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The Impact of Digital Marketing on Local Restaurants in Vaasa

Marketing Communication through Website as A Digital Channel

International Business

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ABSTRACT

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In the digital age, local restaurants are in need of finding new ways to reach their consumers not only through food but also through online marketing, in order to stand out among the competitors, especially big chains and franchising companies which have professional strategies and huge budgets. If social media and paid ads are already familiar with most of restaurants owners, website is introduced in this paper in terms of how it can be used to communicate with customers as well as the benefits and challenges of operating and managing websites. Vaasa is chosen to be the area in which the research is conducted.

Combining secondary research, quantitative methodology and online survey, the results showed evidence that communication on website plays an important role in the buying process, in particular in the evaluation and selection stages. On the other hand, certain difficulties were discussed, along with limitations of the paper and suggestions for further studies.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the thesis

More than just the idea of food and the matter of flavour, the restaurant industry has become a competitive market. Accounting for \$3 trillion in 2020, the new report by Global Industry Analysts (2022) stated that the value is expected to reach \$4.1 trillion in 2026. In Finland, an annual growth of 1.3% has been recorded in the period of 5 years between 2018 and 2023 (Industry statistics 2022). Finding ways to be recognized and to stand out among competitors, marketing is believed to be the key to popularity, in which communication plays an essential role. While big brands and franchises have focused on marketing in all possible approaches, local restaurants are still struggling to figure out the most suitable strategy. Besides the traditional methods, digital marketing helps businesses to get close to their customers with more efficiency, saving time and cost through mediums, ads or search engine, as the fact that about 99,000 searches are done every second on Google alone, making more than 8.5 billion daily (Internet Live Stats 2022).

Among several online channels, website and social media rank the top worldwide in 2022 (Woosuite). Instead of putting them in the comparison, each tool is believed to carry out its own mission, together bring brands to customers and help companies stand out from competitors. While widely used platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram... grow steadily with over 4.6 billion active accounts in 2022 (Datareportal), create an interactive environment where consumers not only can see the brands but also express their emotions and thoughts; a website acts as the home base to which traffics are driven, a credible place that shoppers can explore all sorts of information through different landing pages, where businesses can do more than identify themselves but introduce products and actual sales with multiple types of transaction. If social media is already familiar to local organisations for being free of charge and easy to use, website still appears to be more challenging. And since social channels have been analysed by various researchers, this paper will conduct a thorough study on the website as a platform for communication and how it affects local restaurants in Vaasa, referencing articles, previous reports, books and online survey. The purpose is to figure out how

restaurants can communicate with their customers, how it affects the purchase/dining decision and the business subsequently. As the survey will be handed out to people living in Vaasa, the geographical and population facts related to the topic will be discussed as well. The results from this work can be used for future researches, and also to support local restaurants to get hold of digital marketing's benefits in practice, which contributes to develop their businesses.

1.2 Objective and research problems

This study is intended to investigate how marketing communication on local restaurants' websites gets to customers, affects their decision to visit the diners or purchase a dish online. Being designed to bring everyone on the same page, it is critical first and foremost what to present on the website, what kind of content and illustration, in order to deliver the restaurant's values and offers, at the same time matches what customers wish to see. The decision-making process is considered afterward, at which stage the information is needed as well as how important it is.

The research questions below are meant to be answered as the result of this paper:

- What is the target customer segment of digital marketing?
- What type of restaurant is the most in need of digital marketing communication on website?
- What is an effective digital marketing communication?
- What are the benefits local restaurants in Vaasa can acquire from digital marketing communication on website as well as the challenges?
- At last, is it important for local restaurants to focus on digital marketing communication?

1.3 Research methodology

The research will be carried out by Quantitative methodology, divided into two different methods: secondary research and survey. Information is collected from previous articles, books and reports, classified and analysed by the author to explain certain terms and answer the research problems. In the Empirical study chapter, a well-structured list of questionnaires will be handed out via email to respondents who are living in Vaasa. The responses then will then be converted into

numbers and processed by the SPSS system, consequently bringing the most accurate outcome for the data review and analysis.

The reason for applying Quantitative research methodology is to gather data from a larger population in a short period of time and at low cost in order to quantify the problem and understand the prevalence. To secure the objectiveness of the results and privacy of the respondents, the survey will be in anonymous form.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

The paper is divided into six main chapters, it begins with an introduction part to briefly describe the background of the topic, the research problems and the chosen research methodology.

The second part of the thesis includes the theoretical study, where certain terms are discussed and explained with credible references: digital marketing communication for local restaurants, the relationship between digital marketing communication and the customers buying process, website as a specific channel, acquired benefits as well as challenges.

A summary of how the theoretical framework is applied to the design the questionnaires and analyse the obtained results is the content of the third chapter.

Moving to the next section, the applied research methodology will be continually reviewed with more details and by what methods it is implemented, which leads to the results evaluation in the empirical study part.

Finally, the sixth step is to summarize the key findings of the paper, which will be utilized to answer the questions at the beginning and unveil certain limitations as well as suggestion for further studies.

2 THEORETICAL STUDY

2.1 Restrictions and limitations

To begin the theoretical research, this chapter once again explains in more detail why website is chosen to be mainly focused on, hence, leads to the limitation of the paper not to cover other marketing tools and channels.

Traditional advertising is no longer an unfamiliar term, defined as offline methods namely from printed ads, broadcast through radio, TV, billboards to direct mail and phone calls, reaching targeted audiences by physical senses. On the other hand, just as how it is called, digital marketing includes online activities through several channels, from social media, website, email to different types of ads.

While the traditional way works the best to spread the brand's awareness in certain areas, approaches the large populations, the digital one depends on technologies and requires necessary training to operate, however, there are generally standing out advantages such as cost reduction, full control of real time results, quicker implementation (traditional marketing takes time for designing, printing, permitting, set-up and so on), etc. (Kayla Carmicheal 2019). If the old forms of marketing refer to mass communication, digital tools enable also pull marketing strategies, when consumers find their way to products based on their demands, at the same time create interactive environments between customers and marketers. In terms of eco-friendliness as a rising concern, the replacement of printed ads contributes a sustainable solution, by reducing paper waste, forest destruction and carbon dioxide emission.

Among all online marketing applications, each has its own distinct features. Instead of evaluating and pointing out the best tool, this paper aims to introduce website as a channel to whom consider it is the most suitable one for their businesses. Social media, pop-up advertisement are in use by most of local shops thanks to the easy installation and effective interaction with customers. However, facing the risks in security, competition with other posts, lack of control and viewers report and so on, using a website it is possible to avoid these issues, acting as the home content which contains all information about the brand in several landing pages, where shoppers pay full attention and can even purchase products. This

research will discover how restaurants in Vaasa can communicate with customers on their websites, as well as how it affects the buying and consumer retaining processes. A deeper studying on website for restaurants will be conducted on chapter 2.2.2, benefits can be acquired from the communications on website is listed under section 2.3, along with challenges in 2.4, and 2.5 provides practical applications.

2.2 Digital marketing communication for local restaurants in Vaasa

2.2.1 Marketing communication on digital channels

In order to answer the question “What is marketing communication”, the term “**communication**” first needs to be defined. “Communication” is defined as the process of information transmission. The word communicating is used widely in daily life, more simply, can be a conversation between one and another or in a group, a phone call, a message, nowadays known as a “social media interaction - a “snap,” a “tweet,” a “share,” a “like,” a “chat,” a “post,” a “favourite,” a “comment,” and so on” (Jeanne M. Persuit, Christina L. McDowell Marinchak, Daniel Assmus, Jill K. Burk, Vernon E. Cronen, Kelli Lynn Fellows, Kees van het Hof, Jeremy Langett, and Paul A. Lucas, 2016, 1). One of the earliest and fundamental models of communication was issued by Harold Lasswell in *The Structure and Function of Communication in Society* (1948), was a linear transmission (one-way direction), contributed to later on develop mass media. Lasswell model points out five phases: communicator, message, medium, recipient and effect. On the other hand, Schramm believed communication was a cycle, not a one-way process, which means he is one of whom pays attention to the outcome, where there are “sender” and “receiver”, messages are not just to be sent continuously, but to be understood and responded. This happens only when information is delivered to the right destination, the receiver can learn the meaning of it base on their own knowledge and experience in life, then return another message as feedback (Schramm 1960).

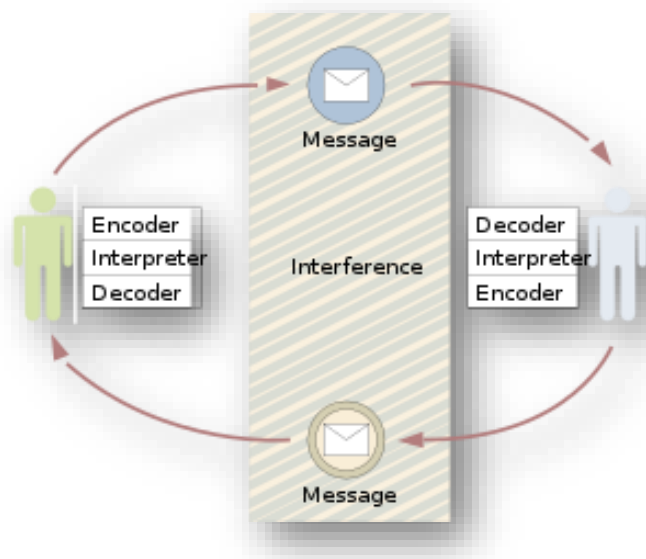


Figure 1. Schramm’s model introduces a feedback loop between sender and receiver (Sheila Steinberg 1995, 18).

In marketing, the term “communication” has been discussed in several studies, falling under the Promotion decisions in the “4Ps of marketing management” (see Figure 2), with the main purpose is to deliver the planned messages to target customer groups (Lynne Eagle, Barbara Czarnecka, Stephan Dahl, Jenny Lloyd, 2014).

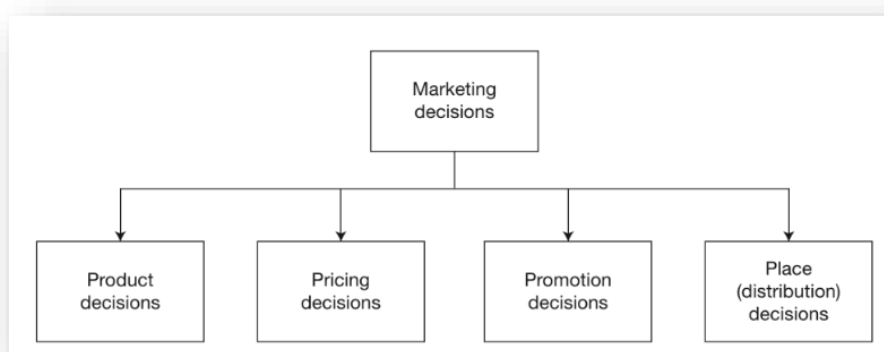


Figure 2. Traditional marketing management decisions (Edmund Jerome McCarthy 1964).

In an interactive communicating process (see Figure 3), the first step is to identify the target customer segment, following by encoding the sender's idea into messages. A successful message begins with a comprehensive delivery of the business value, vision, mission, what they can offer to customers while the offers are actually impressive and match the consumers' needs, with the final goal is beyond attaching new audiences but convincing them to buyers. The next stage is decoding which now relies on how the receiver read and understand the signified information. That explains why the message should be encoded into comprehensible language, clear and contains the most meaning in the least number of words. The direct outcome may bring positivity when customers not only understand but also applaud the implication by spreading word of mouth and then gain "free publicity", while it also can be interrupted by "noise" which leads to distortion (Flori Needle 2021; Lynne Eagle et al. 2014). The "noise" happens progressively from the encoding to decoding process, classified by Shannon and Weaver as three types: technical, semantic and effectiveness problems (Shannon 1948), as for instance, issue occurred during the transmission disturbing hearing, reading the message; misleading interpretation; the receiver does not react as the sender's intention; respectively. Marketing communication implementation is completed when the feedback from consumers goes back to the marketer in form of a new message, from which can be analysed in order to bring offers that closer to the demands and the whole process starts again (Schramm 1960).

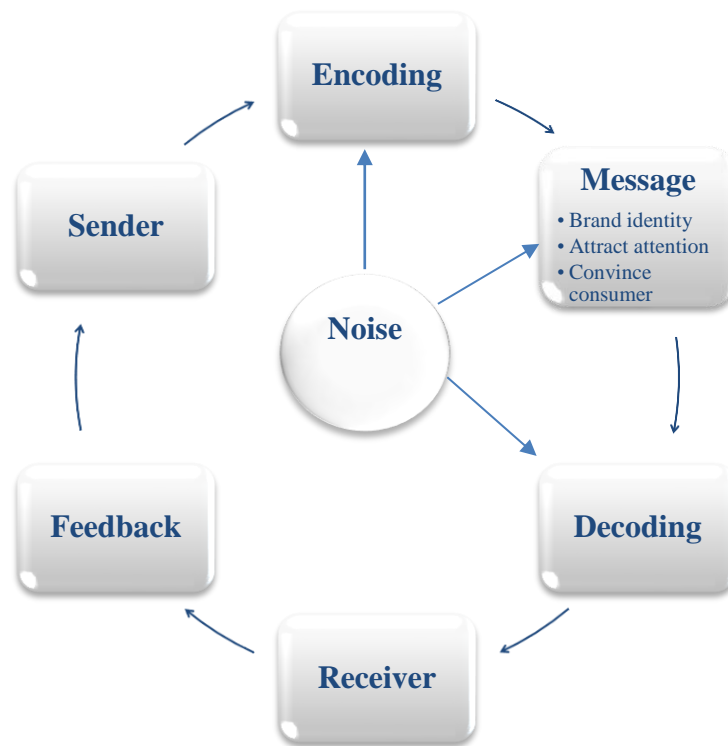


Figure 3. Marketing communication process.

The history of “digital” drives back to the 19th century, in 1896, when Guglielmo Marconi was the first ever in the humanity to discover a wireless telegraphy system according to The Nobel Prize, and then the invention of the first radio in 1932. March 1989 observed the first concept of Web proposed by Tim Berners-Lee and in the following year, the term “**digital marketing**” launched a debut along with the born of the first website ever <http://info.cern.ch> in 1991. The last three decades have been witnessing an astonishingly expansion of the web technologies (see figure 4), with approximately 5.3 billion of the world's population using Internet (Fact and Figure 2022) nowadays, more than 92% of them access by mobile phone (Statista 2022) and Google is reported to be the most visited online search engine, accounting for 92.18% of the whole market (Thomas J Law 2022) in 2022.

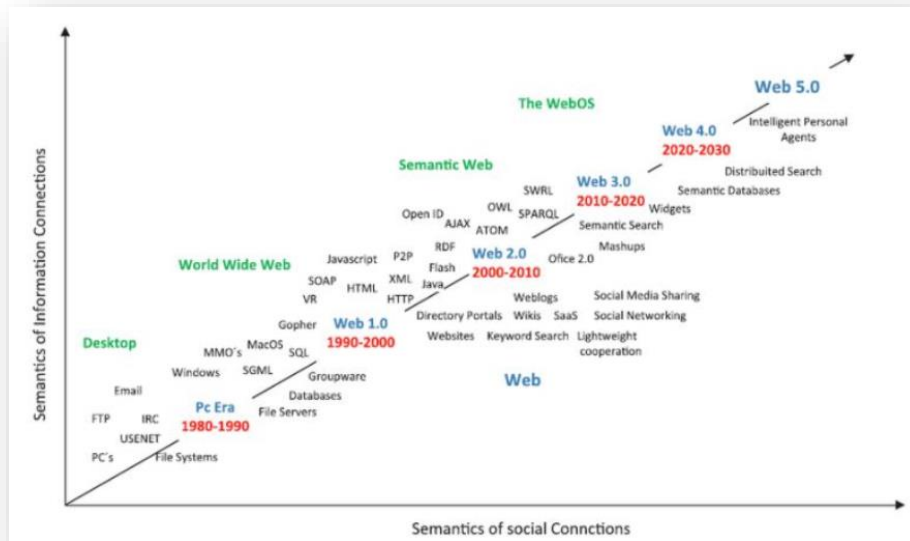


Figure 4. Evolution of Web technologies (Osorio Ortiz 2013).

A simple **definition of the term “digital marketing”** is any marketing act that involves electronic devices (Neil Patel 2023). In the book *Digital marketing strategy, implementation and practice 2015*, the authors defined digital marketing as “achieving marketing objectives through applying digital technologies and media” (Chaffey, D. & Ellis-Chadwick, F. 2015, 11). Being developed based on direct marketing, interactive marketing was generated in the mid-90s to address two-way conversation, an evolution from mass marketing (Debra Zahay 2015), which ignores the concept of market segment. In summary, digital marketing is the management of “online company presence” through multiple media channels with the aim to convert online visitors into new customers, provide them their needs and build the relationship of engagement. Hence, the online channels are distributed to three types (see figure 5): paid, own media and earned media (Chaffey et al. 2015, 11).

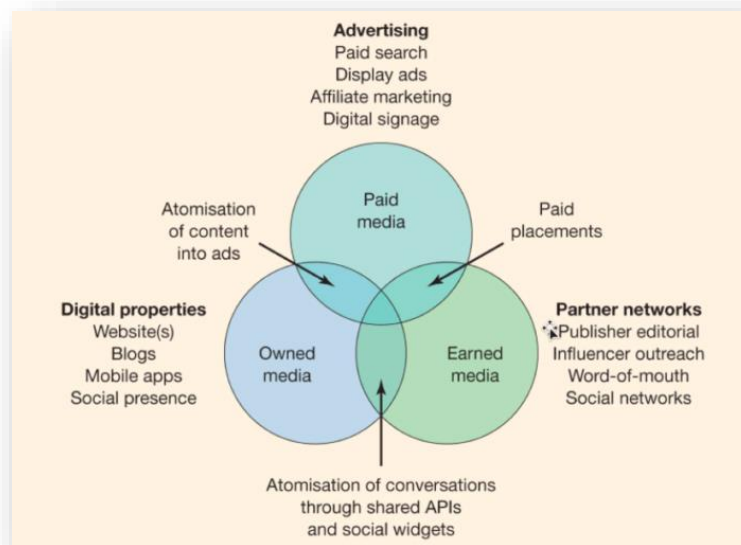


Figure 5. The intersection of the three key online media types.

Since this paper conducts a research on the impact of marketing communications on restaurant website, owned media will be mainly focused.

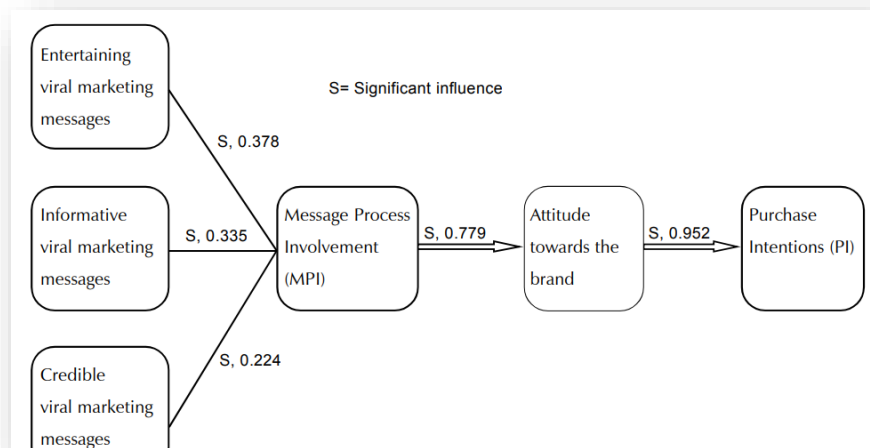
Any online property that belongs to the company, under the complete control of contents, publishing location and schedule is how to characterize “owned media”. To present the most understandable explanations, “paid media” is selected in comparison to “owned media” (see table 1).

Owned media	Paid media
Utilize pull marketing strategy	Utilize push marketing strategy
Bring customers to the brands, products, services, etc., by providing high-value contents on company’s own channels such as website, email, blog, social media, app...	Bring the brands, products, services, etc., to customers by paying for ads display and search
Less expensive	More expensive
Build engagement with targeted groups	Draw attention from large population
Long-term	Short-term

Table 1. Owned media versus Paid media (Kayla Carmicheal 2021).

The process of creating owned media starts from analysing the market. Self-assessment of the company’s value, mission, vision, goal, offers, then identify the

target audiences, figure out their demands and what makes the brand stand out compared to competitors. The next step is carrying out the communication by initiating compelling and viral messages in both content and appearance as the fact that an interesting content travels much faster on its own among targeted customers without high expenses (Kumar 2016). In depth, Ducoffe (1995) stated that informativeness, entertainment and credibility are the factors to evaluate the marketing message by customers. Studying how these three aspects influence consumer behaviour among generation Y in India, Jay Trivedi (2017) concluded that an informative, entertaining and credible message plays an important role in “message process involvement”, affecting later the attitude towards brands and purchasing intention, which is the probability of buying the product or service in the future (Mackenzie et al. 1989) with significant (S) value (P values were less than 0.05) (see figure 6). Moreover, the figure below also demonstrates the beta values between each relationship, while the higher the number is, the bigger influence it has. Hence, entertainment is the most essential factor which affects the message process involvement, followed by information and credibility. (Trivedi 2017)



Hypothesis			β value	t value	P value	Hypothesis Result
H1 : MPI	<—	ENT	.378	4.213	.000	Accepted
H2: MPI	<—	INF	.335	2.626	.009	Accepted
H3 : MPI	<—	CRD	.224	2.086	.037	Accepted
H4: AB	<—	MPI	.779	7.188	.000	Accepted
H5 : PI	<—	AB	.952	7.736	.000	Accepted

Figure 6. The effect of entertaining, informative and credible marketing message on consumer behaviour.

Measuring the performance and feedback is the last stage yet the starting point for a new communication cycle. Net accomplishment can be assessed by quantitative analysis using Google Analytics, Kissmetrics, Adobe Analytics, etc., while qualitative analysis can be done by VWO, Hotjar, Optimizely, and so on... Meanwhile, feedback can be collected from email as a part of website, forum or social media, acting the same as a proof of a through interactive conversation (Blythe Jim 2009). To Schramm (1960), feedback does not necessarily come from receiver, but can be the sender's reflection on their own messages, in order to develop the efficacy in the next communicating round.

2.2.2 Website as a specific communicating channel for restaurants

Listed under "owned media" category (Chaffey 2015), website is a property under a complete control of content, publishing, scheduling by the company, a digital channel to communicate with customers, carrying the brand's unique tone, voice and appearance, a place for interactive conversations through email or contact form enclosed on the website. With the first website in 1991, the need of getting this digital channel has never been lessened, as the number of websites keeps growing and reaches around 1,13 billion worldwide, among that more than 200 million are active, on another word, about 3 new websites are published every second (Sistemy 2023). According to the most recent report in 2023, Hubspot stated that website will continuously be one of the top used channels by marketers.

What are the reasons for choosing website as the company online presence?

Based on a research conducted among small businesses in the US, 41% of the representatives answered they build the website for brand's visibility (Sabrina Dougall 2022) and in fact, 81% of buyers search online before making decision, of which 47% visit businesses websites (Jack Flynn 2022). While social media can be found only if the brands are somewhat familiar to customers (at least they know the names to search for), websites can appear on SEO (search engine optimisation) when keywords about the products or services and what they do to solve problems are included, as the result, brings new potential clients to the businesses

(51% of online users find out about new companies through engine search, Linked in 2021).

Website is a reliable source for both the company and customers. Business owners do not own social media as well as the followers, on the contrary, they own their websites and are free to create several types of content not under any rule or principle, from blog, post, picture, short video, etc., to the leads to different platforms accessed by just a click. Everything is secured safely leaving out the risk of getting hacked or losing the account. Expert manager, strategist, content creator, coach Michelle Gifford addressed website as the “home base” for content, where all leads should go back to. It helps the businesses in terms of controlling, analysing and risk management while customers can rely on unified and credible information. Last but not least, a private environment is created between the business and customers on the webpage, when all attention is captured with no competitor’s post can be scrolled down to (Steph Loaiza 2022).

From the consumer’s point of view, business’s own website is believed to be trust-worthy source of information, thus, 70% to 80% of shoppers search the company before making their decisions (Ema Bliznovska 2022). As reported by a different study, 92% of net users check out the websites even they are not about to make the purchase, indeed, 45% are looking for information, 25% comparing prices and 10% finding physical stores detail (Episerver), which all may accelerate their buying intention in the future. Online customers explore the websites when they are in need, on their own will, on the other hand, many may feel disturbing by mass media, causing back flash on consuming behaviour.

Despite several reasons that businesses should adopt the digital technologies and have a website for their own, even just a simple one with basic information, a research in America showed that 40% of small businesses owners do not want to have a website since they think it is not needed and does not deserve the investment. In specific, what is the case for local restaurants? The answer should be found while discovering the target segment of digital marketing and factors around different types of restaurants. Taking age demographic into consideration, while the revolution of technologies happened quite late to the Baby Boomer Generation (1945 - 1964 born population), Generation X (1961 – 1981) got to see it at much younger age, The Millennials/Y Generation (1975 – 1995) has observed the

most dramatic development and Generation Z (1995 – 2015) has been surrounded by digital world (Ian Edwards 2019). This gives an explanation of how X and Y are the biggest consuming groups online, when 18% and 15% of them respectively spend at least 5 hours a week, the people who used 5 to 10 hours weekly on Internet account for 23% and 21% spend more than 20 hours (Kajal Sinha) (see Figure 7).

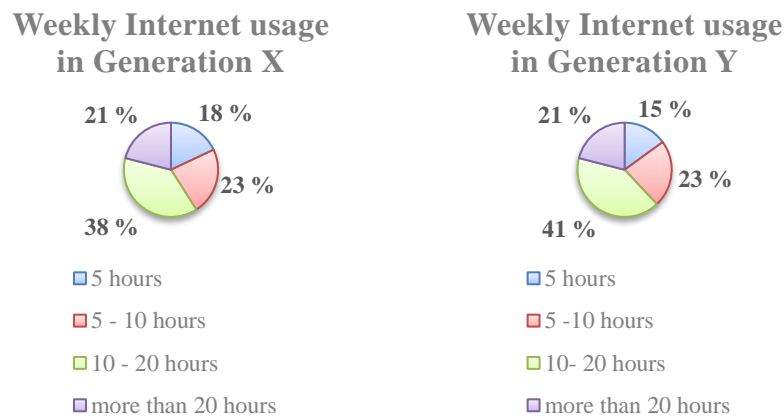


Figure 7. Age distribution of Internet users in Generation X, Y

The trend in age and online consuming shows that a website would play a vital role in restaurants with young to middle age are targeted customers. In terms of consuming behaviour, if Baby Boomers are known for their loyalty, suspicion of online marketing, the younger generations are more open-minded and welcoming. Therefore, new restaurants would stand in need of this technology more than long-history locals who already have a strong customers base, to attract visitors and be outstanding among competitors.

2.2.3 Vaasa as a particular area of the research

Located on the west coast of Finland, Vaasa ranks the 15th of the most inhabited cities with more than 67 thousand people (Statista 2021), acknowledged to be the biggest university with one every five people is a student (City of Vaasa 2023). Population under the studying and working ages account for almost 65% (Figure 8) makes it a young and potential city for new businesses as well as digital marketing.

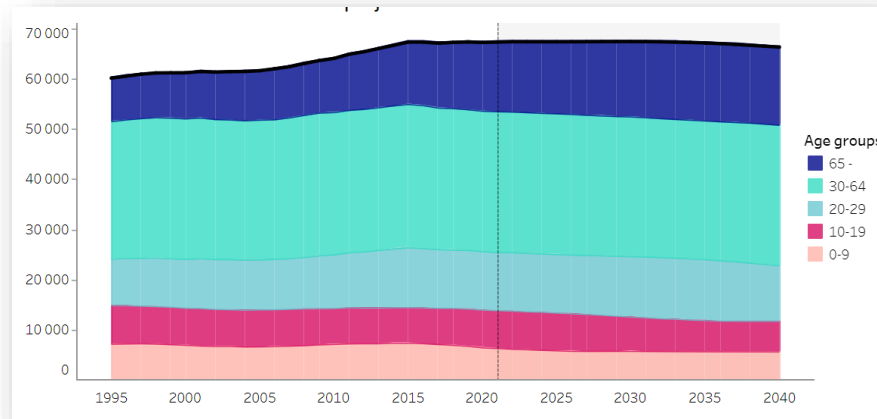


Figure 8. Vaasa population by age groups

Being a bilingual city, Swedish is the second language beside Finnish, while 58 other mother tongues were recorded in 2021 (City of Vaasa 2023), thus, language obviously should be taken into account in content creation. In spite of the large inhabitants, restaurant industry in Vaasa is yet a huge but still a competitive market with approximately more than 70 active diners (City of Vaasa 2023) and more newcomers annually. All in all, although starting the business may not seem to be challenging, new local restaurants still in competition with big franchises such as fast-food chains Burger King, McDonald's, or Finnish brands namely Hesburger, Kotipizza, Rosso and others requires a thorough marketing plan and digital website is the focused approach in this paper.

2.3 Benefits acquired from digital marketing communications on website

Aiming to support marketing as a whole, digital media channels including website help to acquire the goals of “brand awareness, familiarity, favourability”, pushing engagement and by the end, influencing on the purchasing intention and the buying process.

Acting as the “landing page” or “destination”, online traffic is driven to main websites by combining both push and pull marketing strategies. While customers can arrive at the web pages through ads or links on referring sites, website can also be found directly on search engines carrying the key words of customer's “pain point” (their needs and demands). Here, brands have a full control in publishing creative content **delivering the planned messages**, which helps customers

to identify the values and offers, to remember and recall while considering purchasing decision later on. At this point, website is an effective medium since it is capable of capturing complete attention from visitors without any competitors' content.

Not only one-way conversation, but website is also a place to **initiate consumer interaction**, where companies can learn about their potential buyers' thoughts and wishes through inbound marketing, which is defined as permission given by customers to be involved in "brands' marketing activities", normally pairs with incentives (sale deals or redeemable coupons). In this stage, by having customers fill in certain mandatory questions while ensure their privacy to build trust, companies are able to learn about "customer insight", accordingly, support classifying target groups, demands and future communicating dialogues. Moreover, organisations have a chance to convince customers by further detailed information (newsletter) sent directly to their email addresses or permitted phone call instead of interruption marketing.

Moving to the next level of the buying process, websites have an essential role in **evaluation and selection**, where consumers can compare different products or services side by side and find the most suitable option. Based on the rational decision-making process, the online presence can be used as a source of information in several stages among five stages outlined by Taylor Nigel (1998, 68 – 68), from identify to evaluate alternatives. The result of buying process is the **purchase**, which can also be operated on the brand's website, however, not the end point. **Post-purchase and feedbacks** complete the process and at the same time, contributes to a new one. Companies have access to feedback customers leave on website's contact form, possibly support and provide customer services to enhance satisfaction. All of these outcomes can be analysed to **retain relationships**, consumers then continuously receive updates that they gave permission to, repeatedly visit the website and intent new purchase due to their needs. (Chaffey et al. 2015)

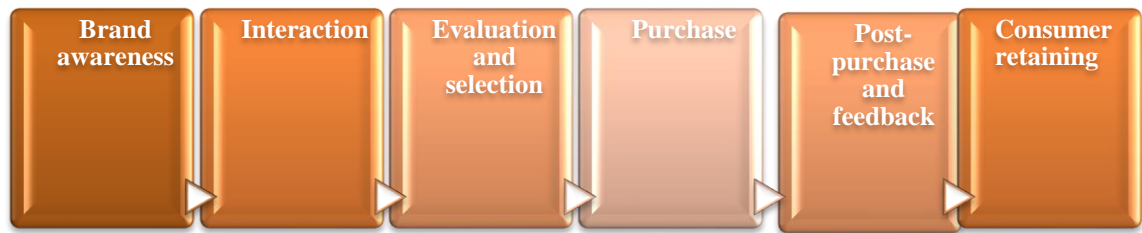


Figure 9. Summary of buying process

A successful digital marketing contains an effective communication on media channels. In the case of website, it is an informative and personalised communication which participate in every single step of the buying process. Information is the main reason for website visiting behaviour, when web users look for solutions to their problems and put in comparison to other providers, which can also be discovered through mass media. What allows digital marketing beyond that is personalised messages. Intelligent collecting and storing data about web visitors understand certain individual's need, put together customer's profile, consequently, display that first on the landing page, or send related offers to email (inbound marketing). In depth, marketers are able to monitor the effectiveness of these approaches via positive results (purchase, click...) or negative ones (unsubscribe newsletter, complaints...) then adjust the frequency of updated emails or conduct a survey to figure out improvements (Chaffey et al. 2015).

2.4 Challenges in implementation

Despite the fact that digital marketing utilizing website has provided a powerful online communication to new and existing customers, unique advantages compared to other social mediums, it remains challenging to local businesses, especially restaurateurs in the phase of management without professional helps.

A research conducted by Digital at the end of 2021 among American small retail businesses reported that 23% of them still did not have a website. Besides the reasons of disbelief in the receivable benefits, approximately 25% stated that they were lack of budget, human resources and digital knowledge to create and manage a website (see Figure 10).

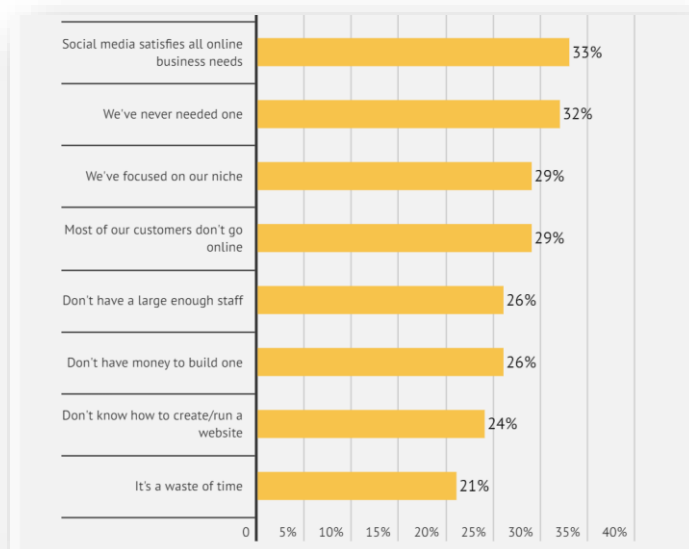


Figure 10. Reasons why small retail businesses do not have websites

Capital has always been a problem for small businesses especially without any external investment. Thus, intending to cut down the expenses, the number of companies using in-house workers to manage digital marketing instead of outsourcing is 46% (Ema Bliznovska 2022). However, it requires certain skills and knowledges which are unavoidable challenges, from establishing to operating a website, creating and updating content, analysing data for development, to synchronising information among different media channels. Even though small retail enterprises try to run the online presence themselves, an expense of \$35 – 780\$ at the beginning and \$11 – 50\$ monthly is expected using WordPress for instance, accounting for 43.2% of websites worldwide (Hubspot 2022). On the other hand, time-consuming and employee shortage are also taken into consideration. All the factors directly or indirectly affect the efficiency of the digital medium with the final goal is to generate sales and customers.

2.5 The application of Digital marketing communications on Vaasa local restaurants websites

As mentioned in section 2.2.3, Vaasa is a home for more than 67 thousand citizens yet there are only around a hundred restaurants opening. Therefore, it is not

hard to find a restaurant online with the key words “restaurants in Vaasa” or “restaurant name” + “Vaasa”. On another meaning, SEO may not be the first priority but the content should be mainly focused on. Acting as the official online presence, where complete attention of consumers is acquired, a good website should do well the job of delivering What is the restaurant about, who is it for, where is it located, how are the products served/offered. Not only the text but also the font, size, color, images, logo and so on are small yet crucial details in brand identity, which should be synchronized with other social mediums online as well as offline. Furthermore, language needs to be taken into account when Vaasa is a bilingual city of Finnish and Swedish, besides, diners which target youngsters or students may consider English as the third option, since there are 300 internationals among overall 13,000 pupils (City of Vaasa, Study Abroad Aide).

“What shoppers see on a website” “and how it is delivered to them, can make or break their final decision to make a purchase” (Ed Kennedy 2017). In order to capture the most attention in the least amount of time, informativeness is the first credible factor, discussed thoroughly by Tsang et al. (2004), Haghirian et al. (2005) and Blanco et al. (2010) sharing the same conclusion about positive influence on consumer attitude. Basic information about a restaurant could be the behind story, opening time, address, contact details, different services and so on. Appearance and transparency are the next elements that customers are looking for as 38% of web visitors are “turned down” by unappealing design (Jack Flynn 2022), 85% believes products’ description and illustrations should be provided (Think with Google), while 78% commented on must-include prices (Gregor 2021).

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The purpose of this page is to summarize the previous chapter and explain how the theoretical studies will be applied to the empirical part, which helps to understand and analyze the survey's results, exploring the impact of marketing communication on restaurants' websites and consumers responsiveness.

Similar to other digital channels, website acts as an "online company presence" (Chaffey et al. 2015, 11), which spreads the brand's awareness to consumers initiating two-way communication and pull marketing strategy, with the final goal is to convince visitors into buyers, build and maintain relationships with them. Being listed under "owned media" sector, while companies do not possess social media accounts, likes or followers, websites belong to brands in all possible aspects, with complete control of content, publishing, real-time viewers and reaction results, without any limitations or restrictions (Kayla Carmicheal 2021). While the purpose of the paper is not to evaluate and point out the best digital marketing tool, several reasons why websites should be utilized are provided. Independence, reliability, credibility, trust-worth source of information were the factors discussed in chapter 2.2.2, a practical view from consumers will be discovered under the empirical part, answering why they choose to visit restaurants websites and if websites are chosen more than other channels particularly.

On the other hand, it was also stated that the effectiveness of communication on websites relies on different types of restaurants with different target segments. Regarding the online usage and shopping behaviour through digital channels, people in generation X and Y are potential customers who are influenced by marketing communications on websites. Besides, as the main intention is to search for information, websites are better use for new restaurants which are in need of reaching more customers than long-history diners which already have strong and loyal buyers. The relevancies of websites impact on age groups and restaurants concepts are bound to be studied as the results of the survey outcomes analysis.

Chapter 2.3 has discovered that digital marketing communications on website affect directly the buying process in every stage, from "brand awareness", initiating "in-

teraction”, “evaluation and selection”, “purchase” to “post-purchase” and “retaining”. A successful communicating on websites is to deliver the planned messages to customers, provide what they need and lead to the purchases, take feedback into account and maintain relationships, while develop new products or offers which are more personalised with different types of buyers. Having the ability to “make or break” the “final decision”, what is shown on website has a mission to capture the most attention in the least amount of time. Language, informativeness, appearance, transparency, illustrations and the synchronising among online mediums are believed to be the key features. The survey handed out to Vaasa citizens will answer these questions more practically and specifically, about how restaurants websites are involved in consumers buying processes, as well as what they wish to see online and how it “make or break” their decisions.

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Choice of methodology

Resulting from the secondary research conducted by collecting information in previous studies, articles, books and online sources, a hypothesis is formed as below:

Digital marketing communication plays an important role in local restaurants which targeting young customers segment, influences on the purchase intention, buying process as well as retaining development.

In the next chapter, **quantitative methodology** (QTM) is chosen to test the accuracy of the hypothesis and the research questions mentioned in the Introduction part. **The reason behind this selection** lies in the main features of QTM, which has the capacity to gather data from larger populations in short amount of time and free to low budget, the findings are clear, straightforward, objective and can be analysed statistically, bring the results drawing the patterns and testing the hypothesis. Despite the fact that other methodologies have their distinguish advantages, these certain characteristics make the author believe QTM is the most suitable for this paper.

Summarized by Suphat Sukamolson (2007), the term QTM has been defined by several scholars in different ways, however, all share the similar features as “explaining phenomena”, “numerical data” and “mathematical-based methods”. Whether it is using QTM or qualitative methodology (QLM), the fundamental purpose of a research is to explain a fact or circumstance. What differentiate QTM from the others is that it gathers information in the form of numbers and as the result can be analysed by using statistics. While it is undeniable that the correct tools need to be applied at the end to gain significant results, the succeed of this research type lies in the implementation and design of questionnaire, which may be originally numerical or can be converted into numbers for later analysing. Well-structured list of questions is extremely important to figure out the relevance and relationship of problems statistically.

If QTM has advantages over QLM in terms of reaching larger populations in short period of time, providing objective and reliable results, QLM goes in depth of the reasons behind each answer, which is seeking the meaning and subjectivist. In this

paper, QTM is applied also because of its conveniences as it can be done remotely, the answerers can feel free to give opinion since it is anonymous, and the researcher is in need of random as well as objective information from larger general population to test the hypothesis above. In order to study how a number of population think about the research problems, while dividing them into different demographic groups, to discuss the relevance of particular group and particular opinion or attitude, quantitative research is believed to be the most suitable methodology. On the other hand, certain limitations are acknowledged. Firstly, all questions are answered remotely, without in-person interview, which may not be able to guaranty high level of truth, coming from lack of effort responding or misunderstanding. Secondly, QTM is about “bean-counting” but cannot seek the explanation behind, therefore, the results of this research are solely for understanding the relationship between the research objectives, further studies for example using QLM should be conducted to get to the bottom of these problems and find solutions. (Louise Gaille 2019, Tim Vaughan 2021)

4.2 Implementation

The implementation of QTM (see Figure 11) in this paper start with defining the objectives and research problems, with certain questions to be answered as the results of the study. The author then conducts a secondary research to learn about the terms as well as attempt to find the answers from literature review, referring books, articles and online sources. An empirical study utilizing survey method is the third stage, from which then will be analysed by SPSS tool demonstrating the findings in specific trends and relevance.

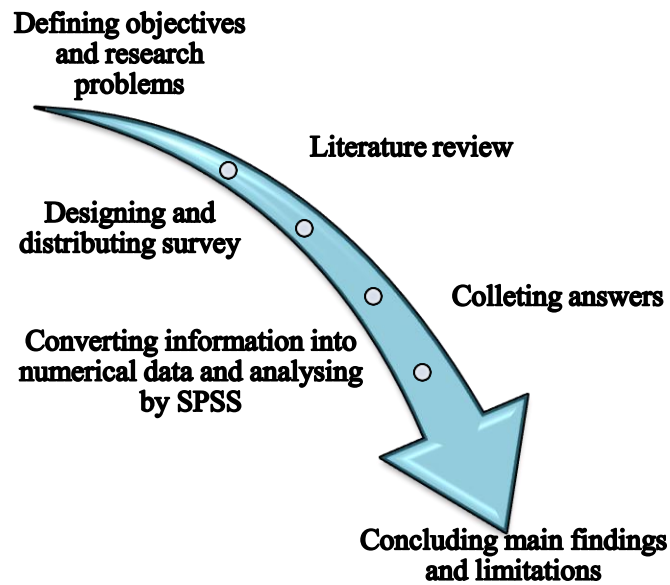


Figure 11. Implementation process of quantitative research methodology

Among several types of QTM, survey is selected for this thesis. Survey is a statistical method in the form of questionnaire of which each respondent represents a group of population with different options and attitudes. The random feature and wide number of responses improve the precision of this approach.

In this case study, a list of self-administered questionnaires is sent through email to the sampling units. Under the support of Vaasa University of Applied Sciences (VAMK), the survey is sent to VAMK's students, meaning that the samples are mainly from youth group of population, who are also proved to be the target segment of digital marketing.

Including twenty questions, the survey is divided into three sections, with the case described as customers are looking for a local restaurant for dining or ordering online today. It also mentions that popular fast-food or other types of chain restaurants are casted out since the purpose of this thesis is about local diners in Vaasa. Moreover, respondents were asked to answer in the imagination without external factors such as recommendations, opinions from their acquaintances, or previous knowledges.

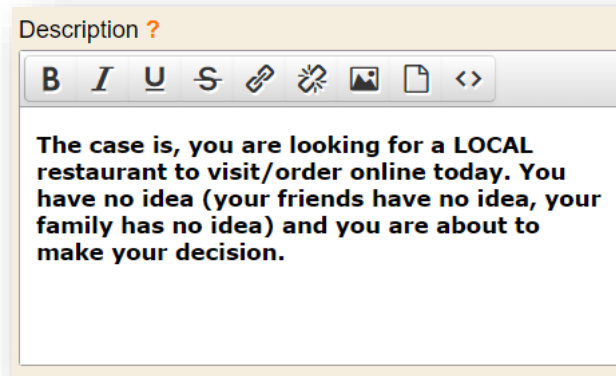


Figure 12. Description of the survey

The first section of six questions gathers basic information about the repliers, classifies them to different groups based on age, occupation status, favourability in terms of where to eat and online channels for information searches. Question seven to fifteen focus on the role of website in the buying process as the last five ones explore how website affects customers retaining. Varying from nominal variables which category characteristics, ordinal variables which can be ranked in order, to scale variables allows answerers to rate the level of importance in their opinions, however, in more details, ordinal inquires using Likert scale with no neutral option. Explaining this structure, the researcher believes the questionnaires are understandable, answerable about the respondents' behaviours and experiences happen in their daily lives. Therefore, discarding the neutral point helps the results more accurate with the better use of median. (Dwight Barry 2017, Michaela Mora 2020, Stephanie Glen)

5 EMPIRICAL STUDY

The empirical study was conducted by applying survey method, sent through Vank to students as well as other online channels, answered anonymously and analysed by SPSS. A total 80 responses were recorded, leaving out two incomplete answers, 78 are used in this research paper, aiming to discover how local restaurants in Vaasa can communicate to consumers on their websites, and how it affects the buying process.

Containing twenty questions, varying in drop-down, single-choice and multiple-choice, with the case described in the beginning, as the respondents were about to decide where to dine in or order online on the asking day, without any previous knowledge or suggestions, the decision was made purely on their own. Moreover, popular chain restaurants were discarded since the topic was about local ones in Vaasa. To avoid any possible misunderstanding and to make the process more interesting, the survey was created in informal English and friendly tone. The design of the questionnaires was based on the theoretical part (detailed explanation in section 4.2), as the result, the findings are to support answering the research questions under Introduction chapter and proving the hypothesis above (4.1).

5.1 General information about the respondents

This section gives the respondents' general information in terms of age, gender, occupation and their favourite types of restaurants, which contributes to possible relevancies to their behaviours in the upcoming part. Mentioned at the end of chapter 2.2.2, website may not be ideal to all businesses, on another word, different products and services with different target segmentations see distinct influences of marketing communication on websites.

The data shows that more than half of participants were female, 42.3% male and 1.3% others (see Figure 13).

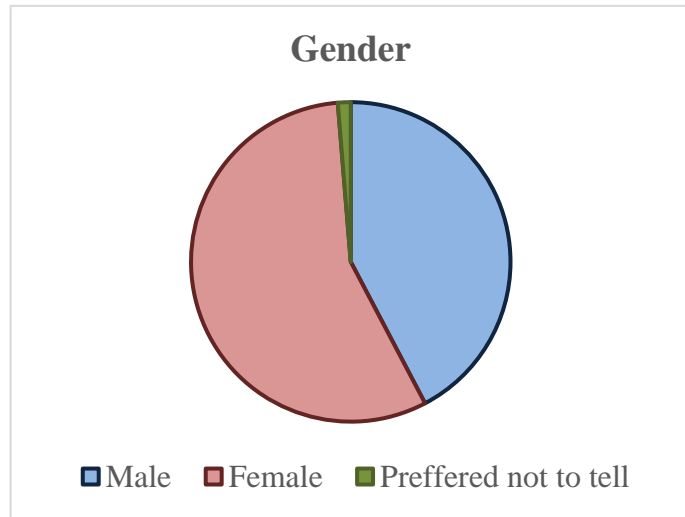


Figure 13. Gender

Meanwhile, three different age groups were reported, with 50% 18-to-24-year-old students, 30.8% age from 25 to 34, and the last segment of 35-44 accounts for 19.2% (Figure 14). These are also the most significant internet users' distributions worldwide according to Statista 2021. Regarding occupation, 82.1% of the answerers were students, following by 12.8% employees, 3.8% unemployment and 1.3% employer (Figure 14).

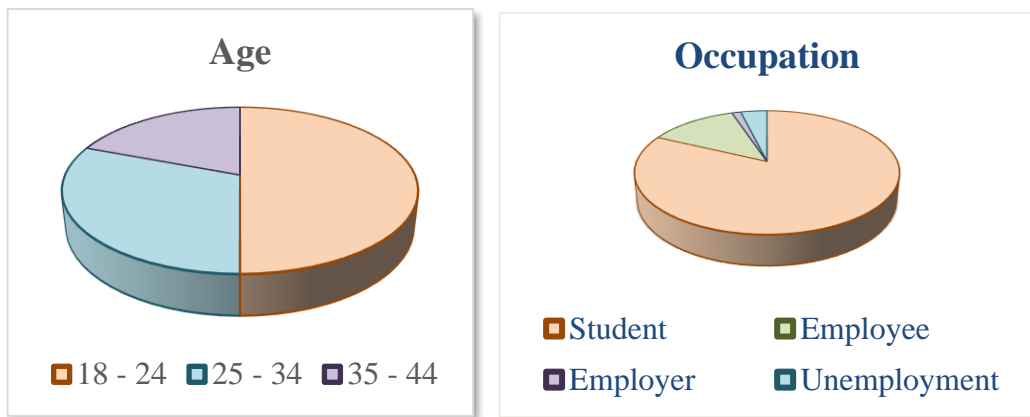


Figure 14. Age and occupation

Besides the basic information, a selecting question about what kind of restaurant they prefer were required, including three main concepts fast-food, casual and fine dining. If the first term is defined as “quick-service”, “precooked” or “frozen” ingredients, affordable prices with minimum amount of table service, Fine dining is completely opposite while bringing formal atmosphere and expensive exclusive dishes, with full table service strictly requires etiquette rules. Lying at the between

of these two concepts, Casual offers comfortable environment, middle-range price with all services and quality menu items (WebstaurantStore 2022). Figure 15 demonstrates the percentage of respondents choosing each concept as their favourability (more than one can be selected). Casual restaurant was liked the most by over 80%, while fast-food and fine dining were 38.5% and 10.3% respectively.

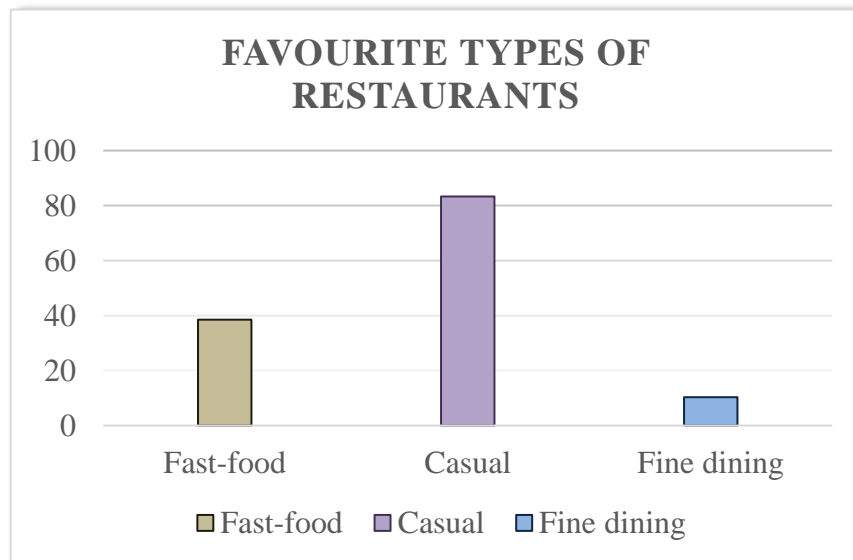


Figure 15. Favourite types of restaurants

By dividing into different demographic groups, the goal of section 5.4 is to discover whether or not there are relevancies to the consuming behaviour affected by communication on websites.

5.2 Customers' responsiveness to local restaurants' marketing communication on their websites

As the question about which online channel to visit when in need of information, website was chosen by 79.5% of the respondents, a significant gap compared to 16.7% going to social media, while 91% agreed that they visit restaurants' website before dining decision. This positive number goes in line with several previous researches, when Elizabeth Norton found 77% of customers having a look at websites before deciding where to eat, while 74% of shoppers confirmed this channel has influences on purchasing decisions (Jeanne Hopkins 2022).

In depth, the survey's outcomes show a notable role of website in the buying process, especially in evaluating and selecting stage. Analysing among 91% of participants who visited restaurants' websites, approximately 85% (84.5%) of them preferred looking for websites before entering diners, 94.4% still needed to check out the online channel even after seeing other advertisements and 91.5% could make up their decisions based on websites. As the ability to "make or break" purchasing intention (Ed Kennedy 2017), 97.2% accepted that they might not visit restaurants which seem not to have what they were looking for, matching a finding in US when consumers stated websites affected both their dine in and takeout or delivery decisions (Baltimore 2019).

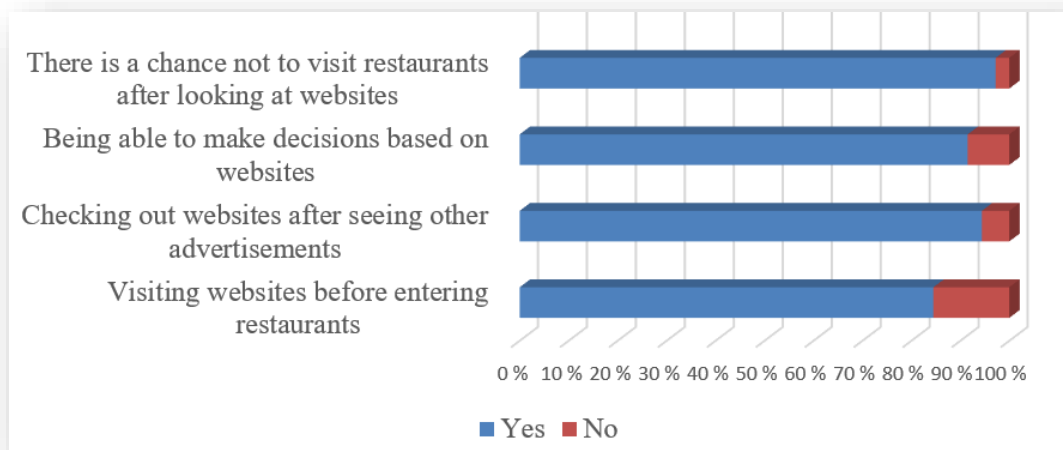


Figure 16. The role of websites in evaluating and selecting process

Since the buying process does not end at the purchase, websites also support the post-purchase and feedback, from which restaurants can study their customers and make improvement or develop new offers. The survey's result points out 62% of buyers (44 out of 71 people) returned to websites from time to time and 86.36% among them (38 people) would be willing to give feedbacks (figure 17).

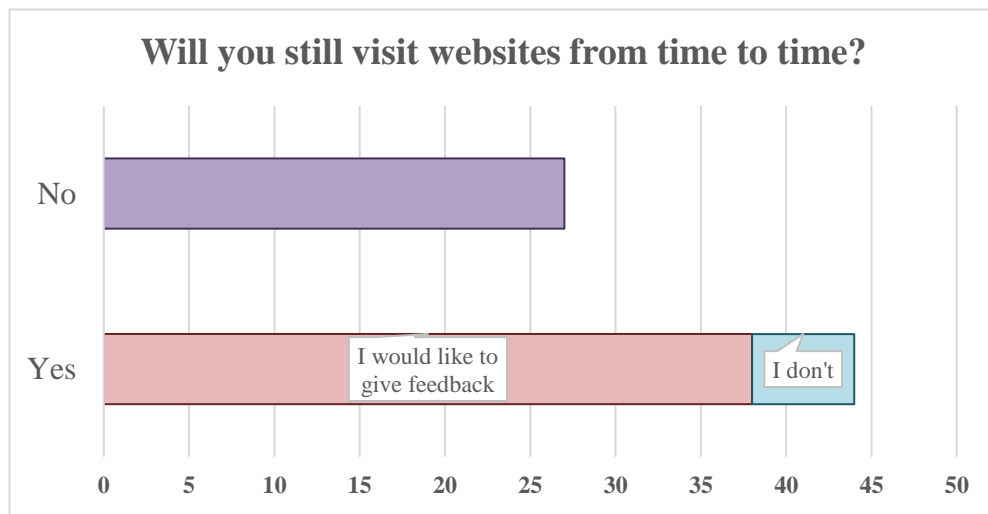


Figure 17. Websites and the post-purchase stage

5.3 What marketing communication customers expect from a restaurant’s website

As the proven fact that websites play an essential role in the decision making and purchasing intention, what kinds of communication encourage the consumption are to be explained in this section. Out of overall 78 responses, only the 71 who said they would visit websites before dining out will be analysed further, the others will be discarded to protect the credibility and accuracy of the report.

A trust-worthy source of information, comparable and evaluable are the reasons why online users visit restaurants’ websites according to the theoretical chapter (2.2.2), the survey added “to be sure” and “budgeted prices” as options to “weigh the evidence” in decision making process (Rafiq Elmansy 2015). Figure 18 showed strong agreement with comparing, making sure the restaurants have what they are looking for, and affordable prices as the reasons behind the web’s visit (the means were 3.44, 3.42, 3.45 with the maximum of 4, which is the absolute agreement). Moreover, websites were also acknowledged to be trusted more than other sources when it comes to the companies’ information, while the allergy matter just slightly leaned toward the agreeing point (mean of 2.89).

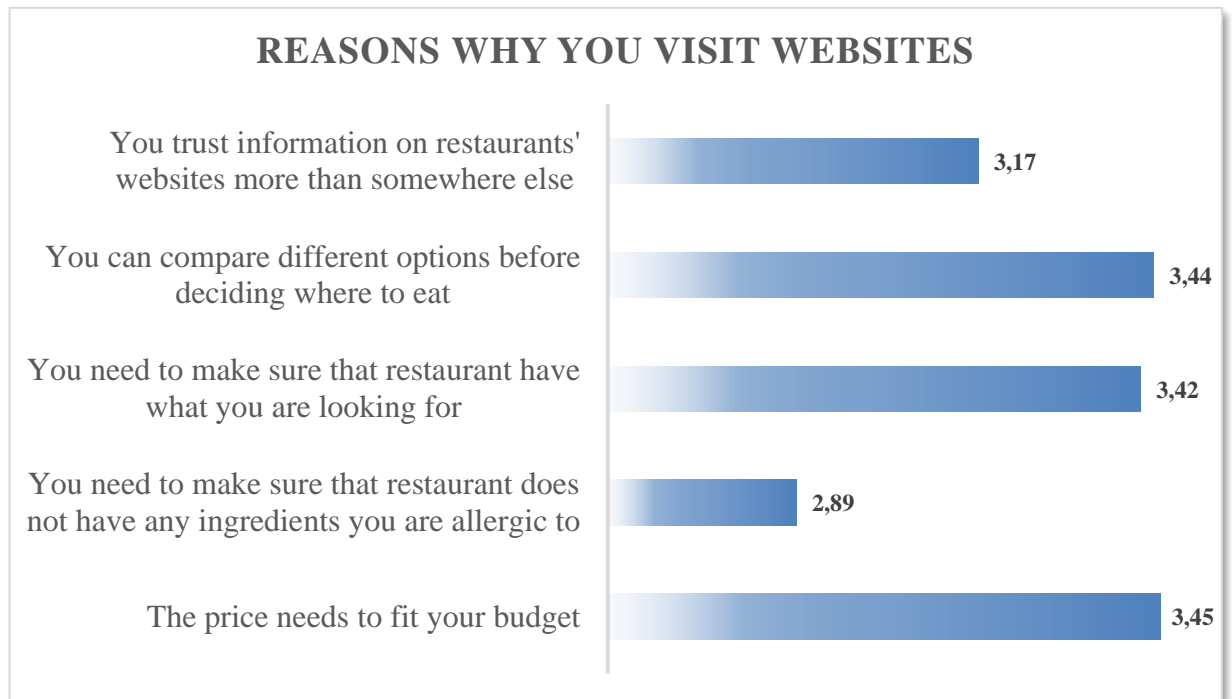


Figure 18. Reasons why consumers visit restaurants' websites (means)

(Strongly disagree (1) – Disagree (2) – Agree (3) – Strongly agree (4))

“Online presence” is the role of websites, which is used for brands to speak for themselves, to identity who they are through “About us”, “The story behind” or other blog pages, what they offer on “Products”, “Services”, “Menu” as for restaurants. Since websites do not only contain one-way communication but an interactive one, “Contact us” or “Contact form” give chances to hear from customers. Among several content a website for restaurant should have, “menu” is ranked the most important object to be displayed with the mean of 2.17 (from 1 to 7, while 1 is the most priority), followed by general information, pictures of dishes, discounts and pictures of restaurants, reservation and contact form are at the end of the list (see Figure 19). In comparison to a research done by Think with Google about consuming trends in common, 85% of surveyed shoppers looked for information and illustrations of online products, on another case, The Rail (2019) posted that the number of customers who wanted to see special offers accounts for 80%, followed by 36% who were menu’s searchers.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Menu	71	1	7	2,17
General information about the restaurant concept, origin of ingredients, opening time, etc.,	71	1	7	3,41
Some pictures of the dishes	71	1	7	3,55
Special offers/discounts	71	1	7	4,20
Reservation option	71	1	7	5,07
Some pictures of the restaurant to assure it suits your needs today (anniversary, celebration, just a normal meal, family dinner, etc.,)	71	1	7	4,39
Contact form	71	1	7	5,99
Valid N (listwise)	71			

Figure 19. Website's content ranked by consumers

Credibility has been stated to be an essential key in communication and relationship building with customers (2.2.1), which creates solid reputation that can be trusted by new buyers, and gain more loyalty, proven by the fact that 94% of surveyed consumers said they preferred brands had transparency in marketing according to Global Marketing Professors (Taylor Goodman 2020). In this research, a question was distributed concerning the transparent restaurants' websites, which clearly show prices, type of restaurant, information about ingredients and dishes as well as up-to-date factor. Respondents were asked to express their opinion from Strongly disagree, Disagree, Agree to Strongly agree, with the value from 1 to 4, the means will be calculated (Figure 20). The result demonstrated a nearly absolute agreement with transparent prices on websites (mean of 3.86), furthermore, the surveyed people also believed what shown on websites should match what is offered in reality (3.65), as well as description of dishes and ingredients (3.55 and 3.11), while type of restaurant was the least concerned but still a positive mean toward the agreeing side (2.97). Prices factor is shared in other reports as the priority, claimed by LinkedIn (2021) that products' prices are "must-have" for 78% of customers according to their study.

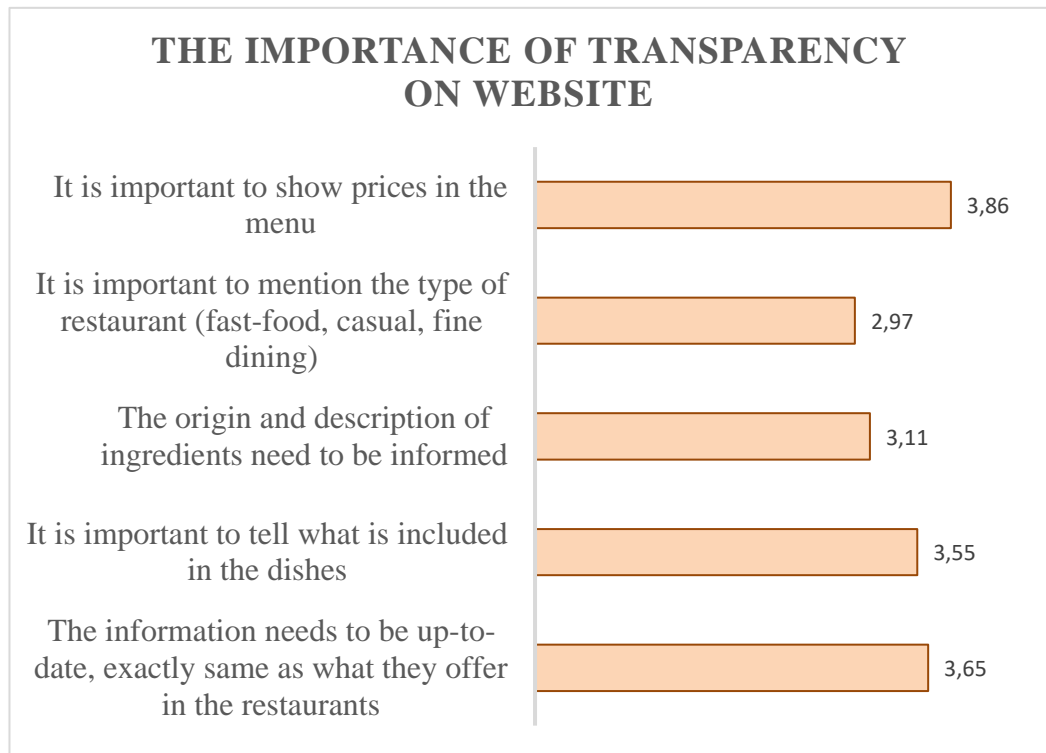


Figure 20. The importance of the transparency in communication on websites (means)

(Strongly disagree (1) – Disagree (2) – Agree (3) – Strongly agree (4))

If a successful marketing communication on websites brings restaurants more customers, a downside is it may also turn them down for certain reasons. While communicating in person comes not only with words, voices but also body languages and gestures, facial expressions, brands communicate on website through words with appealing layout, fonts, colours and pictures. In fact, 38% of web visitors would not engage with an unappealing website (Jack Flynn 2022), 30% disliked unclear menus and another 30% were not fond of websites which look out-of-date (MGH, inc. 2019). In this paper's studying case, language, appearance, transparency and food preference were taken into account, utilizing the same method as above to figure out the means in opinion among the respondents. Price was again the most important which "make or break" the buying intention, followed by the preferences of food and understandable language option, since the survey was handed out in Vaasa, an international city with mainly three different speakers (2.2.3). Although the layout and dishes' description ranked the last two positions, there was still a significant agreeing means (3.08 and 3.04).

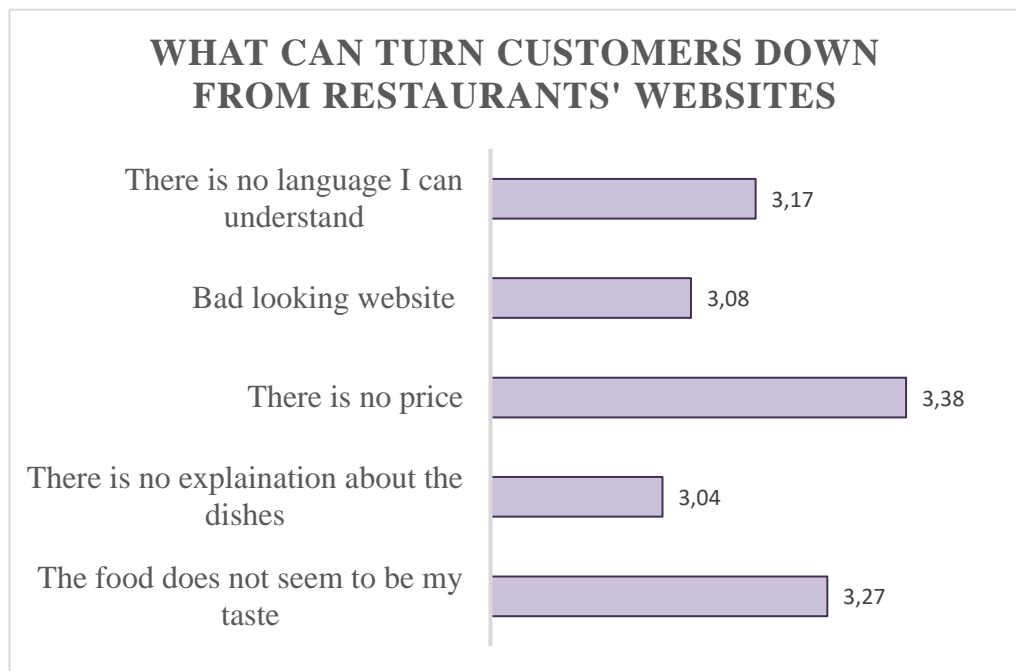


Figure 21. Factors on websites that affect negatively the consumption (means)
(Strongly disagree (1) – Disagree (2) – Agree (3) – Strongly agree (4))

On another aspect, a smooth digital communication is affected seriously by the navigating and loading speed factors. Since online users spent averagely no more than 2 minutes 17 seconds on a website, 47% of them expected the loading time to be less than 2 seconds and 53% said they would leave if it took longer than 3 seconds (Gregor S. 2019). As a rising matter, 89% of searches for diners were done via smartphones and 72% were predicted to be solely through phones in 2025 (The Rail 2019), which makes it important to take mobile-friendly features into consideration.

In the retaining stage, an analysis was conducted among 62% of respondents who would visit websites again after the purchase, in order to study what they were looking for (Figure 22). Most of them answered updated information and “to make sure” were the reasons for the visit (72.2%), while new dishes and discounts/offers searchers account for 63.6% and 52.3% respectively. However, contact form for feedback showed special low concern which is only 2.3% among the

responses, suggesting restaurants giving incentives if they wish to hear from customers through the contact form on websites, especially negative feedbacks, instead of public reviews or complaints on Google.

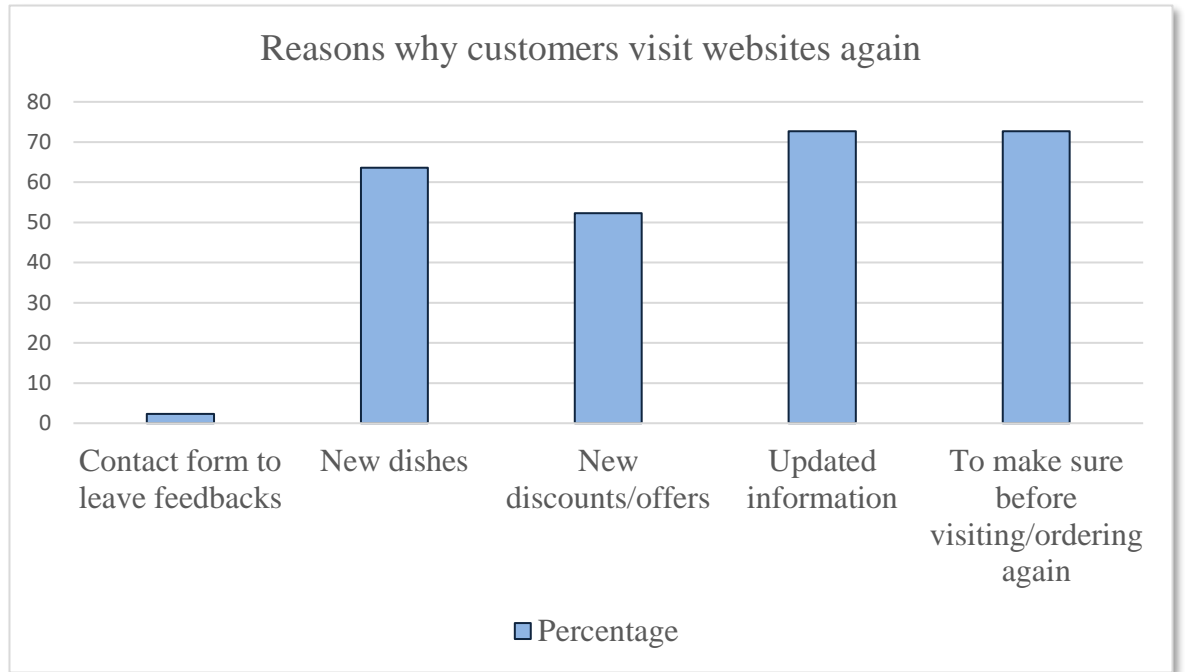


Figure 22. Reasons why customers visit websites again

Low interest in engaging with restaurants via the contact form on website is also shown in the following questions where participants were asked for their thoughts about this function (only respondents who said they would visit websites again after the purchase were analysed (44 people)). While they mainly agreed that the forms' purposes were for diners to answer questions from customers, to learn from feedbacks and develop new offers with an average mean of 3.37 (Strongly disagree (1) – Disagree (2) – Agree (3) – Strongly agree (4)), only a small positive mean leaning toward the agreement with the preference of giving feedback on websites (2.64) (see Figure 23). Therefore, if restaurants want to encourage consumers to communicate through this online channel, permission marketing should be considered applying incentives method (Chaffey et al. 2015, 44) such as promised discount coupons or other valuable offers.

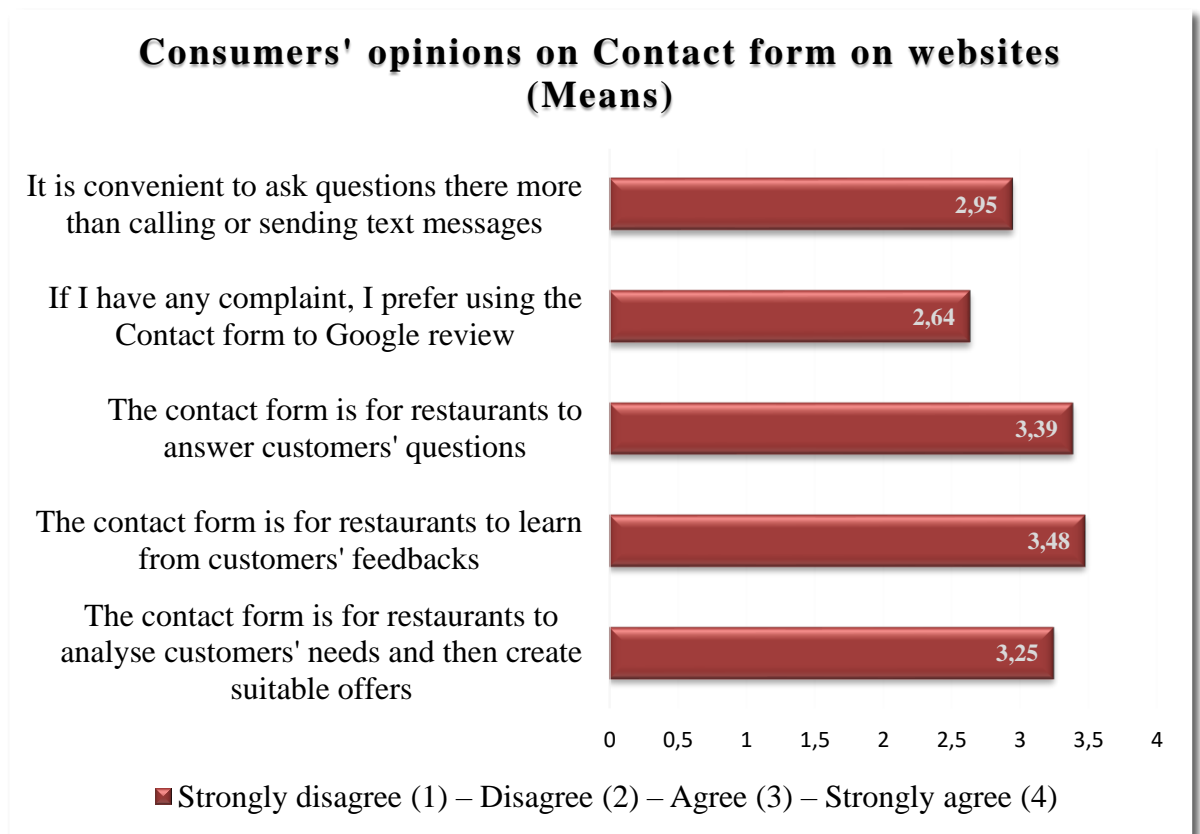


Figure 23. Consumers' opinions on Contact form on websites (Means)

5.4 Trends and relevancies between different demographic groups and the effects of communication on websites (in the case of local restaurants in Vaasa)

Divided into different demographic groups based on age, gender, occupation and restaurants' concepts preferences, this section is aimed to study whether or not there are relevancies between these factors and the responsiveness toward dining websites. Since the survey recorded only 78 responses, the results do not cover large population enough to form conclusions. Therefore, the main findings act as suggestions and references for further studies.

While there was no significant trend related to gender and occupational factors, consumers in different age groups and favourable type of restaurant show dissimilar behaviours affected by communications on websites.

Among three recorded generations, 25-35-year-old buyers showed the least attentiveness to websites, although the numbers were still highly positive. The other two segments demonstrated significant bigger percentages of whom chose website

as the source of finding information, visited this channel before making decisions and could decide based on websites. Moreover, there was also higher chance they visited websites again, yet the youngest group showed the lowest chance of giving feedbacks (See Figure 24).

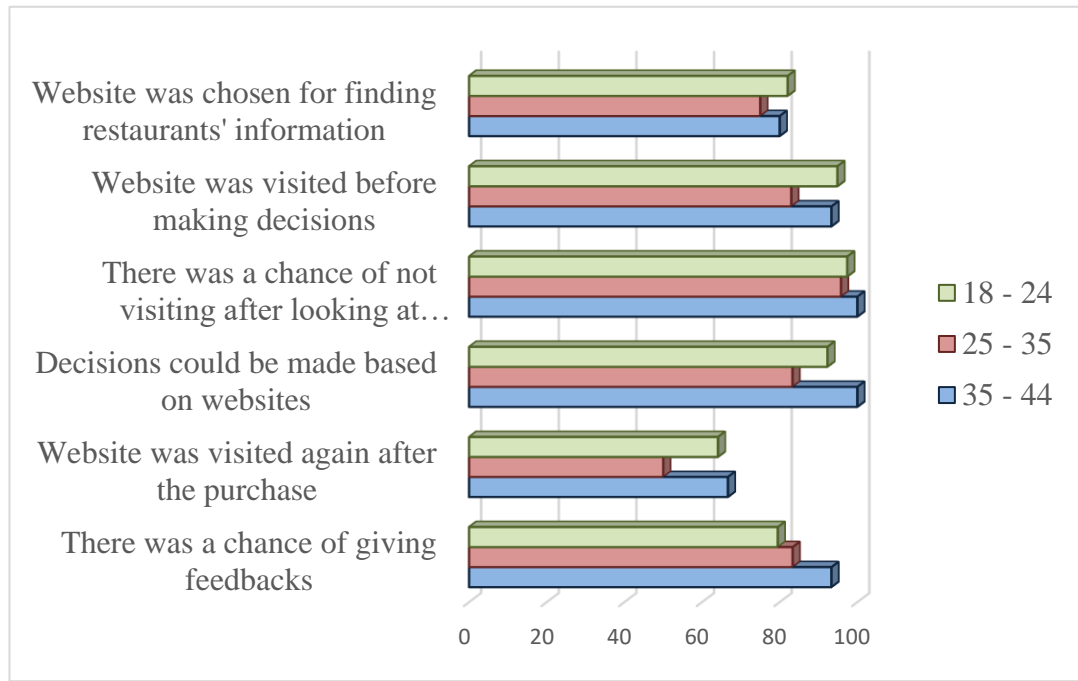


Figure 24. Behaviours toward restaurants' websites and different age groups

Since each restaurant has its own target age group, understanding what kind of content the buyers wish to see on websites plays a crucial role, determining whether or not the marketing communication is successfully bringing more consumers. Applying the analysis of multiple variances using 0.05 level, the study has found out certain significances (a sig. value less than 0.05 indicates a significant difference among the variances). Ranking different contents in the order of priority, “special offers/discounts” was the only factor which was chosen to be important significantly by people at the age of 25-34 years old, while the 35–44-year-old group cared the least about this (see Figure 25). On the other hand, “menu”, “general information”, “pictures”, “reservation option” and “contact form” were not differentiated.

Multiple Comparisons								
Tukey HSD								
Dependent Variable	(I) 2. Your age is	(J) 2. Your age is	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval		
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound	
Menu	18 - 24	25 - 34	-1,115	,525	,092	-2,37	,14	
		35 - 44	-,749	,615	,446	-2,22	,72	
	25 - 34	18 - 24	1,115	,525	,092	-,14	2,37	
		35 - 44	,367	,666	,846	-1,23	1,96	
		18 - 24	-,749	,615	,446	-,72	2,22	
General information about the restaurant concept, origin of ingredients, opening time, etc.,	18 - 24	25 - 34	-1,090	,456	,050	-2,18	,00	
		35 - 44	-,323	,534	,818	-1,60	,95	
	25 - 34	18 - 24	1,090	,456	,050	,00	2,18	
		35 - 44	,767	,579	,386	-,62	2,15	
		18 - 24	-,323	,534	,818	-,95	1,60	
Some pictures of the dishes	18 - 24	25 - 34	-,051	,400	,991	-1,01	,91	
		35 - 44	,149	,468	,946	-,97	1,27	
	25 - 34	18 - 24	,051	,400	,991	-,91	1,01	
		35 - 44	,200	,507	,918	-1,01	1,41	
		18 - 24	-,149	,468	,946	-1,27	,97	
Special offers/discounts	18 - 24	25 - 34	,663	,373	,184	-,23	1,56	
		35 - 44	-,728	,437	,225	-1,77	,32	
	25 - 34	18 - 24	-,663	,373	,184	-1,56	,23	
		35 - 44	-1,392*	,474	,012	-2,52	-,26	
		18 - 24	,728	,437	,225	-,32	1,77	
Reservation option	18 - 24	25 - 34	,080	,404	,979	-,89	1,05	
		35 - 44	,472	,473	,581	-,66	1,60	
	25 - 34	18 - 24	-,080	,404	,979	-1,05	,89	
		35 - 44	,392	,513	,726	-,83	1,62	
		18 - 24	-,472	,473	,581	-1,60	,66	
Some pictures of the restaurant to assure it suits your needs today (anniversary, celebration, just a normal meal, family dinner, etc.,)	18 - 24	25 - 34	,782	,404	,136	-,18	1,75	
		35 - 44	,215	,473	,892	-,92	1,35	
	25 - 34	18 - 24	-,782	,404	,136	-1,75	,18	
		35 - 44	-,567	,513	,514	-1,79	,66	
		18 - 24	-,215	,473	,892	-1,35	,92	
Contact form	18 - 24	25 - 34	,849	,410	,103	-,13	1,83	
		35 - 44	,241	,480	,871	-,91	1,39	
	25 - 34	18 - 24	-,849	,410	,103	-1,83	,13	
		35 - 44	-,608	,520	,475	-1,85	,64	
		18 - 24	-,241	,480	,871	-1,39	,91	
		25 - 34	,608	,520	,475	-,64	1,85	

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Figure 25. Analysis of variance: What contents each age group would like to see on restaurants' websites

In the matter of the transparency of information posted on websites, the analysis showed that surveyed customers who belong to the oldest group (35-44) expressed the most their concern about the type of restaurant, with the mean of 3.40 (Strongly disagree (1) – Disagree (2) – Agree (3) – Strongly agree (4)), while 18-24 buyers thought it was necessary to mention what the dishes contain (mean of 3.72) (see Figure 26). In both cases, the middle age group (25-34) showed the lowest means, although they still leaned strongly toward the agreeing point.

Multiple Comparisons

Tukey HSD

Dependent Variable	(I) 2. Your age is	(J) 2. Your age is	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
9. How important is the transparency of information on the restaurant s website?: It is important to show the price in the menu	18 - 24	25 - 34	-,003	,115	1,000	-,28	,27
		35 - 44	,005	,135	,999	-,32	,33
	25 - 34	18 - 24	,003	,115	1,000	-,27	,28
		35 - 44	,008	,146	,998	-,34	,36
	35 - 44	18 - 24	-,005	,135	,999	-,33	,32
		25 - 34	-,008	,146	,998	-,36	,34
9. How important is the transparency of information on the restaurant s website?: It is important to mention the type of restaurant (fast-food, casual, fine dining)	18 - 24	25 - 34	,199	,199	,579	-,28	,67
		35 - 44	-,451	,233	,135	-1,01	,11
	25 - 34	18 - 24	-,199	,199	,579	-,67	,28
		35 - 44	-,650*	,252	,032	-1,25	-,05
	35 - 44	18 - 24	,451	,233	,135	-,11	1,01
		25 - 34	,650*	,252	,032	,05	1,25
9. How important is the transparency of information on the restaurant s website?: The origin and description of ingredients need to be informed	18 - 24	25 - 34	,122	,162	,733	-,26	,51
		35 - 44	,272	,189	,328	-,18	,72
	25 - 34	18 - 24	-,122	,162	,733	-,51	,26
		35 - 44	,150	,205	,746	-,34	,64
	35 - 44	18 - 24	-,272	,189	,328	-,72	,18
		25 - 34	-,150	,205	,746	-,64	,34
9. How important is the transparency of information on the restaurant s website?: It is important to tell what is included in the dishes	18 - 24	25 - 34	,426*	,154	,019	,06	,79
		35 - 44	,318	,180	,189	-,11	,75
	25 - 34	18 - 24	-,426*	,154	,019	-,79	-,06
		35 - 44	-,108	,195	,845	-,58	,36
	35 - 44	18 - 24	-,318	,180	,189	-,75	,11
		25 - 34	,108	,195	,845	-,36	,58
9. How important is the transparency of information on the restaurant s website?: The information needs to be up to date, exactly same as what they offer in the restaurant	18 - 24	25 - 34	-,067	,138	,878	-,40	,26
		35 - 44	-,026	,162	,986	-,41	,36
	25 - 34	18 - 24	,067	,138	,878	-,26	,40
		35 - 44	,042	,175	,969	-,38	,46
	35 - 44	18 - 24	,026	,162	,986	-,36	,41
		25 - 34	-,042	,175	,969	-,46	,38

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Figure 26. Analysis of variance: Different age groups opinion toward the transparency of information on websites

In comparison to other research, according to MGH (2019), photography obtained the most attention of people from Z and Millennials generations, when approximately 60% of age 18 – 24 cared for photos on web pages and the number of 25 – 34 group was 55%. Meanwhile, 49% and 41% of them respectively also accepted the loss of interest if the dishes and restaurants appeared bad-looking on pictures.

In terms of concept favourability, a total of 57 respondents (out of 71 who said “yes” to websites visiting) were found to choose only one favourite type of restaurant, either fast-food, casual or fine dining (Table 2). Their responses will be taken into the onwards analysis, in order to provide higher accuracy. Fine dining’s customers expressed the most consideration to this online presence, when 100% answered they went through websites for information, as well as the other stages of the buying process, from “brand awareness” to “post-purchase and feedbacks” (66%). On the other hand, consumers who liked fast food restaurants showed the

least interest in websites, while only 30% of them deeply engaged in this channel. Analysing among seven participants who did not check out websites before dining out or ordering online, fast food accounted for the biggest percentage of 85.7%, followed by casual concept's consumers and no one belonged to fine dining group.

Furthermore, these three groups also answered differently about the reasons for the webs' visits, as "affordability" and "prices" were the priority for casual's customers, who frequently go to fast food wanted to compare several options, and fine dining's lovers made sure the food is their cup of tea.

	Casual	Fast food	Fine dining
Total number of respondents	44	10	3
Choose website as the channel to find information about restaurants	84.1%	70%	100%
Visit websites before making decisions, be able to make decisions based on the website, visit website again sometimes and willing to give feedback	52.2%	30%	66%
The most significant reason for visiting website	To compare, make sure about what the restaurant has and budget	To compare different options	To make sure the restaurant has what they are looking for
What can turn down from the website	No price in the menu	Every factor except what is included in the dish	The food does not seem to be their cup of tea
Favourite type of restaurant of people who do not visit website	71.4%	85.7%	0%

Table 2. Trends in different restaurant concepts and the influences of communication on websites

Reflecting the hypothesis formed under section 4.1, regarding the impact of digital marketing communication on local restaurants in Vaasa, which have "young customers segment", emphasizing the influence on the "purchase intention", "buying process" and "retaining", here comes the test results after the empirical study.

Since all the respondents were in young to young-middle age groups, it was not possible to figure out whether if digital communicating only affects young consumers or affects this group more than the others. Therefore, in order to make comparison, further studies on larger populations are needed. However, it clearly

showed that marketing communications on websites play important role in the decision making and buying process of surveyed people (age 18 to 44). Websites were chosen to be the source of information, which help restaurants spread their brands awareness, used in evaluating, comparing and deciding stages, as well as post-purchase (feedbacks) and retaining (customer service, new offers based on previous feedbacks) (details in chapter 5.2 and 5.3).

Instead of the target customers segment, the study found the type of restaurants influenced the most by digital marketing on websites, which were casual and fine dining concepts (see Table 2).

6 CONCLUSION

6.1 Main findings and answer to the research questions

The paper's outcomes are summarised from both the theoretical and empirical studies, in the form of answering the research questions below.

- What is the target customer segment of digital marketing?

Going in line with digital in general, young to middle age populations are the target groups in terms of age, who have been surrounded by the digital world, opened-minded to online advertising and shopping, as well as spend a significant amount of time daily using Internet (Figure 7) (Sinha 2018). Regarding the paper's researching area, Vaasa city was taken into account, with approximately 65% of inhabitants under studying and working age groups (Figure 8), making it a desirable environment for marketing through online channels. Analysing among respondents who age 18 – 24, 25 – 34 and 35 – 44, the second group demonstrated the least yet still highly positive toward marketing on restaurants' websites (Figure 24).

- What type of restaurant is the most in need of digital marketing communication on website?

The empirical study found evidence that among three main restaurant concepts, casual and fine dining consumers showed higher engagement with communication on websites throughout the buying process (Table 2).

In short, the results suggested that marketing communication on websites is ideal for local restaurants in Vaasa, which target young to middle-aged customers, and especially diners provide casual or fine dining concepts.

- What is an effective digital marketing communication?

An effective communication through online channels starts with the successful delivery of the planned message to consumers, which identifies the brands' value, vision, mission and offers, avoid "noises", create an interactive environment and convert visitors into buyers, retain the relationships with them, study the results and develop new products or services. (Chaffey et al. 2015)

More than the regular conversations happen in daily life, there are several factors which can affect the communicating online, “make or break” the purchasing intention (Ed Kennedy 2017). The first and foremost is the dependence on technology, requires certain investment, implementation, installation and updates, as well as human resources and training to manage websites, obtain and analyse statistics. Appearance and designing also play essential roles in attracting attention and keeping buyers staying focused. Layout, colours, illustrations, font and languages were discovered under the practical research. In terms of communicating content, the transparency of information is highly considerable, as for restaurants, surveyed customers claimed that prices, dishes descriptions and up-to-date information were must-have on websites, followed by the origin of ingredients and explanation of the kind of services (Figure 20). The results of the empirical study go in line with several previous researches, done by Think with Google in terms of the importance of products’ description and illustrations, Jack Flynn (2022) claimed that unattractive design might “turn customers down”, or Gregor (2021) found that prices were must included.

Beyond the goal to convince consumers to purchase, marketing communication on websites is responsible for the post-purchase stage with permission marketing (Chaffey et al. 2015), when feedbacks can be left willingly through Contact form on websites or personalize/special deals/offers are allowed to be sent to customers’ email addresses. In this phase, the survey’s results showed a low interest rate in choosing websites as where to express their opinions (Figure 23), therefore suggesting restaurants to have certain incentives if they wish to encourage consumers to contribute their thoughts via this channel instead of other public ones for instance Google review.

- What are the benefits local restaurants in Vaasa can acquire from digital marketing communication on website as well as the challenges?

There are several undeniable reasons for choosing website out of other online presences when it comes to marketing communications in general and for restaurants in specific.

In comparison to traditional marketing, digital marketing is the application of technologies, allows quick implementation, cost reduction and real-time results,

refers to both push marketing strategy (different display ads) and pull marketing when consumers find their ways to brands based on their demand (through search engines). Moreover, online marketing takes advantage over traditional method in creating two-way conversations, interactive environment between customers and marketers, which contributes to the development in products and services. Last but not least, eco-friendly factor is also taken into account as a standing out point about digital marketing especially when pollution and global warming have been concerning issues for decades (online marketing helps to reduce paper waste, carbon dioxide emissions and forest destruction).

Being discussed in detail under section 2.2 and 2.3, websites have distinct features compared to other online channels. The first benefit of utilizing this tool is to have a secured home content that is reliable for both companies and consumers, which is the reason why brands attempt to drive traffics from different sources to their websites (Michelle Gifford), where information is sorted orderly in landing pages, surrounded by appealing design, font and illustrations. If enterprises need to follow certain rules on social media platforms, while they do not own the likes nor followers, at the same time have competitors appear on the same page, websites provide a private environment in which visitors pay complete attention, and companies have complete control of content, publishing and real-time analytics, without the risks of getting hacked or losing accounts. Moreover, websites also enable interactive conversations with shoppers, usually applying incentives, offering discounts or redeemable coupons in exchange for short survey or permission to send newsletters, from which brands are able to study the consuming needs, trends and develop new or personalised products and services. Moving to the second advantage acquired by using websites, the paper found that this channel was trusted by customers in terms of searching for information, in general as well as in the case of restaurants. As an inbound marketing strategy, websites can be found through search engines, on consumers' own wills, avoid any disturbing feeling that may lead to backflash. In Vaasa region, since there are only about 70 active diners for more than 67 thousand citizens, restaurants' websites appear easily with key words such as "restaurant in Vaasa", "where to eat near me" or words describe the type of food, which means businesses are not in need of a big investment in SEO. After all, websites have effects on the whole buying process (Figure

9) (Chaffey et al. 2015), from brand identity, interaction via permission marketing, evaluation among different products and providers, selection and purchase, to post-purchase and feedback and maintain the relationships. The key profit of using websites in marketing communications is to create personalized messages initiated in every stage of the buying process. Having the chance to hear from customers and the real-time analytics (view, click, subscribe/unsubscribe, feedback left on Contact form...), marketers can then adjust the marketing plan, conduct survey to figure out solutions for problems, offer different combinations of products to different customers, which as the result, improve the efficiency of marketing.

On the other hand, website marketing comes with certain challenges (chapter 2.4). Firstly, it may not be able to reach all population, who are not familiar with the online shopping and advertising, or do not spend much time on Internet, as the research figured that generations X and Y account for the major of online users (Figure 7) (Sinha 2018). Besides, the implementation of this technology has direct difficulty to many businesses, especially small and medium-sized, in the phase of budget, human resource, knowledge and skills to manage websites. At last, as other technical tools, digital marketing can be affected negatively by connection, navigation, loading speed which unsatisfied users' experience.

- Is it important to for local restaurants in Vaasa to focus on digital marketing communication on websites?

With all the explanation of digital marketing communication on websites, practical implementation of content for local restaurants in Vaasa, along with several benefits as well as challenges, it falls in hands of the marketers to decide whether or not this is a suitable tool for their businesses. The paper's main findings would suggest the use of websites for restaurants which target young to middle age population, in need of spread the brand awareness to stand out among competitors, gain new visitors and retain loyal customers. The result found high responsiveness to all main three types of restaurants, especially for casual and fine dining concepts, with significant percentage of choosing websites over other channels to look for restaurants' information, most likely to compare different options, prices, to see photos or just to make sure before a physical visit/order online. Although having a website is a positive point, it is important to be aware of the "make or

break” ability to the purchase intention. If a good website plays essential role in the purchase, a bad one may also turn down customers.

6.2 Reliability and validity

As to measure the quality of the survey and obtained data, reliability referred to the consistency while validity represents the accuracy of the results. On another word, a reliable survey instrument leads to reproducible outcomes which is repeatedly achieved utilizing the same methods under the same circumstances. The findings of a research are considered to be highly valid when they “cover all aspects”, correspond to “existing theory and knowledge” as well as “other valid measures” of the research objectives. (Middleton 2023)

Since the paper’s topic is to discover how marketing communication on website affects local restaurants in Vaasa, other online channels will not be studied. Digital marketing is a wide subject which has been discussed in several researches, with unique implementations applied for different fields of business. The thesis focuses mainly on how restaurants can use websites to communicate with consumers and the benefits as well as challenges. Online marketing plan on websites, restaurants’ websites designing for effective communicating are off limit in this paper, yet interesting problems to be studied further, supporting local businesses to manage their digital presences. As Vaasa is the researching area, the results may not be accurate to apply in other regions or countries.

Regarding the survey conducted in the empirical chapter, due to the lack of time, only 78 responses were recorded, including three age groups from 18 to 44 years old. Therefore, further surveys are needed in larger population to produce more credible results. Utilizing the same research topic with different approach and methodology is also a potential suggestion for other researchers, bringing the findings into comparison and develop the most suitable marketing communication strategy for local restaurants on websites.

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8 APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1. Survey

The impact of digital marketing communication (website is chosen in specific) on local restaurants in Vaasa

The case is, you are looking for a **LOCAL** restaurant to visit/order online today. You have no idea (your friends have no idea, your family has no idea) and you are about to make your decision.

Background information about you

1. You are... --Select--

2. Your age is --Select--

3. Your occupation --Select--

4. Where you usually go to eat/order online? --Select--

5. What is your favourite type of restaurant? (We are talking about LOCAL only, no franchises)

Fast-food (low cost, fast, frozen-made products)

Casual restaurant (mid-range price, fresh-made dishes, more table services)

Fine dining (all need to be perfect but obviously expensive)

6. When you want to find some information about a restaurant, you usually go to... --Select--

Okay, now you are looking for a **NEW LOCAL** restaurant to visit/order today (new for you, not like it just opened yesterday)

7. Do you visit the restaurant website before going to the restaurant/order online? --Select--

8. What are you looking for on their website? Please mark with the order of priority (the most important factor is number 1)

	Your priority list from 1 to 7
Menu	<input type="text"/>
General information about the restaurant concept, origin of ingredients, opening time, etc.,	<input type="text"/>
Some pictures of the dishes	<input type="text"/>
Special offers/discounts	<input type="text"/>
Reservation option	<input type="text"/>
Some pictures of the restaurant to assure it suits your needs today (anniversary, celebration, just a normal meal, family dinner, etc.,)	<input type="text"/>
Contact form	<input type="text"/>

9. How important is the transparency of information on the restaurant's website?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
It is important to show the price in the menu	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is important to mention the type of restaurant (fast-food, casual, fine dining)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The origin and description of ingredients need to be informed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is important to tell what is included in the dishes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The information needs to be up to date, exactly same as what they offer in the restaurant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

10. You visit the restaurant website because...

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
You trust the information on the restaurant's website more than somewhere else	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
You can compare different options before deciding where to eat	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
You need to make sure that restaurant have what you are looking for	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
You need to make sure that restaurant does not have any ingredients you are allergic to	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The price needs to fit your budget	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

11. What can turn you down from a restaurant website?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
There is no language I can understand	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Bad looking website (font, colour, illustration, etc.,)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There is no price	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There is no explanation what is included in the dish	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The food does not seem to be my taste	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

12. When you pass by a new local restaurant, you...

13. When you hear about a new local restaurant from somewhere (someone told you, you saw it on a printed flyer, you saw an ads popped up online, etc.,) and it seems to be your taste...

14. Is there a chance that you will not visit the restaurant after looking the website?

15. Let's say you visited the website and everything looked good, will you now go there to eat/order online?

16. Will you still visit the restaurant's website from time to time?



17. What are you looking for?

- Updated information
- New discounts/offers
- New dishes
- Contact form to leave a feedback
- Just to make sure before visiting/ordering there again



18. How do you think about the contact form on the restaurant's website?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
It is convenient to ask any questions there more than calling or sending a text message	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I have something to complain about, I prefer using the Contact form to Google review	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



19. You think the contact form is for restaurant to...

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Answer customers' questions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Learn from customers' feedbacks	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Analyse customers' needs and then create suitable offers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



20. If there is a restaurant you like, would you be happy to give them feedbacks so they can keep developing better?

