

Ba (Hons) Developing Leadership and Management
BMSW5013: CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION
A REPORT DETAILING INNOVATIVE SOLUTION TO AN
OPERATIONAL PROBLEM

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1. Introduction

Masala (Llanelli Ltd) is a microbusiness, operating in the hospitality industry, based in 31 West End, Llanelli, SA15 1AN, Carmarthenshire, beginning in 2004 (Masalarestaurantllanelli.co.uk, 2025). It is a private limited company, and the number of employees it manages is less than 10, and its turnover will remain less than £109.4 k (Gov.uk, 2025). At this point, the company is in the early stages of developing a strong market presence and differentiating itself in a competitive industry.

My role as operations manager involves working the supply chain, production efficiency, and customer experience to keep operations running smoothly. I concentrate on improving business processes, which improve product quality, reduce cost, and ensure fast delivery.

This paper aims to determine a primary operational position in Masala Llanelli Ltd and come up with innovative ways in which the operation will be efficient, for the long-term sustainability and growth of the organisation.

2. The Importance of Creativity and Innovation in the Restaurant Industry

The Competitive Landscape of the Restaurant Industry

From the very nature of the restaurant business being competitive, there are many businesses competing to get customer attention. As a small Indian restaurant, Masala has problems attracting and retaining customers. Opening a restaurant does not need a lot of capital, and new competitors constantly make it hard to achieve a reputable position in the market. Since Masala is a smaller and newer restaurant, brand recognition and a loyal customer base are out of reach, and thus, they need to find a way to differentiate themselves, via unique offerings, excellent service, and strategic marketing, from more established and larger restaurants (Asbari *et al.*, 2021).

A major challenge is to manage suppliers. In this case, as a small business, Masala relies on food suppliers, equipment providers, and packaging vendors, but does not have the same power that a large restaurant chain has to negotiate with suppliers over costs, etc. Cost management is an underlying concern due to prices for ingredients and materials continuing to rise and fall. In order to keep expenses under control, Masala must look at ways of local sourcing, develop relationships with a number of suppliers, and optimise its inventory, reducing waste.

The second key factor is the customer's expectations. In the presence of numerous dining options, customers now have the highest expectations not only for the quality of food but also from a service perspective as well as convenience. Since their decisions are heavily influenced by online reviews as well as social media, it is vital to have a strong digital presence. In the above view, Masala should fulfil its commitment to keep food quality and service, while attracting customers through different kinds of digital marketing, personalised promotions, and interactive content to build customer loyalty towards the brand (Cankurtaran and Beverland, 2020).

Besides direct competition, more and more alternative dining options are being introduced, for example, meal kits, supermarket environment meals, and fast-food chains that sell quick and inexpensive choices. Since Masala would need to beat these alternatives, it would have to focus

on the traditional and fresh flavour of Indian foods. Offering home delivery services, creating special menu items, and introducing loyalty programs will all make loyal and repeat customers. Masala must build up a strong identity in the market to succeed in the long term. The restaurant can rise above a bustling industry by engaging with customers both online and offline, providing the best possible dining experiences as well as continuing to innovate what its offerings are (Mahmoud *et al.*, 2021). For Masala to do away with competitive pressures and meet sustainable growth, it must stay adaptable and responsive to market trends.

The Crucial Role of Innovation in the Restaurant Industry

In an industry where customer preferences are everchanging, almost every item is changing, like the introduction of new flavours, healthier options, plant-based alternatives, etc. to suit a wide array of dietary needs. By developing the menus creatively, menu staples are given a seasonal theme, or they may be switched up in the form of chef's tasting menus to keep the customers coming back (Karatepe *et al.*, 2020).

The other area of the restaurant that needs improvement beyond menu innovation is operating efficiency. Kitchen automation, thanks to innovations such as kitchen automation, AI-based inventory management, and smart reservation systems, helps optimise workflow, reduce waste, and speed up service. Integration of technology in daily operations gives restaurants a chance to increase profitability while still keeping the quality of food and service high.

The other major driver of innovation in the restaurant industry is sustainability. Due to the increasing consumer awareness of environmental matters, some products have become in high demand in the market, including locally sourced ingredients, biodegradable packaging, and waste reduction products (Breier *et al.*, 2021). By implementing sustainability, costs will reduce, and the reputations will improve while attracting environmentally conscious customers.

Innovation also affects customer engagement and brand loyalty to a great extent. In this new digital age, social media marketing stands out; Facebook advertising, influencer collaborations, authentic experiences such as live cooking sessions, and digital loyalty programs are the ways in which businesses can connect with their audience (Sjödin *et al.*, 2020). That type of restaurant that fails to innovate customer engagement is bound to fall behind restaurant businesses that utilise personalised marketing, data-driven promotions, and immersive dining experiences.

Innovation as a Driver of Efficiency, Differentiation, and Growth

It is suggested by Tidd and Bessant (2018) that innovation is leading to efficiency, differentiation, and long-term growth. Using technology to enhance the effect of technology on kitchen operations, cost, and service quality (Distanont, 2020). The differentiation comes from a unique culinary concept, a unique way of presenting—creative presentation—presence, and a unique dining experience compared to other competitors. Always adapting to market trends, growing digital presence, and providing creative services that cater to the interests of new and old customers ensure they continue to grow.

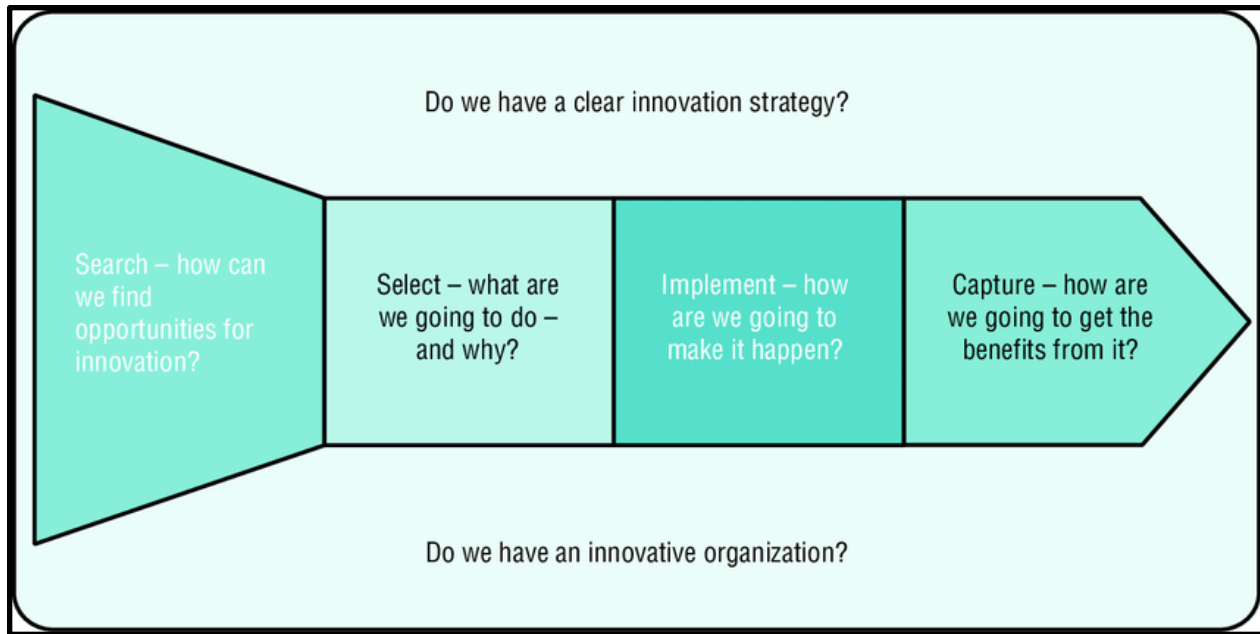


Figure 1: Clear Innovation Strategy Framework
(Source: Distanont, 2020)

In order for Masala to succeed in a very competitive restaurant industry, innovation will be key. The restaurant would achieve long-term success by embracing creativity in its menu, optimising operating processes, and leveraging digital tools in customer engagement to provide an improved brand and greater profitability.

3. Identifying a Problem and the '4 Ps of Innovation'

Problem Identification

Masala Llanelli Ltd is comparatively a recently set up microbusiness in a fiercely competitive restaurant market, and as such, it faces several challenges that, if they are not addressed, could prevent the business from growing or being sustained (Masalarestaurantllanelli.co.uk, 2025). A severe deficiency in the brand and in the marketing strategy, which in the end restricts the reach and retention of the customers, is one of the most severe (Hofstra *et al.*, 2020). Masala is a small independent restaurant; thus, it faces a challenge in developing brand awareness and thereby attracting and retaining a loyal customer base (Gov.uk, 2025).

Nowadays, whether to have a tasty takeaway or go fine dining depends a great extent on how it's advertised online. People's recommendations to their friends on social media result in reviews and further customer engagement, or a lack thereof. However, various restaurants make use of platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and Google Reviews, among others, to gain visibility and customers' trust. Nevertheless, Masala Ltd has not yet distributed itself online or embraced AI-integrated digital marketing to connect with possible customers. In the absence of a good marketing strategy, the restaurant will face the risk of losing its market share to its competitors, who are significantly more active with their audience via targeted ads, promotions, and online interaction with customers (Usai *et al.*, 2021).

In addition, the advent of online food service managers delivery and takeout culture presses restaurants to optimise their digital ordering and customer engagement play fields. Masala might struggle to compete with the restaurants that are providing seamless digital experiences with the help of AI-driven food recommendations and personalised offers if it does not adapt to the changing consumer behaviour (Bibri and Krogstie, 2020).

For this reason, Masala has to launch a technology-based marketing and sales strategy supported by AI-powered digital engagement to entice the customers, make the customers aware of the brand, and improve retention.

4 Ps of Innovation

Tidd & Bessant (2018) categorise innovation into four types: products, processes, positions, and paradigm innovation. These categories also help businesses grasp the best approach to introducing innovation and emerging as a winner in a competitive business game.

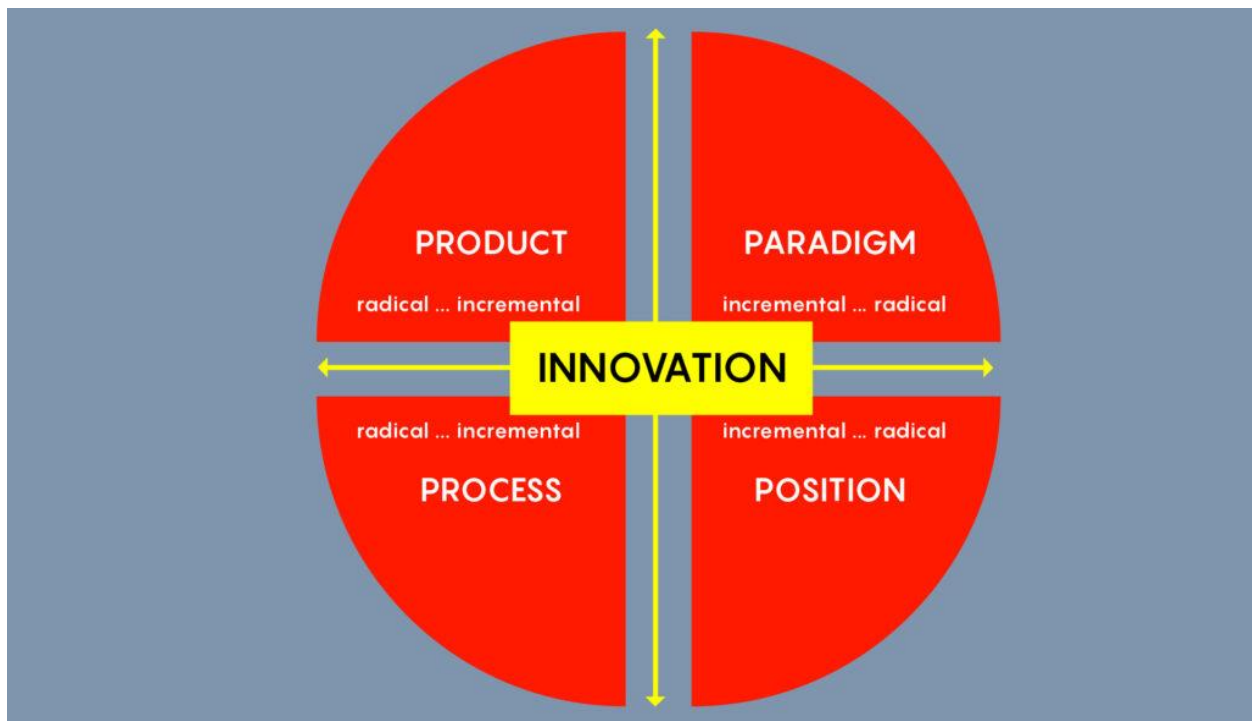


Figure 2: 4 Ps of Innovation

(Source: Herrero *et al.*, 2020)

Changes or improvements in the products or services provided by a business are product innovation. As this is a restaurant setting, it could be adding new menu items, fusion cuisine, or healthier alternatives. Product innovation may be important, but it is not the problem Masala faces as it lacks visibility and reaching new and existing customers.

Process innovation seeks to increase improvement in internal operations, service delivery, or customer interaction. The project could encompass kitchen automation, AI-powered food recommendations, or even digital ordering systems. In the case of Masala, process innovation

involves improving digital marketing and customer engagement, as it involves directly increasing the restaurant's connection with its customers and increasing sales (Herrero *et al.*, 2020).

Position innovation involves altering how a product or service is viewed in the market. It includes rebranding, and repositioning of offerings for targeting new target demographics or a specific target market. Brand is important, but Masala's main problem is, to begin with, creating awareness rather than rebranding (Pan *et al.*, 2022).

A paradigm innovation is a radical business model change or the entire industry practice. The examples here are cloud kitchens or AI-powered automated restaurants. Such a large-scale transformation is beyond the immediate scope of Masala, which is a new business (Distanont, 2020).

In these categories, process innovation would be best applied to Masala. With the implementation of AI-powered digital marketing and automated customer engagement strategies, the restaurant has managed to attract a larger crowd, increase customer retention, and get more lucrative sales in the long run.

4. The Creativity Process Applied to Generate the Idea

Identifying and making use of innovative solutions, which ultimately lead to business success, is through creativity. To achieve Masala's challenge of low brand awareness and customer engagement, various creativity techniques were used to generate, refine, and develop a viable solution. The first development helped shape this AI-driven digital marketing strategy; the mainland included brainstorming, and design thinking were the key methods in this process.

Brainstorming and Idea Generation

Brainstorming as a widely used technique for generating multiple ideas in a short period was the first stage of the creativity process. An approach was taken on a team basis to explore how the restaurant could achieve a greater market presence and attract more customers. With several ideas, among which were influencer partnerships, loyalty program initiatives, interactive social media campaigns, and AI-powered marketing solutions (Oppenlaender, 2022). Based on the feasibility, cost effectiveness, and influence of customer engagement, ideas were evaluated. The most optimal approach that was determined to be AI-driven marketing was due to the ability for personalising customer interactions, advertising efforts, and brand visibility.

Refining the Idea

The AI-driven marketing strategy was aimed to be refined; therefore, traditional methods, such as printed flyers and generic online ads, were replaced by more efficient and customer-engaging AI solutions. AI helps customers analyse customer data from their online orders and social media interactions, and AI offers personalised recommendations to customers to boost their dining experience (Begum *et al.*, 2022). With the use of AI-driven marketing automation, Masala will have adequate and effective promotions guaranteeing a better return on investment compared to the use of ineffective advertising.

Besides, these AI-infused chatbots chat with the customers, answering their questions and offering specialised offers, boosting customer retention. Automated marketing tools constantly check on trends to promote real-time optimisation of promotions so as to ensure that only the content that is relevant goes to the rig optimisation (Begum *et al.*, 2022). Integrating AI into the business enables the marketing effort to be streamlined, and cost-reduced, as well as enabling a personalised experience for the customer. By moving away from broad advertising, this approach brings in an intelligent, data-driven engagement which enhances brand loyalty and sales. Besides modernising marketing, the strategy is integrating the business to face future competition for a long time.

Applying Design Thinking for Development

To be innovative and customer-centric, the final solution was designed based on the design thinking approach. The process of applying this method is structured and involves setting customer needs, identifying the problem, ideating solutions, prototyping, and testing. The first step involved trying to empathise with the customer, to try to understand how the customers were dining by looking at dining trends, online reviews, and seeing what customers' digital preferences were when they opted to dine at other restaurants (Treffinger *et al.*, 2023). This helped in understanding the essence of low brand awareness and negligible use of interactive digital marketing.

Moreover, during the ideation phase, several AI-driven strategies were evaluated, such as chatbot-based customer engagement, personalised discounts based on customer behaviour, and social media automation. An AI-powered promotion as well as automated customer response, was developed into a prototype campaign. Through these small-scale, digital advertisements and chatbot trials, Masala conducted testing that allowed the people to see real-time feedback and data collection (Shalley and Zhou, 2024). Using the result, the approach was further refined to achieve maximum customer satisfaction at an economical cost to the business.

Theoretical Framework: Amabile's Componential Model of Creativity

Amabile's Componential Model of Creativity is applied in its iteration of the creativity process that was applied in this innovation that is related to domain-relevant skills, creativity-relevant processes, and intrinsic motivation in producing an innovative solution (Usai *et al.*, 2021). The idea needed to be shaped by industry knowledge, which is specifically in restaurant marketing and digital consumer engagement. By using structured creativity techniques, brainstorming, and design thinking, idea development took a very clear path. Secondly, it helped motivate the need to create Masala to be a competitive and broadly considered brand within the restaurant organisation.

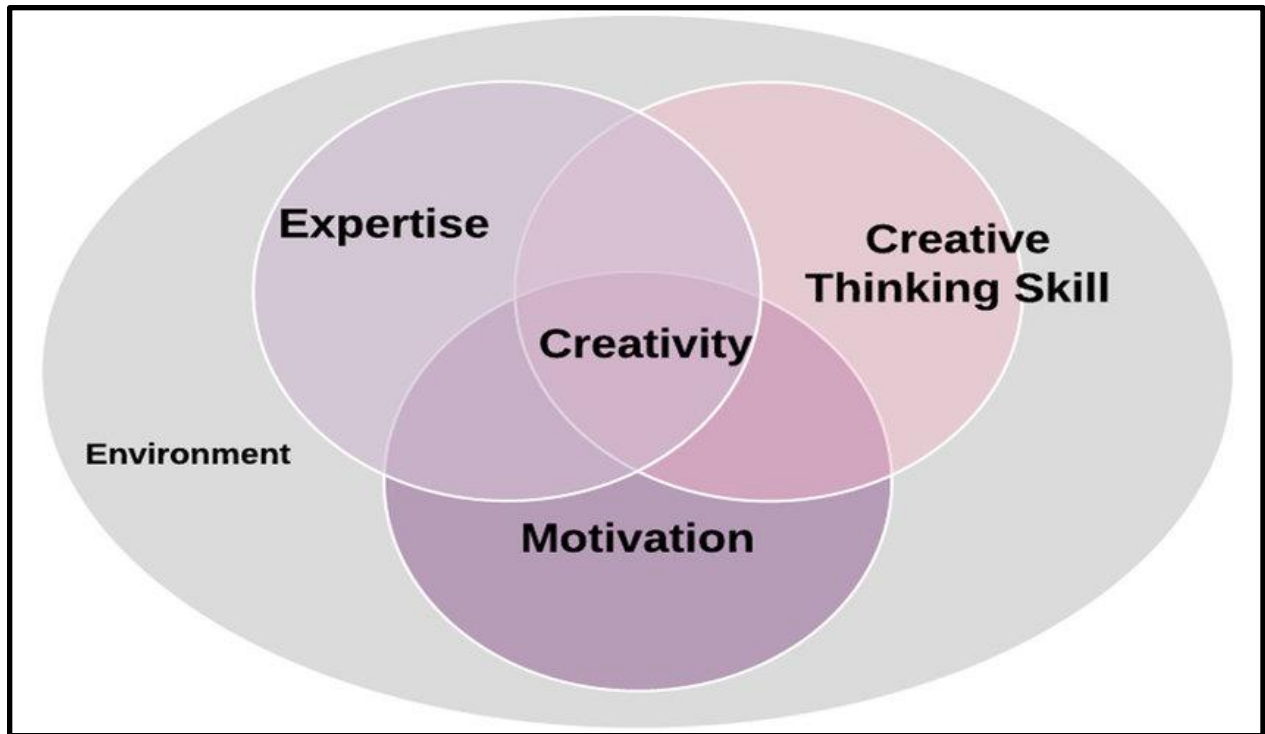


Figure 3: Amabile's Componential Model of Creativity
(Source: Shalley and Zhou, 2024)

5. Evaluating the Idea Using Lewin's Force Field Analysis

As a decision-making framework, Lewin's Force Field Analysis provides help in determining the change being implemented, as a change can only be adopted when the company identifies the driving forces that are either pushing it or the restraining forces working against it. The model then provides for an innovation to be successfully implemented only if the driving forces outweigh or weaken the restraining force (Shafaghat *et al.*, 2021). This analysis can be applied to assess Masala's viability and face challenges.

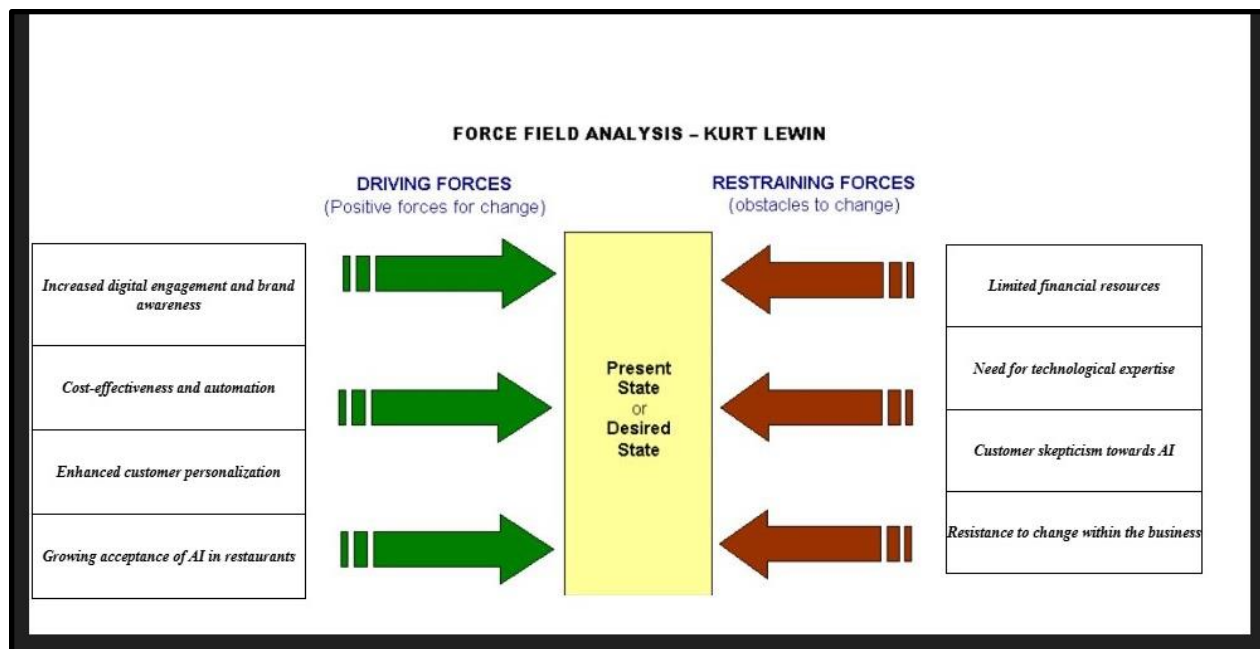


Figure 4: Lewin’s Force Field Analysis

Driving Forces Supporting Implementation

The internet has made it possible for restaurants to be fully digitalised too. Digital marketing is paramount for brands to gain awareness with consumers via online platforms, like online platforms to look for dining options, read reviews, or order food. With AI, it gets to the personalised customer interactions, and engagement with a customer, because it leads to a better overall customer experience, which will translate into increased repeat business and increased customer loyalty (Hussein *et al.*, 2023).

It helps to solve issues with the cost-effectiveness and efficiency of AI-powered solutions. AI marketing doesn't need human effort along with continuous expenses, and yes, it's a bit different from traditional marketing that needs manual effort to run marketing campaigns and needs continuous investment to run marketing campaigns. Data from the customer can be analysed by AI-based tools to prepare targeted promotions that optimise marketing spending and give better returns.

Finally, technological progress and the consumers’ acceptance of AI-driven services enable this innovation (Kump, 2023). Various businesses, like restaurants, have already successfully incorporated AI in making customer service, chatbot support, and personalised recommendations. So, consumers are becoming receptive to AI-driven engagement due to more adoption of AI in food delivery and hospitality.

Restraining Forces Hinder Implementation

However, a number of restraining forces may restrain the adoption of AI-powered digital marketing by Masala. However, lack of financial resources is one of the main challenges. As a newborn microbusiness with limited funds, the company has to make use of all its budget in spending and investing; spending on AI technology might not come cheap in the first place. Achieving the affordability of AI-powered marketing tools and the ROI must be evaluated.

Another possible barrier is technological limitations as well as expertise. Technical knowledge and expertise are required to get these AI solutions implemented in Masala, and they may not necessarily be present within the organisation (McNett *et al.*, 2022). Others would use it to save on operational costs and complexity by hiring or training staff to manage AI-driven marketing. There exists another challenge of customer acceptance and trust in AI interactions. Even in the restaurant industry, customers may prefer human interaction over AI interaction for better customer satisfaction. Thus, both the chatbot and human agents would have a reason to stay present. For adoption to be successful, it will be necessary to make sure that AI enhances, rather than replaces, human interaction.

An analysis of these forces indicates there are difficulties in implementing AI-powered digital marketing at Masala, but the forces that drive adoption are strong. Strategies like securing inexpensive AI tools, training employees, and maintaining the perfect balance of AI and human interaction should be taken to increase the chances of success (Hussein *et al.*, 2023). This innovation can be a major force for long-term growth and competitiveness of the restaurant if the restraining forces can be effectively managed.

6. Organisational Climate for Innovation & Management Support

Leadership, resource allocation, and the level of risk that a company tolerates to take influence the organisational climate for innovation. For differentiation and long-term success in a highly competitive industry, innovation is a must in a newly established Indian restaurant at Masala. Leadership within this restaurant will play an important part in creating this climate, as it will shape decision-making, openness to new ideas, and investment in innovative solutions such as AI-driven digital marketing (Chittipaka *et al.*, 2023).

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions and Innovation at Masala

In Masala, the organisational climate of innovation depends on how much of these factors are in place. Masala is an established Indian restaurant in the UK operating in a highly competitive market where differentiation, and client retention are essential for the success of a business. Hence, the likelihood of management approving and implementing innovation can be assessed by analysing the UK's business culture and its role in decision-making using Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Model.

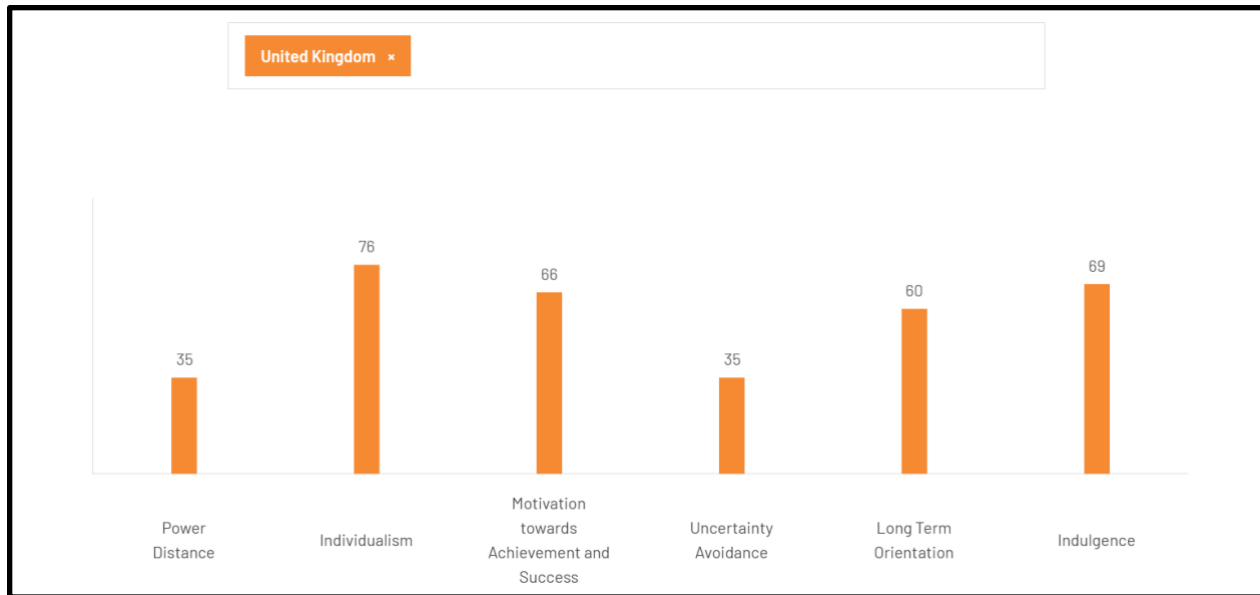


Figure 5: Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions of the UK
(Source: Obtained from Theculturefactor.com, 2025)

Power Distance (35)—Encouraging Open Communication: Since the score of 35 on the power distance index implies a flat organisational structure where leadership places high value on employee input, the power distance score is low (Theculturefactor.com, 2025). This expertise, coupled with the onset of the COVID-19 vaccine in the country, is being nurtured into the open communication culture at Masala, where staff are free to propose new menu ideas, sustainability campaigns, and AI-driven marketing schemes to management without the restrictions of strict hierarchy. Bottom-up innovation is likely to be acceptable for management (Na *et al.*, 2022).

Individualism (76): Emphasis on Independent Thinking: UK businesses have a high individualism score (76); therefore, businesses encourage personal initiative and creativity. Unique branding strategies (Theculturefactor.com, 2025), personal customer experiences, and digital engagement solutions would be a good idea to adopt in Masala since the restaurant will be in a competitive market and its employees and managers may find it easier to embrace.

Achievement Orientation (66) – Focus on Performance: Those UK businesses who are highly motivated towards achievement (66) do so on the basis of efficiency and achieving competitive advantage (Theculturefactor.com, 2025). Management of Masala will support innovations that will improve customer satisfaction, operational efficiency, and revenue growth, for example, AI-led personalised marketing or streamlined online ordering systems.

Uncertainty Avoidance (35) – Willingness to Experiment: High uncertainty avoidance score (94) is the UK business. It is probable that Masala's leader is going to be ready to try out such experiments as AI-driven customer recommendations or automated reservation systems and stay away from doing it with too much hesitation (Theculturefactor.com, 2025).

Indulgence (69): Enhancing Customer Experience: A culture that values experiential consumption and leisure is indicated by a high indulgence score (69) (Theculturefactor.com, 2025). With this,

Masala can win customers with the experience they seek by providing an interactive dining experience, digital loyalty programs, and social media-driven engagement strategies.

Innovation Culture at Masala

The leadership approach of Masala and its openness to change make the organisation able to foster innovation. In the case of a restaurant, a culture that helps solve creative problems and enables the digitisation of the business—in this case, a profitable AI-based marketing strategy—can be the one that empowers the restaurant to overcome its competitors. Since the power distance index for the UK is 35, the organisational structure may be decentralised and participative, giving employees ideas and opportunities to make decisions (Malik *et al.*, 2021). This makes it a welcome environment for innovation, as in all aspects, employees, at all levels can have autonomy to put forward and take up new strategies.

The other critical factor is resource allocation for fostering innovation. Masala, as a microbusiness, might not have much financial resources to invest, making such a huge technology investment tough. However, this is because the business culture in the UK supports entrepreneurial thinking and independent decision-making, which is higher (76) than the high individualism (76) of the UK. As such, Masala's top leadership would most probably prefer strategic investments that promote long-term growth, which would make innovation in digital marketing and AI customer engagement more feasible (Kim and Park, 2020).

An innovative culture involves an essential amount of risk-taking. The UK has a low uncertainty avoidance (35) score, which means British businesses are comfortable with ambiguity and ready to experiment with new ideas. This implies that Masala's management may be willing to experiment with innovative variations such as AI-powered customer suggestions, targeted digital advertising, and data-pushed menu personalisation (Chen *et al.*, 2020). The restaurant is most likely to get creative, thus being flexible, with a gradual approach and gradual implementation and adaptation of change based on the customer reaction.

Likelihood of Management Approving and Implementing Innovation

Masala UK Ltd will implement an AI-driven digital marketing strategy only when the management decides whether there should be any benefits or risks associated with it. As the UK's long-term orientation score is moderate (60), British businesses generally strike a balance between short-term and long-term gains (Newman *et al.*, 2020). Based on this, the leadership of Masala will most likely consider the feasibility of AI-driven marketing, which can retrospectively improve customer engagement and create long-term brand building.

Moreover, the UK features a high indulgence score (69), and more and more people in the UK highly value experiential, personalised services and digital engagement. It makes AI-driven marketing a relevant and strategic investment for Masala, as it fits in with the restaurant industry's shift to technology-driven customer experience (Kim and Park, 2020). The chances of successful implementation of the innovation are bigger if management recognises consumer change and brand extension in terms of digital branding.

7. Conclusion

Therefore, continuous innovation is what Masala has and will continue to do in order to remain competitive and be future secured. The restaurant business is such that it is highly dynamic and

requires change in evolving consumer preferences as well as technology. Masala can improve its job operational efficiency and connect to the brands through AI-driven marketing, automation in reservations, and by focusing on improving customer engagement.

As an operations manager, my job is to convey these innovations to aid in streamlining processes and upgrading service quality. By integrating AI-powered chatbots, customer satisfaction level and retention will be increased. Also, the online ordering and delivery services will be optimised based on evolving consumer demands. Most importantly, effective inventory management will help minimise waste and enhance profitability, while it will also facilitate training and upgrading of staff in modern technology to improve the overall efficiency of the operation of the business.

These strategies are feasible and beneficial with strong management support, consumer demand for innovation, and a UK business environment providing the right environment for creativity. The solution for Masala's sustainable growth lies in embracing AI-driven solutions and operational improvements, as Masala aims to become the dominant player in the rapidly changing restaurant industry.

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