

CAPSTONE PROJECT

TITLE: REDEFINING THE BRUNCH & APERITIVO

CULTURE IN TORONTO

Executive Summary

This report has proposed a Toronto-based concept regarding hybrid dining that addresses a market gap bridging traditional brunch with Italian-aperitivo culture. The analysis of the industry depicts a strong demand regarding fusion dining, and experience despite a spike in competition and various costs, mostly labour and food charges. Integration of technology and sustainability support brand appeal and operational effectiveness, while regulatory compliance continues to be critical. Overall, within the evolution of consumer trends, the concept is well-positioned, with the success of the restaurant relying heavily on cost-control, clear differentiation, and effective execution in a high-cost and competitive Canadian hospitality environment. The analysis assesses the market needs of a hybrid brunch and aperitivo idea in central Toronto by defining the main market segments, changing eating habits, and consumption pattern based on tourism. It further describes the role of a differentiated menu blend of high-quality coffee, dishes to share, and light cocktails in diversifying revenues. Competitor analysis reveals areas to differentiate the idea with experiential ambience, flexible daytime service and culturally influenced services that react to the demands of the urban lifestyle and enhance competitive edge in an oversaturated hospitality market. The proposed restaurant will have a differentiated and experience-based concept that provides a unique competitive edge by incorporating North American brunch with Italian-aperitivo culture. The social dining and flexible service formats are in high demand in Toronto as market analysis reveals, and there is a definite gap of hybrid to be filled through competitor analysis. The company has a position that appeals to young, urban customers in search of quality and ambience. The strategic plan enhances successful implementation with well-organized operations, competent recruitment, price differentiation, and product focused menu. High local and digital marketing strategy will improve visibility. On the whole, the idea is viable, competitive, and in line with the current industry trends in regard to sustainable development.

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4. Overview of Business

4.1 Business Description

The proposed venture involves a hybrid hospitality that merges the brunch culture of North-America with traditional Italian aperitivo. The business offers a dining experience that is transition-based, where the customers shift from a relaxed daytime brunch to a social, vibrant evening ambiance that is inspired by the culture of Italian pizza.

A clear gap in the market, which is the division in Toronto's dining scene between the predictable formats of brunch and conventional Italian venues of dinner, and this problem is going to be addressed by the core solution. This business is going to incorporate both these aspects in to one cohesive experience that merges familiarity with cultural novelty. Customers are benefitted from the aspects of inculcating a socially emergent environment of dining, a fusion menu that merges the Canadian ingredients with Italian culinary techniques, and a flexible format of dining that is going to evolve throughout the day.

Such facets being offered by the business positions it as an experience-driven brand of hospitality, instead of a traditional restaurant.

4.2 Positioning in the Market by applying Porter's Generic Strategy

By implementing the strategy of differentiation from Porter's Generic Strategies, the business emphasises upon the uniqueness instead of pricing competition. The key differentiators comprise of the merging of two distinct cultures of dining, social and high-energy atmosphere, and focusing on cultural authenticity and storytelling. This approach permits premium pricing while appealing to the experience-centric customers, specially social and young professional diners (Teoh, 2025).

4.3 Trending of the organisation

The business has been trending in regards to an experience-driven and emerging hospitality concept that is positioned as a premium-casual dining segment in Toronto. It aligns with a huge demand for social-dining, lifestyle-oriented experiences, and fusion cuisine. A shift from traditional brunching experiences to a dynamic brunch-aperitivo model is also taking place, which implies the dynamism of the preferences of customers regarding immersive ambiances. Early appeal is expected to be garnered from potential consumers via a demand of group dining, social-media appeal, and differentiated offerings, which indicate

an uptick on growth potential if consistency persists regarding brand-positioning and execution (Mušanović, Dorčić & Gregorić, 2023).

4.4 Location of Business and Stage of Development

The restaurant is going to be located in Toronto because it is targeting a mixed-use neighbourhood or high-footfall residence where there is a strong demand but less competition than the core downtown.

Currently, the business is in the phase of startup but is designed for scalability with the help of multi-locational expansion, branded experiences such as events or themed brunches, and extensions of potential product such as packaged commodities (Agrawal, 2025).

4.5 Key Initiatives

Major initiatives comprise of menu innovation that merges the elements of North-American and Italian cuisines, designing experiences that emphasise on music, ambiance, and style of service, strategic local supplier sourcing, and focusing on brand positioning and digital marketing, and all these initiatives cumulatively support a strong experiential value-proposition (Nanda, 2023).

4.6 Duration of time since the company has been around

As it is a start-up venture, the restaurant is currently in its initial launching stage having no operational history. However, its concept has evolved from a conventional idea of restaurant into its hybrid model that will be blending North-American brunch with an Italian aperitivo culture. The major changes revolve around a strong emphasis on social engagement, experiential dining, and cultural authenticity. There has also been an incorporation of local sourcing, technology, and sustainability within its strategy, which reflect the current trends of the industry alongside consumer expectations (Voicu, 2025).

5. Overview of Industry and Trends

5.1 Analysis of the Industry by Using Porter's Five Forces Framework

By incorporating Porter's five forces, the analysis of the competitive environment can be done.

- Competitive rivalry (high): Toronto has a dense restaurant concentration, which results in the increase of pressure on differentiation (Bowyer, 2025).

- Bargaining suppliers' power (moderate): Usage of premium ingredients may increase costs significantly, but local sourcing can minimise dependency (Schwarz, 2025).
- Threat of new entrants (moderate): While there are relatively low entry barriers, the requirements of capital alongside brand differentiation can create some protection (Morosan & Bowen, 2022).
- Bargaining power of customers (high): There are several alternatives offered to customers as they are quite price-sensitive.
- Threat of substitutes (high): The formats of home-cooking, delivery services, and alternative dining in Canada directly compete (Statista, 2026).

The requirement of a strong and differentiated concept in order to stay competitive is reinforced by this analysis.

5.2 Growth of the Market and Demand Trends

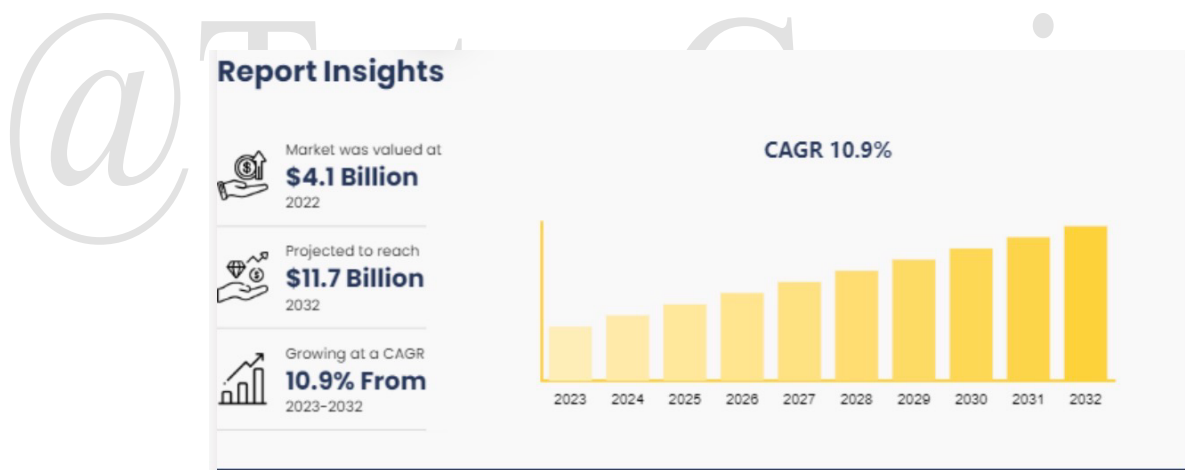


Figure 1: Projection of the Canadian Fast Casual Restaurant Market

(Source: alliedmarketresearch.com. 2023)

The foodservice industry of Canada continues to steadily grow as it is driven by an increased frequency of diners alongside the evolution of the lifestyles of consumers. Evidence, in this case, is supported with an increase in the shift of demand being met by over 8000 restaurants and food-vendors in 2025, and has been currently operating at a CAGR of approximately 10.9% since 2023, and is estimated to cross the 11.7 Billion mark by 2032 (alliedmarketresearch.com. 2023). In this regard, experience-centric dining, premium

casual formats, and social and group-oriented meals are taking precedence (Petronio, 2025). Instead of just being a meal, the brunch culture has specifically evolved into a social activity, which aligns well with the aperitivo concept.

5.3 Shifts in Customer Behaviour

One of the key trends that is shaping the market comprises of experiential consumption, where customers give priority to social engagement. In this regard, another key trend is the consumption of global flavours, which has been an increased interest in fusion cuisines (Can, 2021). Another key trend revolves around help them sustainability where these two factors are prioritised by consumers, which is evidenced with their increased consumption of fresh, local, and ethically-sourced dishes. Lastly, value-sensitivity is another trend where the consumers are continuing to be price-sensitive, in addition to their search for quality (TOMALIA, PRYLEPA & ANTOSHKOVA, 2024).

The proposed business aligns directly with these shifts as it offers a socially engaging and also a culturally immersive experience.

5.4 Analysis of the Macro-Environment Using PESTLE framework

- **Political:** The presence of strong regulatory acts in Canada such as the HACCP and Safe Food for Canadians Act (SFCA) in regards to food safety and alcohol service increase costs of compliance but also improve the trust of customers (Kitz et al., 2022).
- **Economic:** The restaurant industry of Canada has exceeded \$132 Billion in sales, which is testified with over 62% Canadians dining out on a weekly basis (Pendrill, 2024). This indicates a strong demand despite inflation alongside the spike in labour charges.
- **Social:** Social factors strongly support the concept of the diverse Canadian population driving demand for fusion cuisine, while the younger consumers are prioritising shareable and experiential dining increasingly, and this directly aligns with the communal and social nature of the Italian-Aperitivo culture (Stefani, 2025).
- **Technology:** Spike in digital orders, the rise of AI-infused kitchens, and increased usage of data-analytics are transforming operations, which in turn are enhancing

customer expectations (Zemlina et al., 2023). It has become necessary to adopt these tools in order to remain competitive and effective in a competitively intense Canadian restaurant industry.

- Legal: High barriers of entry are created with the help of licensing, labour laws, and regulations on alcohol, which in turn create higher barriers to enter this industry, and they play a huge role in protecting established businesses (Rose, Reeve & Charlton, 2022).
- Environmental; The surge in the demand for implementing sustainable practices while also sourcing locally offers both a branding advantage and social responsibility (Reynolds, 2025).

Overall, while careful cost-management is required to handle regulatory and economic pressures, the evolution of consumer preferences and presence of a strong social demand will be helpful to create a favourable environment for an experience-driven and differentiated concept of dining.

5.5 Risks and Challenges

The proposed concept might have to deal with major market and operational challenges within the restaurant industry of Canada. Spike in input costs are becoming a major concern, with 88% operators in the country mentioning food costs and 89% operators citing labour costs to be the key pressures, which have been affecting the profit-margins directly (restaurant.org. 2025). Alongside this, wage expenses have sharply increased, with a 22% surge experienced in recent years, which have intensified margin constraints. Demand-side risk is also critical equally, which has been a concern because of the cost-of-living crisis as 75% Canadians are dining out less frequently, and this has become more specific for younger customers (Wilson, 2025). Such a risk threatens the experience and premium-based model directly because of its dependency on discretionary spending. In addition, 44% of Canadian restaurants are suffering losses or are barely breaking-even, thereby depicting the fragile fiscal environment (Hughes, 2026).

There also lies the occurrence of major execution risk in regards to the concept of the hybrid brunch-aperitivo model. The blending of two dining cultures may create confusion amongst consumers if they are not positioned clearly. High dependency on

experience and ambiance increases fixed charges, thereby making profitability sensitive to the fluctuations in footfall (Kusnedi et al., 2025).

Lastly, the instability, staffing shortages, and inflation of the supply-chain further can create complications in operations. Cumulatively, these challenges imply success heavily depending on cost-control, strong differentiation, and a consistent demand of consumers in a highly uncertain and competitive market.

6. Technological Trends

The implementation of new technologies are disrupting the Canadian restaurant industry significantly via automation, AI, and digital platforms. 40% restaurants in this country have already been using automation systems, and 39% of them are utilising inventory software, while the deployment of AI tools enhance efficiency alongside the reduction of costs (squareup.com. 2025). Pertaining to this concept, the utilisation of the TAM (Technology Acceptance Model) will be making sure of the easy usage of technologies, which are also clearly beneficial to the business.

The business is going to adopt mobile payments, QR menus, POS-integrated inventory, and reservation systems in order to enhance speed and improve customer experience (Al-Dweik, 2021). With the help of regular updates, vendor support, and training of staffs, these systems will be maintained.

There has also been a major increase in dependency on digital ordering by customers, with the surge of online ordering spiking by approximately 155% in the recent years, which reflect a major shift towards convenience (Kabir *et al.*, 2025). Suppliers are also digitising logistics and procurement, which in turn have facilitated in cost-controlling and real-time coordination of products.

Every aspect of the business, which includes back-end operations (inventory and staffing), front-end service (ordering and payments), hiring (digital scheduling), and supply-chains (predictive ordering) is influenced by technology. By aligning with the principles of TAM, the business is going to make sure of adoption, alongside an improvement of efficiency by delivering a seamless and modern dining experience.

7. Government Regulations

In Ontario, the restaurant industry is regulated immensely, alongside the imposition of several legal frameworks affecting this business model mentioned in the given case-study directly. The laws of food-safety such as the Food and Drugs Act alongside Ontario's Food Premises Regulation Act (O. Reg. 493/17) demand strict adherence to the handling, hygiene, and storage of food, including mandatory certified on-site food handlers (Eohu.ca. 2025). Such regulations improve the costs of operation but they also make sure of food-safety and credibility for a new concept.

A core aspect of the aperitivo model involves the serving of alcohol, which is supervised by the Act of Liquor License and Control, and it requires licensing, responsible serving practices, and complying with age-restrictions and operational rules (Akhtar *et al.*, 2025). Not only complying with these rules are complicated, but they also pose as entry barriers, thereby limiting competition.

Recent policy developments such as the Protect Ontario Through Free Trade Within Canada Act of 2025 permit the expansion of interprovincial selling of alcohol, which potentially enhance supplier access alongside improving product variety (Holland, 2025). In addition, stricter labelling regulations of food and alcohol make sure of transparency and protection of consumers.

With an increase of pressure on Toronto-based restaurants to minimise waste and implement sustainable practices, environmental regulations in the region are also becoming more prominent (Yang *et al.*, 2025). Industrial associations highlight these evolving standards quite frequently, which demand businesses to remain updated.

Overall, despite the imposition of heavy regulations in the restaurant industry of Canada, and adhering to them improves long-term sustainability and brand trust among the customers. This makes regulatory awareness vital for a startup restaurant to successfully operate in the country.

8. THE MARKET

8.1 Overview of Market Trends

- ***Toronto brunch culture growth***

The brunch culture in Toronto has grown in the last few years. In the industry reports, the food service industry in Canada recorded that the industry earned over CAD 120 billion in revenues, with brunch eating out taking an increasing portion of the casual dining sales. Dining at weekends has become an important social activity among urban dwellers. Several young workers are more likely to have late morning meetings rather than having a conventional breakfast. Café-style lives are on the rise as well, because of the remote and flexible work trends. Aesthetically pleasing dining areas have increased the amount of time spent by consumers. This change is an indication of changing urban behaviour where eating is associated with leisure and socialisation. Thus, brunch is no longer considered a simple meal. It has developed into a social experience segment of the hospitality market (Circana, 2025).

- ***Rise of experiential dining***

There is also a change in the preferences of customers towards experiential dining. Contemporary consumers demand themed spaces and novel ideas as opposed to ordinary food. Fusion dining has gained popularity since it is diverse and new. These decisions are highly affected by social media sites. Dining establishments that have appealing interiors have more interactions and visitors. Cafe culture of the Europeans, particularly Italian cuisine, is on the rise. This trend opens a great potential to present an aperitivo-based concept. It is in line with the need to have leisure and social meals (Arora, 2025).

- ***Market size & demographic expansion***

The growth of the population in Toronto also contributes to the growth of the market. With an annual growth rate, the population of the city is more than 2.9 million. A big percentage will be made up of young professionals and foreign migrants. The pandemic has also shown a significant boost to tourism, which has increased the demand in restaurants. In addition, Canada accommodates more than 800,000 foreign students, with a large portion in some of the major cities such as Toronto. These groups are often out at restaurants and trying new food ideas. This way, the brunch and social dining customer base keeps growing. This population increase is a direct cause of the high demand for new types of restaurants (Toronto, 2017).

- ***Supply chain and product trends***

The market is also being influenced by supply chain trends and product trends. The tendency to source locally and farm-to-table is becoming very strong. Consumers are fond of fresh and sustainable foods. The Mediterranean diet has attracted a lot of attention throughout the world because of its health advantages. The Italian cuisine is in accordance with such tastes. Concurrently, consumption of high-quality coffee is on the increase in Canada. Urban areas have seen a lot of speciality coffee shops. These are trends that advocate for the inclusion of brunch and aperitivo service. The Italian ingredients and small dishes, as well as espresso-based drinks, can be aligned with the modern consumer demands (Staff, 2025).

- ***Regulatory/economic power over customers***

There are also economic and regulatory conditions that affect the behaviour of the customers. The rise in prices of food due to inflation has an impact on the frequency of dining. But, consumers will still be ready to spend on quality experiences. The policies of Ontario on the minimum wage have an implication on the disposable income and the hospitality costs. The service provisions in an aperitivo are also influenced by the alcohol licensing regulations. The behaviour after the pandemic is inclined towards social and real-life experiences. Ambience and quality of service have become more important to the customers. The market is favourable in spite of economic pressures. There is a high demand in the competitive hospitality industry in Toronto in terms of premium casual dining concepts (Canada, 2025).

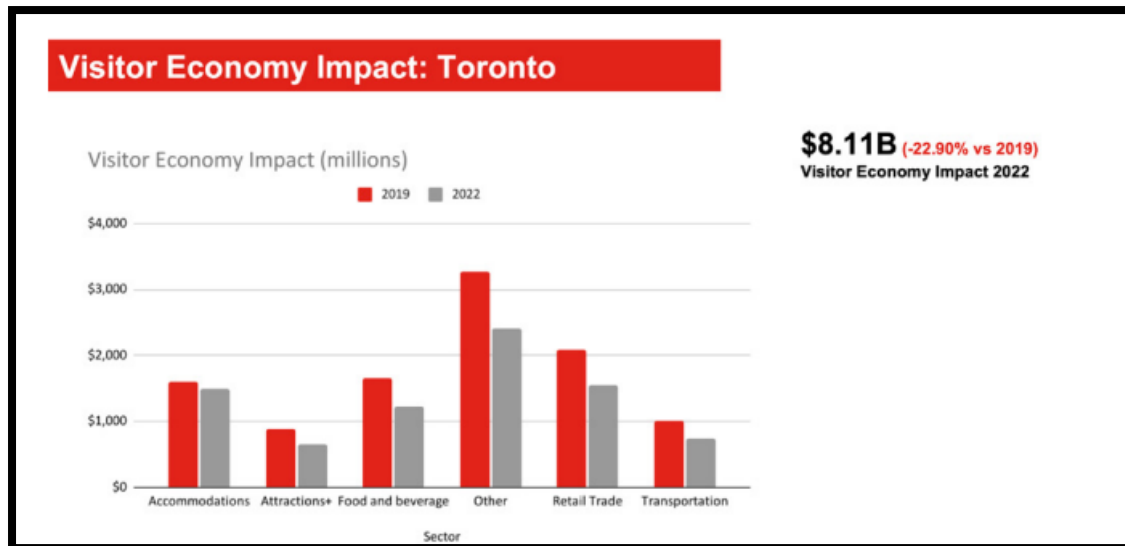


Figure 2: Toronto Tourism Snapshot: Economic Impact

(Source: Toronto, 2017)

8.2 Target Market

- **Primary customer segment (Age group: 22-40)**

The main target clientele for the restaurant's brunch and aperitivo dining idea will involve individuals aged between 22 and 40 years who reside in central Toronto. The target audience will primarily be young professionals, city millennials, and socially active consumers who like having a flexible daytime dining experience. A great number of people work hybrids and often take part in brunching on weekends. They also appreciate aesthetic dining spaces, which favour socialisation and digitalisation sharing behaviour. Consequently, this group is very sensitive to experience-based hospitality concepts that provide ambience, high-quality ingredients and cultural authenticity (Casaletto, 2026).

- **Secondary Customer Segment**

The secondary target market comprises tourists, students, remote workers and weekend visitors who visit the downtown hospitality areas of Toronto. The tourism activity is a great contributor to restaurant demand because most of these tourism activities often require visitors to have special daytime meals. The international students also make a contribution to the trends in food consumption of multicultural diversity, which makes the

innovative fusion ideas more in demand. Remote workers are also a new group of customers, as cafes and brunch restaurants have been turned into flexible workplaces on certain days of the week. As a result, these customer segments exhibit convergent interests in mid-day dining services as opposed to the old early breakfast or late evening restaurant designs (Casaletto, 2026).

- ***Customer Needs***

The target segment customers demand good quality ingredients and comfortable places to eat so that they can have a long social interaction. The health consciousness has led to the creation of demand for fresh and locally sourced food in urban hospitality markets. Aesthetic restaurants are one more factor contributing to customer preference, as many brunchers attach importance to ambience as well as the quality of food. The European-style hospitality, especially the Italian cafe style, is attractive to those customers who want to experience any social dining. Shareable plates have not lost their appeal due to their promotion of informal grouping. These preferences show the significance of integrating brunch menus into a combined aperitivo drink hospitality concept.

- ***Changing Purchasing Behaviour***

Digital technology and lifestyle trends have revolutionised customer buying behaviour. Numerous clients will examine menus, ratings, and availabilities on the Internet and choose restaurants. Restaurant discovery and destination choice among younger consumers are highly impacted by social media. The consumption of meals based on experience is more appealing than consuming meals based on routine, especially following the pandemic, which enhanced the demand for shared social activities. The involvement in group dining has also enhanced in the markets of weekend hospitality. So, there is a positive tendency to innovative fusion cuisine like brunch, mixed with Italian aperitivo culture, which is positively addressed by customers (Toronto, 2024).

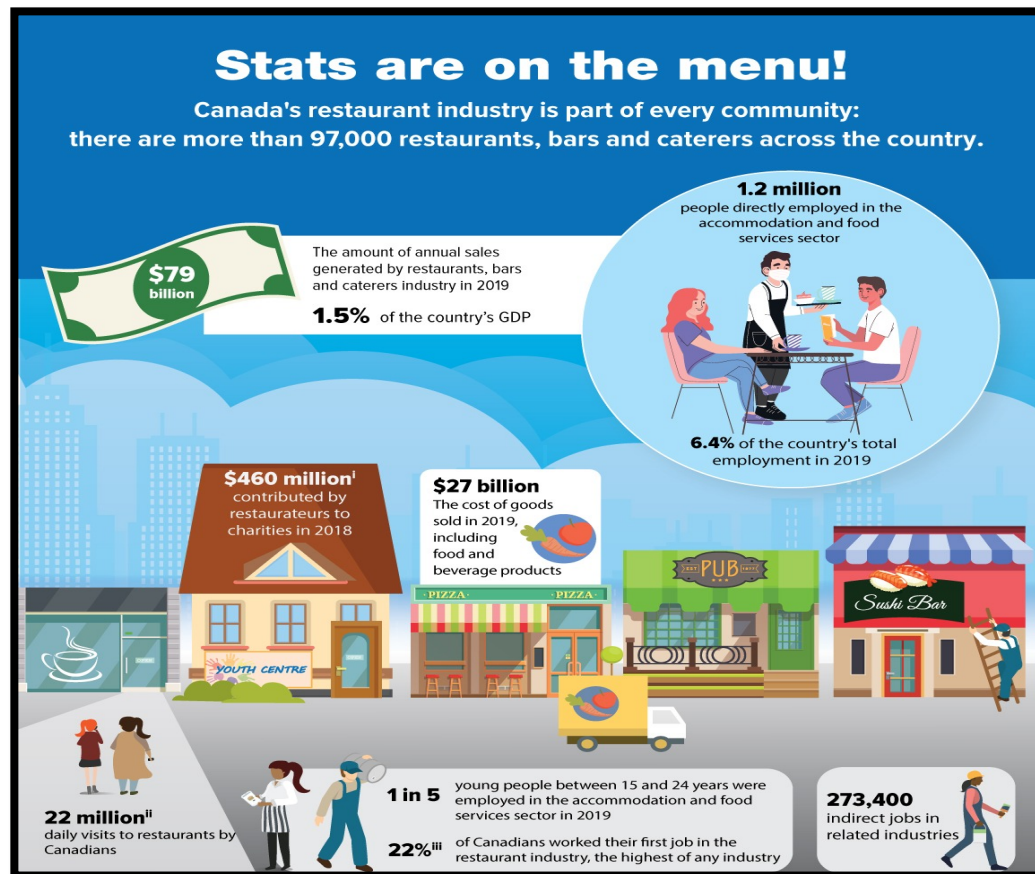


Figure 3: Canada Restaurant Industry Overview

(Source: Toronto, 2024)

9. PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

9.1 Core Product Offering

The package product is a blend of North American brunch culture and traditional Italian aperitivo dining patterns to produce a unique hybrid restaurant experience in Toronto. The menu will consist of brunch dishes like egg dishes, pancakes, and toasts with avocados made using Italian cuisine, including ricotta, prosciutto, and focaccia bread. Moreover, the restaurant will also offer tiny Italian dishes such as bruschetta boards, olives, cheeses, and small portions of pasta that can be eaten in a social way. The menu will include craft coffee made with espresso-based coffee preparation, and various aperitivo cocktails like spritz and low-alcohol cocktails. This food and beverage combination is an integrated meal that promotes experience-based food consumption as opposed to meals that are taken one at a time (Garutti, *et al.*, 2022).

Table 1: Sample Menu Design of Brunch Aperitivo Fusion Idea

Menu Category	Example Items	Service Timing
Brunch Plates	Ricotta pancakes, eggs Benedict with prosciutto, avocado focaccia toast	Late morning
Italian Sharing Plates	Bruschetta platter, marinated olives, burrata with tomatoes, mini pasta tastings	Midday
Artisan Coffee	Espresso, cappuccino, flat white, iced latte	All day
Aperitivo Cocktails	Aperol spritz, Negroni, Italian mocktails, house spritz variations	Afternoon–evening
Desserts	Tiramisu cups, cannoli bites, panna cotta	All day

9.2 Revenue Contribution by Category

Table 2: Estimated Revenue Contribution Structure

Category	Estimated Revenue Share
Brunch menu	40%
Aperitivo small plates	30%
Beverages (coffee + cocktails)	25%
Desserts	5%

The sale of beverages contributes well towards the profitability of the restaurant since it normally offers better margins than food products. Coffee and cocktails are less expensive to prepare than full meal dishes and offer premium pricing opportunities. The culture of aperitivo especially promotes the frequent ordering of drinks when eating out.

Consequently, beverage services aid in stabilising revenues throughout the day and enhance profitability in general within the premium casual hospitality formats (Ruiz-Fernández *et al.*, 2025).

9.3 Products Market Positioning.

The restaurant will be placing its products under the high-end casual restaurants segment of the Toronto hospitality market. The traditional brunch cafes are more inclined towards the breakfast-type menus with a small number of beverages in the afternoon. The Italian trattorias normally focus on their dinner-based pasta and main course meals as opposed to their social lunchtime. Cocktail bars focus more on drinking alcohol in the evenings and have fewer food choices. Brunch meals, shareable Italian dishes, and speciality beverages can be consumed by the customers in a single integrated setting (Sillote & Naelga, 2026).

9.4 Product Evolution Strategy

The product strategy will be flexible in order to effectively react to the fluctuation in customer preferences and the availability of ingredients, depending on the season. The seasonal menus will enable the restaurant to bring on board fresh produce and have a variety of menus all year round. The sourcing of local ingredients will help to meet the expectations of sustainability and improve relations with local suppliers. Vegetarian and vegan food will also be added to cater to the increasing demand of urban clientele for plant-based food. Health-conscious consumers will also be attracted by low-alcohol aperitivo drinks as an alternative to traditional cocktails that are higher in calories. In the future, the business can implement an option of limited delivery service to increase its reach to the customers beyond the dine-in business. As such, menu flexibility will be a boon to long-term competitiveness and customer satisfaction in the changing hospitality market in Toronto (Neyem, *et al.*, 2024).

10. THE COMPETITION

10.1 Competitors and Types of Competition

Table 3: Direct competitors

Competitor	Positioning	Limitation vs Proposed Concept
Mildred's Temple Kitchen	Premium brunch destination	Focuses mainly on traditional brunch menus
Lady Marmalade	Popular casual brunch café	Limited beverage-led aperitivo experience
School Restaurant	Urban brunch-focused dining	Lacks a European café-style social dining atmosphere

These restaurants have a good reputation in the brunch market in Toronto. They draw customers over the weekend, and their brand awareness is high. Nevertheless, their menus are mostly about breakfast-like foods (Zou, et al., 2024).

Table 4: Indirect competitors

Category	Example Role in Market	Limitation vs Concept
Italian restaurants	Provide authentic cuisine	Mostly dinner-focused service timing
Wine bars	Offer social beverage spaces	Limited brunch menu integration
Coffee bars	Strong daytime traffic	Minimal sharing plates or cocktails
Cocktail lounges	Evening social atmosphere	Weak brunch positioning

These competitors provide some of the features of the proposed idea. Nevertheless, they do not integrate brunch dishes, dishes to share, espresso culture and aperitivo drinks into a single experience format (Jung and Nicolau, 2025).

Emerging competitors/disruption risk

New competitors also involve ghost kitchens, delivery-based brunch chains, and high-end chains of cafes that have been growing throughout Toronto. Such enterprises make the accessibility and convenience for the customers more convenient. Nevertheless, the opposite still applies to the experiential dine-in models as they seem to retain an edge

due to the growing importance of ambience, socialisation, and cultural dining experience that cannot be fully emulated by the delivery models.

10.2 Strengths and weaknesses of the competitors

- ***Competitor strengths***

There are a large number of traditional brunch restaurants in Toronto, which have brand identity and a base of loyal customers. Their sites are usually located in busy neighbourhoods like Queen Street West and downtown entertainment areas. Such companies enjoy the advantage of seasoned chefs, the reliability of suppliers and a regular quality of menu. Their popularity is also achieved with the help of a strong presence online, supported by social media and review sites. Furthermore, the extensive presence in the local hospitality sector has also enabled these restaurants to build customer loyalty among customers. This has seen them retain their market leaders in the traditional brunch segment and keep on appealing to the residents as well as visitors in the city (Sharma, e. al., 2023).

- ***Competitor weaknesses***

Even though they have strengths, some of the competitors can be seen to have weaknesses that offer differentiation opportunities. Most brunch cafes are based on conventional menu designs and have a few innovations throughout the service hours. In certain places, there is overcrowding during peak periods on weekends, thus affecting the efficiency of service delivery and the comfort of the customers. Customer satisfaction in high-demand districts is also impacted by long waiting times. Moreover, there are minimal rivals offering the genuine European cafeteria culture atmosphere where a longer mid-day socialisation is promoted. They tend to have a limited range in their beverage offerings with aperitivo-oriented concepts. These shortcomings indicate that there is a significant gap in the hospitality industry in Toronto concerning hybrid dining formats (Alphun, et al., 2024).

- ***Opportunity positioning***

The gaps are filled in the proposed restaurant concept by a clear differentiation strategy. Traditions of Italian hospitality will provide a casual and comfortable atmosphere at the dining. The fusion menu identity will be a blend of brunch foods in North America and

the Italian sharing dishes and aperitivo beverages. The ability to work with flexible service time promotes late morning meals and early evening parties. Brunch-cocktail pairings are also offered at premium, which is another positioning strategy that will reinforce the experience-based positioning of the restaurant. This combined strategy enables the business to cater to the needs of various categories of customers at a single point. Thus, the idea has a hybrid diner niche which is not yet developed in the competitive sphere of brunches and cafes in Toronto (Tsaour, et al., 2024).

11. Competitive Advantage and Differentiator

11.1 Unique Value Proposition

By combining North American brunch and Italian aperitivo culture, the proposed restaurant will have a highly competitive advantage. The concept combines both styles of dining together whereas most restaurants specialize in either one of the two. This puts a distinct market distinction. Food itself is not the only factor that attracts customers but also experience. The idea is centered around social dining, ambience and cultural immersion. This contrasts it with the traditional restaurants which simply offer meals. The dual service concept is also a value addition since the customers are able to visit in the day and evening. Another important differentiator is menu innovation. The menu incorporates a combination of brunch dishes with Italian cuisine and therefore offers some exclusive dishes that cannot be found anywhere. This facilitates differentiation and assists in establishment of brand identity within a competitive market.

11.2 Reasons for Choosing this Service

Value, experience and convenience are some of the factors that allow customers to select restaurants. Dining behaviour has been transformed in recent years. A large number of consumers are now choosing restaurants with a good experience over simple food.

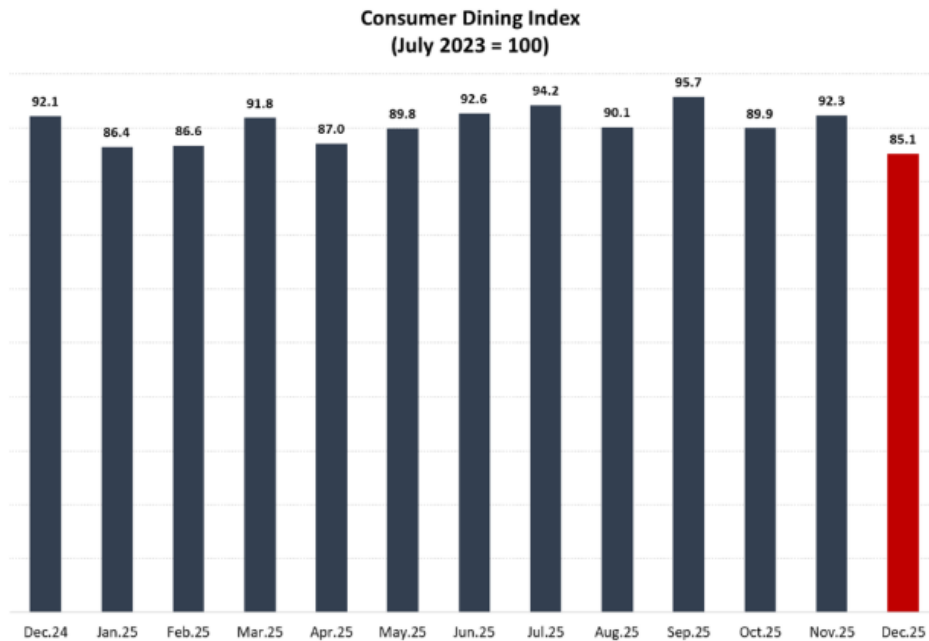


Figure 4: Consumer's Dining Index in Canada

(Source: Restaurants Canada, 2026)

However, the consumer dining index is showing to decline 85.1% from 92.1% in 2025 (Restaurants Canada, 2026b). Meanwhile, affordability is still a consideration. In Canada, 42 percent of the population said that they frequent restaurants less frequently because of the cost, indicating that people are highly price sensitive (Restaurants Canada, 2026). This implies that the restaurants have to strike a balance between value and experience.

The concept proposed will solve this by providing:

- Social brunch in the daytime.
- Evening aperitivo in high-quality.
- Social environment that promotes longer visitation.

This mix enhances value. The customers believe that they are getting quality food and a special experience, which will lead them to return. Even convenience is a factor. Online reservations, mobile ordering, and contactless payment systems are digital systems that

enhance customer satisfaction. These attributes are becoming more and more demanded in contemporary restaurants.

11.3 Special Solutions and Distribution Strategy

The idea offers a remedy to an evident gap in the market. Brunch and evening social dining are served separately in a variety of cities. The customers tend to go to separate places where each experience is offered. This restaurant is a mix of both, eliminating the necessity of making several visits.

The modern methods of distribution and service used in the business include:

- Booking and queue management online.
- Digital engagement and social media marketing.
- Delivery services of chosen brunch items.
- Repeat customer programmes to attract more customers.

The plans improve the accessibility and interaction with customers. Technology also facilitates efficiency in operation and enhances quality of services. Another benefit is flexible pricing. Brunch menu at low prices is suitable to get large customers and evening aperitivo services are used to get high margins. This fair pricing policy helps in profitability.

11.4 Offering Payment Terms

The company has competitive and customer friendly payment methods. Customers are allowed to pay with cash, cards, digital wallets, and contactless to make it convenient. Split payments and prepaid reservations will also be provided as flexible options. Service guarantees that include quality assurance, prompt solution to problems and service that is satisfaction-oriented will be offered to build trust. These will enhance customer confidence and lead to repeat visits.

11.5 Industry Background

The Canadian restaurant business is huge and keeps expanding, despite the economic difficulties. By 2025, the total foodservice sales were approximately 101.4 billion, a 5.6 percent growth over the same year prior (Government of Canada, 2025). This means that there is high aggregate demand. Growth has been enabled by higher customer expenditure and recovery after the historical economic shocks. In 2025, the restaurant traffic increased by 3.2% and spending by 5.7% (Sgabellone, 2025). This means that the consumers are not prepared to reduce expenditure on the eating experiences. However, Inflation and cost pressures are likely to reduce real growth. According to industry reports, the growth in real sales can be estimated at slightly lower by 1.1% in 2026 (Restaurants Canada, 2026a). This puts a strain on restaurants to be efficient and to provide value. Ontario is the biggest market, projected to sell approximately \$39billion in 2025, and it is one of the locations where new businesses can be developed (Rattan, 2025).

11.6 Market Analysis

The market is very competitive particularly in big cities like Toronto. Thousands of restaurants of various cuisines and formats of dinners exist.

There are two trends in consumer behaviour:

- There is a greater need to have unique dining experiences.
- Increased price elasticity owing to increased cost of living.

The dining index in Toronto in 2025 grew exponentially, indicating an increasing popularity of restaurant experiences (Petronio, 2025). Nevertheless, customers are also more discriminating as far as spending is concerned. This provides a window of opportunity to restaurants that are able to provide an experience and value. This need is fulfilled in the proposed concept, which involves the mixture of cultural dining and flexible prices.

11.7 Competitor Analysis

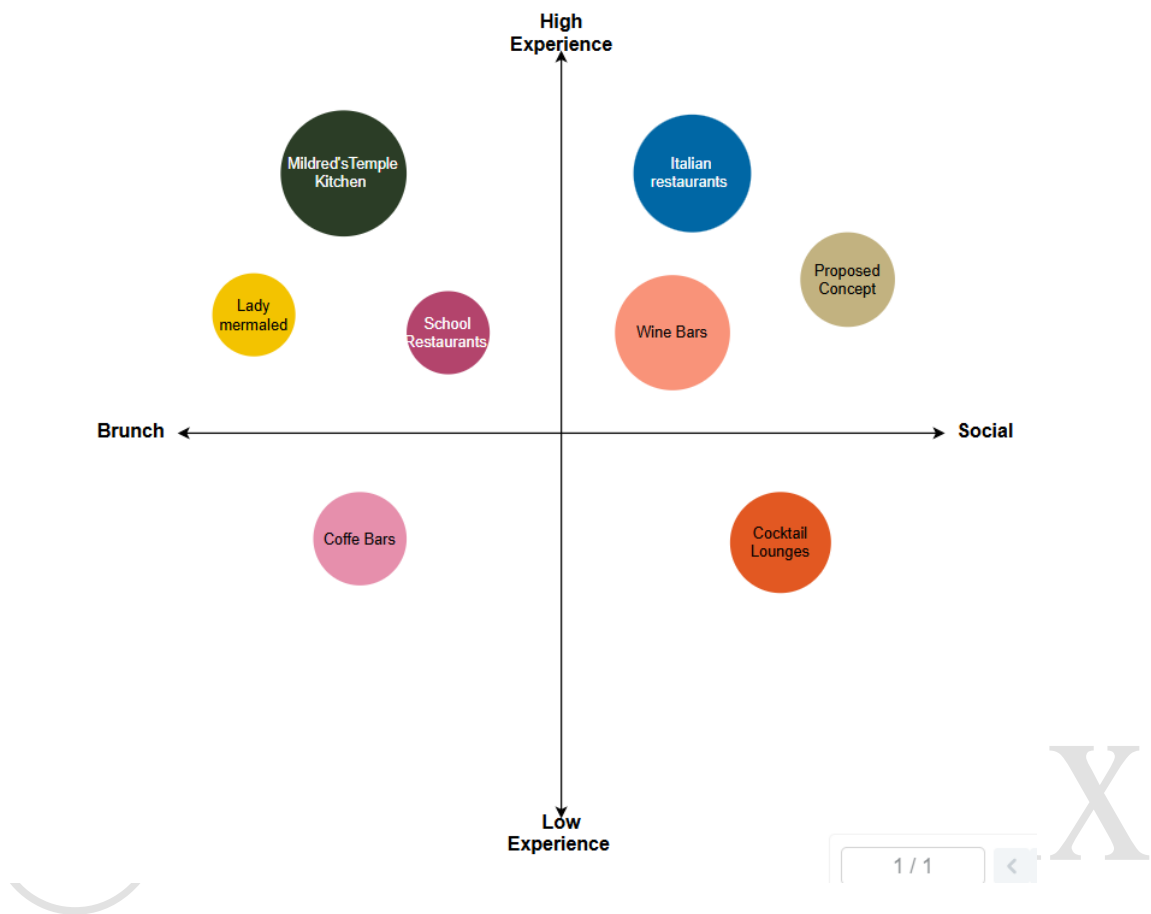


Figure 5: Perceptual Map Showing Competitor Analysis

(Source: Self developed)

Analysis

The perceptual map reveals an opportunity between brunch-restaurants and social beverage-focused restaurants. The competitors such as Temple Kitchen, Lady Marmalade and School Restaurant on the left are greatly concentrated on brunch. Mildreds offers a higher quality of brunch dining experience than Lady Marmalade and School Restaurant which offers middle-of-the-market and casual dining. All three remain, however, confined to daytime hours only, and are largely food oriented and not much social or beverage experience.

On the right, Italian restaurants and wine bars focus more on social and experience. They offer good ambience and drinks but primarily target the night-time market without integrating brunch. This leaves a gap between day and night markets. At the lower end, there is a lack of balance in coffee bars and cocktail lounges. Coffee bars are popular with daytime visitors but only offer limited experiences; cocktail lounges are popular with nightlife but lack food variety and have no brunch appeal. The new concept is in the high experience and balanced food-social quadrants. This enables it to leverage the best of both brunch and social dining. This makes it unique and less competitive while being more desirable to the consumer.

11.8 SWOT Analysis

Table 5: SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
• Exclusive crossbreed idea of two cultures in dining. • Considerable emphasis on experience and atmosphere. • Scalable model of services enhancing revenue prospects.	• Complicated processes because of dual service format. • Greater branding and set-up costs. • Reliance on talented employees.
Opportunities	Threats
• Increasing popularity of experience dining.	Toronto has high competition.

• More applications of technology in restaurants. • Brunch and aperitivo combined concept market gap.	Increased food and labour expenses. Uncertainty in the economy in terms of customer expenditure.
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The proposed restaurant attains competitive advantage based on differentiation,innovation, and compatibility with the market trends. The brunch and aperitivo are combined to form a unique product, which is not a common product in the market. The statistics in the industry indicate that more customers are becoming price-sensitive, even as the restaurant industry is expanding. This heightens the demand for good value and experience. The idea deals with this by providing the flexibility of price, a new menu, and a solid social restaurant atmosphere. All in all, the company stands a good chance of making it in a competitive market due to its ability to provide value as well as a unique customer experience.

12. The strategical plan/ Action Plan/Implementation Plan

12.1 Implementation Plan

The implementation plan is around the controlled launch of the restaurant. The plan will begin with finding a location in a crowded Toronto location with potential customers. Decor will be a blend of both brunch and aperitivo styles. Permits, vendors and equipment will be secured. The revenue is expected to be high with the foodservice industry in Canada earning the country 101.4 billion dollars in revenue in 2025 (Government of Canada, 2025). Prices are on the rise though and planning is required. Training of staff and rehearsal will be done. Testing systems and quality will be done through an opening. Possible testing of technology such as POS, online reservations and ordering will be tested. Gradual roll-out will reduce risk and provide fine-tuning. This will ensure smooth running, minimized expenses and maximized consumer satisfaction.

12.2 Hiring Plan

Staffing plan is concerned with competent staffing. The restaurant will hire the potential employees to work as Chefs, cooks, managers, bartenders and waiters. However, the cooks and Chefs need to be familiar and experienced with the Italian brunches and menus. Labour shortage is being experienced in Canada. It is shown that the labour shortage in the food service industry has been persistent in most jobs, which affects service and operations (Government of Canada, 2022). To overcome this the company will offer competitive wages, flexible working hours and good working culture. Additionally, the training will be provided for the employees regarding customer service and food safety to ensure and adhering all the rules and regulations. Rostered shifts and clear roles will enhance productivity. Retention measures like bonuses, staff meals and training will also be employed. Good staff are needed to ensure quality service and develop a reputation in the competitive Toronto market.

12.3 Pricing Strategy

Price strategy will be a balance between value and profit. Brunch items will be competitively priced to increase daytime customers. Aperitivo items will be priced higher to boost profits during the night. Canada's inflation has driven up food and labour costs, leading to price increases. Inflationary costs had negative impacts on profit in 2025 (Brennan, 2026). To offset this, value pricing will be employed. Meals, happy hour and discounts will add value. This will leave customers with the impression that they are buying quality food and service at a reasonable price. There will be special items that will be pricier owing to the quality of ingredients and presentation. This pricing strategy will attract a price sensitive and a premium market. This helps drive sales while keeping customers happy in a price-conscious industry.

12.4 Product Plan

The product plan is to provide a narrow range of high-quality products. The restaurant will offer a select few items rather than too many. This will increase quality, minimise waste and simplify operations. It will serve Italian inspired brunch, and provide sharing plates in aperitivo. Local produce will be utilized in-season to maintain low costs and

keep the produce fresh. Canadian customers are seeking new, local and global tastes, especially Italian and fusion (Camilleri, 2025). A reduced menu also allows for quicker service. Occasional and seasonal menu items will add diversity and novelty. This strategy delivers speed and quality, while still keeping customers happy. This also allows for quality control, essential for building reputation.

12.5 Marketing Plan

The marketing plan will be mostly online, which will be supported by local advertising. The restaurant will be promoted by Instagram, TikTok, and Google reviews. Social media and online reviews are used by many Canadians as a way of locating restaurants (Mendoza, 2026). Online marketing is important, therefore. The restaurant will post photos, videos and offers. The awareness of the brand will also be enhanced by social media influencers and user-generated content. Email marketing and loyalty cards will be used to retain customers. The local partnerships, events and advertising will be used as traditional marketing. Such activities as aperitivo evenings will assist in attracting customers. Brand recognition is created through online marketing and offline marketing. This will assist the business to stand out and retain customers in the saturated market.

12.6 Funding Plan

The brunch-aperitivo restaurant will be financed under a safe and diversified means of funding. All the investment that could be estimated to initiate the business is around CAD 330,000 and it will be utilized to cover leasehold improvements, equipment, furnishings, licenses, initial inventory, marketing, IT systems, and working capital. With this capital, the business will be operational and be in position to start trading once it opens and it will be able to survive the initial months of operation. There are three sources of capital that the capital will be raised. An infusion of owner equity of CAD 100,000 (30 percent) will indicate a high degree of commitment and reduce the debt. A bank loan with a decent payback will provide CAD 150,000 (45%) of the total. The rest of the CAD 80,000 (25%): the entrepreneur will use his own funds or angels who can offer business advice and assistance. The diversified financing approach will decrease risk and increase business resilience. By

maintaining the growth of revenue, controlling costs and providing products with high-profit margins, such as aperitivo, the company will break-even within 12-18 months.

12.7 Financial Plan (Projection for 1 year)

Table 5: Financial Plan

Month	Revenue	COGS (40%)	Gross Profit (CAD)	Operating Expenses (CAD)	Net Profit (CAD)
Jan	50000	20000	30000	20000	10000
Feb	52500	21000	31500	20000	11500
Mar	55125	22050	33075	20000	13075
Apr	57881.25	23152.5	34728.75	20000	14728.75
May	60775.3125	24310.125	36465.1875	20000	16465.1875
Jun	63814.07813	25525.63125	38288.44688	20000	18288.44688
Jul	67004.78203	26801.91281	40202.86922	20000	20202.86922
Aug	70355.02113	28142.00845	42213.01268	20000	22213.01268

Sep	73872.77219	29549.10888	44323.66331	20000	24323.66331
Oct	77566.4108	31026.56432	46539.84648	20000	26539.84648
Nov	81444.73134	32577.89254	48866.8388	20000	28866.8388
Dec	85516.96791	34206.78716	51310.18074	20000	31310.18074

Analysis

The general discussion reveals that the suggested concept of brunch-aperitivo is quite in line with the trends in the contemporary Toronto market. There is rising demand for experiential dining, the ability to schedule their service times and culturally inspired food particularly among young professionals. Competitor analysis reveals that the majority of restaurants concentrate on brunch or evening only, with a concrete opportunity of a hybrid model. The perceptual positioning ratifies the idea that the concept holds a special position with high experience and a balanced food-social proposition. The financial forecasts indicate a gradual growth in revenues and an increase in profitability in the long term. Together with a systematic funding strategy, the business has a high level of feasibility, differentiation, and potential of long-term growth.

13. Conclusion

In conclusion, the proposed brunch and aperitivo restaurant would be a good fit in the Toronto market. The market is expanding, as there is a high demand to socialise and eat out. Brunch is not a meal anymore, but a social phenomenon, particularly among millennials and urbanites. However, this is also a wonderful time to have some Italian aperitivo, due to the emergence of experiential dining and European cafes. The target customers (22-40 years

old) are already interested in flexibility in meal times, delicious food and a pleasant atmosphere, as a market analysis indicates. They are also social media aware and desire to dine out in restaurants that have memorable dining experiences. This will be as per the new concept. The competitor analysis shows that existing restaurants in Toronto either offer brunch or dinner. It is possible to offer both. There is also no significant player in the high experience - balanced food and social offering space as shown in the perceptual map. This lays a distinct line of distinction. The money and budget plans are also viable. The company possesses a proper mix of funding and reasonable assumptions of revenue growth, and it is planned to break even in 12-18 months. On the whole, the idea will be a success. It is innovative, responds to market needs and it is well-planned which leads to a sustainable competitive advantage in a saturated market.

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