in restoring customer confidence while preserving the restaurant’s experiential essence.

Across all phases, Kampo avoided aggressive price reductions, opting instead for strategic coherence and experiential continuity. This approach allowed the restaurant to maintain brand equity while adapting operationally to crisis conditions.

## 5. Marketing Strategy Adaptation During the COVID-19 Crisis

Figure 1 illustrates the evolution of Restaurant Kampo’s marketing strategy across three analytical phases: pre-COVID-19, lockdown, and post-lockdown. The figure highlights how core experiential and brand elements were selectively adapted in response to changing environmental conditions, while preserving strategic coherence and brand identity.

**Figure 1:** Marketing strategy adaptation at Restaurant Kampo across crisis phases.



The COVID-19 pandemic represented a structural shock to the restaurant sector, forcing organizations to rapidly redesign their marketing strategies under conditions of extreme uncertainty. For Restaurant Kampo, the crisis acted as a stress test for its strategic coherence, experiential positioning, and customer-oriented philosophy. Rather than adopting a purely reactive approach, the restaurant implemented a set of adaptive marketing strategies that balanced operational survival with brand integrity.



### **5.1. Strategic Response During the Lockdown Period**

During the mandatory lockdown phase, the immediate challenge faced by Restaurant Kampo was the abrupt suspension of on-site dining, which directly threatened its core experiential value proposition. In response, the restaurant rapidly introduced take-away and delivery services, reconfiguring its product offering to suit domestic consumption contexts. Menus were simplified and adapted to emphasize comfort food, family sharing, and ease of transport, without compromising product quality or culinary identity.

From a marketing perspective, this adaptation represented a redefinition of the “product” element within the service marketing mix. Rather than replicating the in-restaurant experience, Kampo focused on translating its brand values, authenticity, honesty, and quality, into a format compatible with home consumption. This strategic choice aligns with service marketing literature emphasizing the importance of preserving core value propositions even when delivery mechanisms change.

Communication played a central role during this phase. Social media platforms became the primary interface between the restaurant and its customers, enabling continuous engagement despite physical distancing. Messaging focused on empathy, proximity, and transparency, reinforcing emotional connections and maintaining brand visibility. Rather than aggressive promotional campaigns, communication emphasized continuity, community support, and the human dimension of the brand, which contributed to sustaining customer loyalty during a period of uncertainty.

Importantly, Kampo avoided price-based competition or aggressive discounting strategies. By maintaining price integrity, the restaurant reinforced perceived quality and avoided brand dilution, a risk frequently associated with crisis-driven price reductions. This decision reflects a strategic understanding of brand equity preservation, particularly relevant for author-driven and experience-oriented restaurants.

### **5.2. Post-Lockdown Marketing Recalibration**

Following the gradual reopening of restaurants, the marketing strategy at Kampo entered a recalibration phase shaped by heightened customer sensitivity to safety, hygiene, and trust. While demand slowly recovered, consumer behaviour remained cautious, requiring restaurants to address both functional and emotional concerns.

In this context, the “process” and “physical evidence” components of the marketing mix gained increased strategic relevance. Hygiene protocols, service flow redesign, and capacity management were not only operational necessities but also communication tools that visibly signalled safety and responsibility. These elements were integrated into the overall customer experience, reinforcing reassurance without compromising the informal and welcoming atmosphere that defined the brand.

The “people” dimension emerged as particularly critical. Employees assumed an expanded role as trust mediators, responsible for communicating safety measures, managing customer expectations, and maintaining emotional warmth despite distancing constraints. This finding supports service marketing literature emphasizing the central role of frontline employees in shaping customer perceptions during high-risk service encounters.

At the same time, Kampo preserved its experiential positioning by maintaining the open kitchen concept, informal interaction, and narrative-driven service style wherever possible. Rather than fundamentally altering its identity, the restaurant selectively adapted service delivery while preserving symbolic and emotional elements of the experience.

### **5.3. Strategic Coherence and Brand Resilience**

Across all phases of the crisis, Restaurant Kampo’s marketing strategy was characterized by strategic coherence and alignment between operational decisions and brand values. Adaptation did not involve radical repositioning but rather incremental adjustments that allowed the restaurant to respond to external constraints while maintaining experiential continuity.

This approach illustrates how marketing can function as a strategic management tool, integrating communication, service design, and customer relationship management into a coherent response to crisis conditions. The case demonstrates that resilience in the restaurant sector is not solely determined by operational flexibility but also by the ability to preserve meaning, trust, and emotional engagement in disrupted environments.

By prioritizing transparency, customer orientation, and experiential integrity, Restaurant Kampo was able to maintain business continuity and reinforce its brand positioning during and after the COVID-19 crisis. These findings underscore the importance of marketing strategies that balance adaptability with identity preservation, particularly for small and medium-sized restaurants operating in tourism-dependent destinations.

## 6. Discussion

The findings of this study highlight the central role of marketing as a strategic management function in enabling restaurant resilience during periods of extreme disruption. The case of Restaurant Kampo demonstrates that crisis-driven adaptation extends beyond operational adjustments and requires coherent alignment between brand identity, customer experience, and strategic decision-making.

Consistent with service marketing literature, the results confirm that value creation in restaurant contexts is co-produced through interactions among customers, employees, and the service environment. Kampo's ability to preserve experiential elements, such as transparency, informality, and emotional engagement, despite constraints imposed by the pandemic supports prior research emphasizing the importance of experience continuity in hospitality services (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Yrjölä et al., 2019).

The findings further align with dynamic capabilities theory, which argues that organizational resilience depends on the ability to sense environmental changes, seize emerging opportunities, and reconfigure resources accordingly (Teece, 2014). Kampo's rapid implementation of take-away services, menu adaptation, and digital communication illustrates strategic agility in response to external shocks. However, unlike purely reactive responses observed in other hospitality contexts, these adaptations were embedded within a consistent brand narrative, reinforcing the role of strategic coherence in crisis management.

Moreover, the case supports literature suggesting that crisis marketing should prioritize trust, transparency, and emotional reassurance over aggressive sales-oriented tactics (Keller, 2020). By maintaining price integrity and avoiding excessive discounting, Kampo protected its brand equity and reinforced perceptions of quality and authenticity. This approach contrasts with short-term survival strategies that risk long-term brand dilution and highlights the strategic trade-offs inherent in crisis decision-making.

The increased relevance of people, process, and physical evidence within the marketing mix observed in this study is consistent with post-COVID-19 hospitality research. Visible hygiene practices, service flow redesign, and employee communication emerged as symbolic cues that reassured customers and facilitated the gradual restoration of confidence. These findings reinforce the notion that safety-related measures are not merely operational requirements but integral components of the customer experience in high-risk service environments.

From a contextual perspective, the island destination setting amplifies the significance of these findings. Madeira's structural dependence on tourism magnified the economic and social impacts of the pandemic, intensifying pressure on small restaurant enterprises. In such contexts, the ability to maintain strong relationships with local customers alongside tourist demand proved critical. Kampo's emphasis on proximity, community engagement, and authenticity facilitated this dual positioning, contributing to business continuity during periods of limited tourist flows.

Overall, this study extends existing hospitality marketing research by illustrating how experiential restaurants can operationalize marketing strategies that balance flexibility and identity preservation. The findings suggest that resilience in the restaurant sector is not solely determined by the capacity to adapt operationally but also by the ability to sustain meaning, trust, and emotional connection under conditions of uncertainty.

---

## 7. Implications

---

### 7.1. Managerial Implications

The findings of this study offer several practical implications for restaurant managers and hospitality professionals operating in crisis-prone environments. First, the case of Restaurant Kampo demonstrates that marketing should be embedded at the strategic core of the organization rather than treated as a peripheral or promotional function. Managers should view marketing as an integrative framework that aligns communication, service design, and customer relationships with broader organizational objectives.

Second, the preservation of brand identity during crises emerges as a critical success factor. Rather than pursuing aggressive price competition or radical repositioning, restaurants should prioritize strategic coherence and experiential continuity. Maintaining price integrity and reinforcing core brand values can strengthen customer trust and loyalty, even in contexts of reduced demand.

Third, the study highlights the importance of investing in frontline employees as key agents of resilience. Training staff to communicate safety measures, manage customer expectations, and deliver emotionally supportive service is essential in restoring confidence during and after crises. Employees should be recognized not only as operational resources but as central contributors to brand meaning and customer experience.

Finally, for restaurants operating in tourism-dependent or island destinations, cultivating strong relationships with local markets can mitigate vulnerability to external shocks. Community engagement, proximity-based communication, and authenticity-driven positioning can support demand stabilization when international tourism flows are disrupted.

### 7.2. Theoretical Implications

From a theoretical perspective, this research contributes to hospitality and marketing literature by reinforcing the role of marketing as a strategic adaptation mechanism in crisis contexts. The findings support and extend service marketing theory by demonstrating how experiential value can be preserved through selective adaptation of service delivery mechanisms.

The study also contributes to dynamic capabilities research by providing empirical evidence from the restaurant sector, illustrating how small enterprises operationalize sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring processes under extreme uncertainty. By integrating experiential marketing and brand management perspectives, the research highlights the importance of strategic coherence in sustaining brand equity during crises.

Additionally, the island destination context enriches existing tourism literature by underscoring the amplified effects of global disruptions on structurally vulnerable regions. The findings suggest that future research should further explore the interaction between destination characteristics and firm-level resilience strategies.

---

## 8. General Conclusion

---

As a qualitative single-case study focusing on a restaurant that successfully adapted to crisis conditions, this research is subject to the risk of positive case bias. To mitigate this limitation, data were triangulated across multiple sources, including internal documents, direct observation, and customer-facing digital communication. Analytical attention was given not only to successful adaptations but also to constraints, vulnerabilities, and strategic trade-offs faced during the crisis. Nevertheless, findings should be interpreted as analytically transferable rather than statistically generalisable.

The COVID-19 pandemic constituted a profound disruption to the restaurant and tourism sectors, challenging established business models and forcing organizations to rethink their strategic foundations. This study set out to examine how marketing strategies can function as a mechanism for resilience and adaptation in times of crisis, using Restaurant Kampo, located in Madeira Island, as an in-depth qualitative case study.

The findings demonstrate that marketing plays a central role in enabling small and medium-sized restaurants to navigate periods of extreme uncertainty. Rather than operating as a purely promotional function, marketing



emerged as an integrative strategic framework that aligned brand identity, service design, communication, and customer relationships. In the case of Restaurant Kampo, crisis-driven adaptations were not characterized by radical repositioning but by selective and coherent adjustments that preserved experiential value and brand meaning.

A key contribution of this research lies in highlighting the importance of experiential continuity during crisis conditions. Despite severe operational constraints, Kampo maintained core experiential elements, such as transparency, authenticity, and emotional engagement, thereby sustaining customer trust and loyalty. This reinforces existing service marketing and experiential consumption theories, which emphasize that value creation in hospitality contexts is co-produced and deeply embedded in symbolic and relational dimensions.

The study also contributes to crisis management and dynamic capabilities literature by providing empirical evidence from the restaurant sector. Kampo's ability to sense environmental shifts, seize emergent opportunities, and reconfigure service delivery illustrates how strategic agility can be operationalized at the firm level without eroding brand equity. Particularly in tourism-dependent and island destinations, where external shocks tend to have amplified impacts, such capabilities are critical for business continuity.

From a practical standpoint, the findings offer valuable insights for restaurant managers and destination stakeholders. Strategic coherence, investment in human resources, transparent communication, and the preservation of brand integrity emerge as essential pillars of resilience. The case demonstrates that short-term survival strategies based solely on cost-cutting or price reductions may undermine long-term competitiveness, whereas customer-oriented and experience-driven approaches can foster sustainable recovery.

Despite its contributions, this study is subject to limitations inherent to qualitative single-case research, including restricted generalizability. Future research could extend these findings through comparative multi-case studies across different destinations or through quantitative approaches examining consumer perceptions of safety, trust, and experiential value in post-crisis restaurant contexts. Longitudinal studies may also provide deeper insight into the lasting effects of crisis-induced strategic adaptation on brand equity and organizational performance.

In conclusion, this research underscores the strategic relevance of marketing as a driver of resilience in the restaurant sector. By demonstrating how experiential restaurants can balance adaptability and identity preservation during a global crisis, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of hospitality management in turbulent environments and offers a foundation for both academic inquiry and managerial practice in an increasingly uncertain world.

## References

- Alhelalat, J. A., Habiballah, M. A., & Twaissi, N. M. (2017). The impact of personal and functional aspects of restaurant employee service behaviour on customer satisfaction. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 66, 46–53. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2017.07.001>
- Bessière, J. (2013). "Heritagisation", a challenge for tourism promotion and regional development: An example of food heritage. *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, 8(4), 275–291. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1743873X.2013.770861>
- Fabius, V., Kohli, S., Veranen, S. M., & Timelin, B. (2020, August). *Meet the next-normal consumer*. McKinsey & Company. <https://www.mckinsey.com>
- Grönroos, C. (2003). *Service management and marketing: A customer relationship management approach* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). John Wiley & Sons.
- Kaplan, R. S., & Norton, D. P. (2008). *The execution premium: Linking strategy to operations for competitive advantage*. Harvard Business Press.



Keller, K. L. (2013). *Strategic brand management: Building, measuring, and managing brand equity* (4th ed.). Pearson Education.

Kotler, P., & Keller, K. L. (2013). *Marketing management* (14<sup>th</sup> ed.). Pearson Education.

Kukanja, M. (2022). A 7P comparison between restaurant managers' and customers' post-COVID-19 quality expectations. *Academica Turistica*, 15(2), 249–264. <https://doi.org/10.26493/2335-4194.15.249-264>

Lovelock, C., & Wirtz, J. (2011). *Services marketing: People, technology, strategy* (7<sup>th</sup> ed.). Pearson Education.

Pine, B. J., II, & Gilmore, J. H. (1999). *The experience economy: Work is theatre & every business a stage*. Harvard Business School Press.

Richards, G. (2015). Evolving gastronomic experiences: From food to foodies to foodscapes. *Journal of Gastronomy and Tourism*, 1(1), 5–17. <https://doi.org/10.3727/216929715X14298190828796>

Schmitt, B. (2011). Experience marketing: Concepts, frameworks and consumer insights. *Foundations and Trends in Marketing*, 5(2), 55–112. <https://doi.org/10.1561/17000000027>

Seyitoğlu, F., & Ivanov, S. (2020). Service delivery systems in the (post-)viral world: Hospitality firms' responses to COVID-19. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 91, 102634. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2020.102634>

Sims, R. (2009). Food, place and authenticity: Local food and the sustainable tourism experience. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 17(3), 321–336. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669580802359293>

Teece, D. J. (2014). A dynamic capabilities-based entrepreneurial theory of the multinational enterprise. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 45(1), 8–37. <https://doi.org/10.1057/jibs.2013.54>

Vieira, A. (1998). *A Madeira e a história da alimentação no Ocidente* (Documentos, 7). Secretaria Regional do Turismo e Cultura – Centro de Estudos de História do Atlântico.

Wirtz, J., & Lovelock, C. (2016). *Services marketing: People, technology, strategy* (8<sup>th</sup> ed.). World Scientific Publishing.

Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.). SAGE Publications.

Yrjölä, M., Rintamäki, T., Saarijärvi, H., Joensuu, J., & Kulkarni, G. (2019). Customer value in restaurant service experiences. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 51, 91–101. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2019.05.010>

---

### Ethical Statement

**Conflict of Interest:** Nothing to declare. **Funding:** Nothing to declare. **Peer Review:** Double-blind.



All content from *JER—Journal of Entrepreneurial Researchers* is licensed under [Creative Commons](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), unless otherwise specified and in the case of content retrieved from other bibliographic sources.