

# **Social Media Marketing's (SMM) Effect on Consumer Choice-Making and Brand Image in Finland's Restaurant Industry**

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## Abstract

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<b>Social Media Marketing's (SMM) Effect on Consumer Choice-Making and Brand Image in Finland's Restaurant Industry</b>		
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Abstract		
<p>This research examines the influence of social media on dining choices and brand reputation. As social media becomes integral to communication and decision-making, understanding its impacts on consumers is vital, especially when social media influences are growing. Focusing on younger generations aged 18-35, who are known to be highly active and influenced by social media, it offers perceptions of the principles of social media marketing efficacy in the dining sector.</p>		
<p>Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used in this study. On the other hand, a questionnaire for a specific age group of customers was designed to study the impacts of social media platforms on customer perceptions, engagement, and overall satisfaction that leads to the evaluation of a restaurant's image and reputation. Furthermore, the research revealed problems with social media management and quality management. The report concludes with recommendations for future improvements and possible guidance on refining social media strategies.</p>		
Keywords		
Social media, social media marketing, Dining choices, Restaurant Image, Reputation		

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# 1 Introduction

In an era dominated by digital interaction and virtual experiences, the influences of Social Media Marketing (SMM) on the restaurant industry are considerable. It goes beyond the promotion of eateries and extends to influencing the dining preferences of the younger demographic, aged 18-35. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Google Reviews, and others are now the primary sources for restaurant recommendations among this age group. They are as influential as traditional word-of-mouth recommendations, contributing to the intersection of culinary craftsmanship and digital marketing prowess. In addition to influencing what people eat, social media plays an important role in shaping how they perceive a restaurant's brand, all shaped by the allure of a particular dish in every post, and testimonials.

In the restaurant industry, Social Media Marketing (SMM) is a game-changer. Imagine a local eatery embracing platforms like Instagram and Facebook to showcase its culinary creations and engage with customers. SMM goes beyond mere promotion; it is a dynamic force influencing immediate dining choices and crafting a unique brand identity. Through visually appealing content and interactive experiences, SMM transforms the restaurant from a place to eat into a vibrant community hub, establishing a lasting connection with a broader audience. This sets the stage for exploring how SMM shapes consumer decisions and brand image in the restaurant landscape.

## 1.1 Research background information

In today's world, platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Google Reviews are indispensable tools for restaurant owners seeking to shape their brand image and influence customers' dining decisions. With over three billion active users globally, these platforms are a vital means for restaurateurs to cater to an increasingly discerning public.

Despite social media's apparent impacts on restaurant operations, there is a lack of specific research on specific ways in which social media marketing influences consumer dining decisions and contributes to the formation of brand images. Aiming to bridge this gap, this thesis analyses the intricate relationship between social media, consumer choices, and brand perception.

## 1.2 Objectives and Delimitations

The main objective of this thesis is to investigate how social media marketing affects customer purchasing decisions in dining establishments, with a specific emphasis on various

social media platforms, types of restaurants, and demographic factors. The objectives include analysing the factors influencing consumer choices, assessing the role of social media in brand perception, and providing practical recommendations for restaurant marketers.

Understanding the dynamics of social media's impact on the restaurant industry is critical for businesses aiming to thrive in the digital age. This research not only addresses a significant gap in current literature but also provides actionable insights for restaurateurs to enhance their marketing strategies and elevate their brand presence in a highly competitive landscape. This research is poised to contribute significantly to both academic scholarship and practical applications in the restaurant industry. By uncovering the nuanced ways in which social media shapes consumer dining choices and brand image, this study will offer valuable insights for marketers, restaurateurs, and scholars seeking a deeper understanding of the evolving dynamics in the digital age.

On the other hand, certain delimitations are crucial to acknowledge. This study focuses on the age group 18-35 to capture current trends in the restaurant industry within Finland. It contrasts different types of restaurants that may not cater to highly specialized or niche markets. The study will be conducted primarily in English, and due to resource constraints, the depth of analysis for specific SMM strategies or nuanced consumer behaviours may be limited. External factors, such as global economic events, will not be extensively considered, and the study will not deeply explore the cross-industry impacts of SMM.

In conclusion, clarifying how social media marketing has transformed the restaurant industry is the ultimate objective of this thesis. The research will further examine the complexities of consumer decisions, brand perceptions, and the strategic implications of social media-driven dining preferences for marketers. These delimitations are crucial in defining the boundaries within which this research operates, ensuring a focused and manageable study that provides meaningful insights into the complex relationship between SMM, consumer decisions, and brand image in the restaurant industry.

### 1.3 Scope of the research

Social Media Marketing (SMM) awareness among the young generation and millennials in Finland is the subject of this study. Targeting individuals aged 18 to 35 across various sectors such as students, hospitality industry professionals (e.g., hotel staff, baristas, chefs), and general social media users, the research aims to gauge their level of awareness of SMM influences on food choices. Likewise, the target group can be everyone within the age groups 18-35, who regularly utilize social media platforms for restaurant-related tasks.

Furthermore, the study explores the broader impacts of SMM and specific social media platforms on consumer dining decisions, delving into their decision-making processes and the consequent effects on restaurant images shaped by consumer perceptions influenced by SMM strategies. Eventually, the research revealed identified issues with social media management and quality control prompting the formulation of recommendations for future enhancements and potential guidance on refining SMM strategies.

Additionally, the thesis delves into the following insights:

- Investigating the influence of engagement with restaurant content on social platforms on dining decisions and restaurant visits, including the impact of influencers' recommendations and endorsements.
- Examining how user-generated content, such as reviews and recommendations, shapes restaurant reputations and influences consumer perceptions of restaurant brands via social media.
- Social media platform effectiveness for restaurant marketing: Analysing which platforms (e.g., Instagram, Facebook) are most effective in engaging restaurant audiences.
- Identifying trends in restaurant-related social media content and determining which types of content have the most significant impact on dining decisions.
- Exploring the challenges faced in managing restaurant social media accounts and developing strategies to maintain a positive online presence.

#### 1.4 Methods of Research

The research methodology serves as a guiding framework for conducting the thesis, outlining the general approach, and determining the research method to be employed. Researchers primarily use qualitative and quantitative methods as the most common methods, called mixed-methods approach. Both methods are used here since they provide an authentic framework for utilizing each of their strengths to develop solutions and comprehension of the issues (Sheppard 2012).

Quantitative research methodologies involve using survey research to gather data, focusing on measurements such as quantity, likelihood, and size (Creswell 2018, 51). The survey utilized the quantitative method to tabulate responses and options. Data collection involved the distribution of a Webropol survey form to various Facebook groups within the targeted population, such as "Foreigners in Helsinki", "International Students in Finland", "Vietnamese community in Finland" and other related groups in Lappeenranta such as "International students in Lappeenranta" and "LOAS Laakso". Moreover, sharing survey links on widgets

on social networking platforms (for example, Instagram and Facebook stories) as well as direct messaging to individuals working in diverse fields to ensure a range of responses (Lune & Berg, 2012).

On the other hand, the qualitative method gathers information regarding the beliefs, emotions, and actions of participants, in addition to the significance they attribute to these phenomena. It facilitates the comprehension of intricate concepts, social interactions, and cultural phenomena by researchers (Research Guides 2023). The qualitative analysis is divided into three sections:

- Overview of social media platforms: Exploring the definition of social media platforms used for restaurant-related content as well as their benefits for restaurant businesses.
- Content analysis: Discover various types of content commonly shared by restaurant accounts and display realistic samples.
- Key elements of digital marketing including campaign themes and messaging, engagement metrics to track audience interactions, and influencer marketing to spread brand messages within communities.

## 1.5 Research Questions

Identifying and finding the most accurate and relevant results is entirely dependent on the research question. The thesis's main research question is to explore the awareness of millennials and young adults in Finland of Social Media Marketing and its implications for consumers and businesses in the restaurant industry. As a support to the main question, there are four additional substitute questions:

“How does engagement with restaurant content on social media platforms of young adults and millennials in the Helsinki region influence specific aspects of dining decisions, such as restaurant selection, menu choices, and frequency of visits?”

“How do young adults and millennials perceive authenticity and credibility in restaurant-related content on social media platforms, and how does this perception influence their trust and decision-making process?”

“Which social media platforms, among Instagram, Facebook, and others, are preferred by young adults and millennials for engaging with restaurant content, and how does platform effectiveness vary across different demographic segments?”



“What are the main challenges faced by restaurants in managing their social media accounts, and how can these challenges be addressed to maintain a positive online presence and enhance consumer engagement?”

## 1.6 The Structure of The Thesis

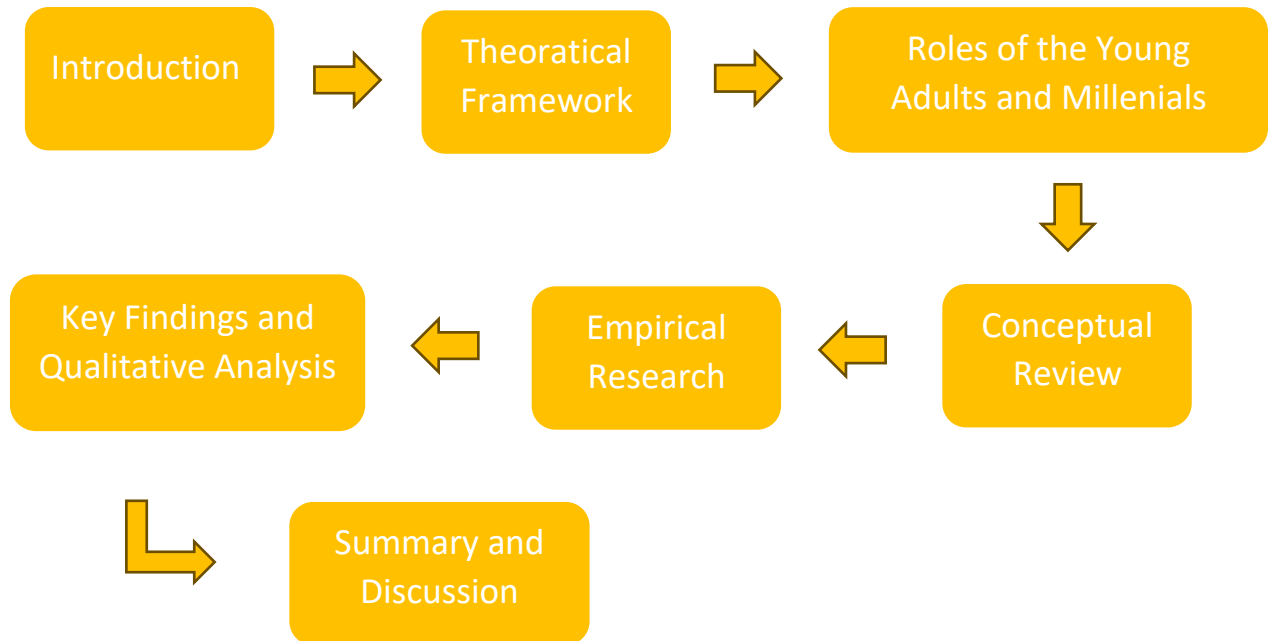


Figure 1 Thesis Structure

In total, the thesis comprises seven chapters. The impact of social media marketing (SMM) on the restaurant industry is examined in the first chapter, highlighting its substantial influence on shaping immediate dining decisions and establishing a distinct brand image. The text also presents the author's motivation for the topic, the study's goals, delimitations, research methodology, and research questions. The second chapter, known as the literature review chapter, examines pertinent theoretical perspectives and models concerning social media marketing, consumer decision-making processes, and brand image formation theory. In addition, this analysis examines its effectiveness, motivational factors, and consumer needs, as well as the five-stage decision-making process. The study builds upon prior studies on social media, digital marketing, and consumer behaviour to establish a solid foundation, including using the 8Ps Marketing Mix. Chapter three provides a clear definition of the young generation, their roles, and the impact of their actions on the integration of culinary expertise and digital marketing skills in the future. Chapter four presents the definitions of different conceptual terms and explores their effects on the consumer decision-making process and brand image. Similarly, the chapter includes definitions of other contrasting terms to emphasize the efficacy and impact of digital platforms on consumers and restaurants in

the present era. Chapter five of the report comprehensively explains the research design, which encompasses the survey approach, sampling strategy, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques. Furthermore, it addresses any ethical implications and constraints. Chapter six, the results chapter presents the findings of the study based on the collected data, interpreting them concerning the research questions and theoretical framework and depicting the analysis of social media content and engagement metrics. The discussion chapter examines the consequences of the findings for both theory and practice. It also acknowledges any limitations and proposes potential areas for future research. The final chapter provides a concise overview of the research findings and offers suggestions for future actions. The thesis is concluded with a references section that includes a list of all the sources that were cited, as well as appendices that contain additional materials.

## 2 Theoretical Framework

In the context of the thesis, focusing on the transformative role of Social Media Marketing (SMM) in the restaurant industry, marketing is pivotal. Through SMM, marketing not only shapes consumer decisions and brand image but also actively contributes to community building, data-driven decision-making, global and local reach, reputation management, and strategies for customer loyalty.

*Marketing is the process by which companies engage customers, build strong customer relationships, and create customer value in order to capture the value from customers in return (Kotler & Armstrong 2017, 29).*

### 2.1 Marketing Foundation - 8Ps Marketing Mix

Marketing, as a dynamic field, involves strategies aimed at promoting products and satisfying consumer needs. The evolution from the traditional 4Ps to the comprehensive 8Ps framework includes elements like Product, Price, Place, Promotion, People, Processes, Physical Evidence, and Partnership (Sahara Group Foundation 2021).

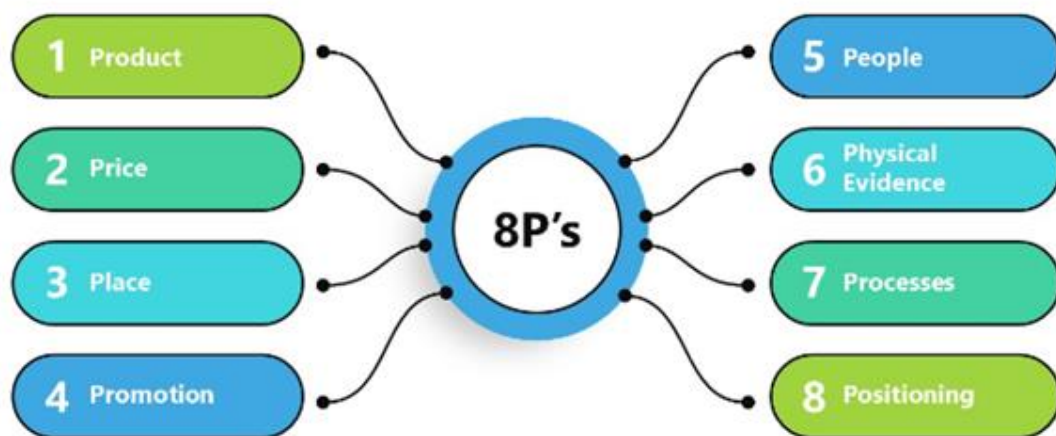


Figure 2 8Ps of Marketing mix (Mannaa 2024)

In the restaurant industry, the Product dimension extends beyond tangible menu items to encompass the entire dining experience, including ambiance, service, and culinary innovation. Pricing strategies involve a delicate balance between perceived value, production costs, and competitive positioning. The concept of Place, redefined by digital platforms and Social Media Marketing (SMM), addresses global accessibility while maintaining a localized presence through targeted online strategies. Central to marketing, Promotion is dynamically

reshaped by SMM, leveraging the digital landscape for interactive and persuasive communication, impacting consumer decision-making processes. Recognizing the role of both employees and customers, the People dimension emphasizes positive interactions in the marketing process. Efficient systems and procedures for service delivery, inherent in the Processes dimension, are critical in the service-oriented restaurant industry, influencing customer satisfaction. Tangible elements encountered by consumers, falling under the Physical Evidence dimension, such as online visual cues and digital interactions, shape brand perceptions. Collaboration and strategic alliances, represented by the Partnership dimension, play a crucial role in enhancing overall marketing strategies and fostering community engagement (Pandey 2023).

Through the exploration of these 8Ps, the thesis aims to unveil the nuanced ways in which marketing, particularly SMM, influences consumer decision-making processes and shapes brand image within the evolving landscape of the restaurant industry.

## 2.2 Theoretical Review of Media Usage

### 2.2.1 McLuhan's Media Theory

Marshall McLuhan's Media Theory serves as the foundational perspective in our exploration of the impact of Social Media Marketing (SMM) on the restaurant industry. The theory introduces the characteristics of the medium that profoundly influence how messages are interpreted (Guins 2014). Applied to SMM, this theory prompts an examination of the distinct features of social media platforms, illuminating their role as mediums that shape consumer perceptions and decision-making. The influence of SMM goes beyond the content itself to the very platforms on which it is shared.

The Canadian philosopher and educator McLuhan is known for his work in education and philosophy. He coined the famous quote "The medium is the message" (McLuhan 1995). As opposed to the media's actual content, he contends that the media transforms people and societies.

Hence, the theory emphasizes how each platform's unique characteristics influence brand messages and viewing social media as an extension of brand communication. It helps analyse how these dynamics shape consumer perceptions and impact decisions in the restaurant industry. Moreover, He further categorizes media into "hot" and "cool" types, envisions a "global village," and views media as extensions of human faculties. "Cool" media

demands a viewer's concentration and participation in understanding its message. In contrast, "Hot" media relies on the senses of the viewers, so viewers do not have to exert a lot of effort to comprehend it (McLuhan 1995).

McLuhan challenged the traditional linear models of communication. He emphasized that electronic media, unlike print, creates a non-linear, multi-sensory experience that engages the audience in a more participatory and immersive way.

### 2.2.2 Social Media Engagement Theory

Zooming in on the dynamics of user interactions, the Social Media Engagement Theory explores the role of likes, comments, and shares in the SMM landscape. In the restaurant industry, this theory becomes particularly relevant as it unveils how user engagements contribute not only to the visibility of content but also to the overall impact on potential diners (TheoryHub). User interactions on social media platforms actively shape consumer decisions and play a crucial role in shaping the brand image of restaurants.

This theory focuses on the ways users engage with social media content. It helps analyse how user interactions with restaurant-related content on social media platforms impact their decision-making and brand perceptions.

### 2.2.3 Consumer Decision-Making Process Model

Structured within the Engel-Kollat-Blackwell Model, the Consumer Decision-Making Process Model provides a systematic framework for understanding how consumers navigate choices. In the context of SMM, this model becomes a guide to identifying pivotal touchpoints in the consumer's decision-making journey. The present model offers a thorough examination of the influence exerted by social media marketing (SMM) across multiple phases of the decision-making process, commencing with the initial stage of recognition and concluding with the preference for a certain dining establishment (Francis 2014). The decision-making process involves multiple stages, such as identifying the problem, gathering information, assessing alternatives, making a purchase, and post-purchase behaviour. Social media marketing strategies are analysed in the context of restaurant consumer decision-making and their impact across each stage of the process.

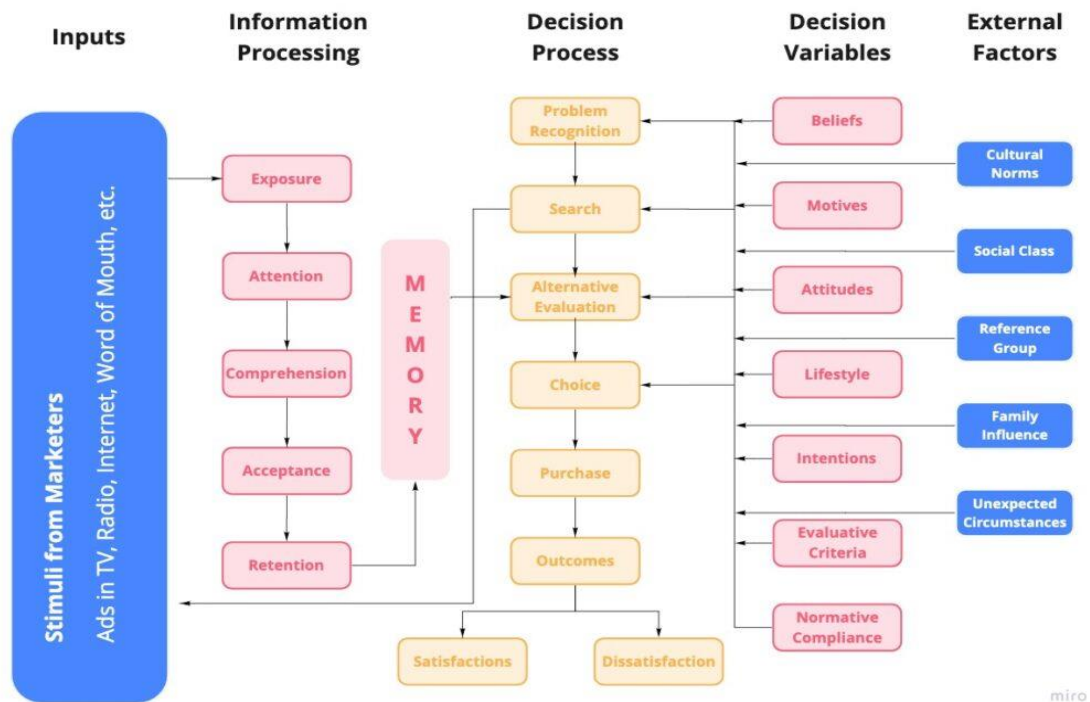


Figure 3 Engel-Kollat-Blackwell Model (Francis 2014)

## 2.2.4 Brand Image Formation Theories

Narrowing the focus to the theoretical frameworks shaping brand image, Brand Image Formation Theories provide insight into how SMM actively contributes to the perception of restaurant brands. Whether it's through visual consistency, messaging alignment, or emotional connections communicated on social media, these theories help dissect the multifaceted ways in which SMM becomes a key player in the formation, maintenance, or evolution of brand images within the restaurant industry (Research Gate 2007). In essence, SMM becomes a powerful tool in crafting and projecting the identity of restaurant brands in the digital realm.

The theories emphasize that consumer perceptions of a brand are shaped by various factors, including brand associations, communication strategies, and overall brand experience (Vytautas & Regina 2007). Hence, those investigate how SMM contributes to the formation of brand images in the restaurant industry and examine the role of SMM in establishing positive brand associations, communicating brand messages, and enhancing overall brand experience.

### 3 The Young Adults and Millennials

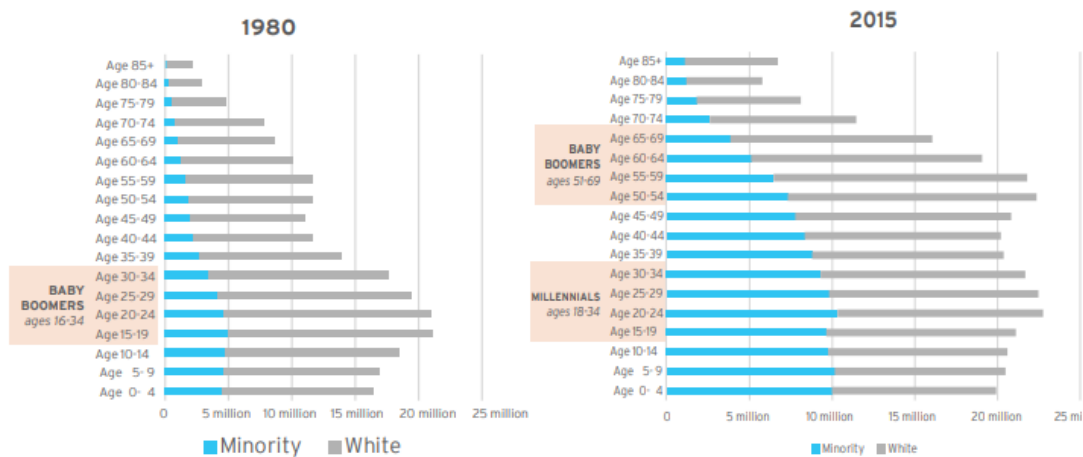
#### 3.1 Definition and The Roles

According to the World Youth Report (2020) indicates that 16 percent of the world's population is comprised of young people between 15 and 24 years of age. In addition, the World Youth Report (2020) emphasizes the notable representation of young individuals who are acknowledged for their creativity, innovation, and ability. These young people play a crucial role in propelling global transformation and progress, providing effective solutions to tackle societal difficulties (UNESCO, 1970). Moreover, the United Nations emphasizes the integral role of youth in sustainable growth and peace, stressing the importance of addressing issues such as unemployment, education, and health through collaboration between youth and stakeholders. The 2030 Agenda underscores the active participation of youth not only as beneficiaries but also as partners in implementing and monitoring policies (United Nations). In essence, investing in education, training, and partnerships with youth is crucial for fostering positive change and achieving global development and peace.

FIGURE 1

#### Age and race-ethnic distributions of U.S. population

1980 and 2015



Source: Author's analysis of 1980 U.S. Decennial Census and Census population estimates

Figure 4 Age and race-ethnic distribution of U.S population (William H. Frey 2018)

Millennials are generally defined as people born between 1981 and 1997, follow the Generation X cohort and precede the baby boomers (Figure 4). This demographic group, comprising approximately 75.3 million individuals, has surpassed the baby boomers in size. Millennials are characterized by their unique attributes in terms of demographics, tastes, and lifestyles. Millennials, despite their substantial numbers, do not wield the same level of

influence over the total population as baby boomers did during their young adult years. A comparison between baby boomers in 1980 and millennials in 2015 illustrates this disparity. In 1980, baby boomers aged 16-34 constituted 33 percent of the population, giving them significant sway over younger generations. In contrast, millennials today, while still numerous, represent only 23 percent of the population. Consequently, they face competition from sizable older generations, such as the baby boomers, in garnering attention and influence socially, economically, and politically (William H. Frey 2018, 6).

## Age structure of population on 31 December

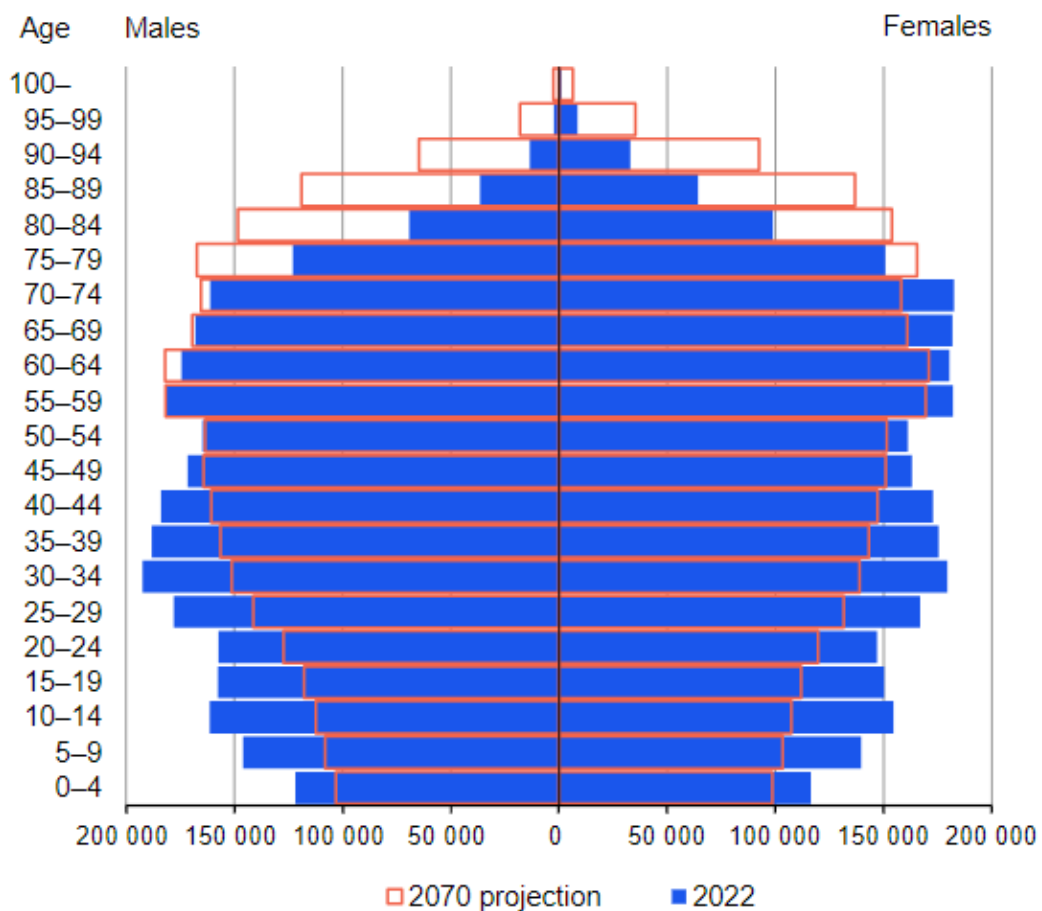


Figure 5 Age structure of population in Finland (Statistics Finland, population structure)

In Figure 5, this demographic data highlights the significant presence of young adults and millennials in Finland, comprising approximately 23 percent of the total population in 2022. With over 1.3 million individuals within the age group of 15 to 34, this segment of the population holds considerable influence, particularly in areas such as consumer behaviour and social media engagement. Understanding the preferences and behaviours of this demo-



graphic is crucial for businesses, particularly in the restaurant industry, as they seek to effectively engage with their target audience and shape their brand image through social media marketing strategies.

Based on the previous data, it is evident that young adults and millennials aged 18 to 35 play a significant role in various aspects of society, including consumer behaviour and social media engagement. With a considerable population size and representing a significant portion of the total population, this demographic cohort wields considerable influence in shaping market trends, particularly in the restaurant industry. Their preferences, habits, and interactions on digital sites have a substantial impact on consumer decisions and brand perceptions. Therefore, businesses, especially those in the restaurant sector, must pay close attention to the needs and preferences of young adults and millennials to effectively engage with them and maintain a positive brand image in the digital era.

### 3.2 The relationship between the Young Adults and Millennials in shaping Social Media Awareness

According to Figure 6, it is estimated that there will be 5.35 billion internet users in the world by January 2024, which represents 66.2 percent of the total global population. Globally, there are 5.04 billion people, which accounts for 62.3 percent, were using social media. Likewise, the internet plays a crucial role in the contemporary information society by linking billions of individuals across the globe. In 2023, Northern Europe emerged as the pioneer in internet usage, with countries such as Norway, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates boasting an impressive 99 percent utilization rate. In contrast, North Korea had the lowest global internet penetration. Asia possessed the most extensive online user population, totalling more than 2.93 billion users, while Europe had around 750 million users. China, India, and the United States ranked highest in terms of the number of internet users. Women made up 63 percent of the global internet user population in 2022, a 6 percent difference from men. The disparity increased in areas such as the Arab States and Africa. The age group of 15-24 demonstrated the highest global internet usage, with Europe leading with a penetration rate of 98 percent. The level of income also had a significant impact on internet access, with high-income countries having a usage rate of 92 percent compared to only 26 percent in low-income markets (Statista - Worldwide digital population 2024).

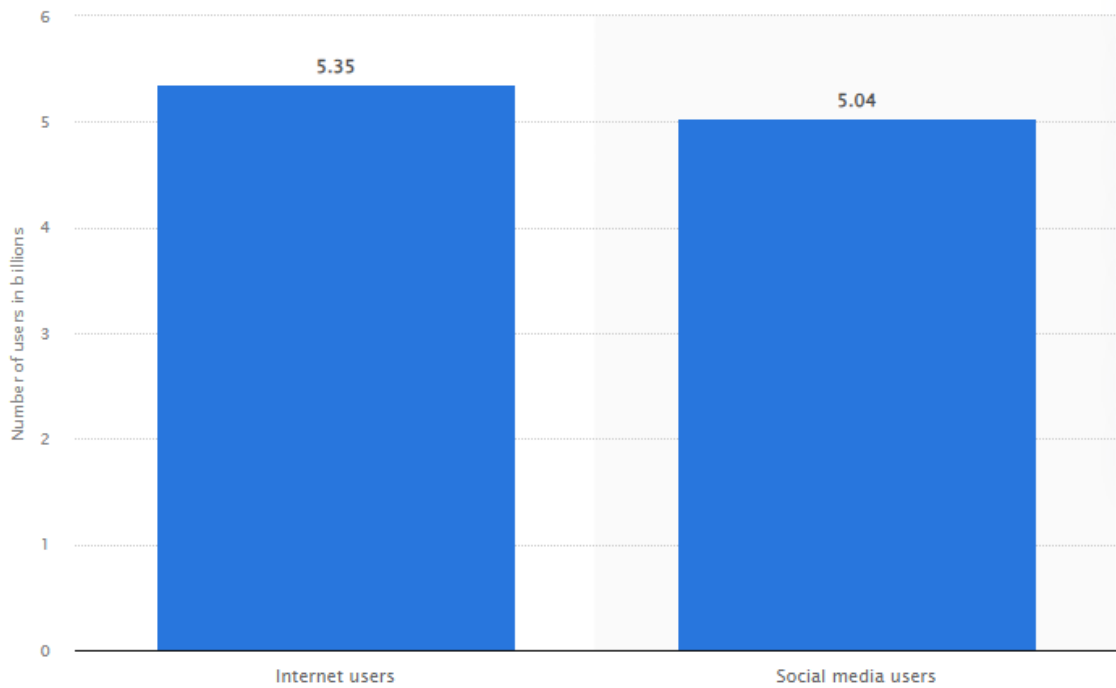


Figure 6 Number of internet and social media users worldwide as of January 2024 in billions (Statista 2024)

### Number of social media users worldwide from 2017 to 2027 (in billions)

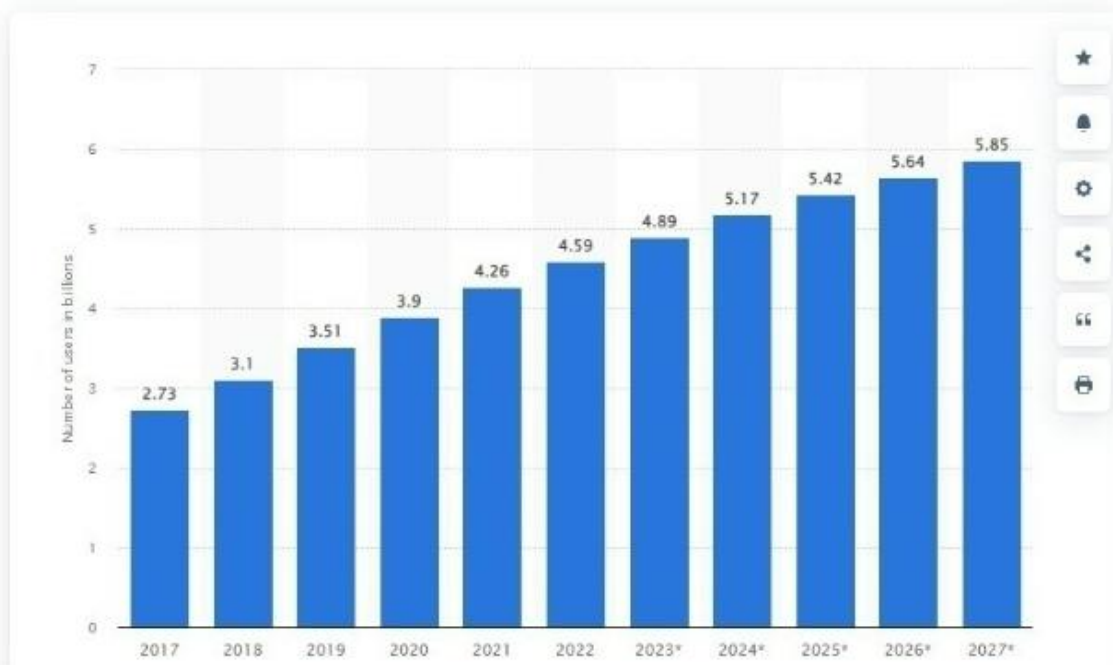


Figure 7 Numbers of social media users worldwide from 2017 to 2027 in billions (Statista 2024)

Figure 7 shows that social media usage has undergone substantial growth and is expected to continue expanding. From 2017 to the present, the number of social media users has increased significantly, with a growth rate of 79.1%, resulting in a current figure of 2.73 billion. According to Statista's forecast, the total number of global users is projected to surpass 5.17 billion by the final time of 2024, which represents a 5.7% increase, compared to 2023. According to Statista's projection for 2027, the global population is anticipated to reach 5.85 billion. The estimated annual growth rate is expected to range between 3.7% and 5.7% until that year.

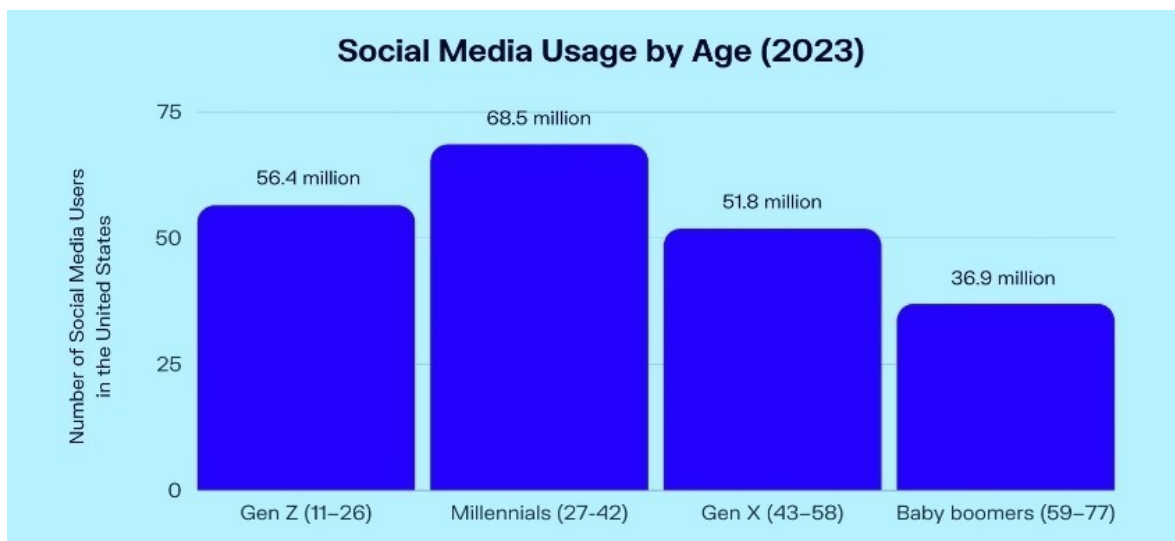


Figure 8 Social media usage by age in 2023 (eMarketer, social media usage)

Moreover, eMarketer's recent research indicates that the largest segment of social media usage by Americans is between the ages of 27 and 42, classifying them as Millennials (Figure 8). There are around 68.5 million Millennials who actively use social media in the U.S., making up about 30.3% of the total social networking site user base. Gen X, aged 43-58, has 51.8 million users, whereas users aged 11-26 generation Z have 56.4 million. In contrast, the demographic group known as "Baby Boomers", who are between the ages of 59 and 77, have the lowest level of engagement with social media, with a total of only 36.9 million users. Although Millennials are currently the most active users of social media, eMarketer predicts that their usage will plateau in 2027, whereas Gen Z users are projected to increase significantly.

Based on the data provided, it is evident that young adults and millennials play a significant role in shaping social media awareness. As the use of social media and the internet increases among individuals aged 15 to 34 in Finland, totalling over 1.3 million and constituting 23 percent of the total population in 2022, this demographic holds substantial influence in the digital landscape. Moreover, global trends indicate a substantial increase in social

media usage, with a projected growth of 5.17 billion users by the end of 2024. Additionally, millennials are identified as the largest demographic group using social media platforms, comprising nearly one-third of all users. This suggests that the behaviours and preferences of young adults and millennials significantly shape social media awareness, usage patterns, and trends. As such, businesses and organizations must understand and leverage the preferences and behaviours of this demographic to successfully interact with their intended audience and shape their brand image in the digital era.

## 4 Conceptual reviews

### 4.1 Social Media

Online platforms and communication channels are referred to as "Social Media", facilitating content creation, sharing, and interaction (Lutkevich & Wigmore 2021). It has evolved into a pervasive and dynamic space where individuals, businesses, and communities connect, share information, and engage in conversations. Communication and information exchange are shaped by social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn (Dollarhide 2024).

Hence, Social media acts as the primary channel to explore the interactions between restaurants and consumers. The diverse nature of social media platforms provides an expansive landscape for studying how marketing strategies unfold and how consumers engage with content. Through detailed analysis of user behaviours, preferences, and feedback, marketers can glean invaluable insights into the ever-evolving dynamics of consumer trends and preferences, empowering them to create more focused and successful marketing campaigns. Therefore, social media serves as a powerful tool for fostering meaningful connections between restaurants and their patrons, allowing for direct communication, personalized interactions, and the cultivation of brand loyalty.

### 4.2 Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing (SMM) is a strategic approach to promoting products, services, or brands on social media platforms. It involves creating and sharing content to engage and influence a target audience (Hayes 2024). SMM encompasses various activities such as content creation, community management, paid advertising, and analytics. The use of social media is crucial in establishing brand awareness, nurturing customer relationships, and advancing business objectives (The School of Art & Design 2024).

SMM is the central focus of the thesis topic, catalyzing an understanding of how restaurants leverage digital platforms for marketing purposes and consumer dining choices. The impact of SMM is likely to be explored in terms of its effectiveness in influencing consumer decisions, shaping brand image, and fostering engagement. By unraveling its transformative effects on consumer behavior, brand perception, and interactive engagement, the study provides actionable insights for restaurants looking to leverage the power of digital platforms to navigate and thrive in today's competitive market landscape.

### 4.3 Digital Marketing

Digital marketing promotes products, services, or brands to a targeted audience using digital channels and technologies (Barone 2024). Digital marketing utilizes online channels and technologies to engage with a target audience, employing strategies like SEO, content marketing, SMM, and more. It aims to enhance brand visibility, drive engagement, and achieve specific marketing goals through measurable and interactive approaches. Digital marketing is an effective way to reach out and connect with potential customers through various digital channels. By making use of websites, mobile apps, email, social media, search engines, and other digital platforms, companies can positively interact with their target audience and create enduring bonds. Its main components include creating and distributing content, optimizing search engine results, promoting through social media, sending marketing emails, using pay-per-click advertising, affiliate marketing, and analysing campaign performance (Barone 2024). Compared to traditional marketing techniques, digital marketing is more personalized and measurable, enabling companies to communicate with their customers more efficiently and effectively.

In summary, digital marketing positively influences consumer decisions, brand images, community engagement, data-driven decision-making, global and local reach, and reputation management in the restaurant industry.

### 4.4 Decision-Making Processes

The act of decision-making follows a structured process that individuals undergo when faced with making choices. This process entails recognizing the problem at hand, gathering information, evaluating various alternatives, and ultimately selecting a course of action. For businesses, comprehending the decision-making process is vital as it enables them to tailor their marketing strategies in ways that positively impact consumer choices (Research Leap 2023).

In the context of the restaurant industry, decision-making processes refer to the series of cognitive steps and evaluations when it comes to dining experiences. These processes involve various stages, including recognition of a need or desire to dine out, information gathering about available options, evaluation of alternatives based on factors such as cuisine type, price, location, and reviews, selection of a preferred restaurant, and finally, post-consumption evaluation and feedback (UMass Dartmouth 2022). These processes are influenced by a multitude of factors, including personal preferences, cultural influences, social dynamics, past experiences, and marketing stimuli. Additionally, external factors such as

economic conditions, trends, and technological advancements may also impact the decision-making process.

Hence, understanding the decision-making processes of consumers in the restaurant industry is crucial for restaurants to effectively target and attract their desired customer base, and better meet the needs and desires of their target audience, ultimately enhancing customer satisfaction and loyalty.

#### 4.4.1 Five-stage Model: Decision-Making Process

Marketing researchers have developed a "stage model" of the consumer process (see Figure 9), which outlines five consecutive stages: need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase, and post-purchase behaviour.

During the initial phase, the process of need recognition occurs as consumers become aware of their desires influenced by both internal and external factors. Internal stimuli arise from fundamental physiological needs such as hunger or thirst, whereas external stimuli, such as encountering a vacation advertisement on television, stimulate feelings of excitement and peak one's interest. Marketers need to accurately perceive the status of consumers and develop deliberate strategies to arouse interest and capture attention through advertising (Kotler & Keller 2016, 195).

Following need recognition, consumers proceed to the information search stage, driven by both internal and external factors. Internal searches involve tapping into personal memories or experiences, while external searches draw from sources like family, friends, or advertisements. The duration of information searching depends on consumer familiarity and interest in the products (Research Leap 2017).

In the subsequent stage, evaluation of alternatives, consumers engage in three key processes. Firstly, they strive to fulfil their needs, followed by seeking product benefits and attributes that align with their requirements. This often involves comparing various product features, such as location, cleanliness, or price for a hotel, or attributes like colour and taste for toothpaste. Ultimately, consumers choose the product with the most appealing attributes that meet their needs (Kotler & Keller 2016, 197). Additionally, in this stage, customer evaluations are influenced by beliefs and attitudes. Beliefs represent strong opinions or thoughts, while attitudes reflect preferences or evaluations. Attitudes shape individuals' perspectives and consistently guide their thoughts toward similar objects (Kotler & Keller 2016, 197).

Moving to the purchase stage, consumers select a preferred brand or product but may still deliberate on factors like when, where, and how much to buy, especially for complex or expensive items. A gap often exists between product selection and actual payment, particularly for high-value items like electronics (Research Leap 2017).

Finally, in the post-purchase behaviour stage, customers assess product performance, satisfaction levels, and take subsequent actions. Satisfaction arises when products meet or exceed expectations, while dissatisfaction occurs when they fall short. Customer evaluations and reviews play a vital part in shaping future purchasing decisions and brand perceptions (Kotler & Keller 2016, 200).

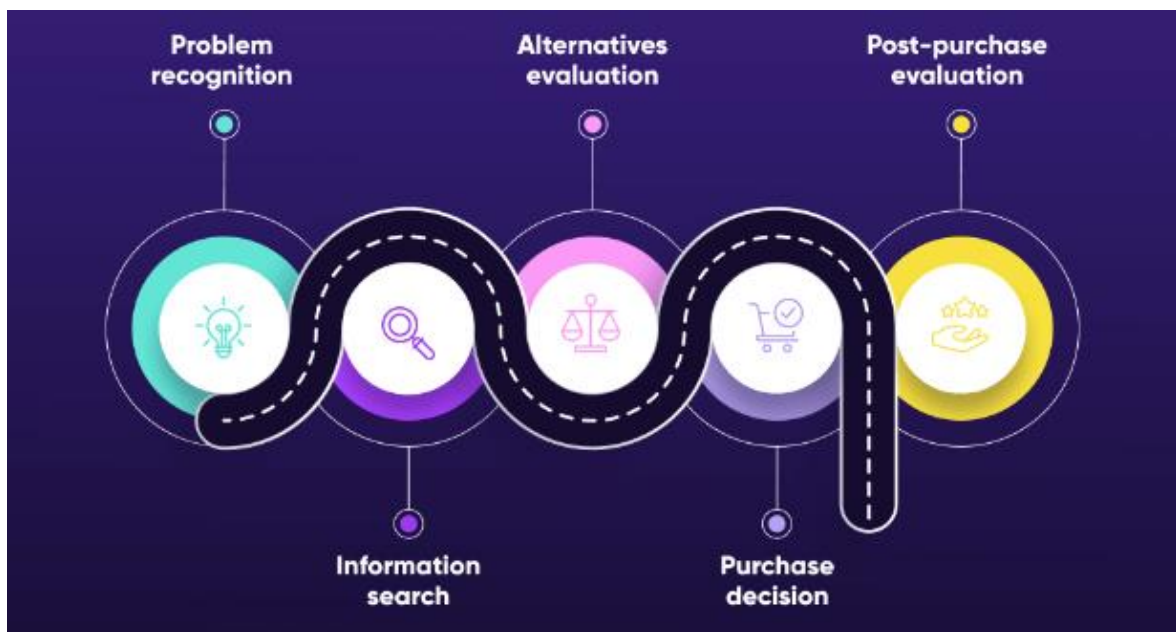


Figure 9 Five-stage Model – The Consumer Decision-making Process (Research Leap 2017)

#### 4.5 Consumer Behavior

Consumer behaviour encompasses the intricate sequence of actions and decision-making processes that individuals undertake when seeking to fulfil their needs and desires through the acquisition and utilization of products or services (Brooks 2023). This multifaceted interplay of psychological, social, and economic factors influences how consumers perceive, evaluate, and select from the various options available to them. A comprehensive understanding of consumer behaviour is crucial for businesses as it enables them to adapt their marketing tactics and product offers to the specific demands and preferences of their target market.



Therefore, understanding consumer behaviour is critical for interpreting the results of SMM initiatives, as it encompasses the impact of social media on consumer decisions and subsequent behavioural responses, such as eating habits and attitudes.

#### 4.5.1 The Motivation Process

As stated by Schiffman & Wisenblit (2019, 48, 49), motivation is the underlying force that influences and explains why individuals engage in certain actions or behaviours. Needs are fundamental circumstances that push individuals to act, and when these needs are not fulfilled, they create motivational cravings causing consumers to acquire goods or services. Customers establish purchase-related goals and subsequently engage in behaviours aimed at satisfying their demands in an attempt to ease the tensions caused by these desires. Personality traits have an impact on the goals that consumers set and the actions they take to accomplish those goals. When individuals have unfulfilled needs, it creates psychological tension and motivates them to take action. This concept is depicted in Figure 10. Personality refers to the internal psychological traits that influence an individual's thoughts and actions, ultimately contributing to their distinct character. Marketers frequently employ a range of personality traits to attract and engage customers. Brand personification is the act of attributing human characteristics to brands, which elicits emotional responses from consumers (Schiffman & Wisenblit 2019, 48).

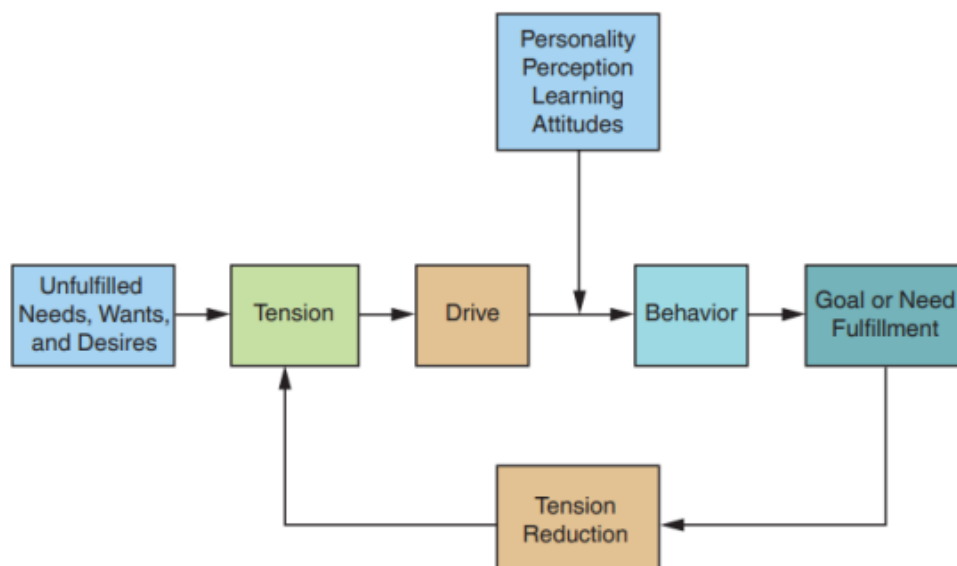


Figure 10 The Motivation Process (Schiffman & Wisenblit 2019)

## 4.6 Customer Attitudes

Customer attitudes represent the positive or negative evaluations and feelings individuals have toward a product, service, or brand. Attitudes are shaped by experiences, perceptions, and interactions with a business (Duggal 2022). Positive customer attitudes contribute to loyalty and advocacy, while negative attitudes may lead to dissatisfaction and disengagement. Understanding and managing customer attitudes are critical for building and maintaining a positive brand image.

The impact of SMM on customer attitudes towards restaurants is a critical aspect of the main topic. Positive attitudes fostered through effective Social Media Marketing contribute to customer satisfaction, loyalty, and positive brand perceptions.

## 4.7 Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is a pivotal concept in marketing that measures how well products or services meet customer expectations, extending beyond transactions to encompass overall experiences. It goes beyond a transactional relationship, encompassing the overall experience and perceptions of customers regarding a brand or business. High levels of customer satisfaction are associated with increased loyalty, positive word-of-mouth, and repeat business (Dilks 2023).

Research has shown that when customers are satisfied with a brand's products or services, they tend to become brand advocates. These advocates share their positive experiences on social media platforms, thereby strengthening trust in the brand and influencing potential customers. SMM serves as a real-time feedback channel, allowing businesses to monitor and respond promptly to customer sentiments. Positive interactions on social media contribute to a positive brand image while addressing concerns showcases commitment to customer service. In summary, customer satisfaction is integral to the success of SMM, fostering brand loyalty and community engagement.

## 4.8 Dining Choices

Dining choices refer to the decisions individuals make when selecting a place to eat or specific dishes to consume. It involves considerations such as personal preferences, cultural influences, dietary restrictions, and situational factors. Dining choices are shaped by a combination of external influences, including social recommendations, online reviews, and marketing efforts by restaurants, contributing to the overall dining experience (Chua, Karim, Lee & Han 2020).

Dining choices represent a direct outcome (of consumer behavior influenced by SMM. Analyzing how social media content influences where individuals choose to dine provides insights into the practical implications of SMM in the restaurant industry.

#### 4.9 Food Quality

Food quality equates to the features, parameter values, and qualities of food that establish its overall excellence (ASC Consultants 2022). It encompasses factors such as taste, freshness, nutritional value, and presentation. Food quality is a key determinant in customer satisfaction and influences dining choices. Restaurants and food establishments strive to maintain high food quality standards to meet customer expectations and enhance their reputation (Dolapo 2023).

SMM plays a role in communicating and shaping perceptions of food quality. Positive portrayals of food on social media can enhance expectations and influence consumers' perceptions of the quality of a restaurant's offerings. It allows direct engagement between restaurants and their audience, providing a platform for real-time feedback, responses, and dialogue. Hence, restaurants can further enhance the perceived quality of their offerings and cultivate a sense of authenticity and transparency. However, the potential for negative portrayals or feedback on social media to detrimentally impacts consumer perceptions. In an era where online reviews and ratings wield significant influence, a single negative experience shared on social media can quickly tarnish a restaurant's reputation and undermine consumer trust (Sandra 2023).

By consistently delivering on the promises made through their social media presence, restaurants can build and maintain a positive reputation, foster trust and loyalty among their audience, and ultimately thrive in an increasingly competitive culinary landscape shaped by the digital age.

#### 4.10 Brand Image

Brand image refers to how a brand is perceived, influenced by its visual identity, messaging, customer experiences, and public opinion (Oxford Reference). A positive brand image contributes to customer trust, loyalty, and preference, while a negative image can adversely impact consumer perceptions and choices (Indeed 2023).

The impact of SMM on brand image is a core aspect of the main objective. Examining how social media activities contribute to the formation, evolution, or maintenance of brand images is crucial for understanding the holistic impact of SMM on restaurant branding. By analyzing how restaurants use platforms to communicate values and engage with followers,

these actions uncover insights into brand formation, evolution, and maintenance (Indeed 2023).

Ultimately, by comprehensively exploring the relationship between SMM and brand image in the restaurant industry, aim to offer helpful guidance to restaurants looking to make the most of social media to establish a unique and compelling brand presence that engages their target audience and fosters lasting success.

#### 4.11 Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty is the term used to describe when consumers repeatedly choose one brand over others on the market. This behaviour is often driven by positive experiences, satisfaction with products or services, and a shared set of values and identity with the brand (Investopedia). This emotional connection and commitment to a brand goes beyond simply making repeat purchases and the implementation of effective customer retention strategies can lead to a multitude of benefits, such as increased customer lifetime value, competitive advantage for the brand, and higher rates of customer retention (Amazon Ads).

Effective SMM strategies have the potential to cultivate strong emotional connections, contributing to sustained customer loyalty and repeat business. Through targeted content and personalized engagement, SMM nurtures trust, belonging, and loyalty among consumers, ultimately driving sustained growth and success for the brand.

#### 4.12 Reputation

Reputation refers to the collective perceptions, opinions, and evaluations held by individuals or groups about a person, organization, brand, or entity (Bhasin 2023). It encompasses the overall impression and esteem that others have towards the subject, often based on past actions, behaviors, achievements, and interactions. A positive reputation enhances trust and credibility, influencing consumer choices and brand perceptions. Reputation is a critical factor in shaping relationships, influencing decision-making, and determining the standing and success of individuals, organizations, and brands in society (Blanchard 2019).

Reputation management through SMM is a key theme. Analyzing the impact of social media on a restaurant's reputation involves assessing how online activities contribute to public perceptions, trust, and overall reputation in the industry. Effective SMM entails engaging with customers, showcasing unique offerings, and managing feedback promptly and professionally. By monitoring sentiment and adapting strategies, restaurants can cultivate a positive online presence, enhancing trust and credibility within the industry.

#### 4.13 Word-of-Mouth (WOM) Marketing

Word-of-mouth (WOM) marketing is a phenomenon that refers to the organic spread of recommendations, information, and opinions about a product, service, or brand from one individual to another (Hayes 2024). This mode of communication is considered a powerful tool in the marketing domain, given that research indicates a notable influence on consumer behaviour.

It relies on individuals sharing their experiences, thoughts, and perceptions with others in their social circles or communities. Marketing experts widely recognize the persuasive power of marketing strategies in influencing consumer behaviour and shaping brand perception. Incorporating this potent marketing tool into overall marketing plans is essential for companies to drive sales and build a favourable brand reputation. Nevertheless, it contrasts with SMM - primarily offline and driven by personal interactions rather than digital platforms (Carmicheal 2022).

Exploring WOM marketing highlights the traditional, interpersonal aspect of restaurant recommendations. Understanding the role of both Word-of-Mouth (WOM) marketing and SMM provides insights into the interconnectedness of online and offline influences on dining choices and brand perception.

#### 4.14 Direct Marketing

The act of communicating is the foundation of the direct marketing strategy, with potential customers directly via multiple channels, to promote products or services and obtain a measurable response or action (Investopedia). Unlike SMM marketing, which targets an extensive demographic, direct marketing concentrates on particular individuals or organizations based on demographic, behavioural, or psychographic characteristics. Direct marketing encompasses targeted, one-on-one communication with potential customers through direct mail, email marketing, telemarketing, SMS marketing, and targeted advertising through digital platforms. It differs from the broader, community-driven approach of SMM (BDC).

Examining direct marketing in opposition to SMM sheds light on the precision and personalization possible in direct communication channels. It underscores the role of direct marketing as a more focused, albeit less interactive, strategy compared to the community-centric nature of SMM. Overall, Social Media Marketing plays a vital role in facilitating direct communication, personalized messaging, targeted advertising, and measurable results, making it an essential component of modern direct marketing strategies.

#### 4.15 Consumer Privacy Concerns

Consumer privacy concerns refer to the apprehensions, worries, and reservations individuals have regarding the protection, usage, and sharing of their personal information by businesses, organizations, or online platforms, including through digital marketing efforts. Organizations are increasingly amassing, retaining, and leveraging consumer data for diverse objectives, including targeted advertising, customized marketing, data analysis, and profiling (Gillis & Lutkevich 2023). This trend has given rise to concerns that warrant attention. This stands in contrast to the open and often data-driven nature of SMM.

Examining consumer privacy concerns as an opposite term emphasizes potential barriers and ethical considerations associated with SMM. Understanding how these concerns influence consumer perceptions and decision-making is crucial for contextualizing the impact of SMM on brand image.

#### 4.16 Negative Online Reviews

A negative online review refers to a critical or unfavorable assessment of a product, service, or experience posted by a customer or user on an online platform. These reviews typically express dissatisfaction, disappointment, or dissatisfaction with aspects such as product quality, customer service, pricing, or overall experience. Negative online reviews represent critical feedback or dissatisfaction expressed by customers on digital platforms. This stands in opposition to the positive portrayals often emphasized in SMM (Sandra 2023).

Considering the impact of negative online reviews in contrast to the positive content of SMM underscores the potential challenges and risks associated with managing online reputation. It also highlights the importance of addressing customer concerns and criticisms in the digital sphere.

#### 4.17 Offline Customer Experiences

Offline customer experiences refer to interactions, transactions, and engagements between customers and businesses that occur in physical, non-digital environments (Lila 2022). These experiences encompass a wide range of touchpoints where customers interact with a brand, product, or service in person, without the use of digital technology or online platforms. Offline customer experiences refer to in-person interactions, service quality, and ambiance at physical restaurant locations. This is distinct from the online interactions facilitated by SMM (Digital Strategy 2023).

Evaluating offline customer experiences alongside SMM emphasizes the importance of a holistic approach to restaurant branding. Understanding how online efforts align with or diverge from in-person experiences provides a nuanced perspective on the overall impact of SMM on consumer decision-making.

## 5 Empirical Research

This chapter delves into the theoretical and methodological perspectives that underpin the present research. It outlines the research techniques, approach, method, sampling, and data collection and analysis used in this study (Research Guides 2023). This passage describes a mixed-methods research approach used to research how social media marketing affects consumers' choices and brand perception in the restaurant industry. It involves quantitative surveys to gather consumer preferences and behaviours and qualitative analysis of content posted and engagement metrics. The study aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of the intricate connections being investigated.

The primary objective of the research was to seek the young adults and millennials' social media awareness in Finland region to their food choices and brand's perceptions.

### 5.1 Survey Approach

Adopting a quantitative research approach, empirical data was systematically gathered through a well-structured questionnaire. Specifically designed to resonate with individuals within the target demographic—students and those aged 18-35 influenced by social media in their dining choices, the questionnaire served as a strategic tool for efficiently capturing diverse quantitative data. This method facilitated an in-depth exploration of perceptions and behaviours tied to social media marketing within the restaurant industry.

### 5.2 Sampling

Research sampling entails choosing a subset of observations from a larger set. It involves selecting individuals or objects that represent the population's diversity. The study's objectives and research methodology determine the sampling methods used. The goal is to generalize sample results to the population. Sampling ensures that research findings accurately reflect population variability, while selection criteria possess a direct impact on study conclusions (Sheppard 2012).

The sample population, comprising individuals aged 18 to 35 in Finland, was strategically chosen due to their notable engagement with social media. Utilizing a convenience sampling method, practical considerations guided the selection process, aiming to achieve a representative cross-section of the target audience.

The research employed the simple random sampling method, a beneficial approach due to its uncomplicated data collection mechanism that suits the current scenario. Given that the



study concentrates on social media marketing, it is critical to analyse consumer perspectives with precision and impartiality. The method guarantees that the sample is selected randomly from the population, effectively reducing any biases that may influence the study's findings.

### 5.3 Data Collection Method

The study employed a quantitative approach to gather data via an online survey. The survey was created using Webropol Form and consisted of fifteen questions, encompassing both closed-ended and open-ended question formats. For example, there were multiple-choice questions where respondents had the option to select answers or use the "other" option to provide their responses. Furthermore, the participants were given the liberty to provide their written responses to specific questions.

The questions were categorized into three sub-sections in order to facilitate the accomplishment of the research objectives. There is a total of 15 questions. Group 1 consisted of questions 1, 2, 3, and 4, which aimed to assess respondents' level of social media awareness. For group 2, questions 5 to 10 focused on the factors that influence their food choices and how these factors affect their decision-making process when using such platforms. Furthermore, question 11 was included as a subsequent inquiry to question 10. Questions 12, 13, 14, and 15 were analysed to assess respondents' perceptions of restaurant brands.

The survey was constructed in the English language and published across multiple social media platforms. It was principally shared within Facebook groups, including the Vietnamese Community in Finland, International Students in Finland, and International Students in Lappeenranta. The survey was distributed directly to numerous respondents from various countries residing in Finland, particularly those working in a range of industries including restaurants, barista services, international business studies, finance, tourism, IT & Engineering, and human well-being.

To obtain responses from a diverse range of participants, the author distributed the survey to both social groups and individuals. The survey was primarily aimed at young individuals residing in Finland, particularly those living in the Helsinki region (Helsinki, Espoo, Vantaa) and Lappeenranta, who were between the ages of 18 and 35. Although it was distributed to multiple recipients, the target group was specifically defined. The questionnaire was released as a web link and simultaneously shared on multiple social platforms, as well as through direct messaging, to gather data from April 3rd to April 17th. These 15 days were allocated for the data collection process, resulting in a total of 53 responses from individuals of various genders.

The survey was conducted using the quantitative method due to its many benefits, including its ability to quickly and easily gather a large number of responses and its ability to display the results in numerical form using graphs like pie charts and bar charts (Sheppard 2012).

## 6 Research results Analysis

### 6.1 Questionnaires Analysis

Following 15 days of data collection, 53 people responded to the survey overall through online distribution and direct sharing via social media platforms within the age groups mentioned via Facebook Messenger, Instagram Direct Message (DM), and WhatsApp.

#### Respondents' basic information

What is your age group?  
Number of respondents: 53

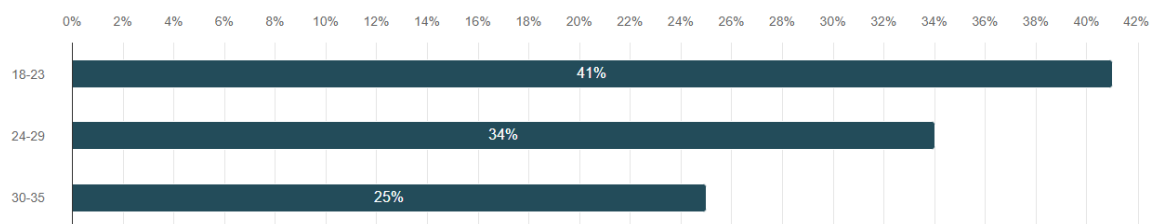


Figure 11 Age groups of respondents

The ratio of three distinct age groups 18 to 23, 24 to 29, and 30 to 35 is shown in the bar graph of Figure 11. Consequently, a comparatively youthful customer base was represented by the 41% of visitors who completed the survey and had an average age of 18 to 23. Participants between the ages of 24 and 29 come next, contributing a respectable 34%, whereas participants from 30 to 35 make up a total of 25% in the population.

Gender

Number of respondents: 53

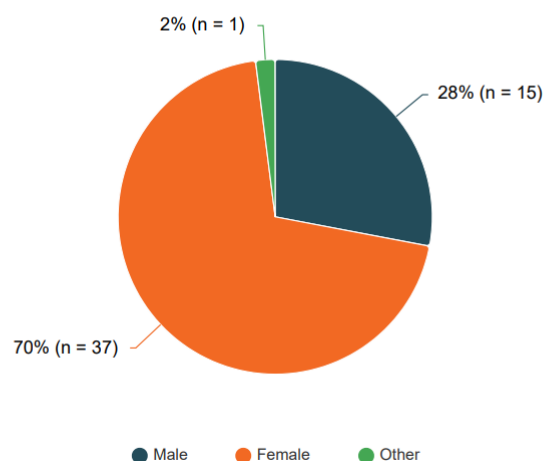


Figure 12 Genders of respondents

The pie chart of Figure 12 illustrates the demographic breakdown of respondents who participated in answering the thesis survey to reach the author's objective. Among the participants, 28% identified as "Male", comprising 15 individuals. The largest segment represents 70% of the respondents, accounting for 35 individuals who identified as "Female". "Other genders" constitutes a smaller portion, comprising 2% of the respondents, with one individual falling into this category.

## Social Media Awareness

How many hours per day do you spend on social media?

Number of respondents: 53

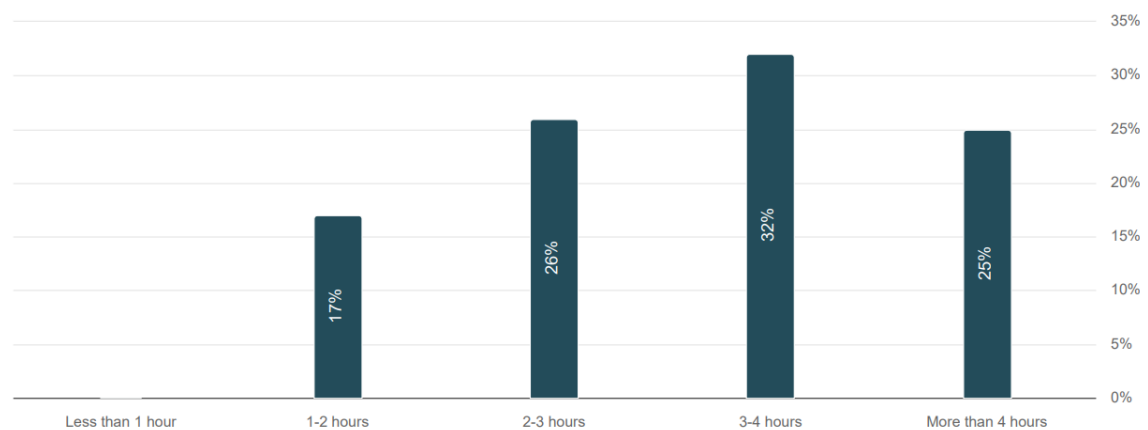


Figure 13 Social Media usage hours from respondents

The bar graph of Figure 13 illustrates the distribution of reported social media usage hours per day among 53 respondents, reflecting a comprehensive spectrum of engagement. Notably, none of the participants indicated spending less than one hour on social media. Specifically, 17% of respondents reported allocating 1-2 hours, while 26% dedicated 2-3 hours to social media activities. A substantial segment, comprising 32% of the reported participants, indicated spending 3-4 hours on social platforms. Additionally, 25% of respondents reported engaging with social media for more than 4 hours daily.

**How frequently do you engage with restaurant-related content on social media?**

Number of respondents: 53

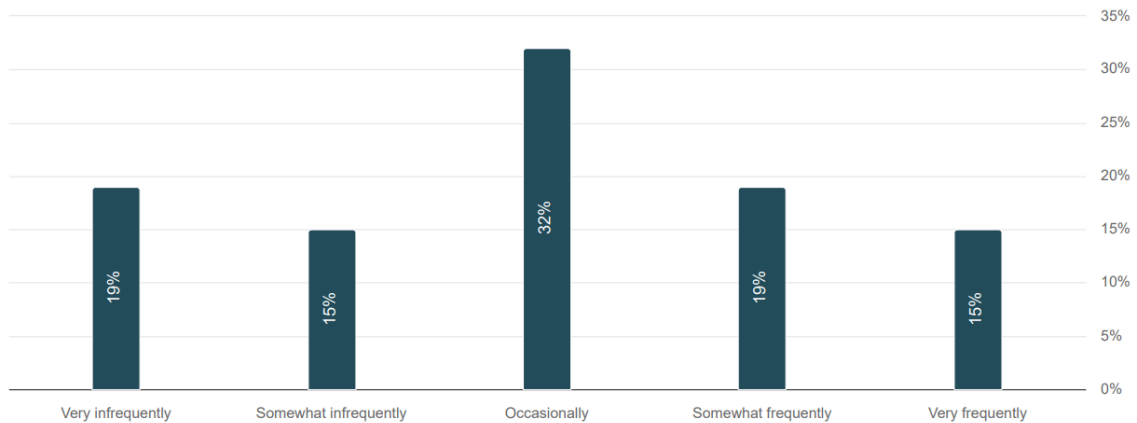


Figure 14 Frequency of engagement with restaurant-related content on social media

The bar graph of Figure 14 depicts the frequency of engagement with restaurant-related content on social media, offering valuable insights into consumer behavior within this domain. Notably, 19% of respondents indicated engaging with such content “Very Infrequently”, while a slightly smaller proportion, constituting 15% of the sample, reported doing it “Somewhat Infrequently”. In contrast, a significant segment of 32% expressed “Occasional” engagement with restaurant-related content on social platforms. Furthermore, an equivalent proportion of 19% reported engaging with such content ‘Somewhat Frequently’, while another 15% indicated ‘Very frequent’ interaction.

Select all platforms that apply to you in preference order (1= highest frequency of use ... 7= least frequency of use).

**Which social media platforms do you use frequently for restaurant-related content?**

Number of respondents: 53

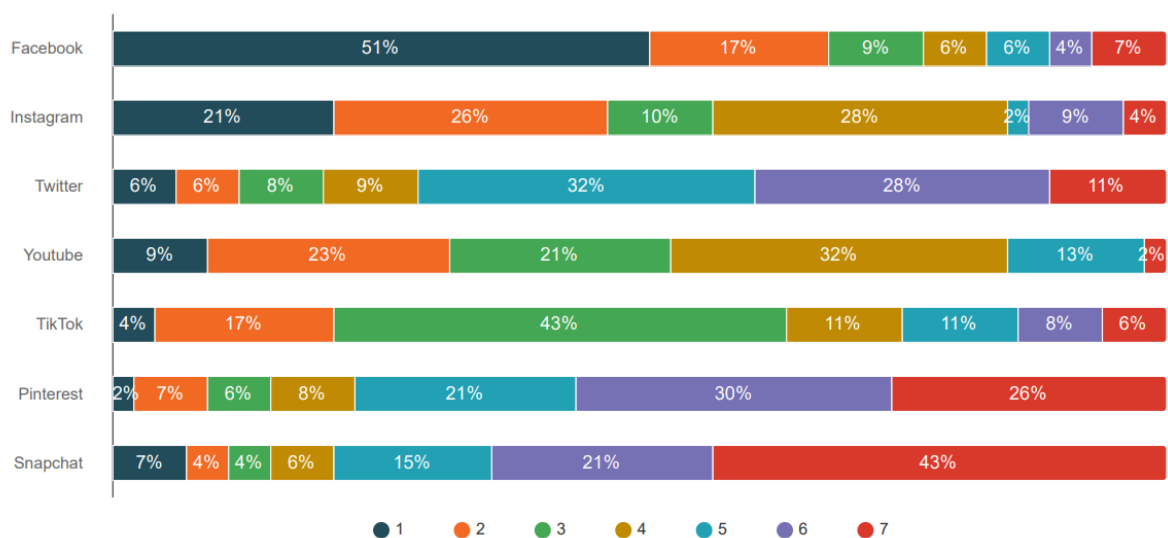


Figure 15 The frequency of social media platforms used in preference order

The bar graph of Figure 15 provides a detailed insight into the frequency of social media platforms chosen by respondents, categorized according to their preference order from 1 (most preferred) to 7 (least preferred). At the forefront, Facebook emerges as the dominant choice for the first preference, with a commanding 51% of respondents selecting it as their top platform. In contrast, Instagram secures a respectable 21% for the first choice, followed by YouTube, Snapchat and Twitter at 9%, 7%, 6% respectively. In addition, despite small contribution, TikTok and Pinterest still have 4% and 2% respectively of reported participants chose those platforms as their first choice.

Moving to the second preference, while Facebook maintains a notable presence with 17%, Instagram takes a lead with 26%, indicating a shift in preference among respondents. Moreover, such significant segments comprising of 23% for choosing YouTube and remarkably 17% for choosing TikTok as their second choice of preference. Interestingly, TikTok experiences a remarkable surge in popularity as the third choice, capturing a substantial 43% of respondents, followed by 21% of total respondents choosing YouTube platform, showcasing its appeal among certain demographics. For the fourth place, YouTube take its lead again of 32%, and a dominant of 28% participants choosing Instagram for this position. However, Snapchat consistently ranks as the least preferred platform across multiple choice ranks, with a significant 43% and 26% for Pinterest as their last choice.

Does a strong social media presence influence your likelihood to try a restaurant?

Number of respondents: 53

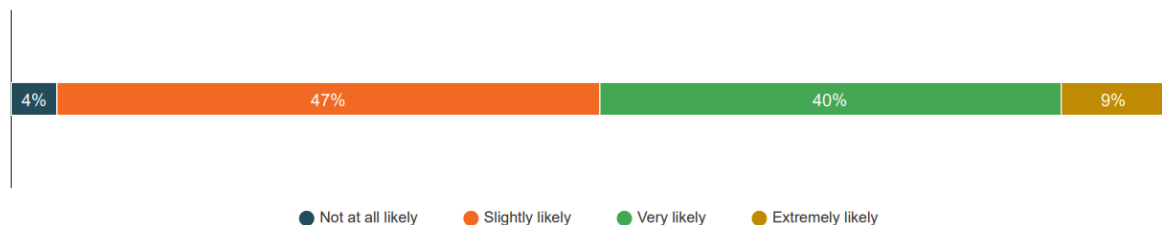


Figure 16 Likelihood to try a restaurant based on a strong social media presence

The bar graph of Figure 16 illustrates participants' likelihood to patronize a restaurant based on its strong social media presence, derived from a pool of 53 responses. A minority, comprising 4% of participants, expressed disinterest in trying a restaurant solely based on its social media presence, categorizing themselves as "Not at all likely". Conversely, a significant portion, constituting 47% of respondents, indicated a slight inclination towards trying such a restaurant, labeled as "Slightly likely". Furthermore, a substantial 40% of participants expressed a heightened interest, deeming themselves "Very likely" to patronize a restaurant with a robust social media presence. Finally, a noteworthy 9% of respondents displayed the

highest level of enthusiasm, labelling themselves as "Extremely likely" to try a restaurant under these circumstances.

### Influences of decision-making process

Have you ever visited a restaurant based on a social media recommendation or advertisement?

Number of respondents: 53

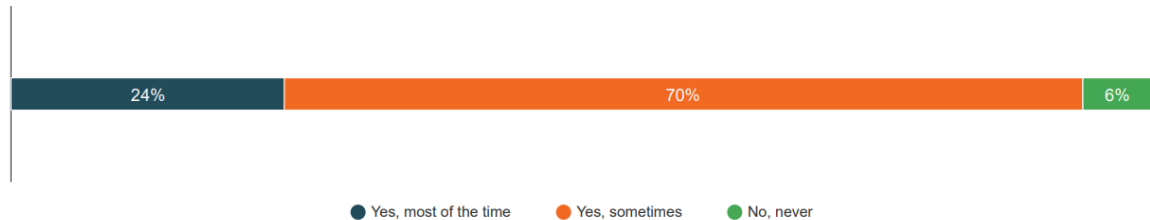


Figure 17 Restaurant visit based on a social media recommendation or advertisement

The bar graph of Figure 17 illustrates participants' tendencies regarding restaurant visits influenced by social media recommendations or advertisements. Among the total respondents, a substantial 70% indicated a propensity to visit restaurants based on such digital endorsements, categorizing their behaviour as "Yes, sometimes". Moreover, a noteworthy 24% of participants reported frequent reliance on social media recommendations, selecting "Yes, most of the time" as their response. In contrast, a smaller but still notable 6% of respondents asserted that they never visit restaurants based on social media promotions, opting for the category "No, never".

Does user-generated content (customer reviews, photos) on social media impact your decisions to try a restaurant?

Number of respondents: 53

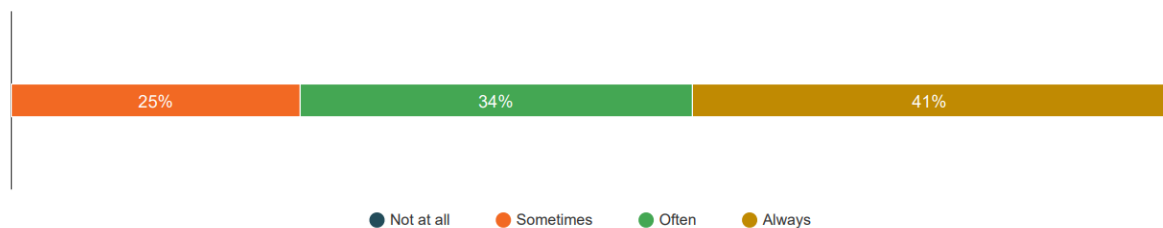


Figure 18 Impact of user-generated contents (customer reviews, photos) on trying a restaurant

The bar graph of Figure 18 portrays participants' perspectives on the influence of user-generated content, such as customer reviews and photos, on their decision to try a restaurant. Notably, all respondents acknowledged some level of impact from such content, with none selecting "No, not at all". The data reveals that a significant portion of participants, comprising 41%, consistently rely on user-generated content, categorizing their behavior as "Always". Additionally, 34% of respondents indicated frequent reliance, choosing "Often", while a further 25% reported occasional reliance, selecting "Sometimes".

**How important are online reviews and ratings when considering whether to dine at a particular restaurant?**

Number of respondents: 53

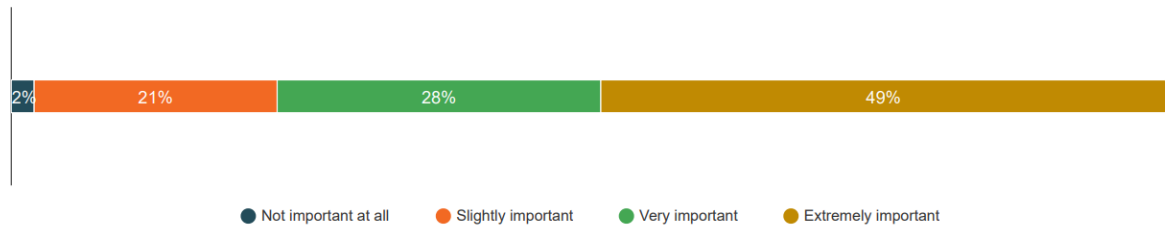


Figure 19 Importance of online reviews and ratings on dining choices

The bar graph of Figure 19 delineates participants' perspectives on the significance of online reviews and ratings in influencing dining choices. Notably, a negligible 2% of respondents indicated minimal importance by selecting "Not important at all". In contrast, the majority of participants expressed a high regard for online reviews and ratings, with 49% categorizing them as "Extremely important" in their decision-making process. Furthermore, a significant 28% deemed online reviews and ratings as "Very important", underscoring their substantial influence. Additionally, 21% of respondents acknowledged the relevance of online reviews and ratings, selecting "Slightly important".

**Select all factors that apply to you in preference order (1= the most influencing ... 8= the least influencing)**

**What factors on social media most influence your decision to try a new restaurant?**

Number of respondents: 53

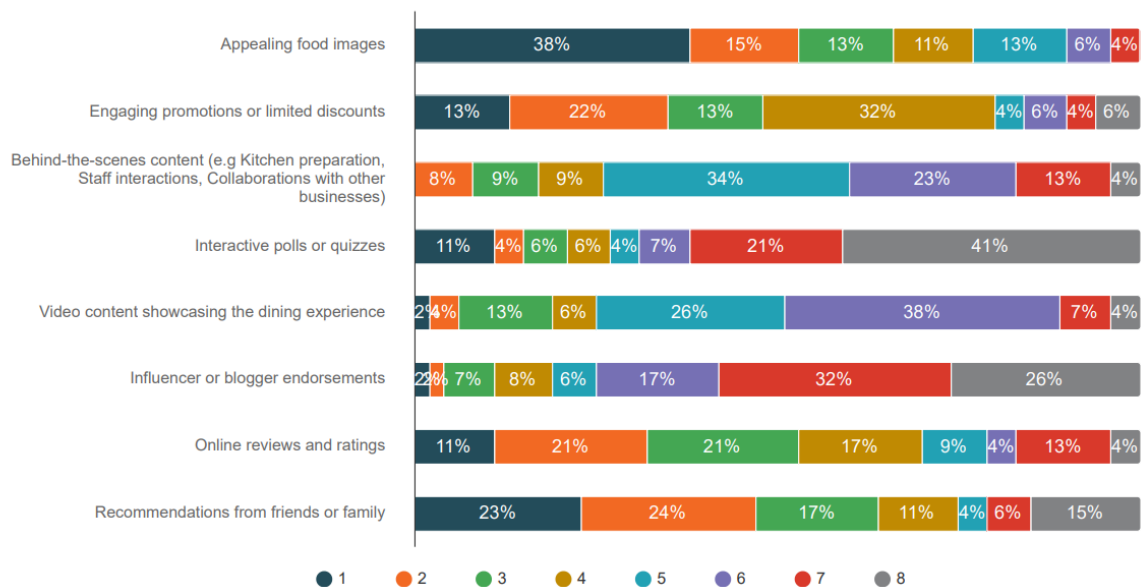


Figure 20 Factors influence consumer's decision on trying a new restaurant in preference order

The bar graph of Figure 20 provides a comprehensive analysis of factors influencing consumers' decisions to try a new restaurant, categorized by preference order from 1 (highest



influencing factor) to 8 (least influencing factor). Notably, "Appealing food images" emerges as the most influential factor, commanding a significant 38% of respondents selecting it as their top choice. Following closely, "Recommendations from friends or family" garnered considerable attention, with 23% of respondents ranking it as their first choice. "Engaging promotions or limited discounts" and "Online reviews and ratings" also held notable sway, with 13% and 11% respectively selecting them as their top choice. In addition, "Interactive polls or quizzes" contents also stand as consumers' top choice with 11%, while "Video content showcasing the dining experience" and "Influencer or blogger endorsements" factors received only 2% as the most influencing factor from participants.

Moving to the second preference, while "Engaging promotions or limited discounts" maintains a notable presence with 22%, "Recommendations from friends or family" on social media platforms takes a lead with 24%, indicating a shift in preference among respondents. Moreover, such significant segments comprising of 21% for choosing "Online reviews and ratings" factor and remarkably 15% for choosing "Appealing food images" as their second choice of preference. Interestingly, "Online reviews and ratings" contents experiences a remarkable surge in popularity as the third choice, capturing a substantial 21% of respondents, followed by 17% of total respondents choosing "Recommendations from friends or family", showcasing its appeal among certain demographics. For the fourth place, "Engaging promotions or limited discounts" take its lead of 32%, and a dominant of 17% participants choosing "Online reviews and ratings" contents for this position. For the fifth place, "Behind-the-scenes contents" take its lead with 34%, followed by "Video content showcasing the dining experience" factor with 26%. However, "Interactive polls or quizzes" and "Influencer or blogger endorsements" consistently ranks as the least preferred element across multiple choice ranks, with a significant 41% and 26% as consumers' the least influencing factor.

How important is visual appeal in social media content for influencing restaurant choices?

Number of respondents: 53

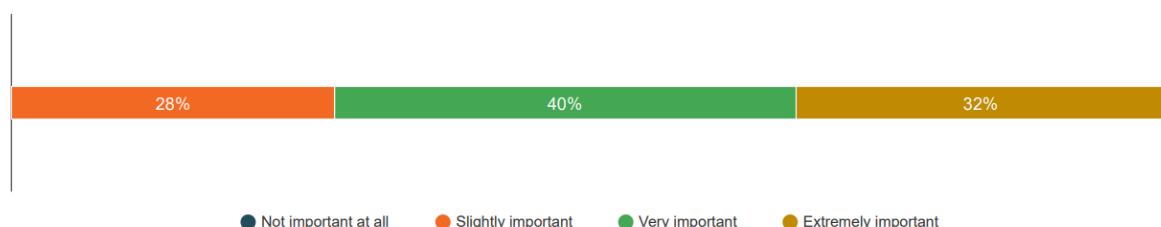


Figure 21 Importance of visual appeals in social media contents for dining choices

The bar graph of Figure 21 provides a comprehensive exploration of consumers' recognition of the importance of visual appeals in social media content when making dining choices.

Strikingly, none of the respondents considered visual appeal "Not important at all," indicating a unanimous acknowledgment of its significance. Notably, a substantial 32% of participants regarded visual appeal as "Extremely important," emphasizing its paramount role in influencing their dining decisions. Furthermore, 40% of respondents deemed it "Very important," while 28% of respondents acknowledged its relevance considered as "Slightly important".

Have you ever changed your restaurant choice based on social media content encountered just before making a decision?

Number of respondents: 53

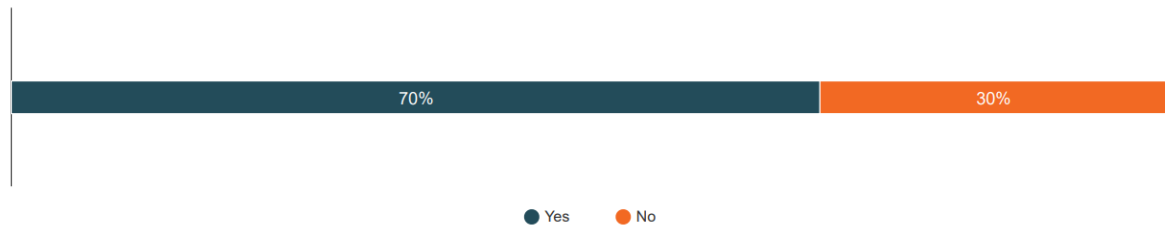


Figure 22 Changing restaurant choices based on social media contents before making a decision

The bar graph of Figure 22 provides insights into participants' tendencies regarding changes in their restaurant choices based on social media content immediately before making a decision. Notably, a significant majority of 70% of participants acknowledged making alterations to their restaurant choices under the influence of social media content. In contrast, a minority of 30% indicated that they did not modify their decisions based on such digital contents.

If yes, why? (Select all that apply)

Number of respondents: 37 , selected answers: 89

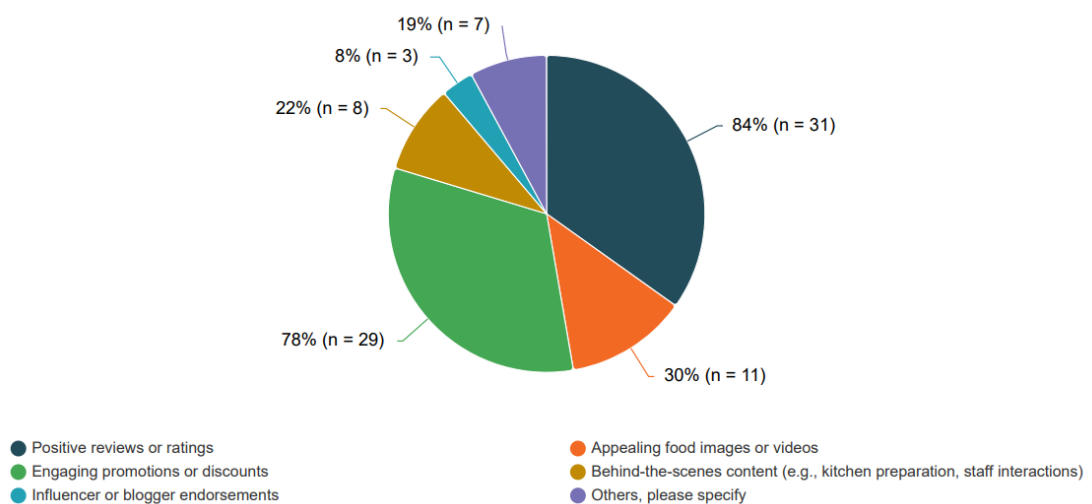


Figure 23 Reasons of changing restaurant choices when choosing "Yes"

The pie chart of Figure 23 depicts the reasons behind participants' decisions to change their restaurant choices influenced by social media content. Out of 53 respondents, there were 37 respondents who indicated making modifications to their dining selections when encountered restaurant-related social media contents. Eventually, 37 responses submitted have provided insights into consumers' decision-making process, resulting in 89 answers submitted for the listed options. Notably, "Positive reviews or ratings" emerged as the most influential factor, with a significant 84% (n=31) of respondents selecting it as a reason for their changes. Following closely, "Engaging promotions or discounts" garnered considerable attention, with 78% (n=29) of respondents citing it as a motivating factor. Additionally, "Appealing food images or videos" influenced 30% (n=11) of respondents, while "Behind-the-scenes content" was chosen by 22% (n=8) of participants. Furthermore, 19% (n=7) of respondents selected "Others" as their reason, underscoring the diversity of factors influencing their decisions.

**Please specify here**

Number of respondents: 7

Environment and aesthetic
News that restaurant staff was overworked and weren't treated well
Viral/trending food items, personal cravings and seasonal/limited food/drinks
Limited or seasonal items
Trending food items on social media platforms
The atmosphere, restaurant's vibe/design
Limited products

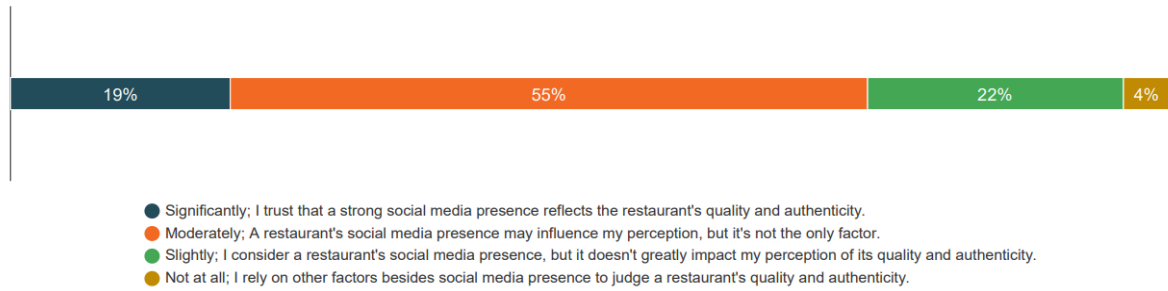
Figure 24 Respondents' other answers when choosing "Yes"

Regarding Figure 24, the list illustrates participants' responses when choosing the "Other, please specify" option when making modifications to their restaurant choices. Among the specified reasons provided by participants; environmental factors, aesthetic restaurant design, and atmosphere, news about unfair staff treatment, viral or trending food items, personal cravings, and limited or seasonal offerings emerged as significant contributors to their decision-making process.

**Consumer's Perceptions towards restaurant brands**

**To what extent does a restaurant's social media presence influence your perception of its quality and authenticity?**

Number of respondents: 53

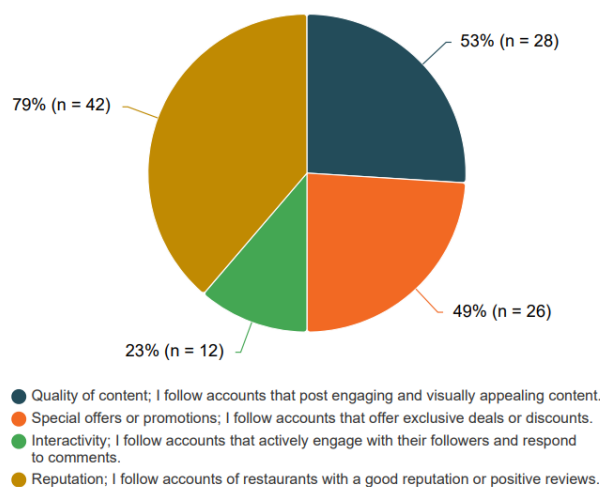


**Figure 25** How restaurants' social media presence influence consumer perceptions of their quality and authenticity

The bar graph of Figure 25 unveils insights into how consumers perceive the quality and authenticity of restaurants based on their social media presence. Notably, a significant majority of 55% of respondents expressed a moderate level of influence, indicating that a restaurant's social media presence may impact their perception to some extent, although it is not the sole determining factor. Likewise, 19% of participants attributed a higher level of significance to social media presence, believing that a strong presence reflects the restaurant's quality and authenticity significantly. Meanwhile, a notable 22% of respondents acknowledged considering a restaurant's social media presence but indicated that it only slightly impacts their perception of its quality and authenticity. In contrast, only a minimal 4% of participants stated that social media presence has no bearing on their judgment, relying on other factors to assess a restaurant's quality and authenticity.

**What factors contribute to your decision to follow a restaurant's social media accounts? (Select all that apply)**

Number of respondents: 53 , selected answers: 108



**Figure 26** Factors contributing to consumer's decision to following restaurant accounts

The pie chart of Figure 26 illustrates the various factors influencing consumers' decisions to follow restaurant accounts on social media platforms, based on data collected from 53 respondents, who provided a total of 108 answers for the listed options. The chart reveals that the quality of content plays a significant role, with 79% (n=42) of respondents consider reputation important, opting to follow accounts associated with positive reviews or a good reputation. Additionally, a substantial 53% (n=28) of participants seen quality of content plays a significant role, indicating a preference for accounts that post engaging and visually appealing content. Moreover, a substantial 49% (n=26) of participants are drawn to accounts offering special offers or promotions, highlighting the appeal of exclusive deals and discounts. Furthermore, 23% (n=12) prioritize interactivity, favouring accounts that actively engage with followers and respond to comments.

How likely are you to trust a restaurant recommendation from a social media influencer?

Number of respondents: 53

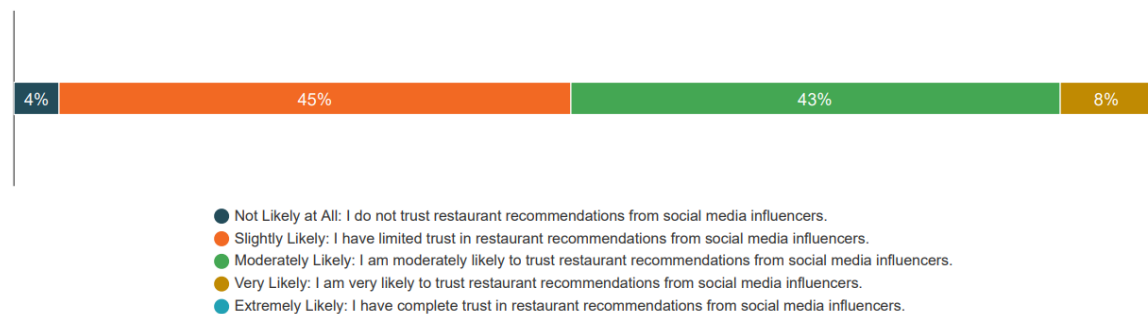


Figure 27 Likelihood to trust a restaurant recommendation based on social media influencers

The bar chart of Figure 27 illustrates consumers' likelihood to trust restaurant recommendations based on social media influencers, as determined by responses from a sample of participants. Notably, a minority of 4% indicated that they do not trust restaurant recommendations from social media influencers at all, choosing the category "Not Likely at All." In contrast, the largest proportion, comprising 45% of respondents, expressed limited trust in such recommendations, selecting "Slightly Likely." Moreover, a substantial 43% of participants stated that they are moderately likely to trust restaurant recommendations from social media influencers, reflecting a significant level of trust in this source. Additionally, 8% of respondents expressed a high degree of trust, choosing "Very Likely" to indicate their inclination to trust restaurant recommendations from social media influencers. Interestingly, none of the participants selected the option "Extremely Likely," suggesting that complete trust in restaurant recommendations from social media influencers is not prevalent among the surveyed individuals.

How likely are you to recommend a restaurant based on its positive social media image?

Number of respondents: 53

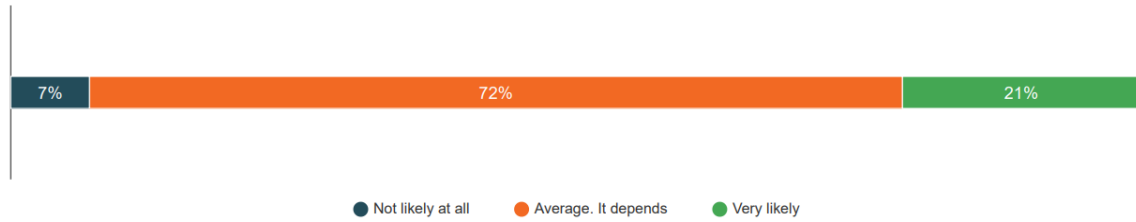


Figure 28 Likelihood to recommend a restaurant based on its positive social media image

The bar chart of Figure 28 provides insights into consumers' likelihood to recommend a restaurant based on its positive social media image, derived from responses collected from a sample of participants. Notably, a small proportion of 7% indicated that they are "Not Likely at All" to recommend a restaurant solely based on its positive social media image. In contrast, the majority of respondents, comprising 72%, expressed an "Average. It depends" stance, suggesting that their likelihood to recommend a restaurant is contingent on factors beyond its social media presence. However, a significant 21% of participants stated that they are "Very Likely" to recommend a restaurant if it has a positive social media image, underscoring the influence of digital branding and online reputation on consumer behaviour.

## 6.2 Evaluation of the reliability of the survey analysis

Question	Count	Average	Confidence interval	Median	Standard deviation
1. What is your age group?	53	1.83	1.61 – 2.05	2	0.8
2. Gender	53	1.74	1.6 – 1.87	2	0.49
3. How many hours per day do you spend on social media?	53	3.64	3.36 – 3.92	4	1.04
4. How frequently do you engage with restaurant-related content on social media?	53	2.96	2.61 – 3.32	3	1.32
5. Does a strong social media presence influence your likelihood to try a restaurant?	53	2.55	2.35 – 2.74	2	0.72
6. Have you ever visited a restaurant based on a social media recommendation or advertisement?	53	1.81	1.67 – 1.95	2	0.52
7. Does user-generated content (customer reviews, photos) on social media impact your decisions to try a restaurant?	53	3.17	2.95 – 3.39	3	0.8
8. How important are online reviews and ratings when considering whether to dine at a particular restaurant?	53	3.25	3.02 – 3.47	3	0.85
9. How important is visual appeal in social media content for influencing restaurant choices?	53	3.04	2.83 – 3.25	3	0.78
10. Have you ever changed your restaurant choice based on social media content encountered just before making a decision?	53	1.3	1.18 – 1.43	1	0.46
11. If yes, why? (Select all that apply)	89	2.57	2.26 – 2.89	3	1.51
13. To what extent does a restaurant's social media presence influence your perception of its quality and authenticity?	53	2.11	1.91 – 2.32	2	0.75
14. What factors contribute to your decision to follow a restaurant's social media accounts? (Select all that apply)	108	2.63	2.4 – 2.86	2.5	1.24
15. How likely are you to trust a restaurant recommendation from a social media influencer?	53	2.55	2.36 – 2.73	3	0.7
16. How likely are you to recommend a restaurant based on its positive social media image?	53	2.13	1.99 – 2.27	2	0.52

Figure 29 Survey reliability analysis (Webropol)

### Question 1: What is your age group?

- The confidence interval (1.61 – 2.05) is relatively narrow, indicating a high level of confidence in the estimated average age group.
- The standard deviation (0.80) is moderate, suggesting some variability in age representation among respondents but not excessively high.
- The average and median values are close, indicating a relatively normal distribution of responses around the mean.
- Overall, the analysis for question 1 appears to be reliable, with a fairly precise estimate of the average age group.

### Question 2: Gender

- The confidence interval (1.6 – 1.87) is relatively narrow, indicating a high level of confidence in the estimated average gender distribution.
- The standard deviation (0.49) is low, suggesting a consistent gender distribution among respondents.

- The average and median values are close, indicating a relatively normal distribution of responses around the mean.
- The analysis for question 2 seems reliable, with a precise estimate of the average gender distribution among respondents.

Question 3: How many hours per day do you spend on social media?

- The confidence interval (3.36 – 3.92) is somewhat wide compared to the other questions, suggesting a moderate level of uncertainty in the estimated average hours spent on social media per day.
- The standard deviation (1.04) is moderate, indicating some variability in social media usage among respondents.
- The average and median values are close, indicating a relatively normal distribution of responses around the mean.
- While the analysis for question 3 provides valuable insights, the wider confidence interval and moderate standard deviation suggest a slightly lower reliability compared to other questions.

Question 4: How frequently do you engage with restaurant-related content on social media?

- The confidence interval (2.61 – 3.32) is somewhat wide, indicating a moderate level of uncertainty in the estimated average frequency of engagement with restaurant-related content on social media.
- The standard deviation (1.32) is relatively high, suggesting significant variability in engagement levels among respondents.
- While the average and median values are close, the higher standard deviation and wider confidence interval suggest a slightly lower reliability compared to other questions.

Question 5: Does a strong social media presence influence your likelihood to try a restaurant?

- The confidence interval (2.35 – 2.74) is relatively narrow, indicating a high level of confidence in the estimated average influence of social media presence.
- The standard deviation (0.72) is moderate, suggesting some variability in the extent to which respondents are influenced by social media presence.
- The average and median values are close, indicating a relatively normal distribution of responses around the mean.
- The analysis for question 5 appears to be reliable, with a fairly precise estimate of the average influence of social media presence on respondents' likelihood to try a restaurant.



Question 6: Have you ever visited a restaurant based on a social media recommendation or advertisement?

- The confidence interval (1.67 – 1.95) is relatively narrow, indicating a high level of confidence in the estimated average likelihood of visiting a restaurant based on social media recommendation or advertisement.
- The standard deviation (0.52) is low, suggesting consistent responses among respondents.
- The analysis for question 6 appears to be reliable, with a precise estimate of the average likelihood of visiting a restaurant based on social media recommendation or advertisement.

Question 7: Does user-generated content (customer reviews, photos) on social media impact your decisions to try a restaurant?

- The confidence interval (2.95 – 3.39) is relatively narrow, indicating a high level of confidence in the estimated average impact of user-generated content on decisions to try a restaurant.
- The standard deviation (0.80) is moderate, suggesting some variability in the extent of this impact among respondents.
- The analysis for question 7 seems reliable, with a precise estimate of the average impact of user-generated content on decisions to try a restaurant.

Question 8: How important are online reviews and ratings when considering whether to dine at a particular restaurant?

- The confidence interval (3.02 – 3.47) is relatively narrow, indicating a high level of confidence in the estimated average importance of online reviews and ratings.
- The standard deviation (0.85) is moderate, suggesting some variability in the perceived importance of reviews among respondents.
- The analysis for question 8 appears to be reliable, with a precise estimate of the average importance of online reviews and ratings.

Question 9: How important is visual appeal in social media content for influencing restaurant choices?

- The confidence interval (2.83 – 3.25) is relatively narrow, indicating a high level of confidence in the estimated average importance of visual appeal in social media content.

- The standard deviation (0.78) is moderate, suggesting some variability in the importance placed on visual appeal among respondents.
- The analysis for question 9 seems reliable, with a precise estimate of the average importance of visual appeal in social media content.

Question 10: Have you ever changed your restaurant choice based on social media content encountered just before making a decision?

- The confidence interval (1.18 – 1.43) is relatively narrow, indicating a high level of confidence in the estimated average likelihood of changing a restaurant choice based on social media content.
- The standard deviation (0.46) is low, suggesting consistent responses among respondents.
- The analysis for question 10 appears to be reliable, with a precise estimate of the average likelihood of changing a restaurant choice based on social media content.

Question 11: If yes, why? (Select all that apply)

- The confidence interval (2.26 – 2.89) is relatively wide, indicating some uncertainty in the estimated average reasons for changing restaurant choice based on social media content.
- The standard deviation (1.51) is high, suggesting significant variability in the reasons among respondents.
- While the average and median values provide insight into the reasons, the higher standard deviation and wider confidence interval suggest a lower reliability compared to other questions.

Question 12: To what extent does a restaurant's social media presence influence your perception of its quality and authenticity?

- The confidence interval (1.91 – 2.32) is relatively narrow, indicating a high level of confidence in the estimated average influence of a restaurant's social media presence on perception of quality and authenticity.
- The standard deviation (0.75) is moderate, suggesting some variability in the extent of this influence among respondents.
- The analysis for question 12 appears to be reliable, with a precise estimate of the average influence of a restaurant's social media presence.

Question 13: What factors contribute to your decision to follow a restaurant's social media accounts? (Select all that apply)

- The confidence interval (2.40 – 2.86) is relatively narrow, indicating a high level of confidence in the estimated average factors contributing to the decision to follow a restaurant's social media accounts.
- The standard deviation (1.24) is moderate, suggesting some variability in the factors considered important among respondents.
- The analysis for question 13 seems reliable, with a precise estimate of the average factors contributing to the decision to follow a restaurant's social media accounts.

Question 14: How likely are you to trust a restaurant recommendation from a social media influencer?

- The confidence interval (2.36 – 2.73) is relatively narrow, indicating a high level of confidence in the estimated average likelihood of trusting a restaurant recommendation from a social media influencer.
- The standard deviation (0.70) is moderate, suggesting some variability in the level of trust placed on influencer recommendations among respondents.
- The analysis for question 14 appears to be reliable, with a precise estimate of the average likelihood of trusting influencer recommendations.

Question 15: How likely are you to recommend a restaurant based on its positive social media image?

- The confidence interval (1.99 – 2.27) is relatively narrow, indicating a high level of confidence in the estimated average likelihood of recommending a restaurant based on its positive social media image.
- The standard deviation (0.52) is low, suggesting consistent responses among respondents.
- The analysis for question 15 appears to be reliable, with a precise estimate of the average likelihood of recommending a restaurant based on its positive social media image.

## 6.3 Qualitative Analysis of Social media contents and Engagement metrics

### 6.3.1 Overview of Social Media Platforms

In Finland, restaurants leverage a variety of social media platforms to engage with their target audience and promote their offerings. Each platform offers unique features and benefits, catering to different preferences and behaviours of users within the 18-35 age group (SAMHSA – Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration):

<b>Social Media Platforms</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Benefits</b>
Instagram	<p>Widely popular among younger demographics.</p> <p>A visual-centric platform ideal for showcasing mouthwatering food dishes, stylish restaurant interiors, and captivating dining experiences.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To showcase menu items and restaurant ambiance through photos and videos.</li> <li>2. Sharing via Feeds, behind-the-scenes glimpses, and interact with followers through visually engaging content, stories, and IGTV videos.</li> </ol>
Facebook	<p>Widely utilize in both younger and older age groups.</p> <p>A valuable platform for restaurants to connect with a diverse audience, including families, professionals, and local community members.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Used for sharing news, events, and promotions, targeting a broader audience demographic.</li> <li>2. Posting menu launches, special promotions, and themed nights.</li> <li>3. Utilizing its unique features: event creation, group discussions, and targeted advertising</li> </ol> <p>⇒ Enable restaurants to foster community engagement and drive online and offline interactions.</p>
TikTok	<p>Emerging platform gaining traction among younger demographics.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Create entertaining and relatable content, such as chef challenges, recipe tutorials, and behind-the-scenes moments.</li> </ol>

	Showcase their creativity and personality through short-form videos and trends	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discovery feed and viral contents to reach new audiences and capitalize on trending topics, memes, and challenges to drive engagement and brand awareness.</li> </ol>
Twitter	<p>A platform for restaurants to share quick bites of information, engage in conversations, and participate in trending topics and hashtags.</p> <p>Sharing real-time updates, promotions, and engage in conversations with followers.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Announce daily specials, respond to customer inquiries and feedback, and join relevant conversations within the local community or broader industry.</li> <li>Retweet and like functionalities enable restaurants to amplify their messages and connect with influencers, journalists, and food enthusiasts.</li> </ol>
YouTube	A video-sharing platform, offers restaurants an opportunity to showcase their culinary expertise, share cooking tutorials, and provide virtual tours of their establishments.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create engaging video content, such as chef interviews, cooking demonstrations, and restaurant reviews, to educate, entertain, and inspire viewers.</li> <li>The platform's search engine optimization (SEO) capabilities and monetization options enable restaurants to reach a global audience and generate additional revenue through advertising and sponsored content partnerships.</li> </ol>
Pinterest	A visual discovery platform where users can find and save ideas for recipes, food inspiration, and dining experiences.	Create boards featuring their menu items, recipes, interior design inspiration, and seasonal promotions to attract users searching for meal ideas and restaurant recommendations.
Snapchat	A popular platform among younger demographics for its ephemeral content and	Sharing behind-the-scenes glimpses, limited-time offers, and exclusive promotions to engage with their audience in a fun and playful manner.

	interactive features like filters and lenses.	
Food Review Websites	Platforms like TripAdvisor, Google Reviews are popular destinations for users seeking restaurant recommendations and reviews.	Actively monitor and engage with reviews on these platforms to address customer feedback, improve their service, and maintain a positive online reputation.

Therefore, restaurants can effectively connect with their target audience, display their offerings, and improve their brand visibility and reputation by utilizing various social media platforms and online review websites.



Figure 30 Social Medias platforms

### 6.3.2 Content Analysis

There are several forms of social media content that businesses may produce and distribute. Each sort of content has distinct advantages and may be utilized to accomplish a variety of tasks, including improving brand recognition, generating traffic to a website, and advertising (Contentiy 2023).

Restaurants strategically emphasize visually appealing content on social media platforms, showcasing high-quality images of their signature food dishes, inviting restaurant interiors, and memorable customer experiences. Captions accompanying these visuals are thoughtfully crafted, featuring menu descriptions, special promotions, and compelling calls to action

that encourage followers to visit the restaurant or interact with the post. Moreover, there is a strong emphasis on authenticity, with behind-the-scenes content spotlighting the food preparation processes and genuine staff interactions, offering a transparent and personalized glimpse into the restaurant's operations. This combination of captivating visuals and authentic storytelling enhances engagement and fosters connections with the restaurant's audience, ultimately driving interest and patronage.

Various types of content commonly shared by restaurants on social media platforms to draw attention to customer eyes, including Visual contents, Textual contents, User-generated contents, Live contents, Video contents and Interactive contents (Contentiy 2023):

### Visual Contents

Visual Content is a popular type of content on social media, which is represented by the number of asterisks. It includes images, infographics, and other types of graphics that are designed to be eye-catching and shareable (Contentiy 2023).

Examples of visual contents on social media include:

- Instagram posts
- Facebook and LinkedIn images
- Infographic
- Memes and GIFs

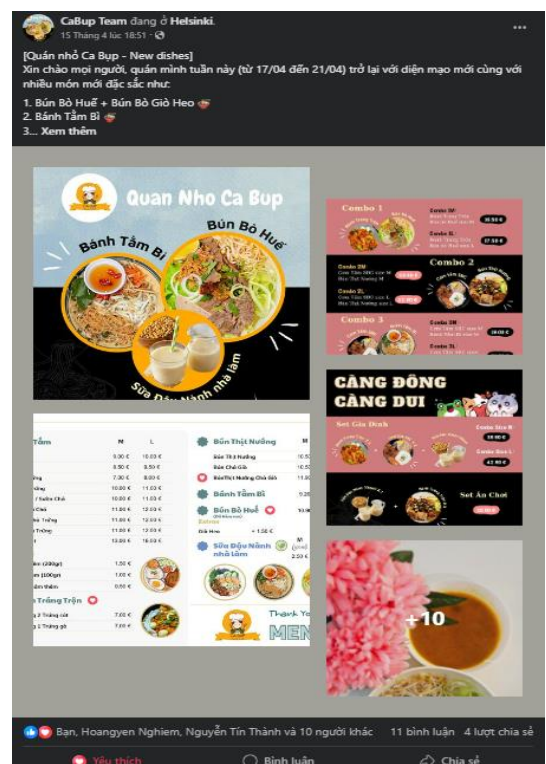
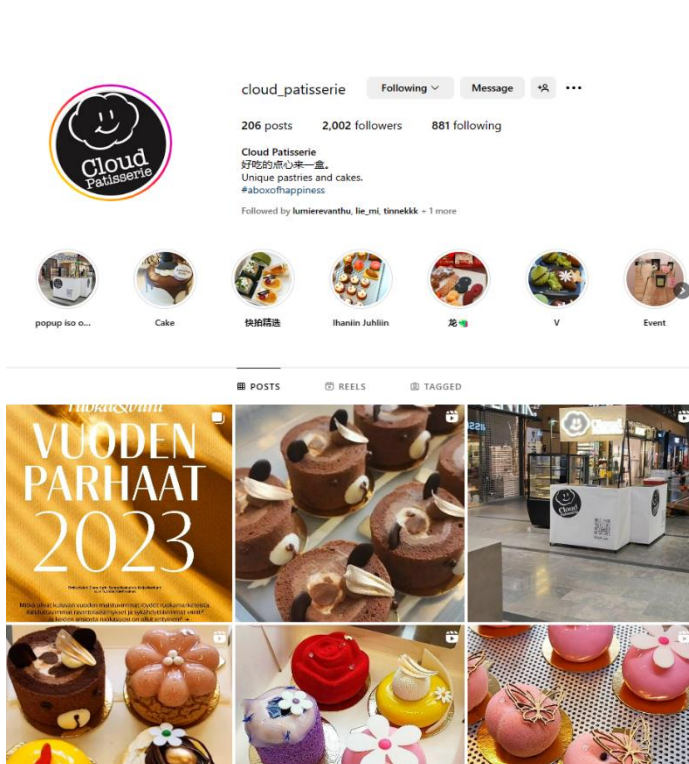


Figure 31 Visual content - Instagram posts (@cloud\_patisserie) and Facebook posts (CaBup Team)

### Textual Contents

Written content is one of the most common types of content on social media. It includes posts, updates, and captions that are primarily text-based. Written content can range from short, punchy headlines to longer-form blog posts and articles (Contentiy 2023).

Examples of written contents on social media include:

- Facebook posts
- Instagram captions
- Tweets
- LinkedIn updates
- Blog posts



Figure 32 Written contents - Instagram captions (@chatime\_finland)

### User-generated Contents

Any content produced by a brand's clients or users is referred to as user-generated content rather than by the company itself (UGC). Among other things, UGC can take the shape of images, motion pictures, reviews, and comments (Contentiy 2023).



The benefits of using user-generated content on social media include increased authenticity, improved brand awareness, and higher engagement rates. UGC is often more relatable and trustworthy to consumers than content created by brands themselves. Additionally, UGC can help to increase the message of a brand by motivating users to distribute content across their own networks.

Examples of User-generated-content on social media include:

- Product reviews
- Product images shared on social media
- YouTube videos
- Customer's testimonials photos
- Mention of positive experience at the restaurant

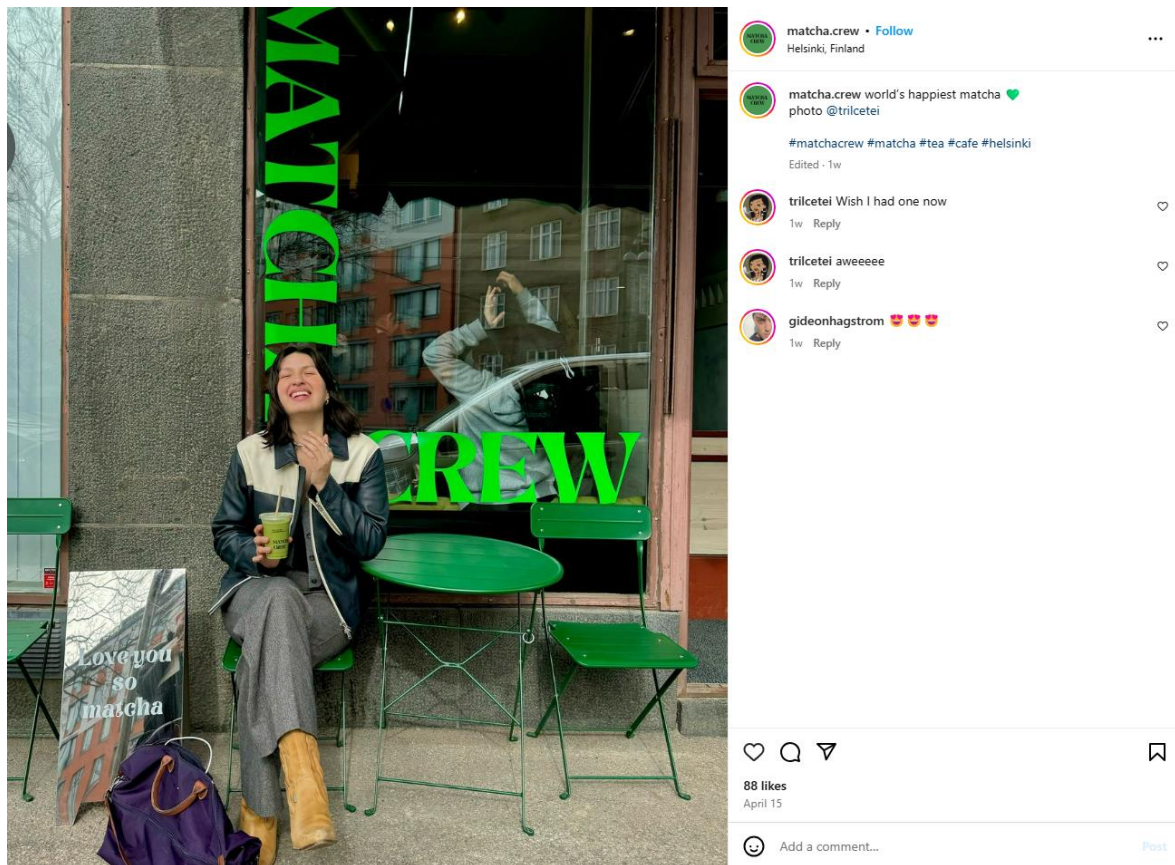


Figure 33 User-generated content - customer reviews (@matcha.crew, @trilcetei)

### Live Contents

Live content refers to any content that is broadcast in real-time on social media. This can include live videos, live chats, and live events. Live content is becoming increasingly popular

on social media platforms because it creates a sense of urgency and encourages engagement from viewers (Contentiy 2023).

Examples of live content on social media include:

- Facebook Live videos
- Instagram Live videos
- Twitter chats
- Unveilings of new products, open discussions, and backstage contents

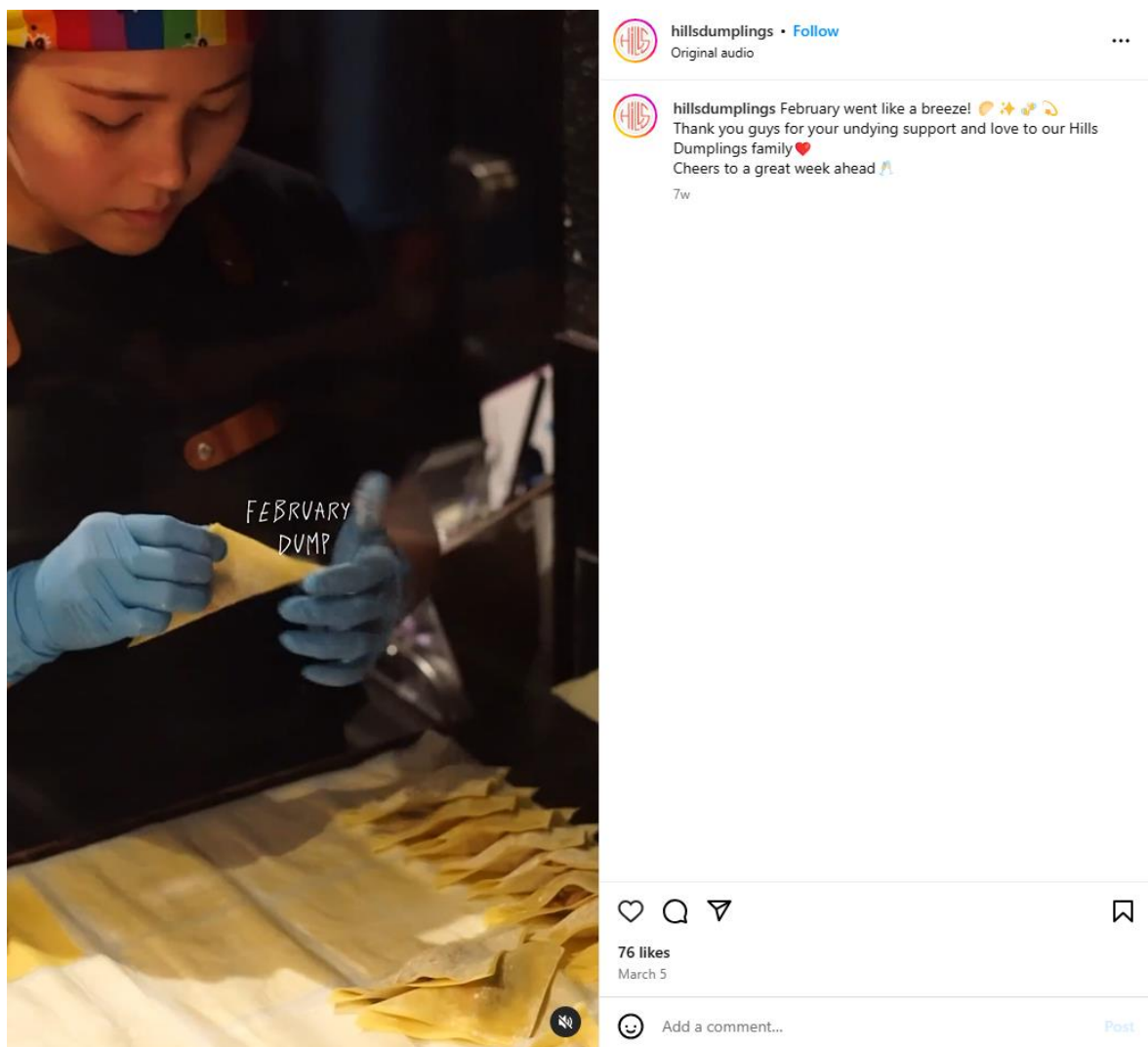


Figure 34 Live contents - Behind-the-scenes (@hillsdumplings)

### Video Contents

One of the most popular sorts of material on social media is video, and its popularity is only increasing. Video content allows businesses to engage their audience in a unique way, conveying complex ideas or messages in a more digestible format. Video content on social

media can come in many forms, including product demos, explainer videos, live videos, interviews, and more (Contentiy 2023).

Examples of video content on social media include:

- **Product demos:** A company might showcase its new product in action, demonstrating its features and benefits.
- **Explainer videos:** A company might create a video that explains how its product works or how to use it.
- **Live video events:** A business could hold a live video event, such as a Q&A session or a peek behind the scenes.
- **Interviews:** A company might conduct interviews with experts or influencers in its industry.
- **Brand videos:** A company might create a video that showcases its brand values or tells the story of the business.

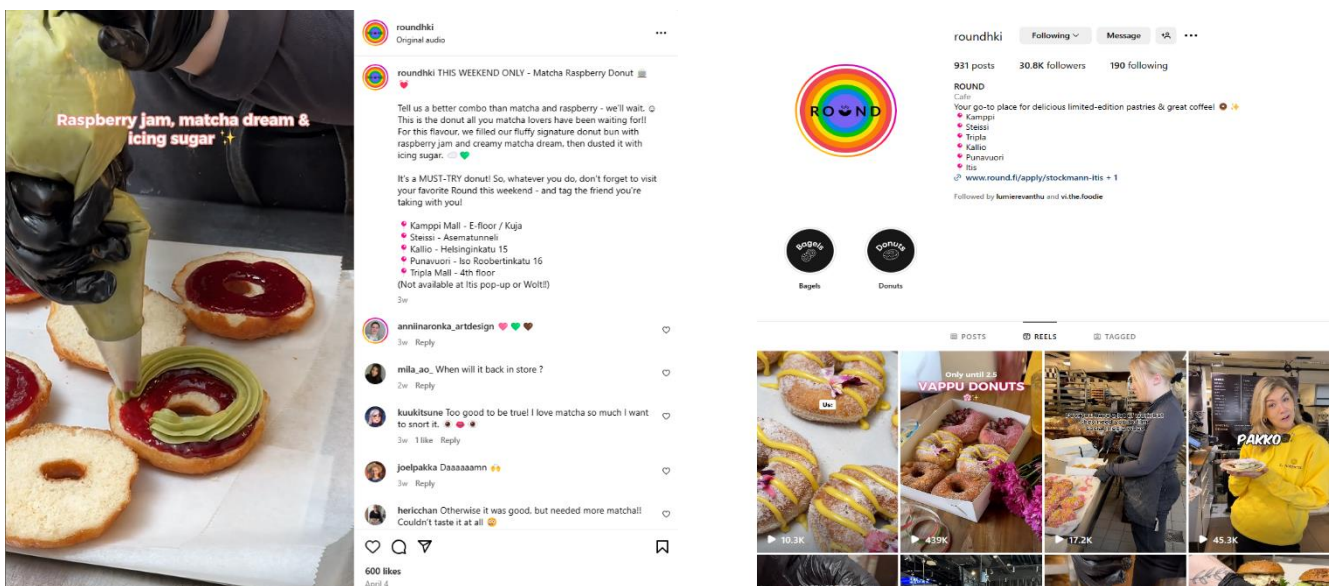


Figure 35 Video contents - Product demos, Brand videos (@roundhki)

### Interactive Contents

Interactive content refers to any type of content that allows users to interact with it in some way. This can include quizzes, polls, and interactive videos. Interactive content is becoming increasingly popular on social media because it can help to increase engagement and create a more personalized experience for users (Contentiy 2023).

Examples of interactive content on social media include:

- BuzzFeed quizzes and Twitter polls
- Instagram Stories
- Challenges and Surveys
- Interactive posts and stories

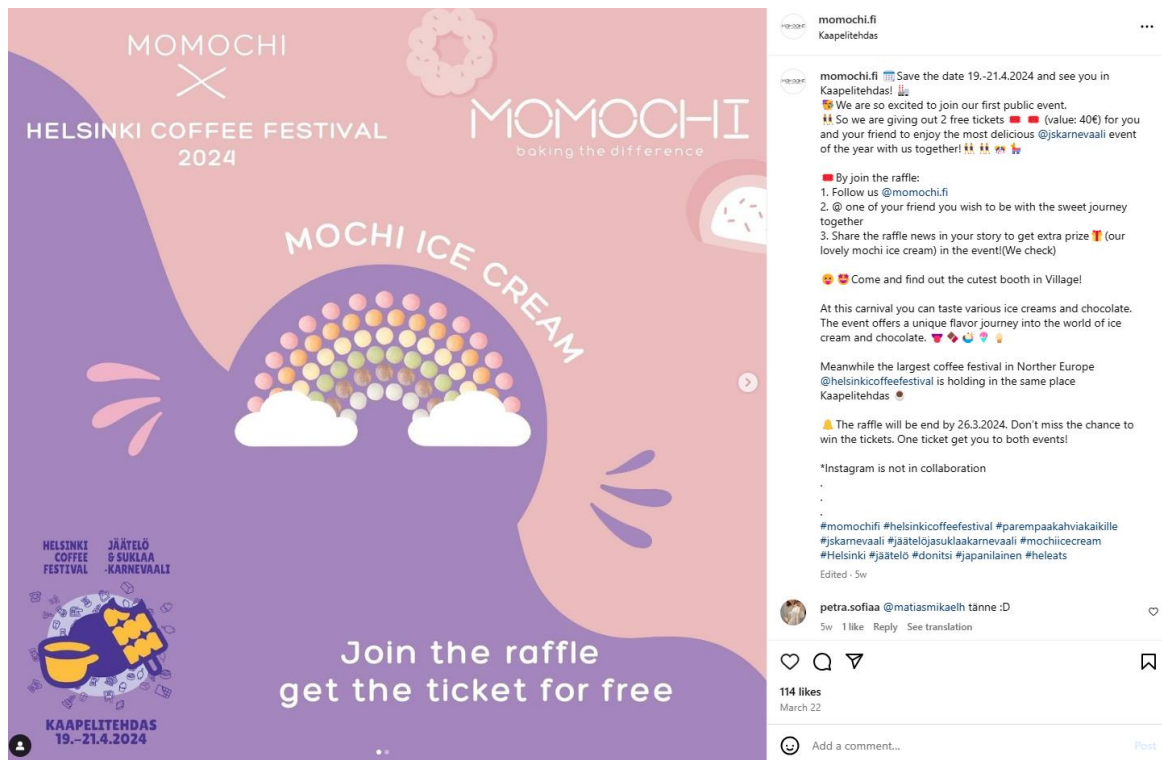


Figure 36 Interactive Contents – Interactive posts, challenges (@momochi.fi)

### 6.3.3 Key Elements of Digital Marketing

#### Themes and Messaging

Businesses' content strategy for the restaurant incorporates key themes such as sustainability, local sourcing, and authenticity, catering to consumer preferences for ethically sourced and environmentally friendly dining options (Adam 2024).

Hence, their messaging emphasizes community engagement, with posts highlighting local partnerships, events, and charitable initiatives. Through lifestyle-focused content, we present dining experiences as social gatherings, celebrations, and cultural encounters, appealing directly to our target age group's desire for unique and memorable experiences.





Figure 37 Restaurant themes and messaging on social media platforms

### Engagement Metrics

The restaurant's social media strategy incorporates several key elements to drive engagement and brand growth (Faster Capital 2024):

- Posts featuring interactive elements, such as polls, quizzes, and user-generated content, receive higher levels of engagement.
- Likes and Share elements depicts how followers and customers reach businesses' contents and products information as well as building brand identity.
- Follower growth rates and post reach metrics indicate the effectiveness of content strategies in expanding the restaurant's online presence.
- Comments and direct messages provide qualitative feedback on consumer preferences, menu suggestions, and overall brand perception.
- User-generated content serves as social proof, showcasing satisfied customers and authenticating the restaurant's brand image.



Figure 38 Elements of engagement metrics on social media platforms (Hootsuite)

### Influencer Marketing

In the restaurant industry, effective digital marketing is essential for boosting brand visibility and engaging customers. Influencer marketing is a type of digital advertising where a larger audience is reached by utilizing the influence of public figures, such as celebrities or social media stars. It allows brands to reach their intended demographic in innovative ways (Wilson 2023).

Likewise, businesses have found success using influencer marketing for internet product and service promotion. The advantages of influencer advertising will be discussed with particular emphasis on restaurant promotion. The main focus is on the efficient use of influencer marketing by restaurants to expand their consumer base, raise brand awareness, and enhance revenue (Aarana Systems Pvt Ltd 2024):

- Collaborations with local food influencers and micro-influencers helps amplify reach and credibility, especially among younger demographics.
- Sponsored content featuring influencer endorsements, reviews, and sponsored events drive brand awareness and engagement.
- Authenticity and alignment with the restaurant's values are key factors in influencer selection and partnership.
- Positive comments praising food quality, service, and overall experiences contribute to a favourable brand image.

- Constructive feedback on pricing, portion sizes, or service issues presents opportunities for improvement and demonstrates responsiveness.
- Transparencies and authenticities in addressing customer feedback build trust and loyalty among followers.



Figure 39 Influencer Marketing (Shanebarker)

## 7 Summary and Discussion

The research's main goal is to investigate the awareness of dining choices among the young generation and millennials in relation to the influence of digital platforms. Additionally, the study aims to seek the factors contributing to the reputation of restaurant brands through the use of social media marketing. To facilitate this study, the survey was distributed among specific Facebook groups, and Instagram stories, and directly sent to individuals between the ages of 18 and 35 who were employed in various industries. This approach ensured the achievement of the research objective. Additionally, the survey was given to people with experience in the Finnish restaurant business to learn more about the respondents' digital usage, their interactions with restaurant content, their opinions about the effect of social media on dining choices, and their level of trust in brands that are active on social media.

This study will examine consumer behaviour theory in the restaurant industry in Finland, specifically among individuals aged 18-35. The research has provided valuable insights into the effect of Social Media Marketing (SMM) on consumer choices and brand image. The theory of consumer behaviour has effectively determined and clarified the impacts of various social media elements and consumer attitudes towards food choices. The survey responses ultimately yielded a wide range of viewpoints and valuable data that strengthened the thesis in accomplishing its goals. The survey data closely corresponded to the theoretical insights, thereby enhancing the exceptional outcomes of the thesis report.

This demographic shows a high level of engagement with social media platforms, spending significant hours daily, which presents a special chance for eateries to engage with their target market through compelling content. Hence, there is no doubt about the pervasive role of these platforms in their daily routines. The distribution of engagement hours underscores the opportunity for restaurants get their intended audience's attention through consistent and compelling social media content. The platform preferences reveal a dominance of Facebook and Instagram for discovering restaurant-related content, emphasizing the importance of visual appeal in capturing consumer interest. While Facebook emerged as the dominant platform of choice among respondents, especially for discovering restaurant-related content; Instagram also maintained a significant presence, particularly for visual-centric content.

Factors such as appealing food images, recommendations from friends or family, and engaging promotions emerge as influential drivers of consumer decisions to try new restaurants. Visual appeal emerged as the most influential factor, reflecting the significance of captivating imagery in driving consumer interest and engagement. Notably, user-generated content, online reviews, and positive social media presence significantly impact consumers'



perceptions of restaurant quality and authenticity. While social media influencers play a role in restaurant promotion, the survey revealed varying levels of trust among respondents. A majority indicated moderate trust in restaurant recommendations from influencers, suggesting that authenticity and relevance are critical considerations in influencer marketing campaigns. Therefore, building trust through authentic storytelling and transparent communication is essential for enhancing brand credibility in the digital landscape. Nevertheless, consumers attributed importance to a restaurant's social media presence in shaping their perceptions of quality and authenticity. Respondents acknowledged the impact of user-generated content, online reviews, and engaging promotions on their decision-making process, highlighting the significance of maintaining a positive online reputation.

Overall, the survey findings underscore the need for restaurants to adopt a strategic approach to social media marketing, focusing on visual content, engagement, and reputation management to effectively engage with young consumers and influence their dining choices in Finland's competitive restaurant industry. By leveraging social media platforms to cultivate positive brand perceptions and foster consumer trust, restaurants can drive customer engagement and ultimately enhance their market presence and profitability.

### **Suggestions**

The survey findings offer valuable insights and recommendations for restaurant marketers and industry practitioners. Firstly, it is essential for restaurants to prioritize visually appealing content to captivate consumer attention and foster engagement on social media platforms. Additionally, building trust through authentic storytelling, positive user experiences, and transparent communication is crucial for enhancing brand credibility and establishing lasting relationships with customers. Furthermore, active engagement with customers, prompt response to feedback, and proactive reputation management are essential for cultivating positive brand perceptions and fostering customer loyalty. Recommendations stemming from these insights include investing in high-quality visual content, fostering community engagement through interactive initiatives, and diligently monitoring feedback to continuously enhance the social media experience for consumers. By implementing these strategies, restaurant marketers can effectively leverage social media platforms to strengthen brand presence and drive customer engagement in the competitive restaurant industry.

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## Appendix 1. Survey

### HOW SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING (SMM) AFFECTS CONSUMERS' DECISION MAKING PROCESS AND BRAND'S IMAGE IN THE RESTAURANT INDUSTRY IN FINLAND

Mandatory questions are marked with a star (\*)

**Hello everyone,**

**This is a survey conducted by a student in Bachelor Degree of Hospitality Management at LAB University of Applied Sciences. The research is conducted based on age groups from 18-35.**

**The surge of social media platforms, especially among Gen Z and millennials, underscores the need to understand their impact on consumer decisions. This empowers industry professionals to refine strategies, enhance online presence, and engage with their target audience effectively. Key platforms like Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube now play a pivotal role, demanding marketers to adapt strategies accordingly. By grasping the influence of different social media platforms on consumer behaviour, marketers can tailor content and engagement, fostering meaningful connections and driving long-term success in the digital age.**

**By participating in this survey, you can contribute your thoughts and experiences regarding social networks, food choices, and brand images. Your detailed input is crucial for understanding how SMM influences consumer choices and restaurant brand image.**

**Thank you for participating in this research, each of your responses contributed are highly appreciated. If you need more information, you can contact me at UYEN.H.NGUYEN@student.lab.fi.**



What is your age group? \*

- 18-23
- 24-29
- 30-35

Gender \*

- Male
- Female
- Other

How many hours per day do you spend on social media? \*

- Less than 1 hour
- 1-2 hours
- 2-3 hours
- 3-4 hours
- More than 4 hours

How frequently do you engage with restaurant-related content on social media? \*

- Very infrequently
- Somewhat infrequently
- Occasionally
- Somewhat frequently
- Very frequently

Select all platforms that apply to you in preference order (1= highest frequency of use ... 7= least frequency of use).

Which social media platforms do you use frequently for restaurant-related content? \*

Facebook	Select	▼
Instagram	Select	▼
Twitter	Select	▼
Youtube	Select	▼
TikTok	Select	▼
Pinterest	Select	▼
Snapchat	Select	▼

Does a strong social media presence influence your likelihood to try a restaurant? \*

- Not at all likely
- Slightly likely
- Very likely
- Extremely likely

Have you ever visited a restaurant based on a social media recommendation or advertisement? \*

- Yes, most of the time
- Yes, sometimes
- No, never

Does user-generated content (customer reviews, photos) on social media impact your decisions to try a restaurant? \*

- Not at all
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

How important are online reviews and ratings when considering whether to dine at a particular restaurant? \*

- Not important at all
- Slightly important
- Very important
- Extremely important

Select all factors that apply to you in preference order (1= the most influencing ... 8= the least influencing)

What factors on social media most influence your decision to try a new restaurant? \*

Appealing food images	Select -
Engaging promotions or limited discounts	Select -
Behind-the-scenes content (e.g Kitchen preparation, Staff interactions, Collaborations with other businesses)	Select -
Interactive polls or quizzes	Select -
Video content showcasing the dining experience	Select -
Influencer or blogger endorsements	Select -
Online reviews and ratings	Select -
Recommendations from friends or family	Select -

How important is visual appeal in social media content for influencing restaurant choices? \*

- Not important at all
- Slightly important
- Very important
- Extremely important

Have you ever changed your restaurant choice based on social media content encountered just before making a decision? \*

- Yes
- No

If yes, why? (Select all that apply) \*

- Positive reviews or ratings
- Appealing food images or videos
- Engaging promotions or discounts
- Behind-the-scenes content (e.g., kitchen preparation, staff interactions)
- Influencer or blogger endorsements
- Others, please specify

To what extent does a restaurant's social media presence influence your perception of its quality and authenticity? \*

- Significantly; I trust that a strong social media presence reflects the restaurant's quality and authenticity.
- Moderately; A restaurant's social media presence may influence my perception, but it's not the only factor.
- Slightly; I consider a restaurant's social media presence, but it doesn't greatly impact my perception of its quality and authenticity.
- Not at all; I rely on other factors besides social media presence to judge a restaurant's quality and authenticity.

What factors contribute to your decision to follow a restaurant's social media accounts? (Select all that apply) \*

- Quality of content; I follow accounts that post engaging and visually appealing content.
- Special offers or promotions; I follow accounts that offer exclusive deals or discounts.
- Interactivity; I follow accounts that actively engage with their followers and respond to comments.
- Reputation; I follow accounts of restaurants with a good reputation or positive reviews.

How likely are you to trust a restaurant recommendation from a social media influencer? \*

- Not Likely at All: I do not trust restaurant recommendations from social media influencers.
- Slightly Likely: I have limited trust in restaurant recommendations from social media influencers.
- Moderately Likely: I am moderately likely to trust restaurant recommendations from social media influencers.
- Very Likely: I am very likely to trust restaurant recommendations from social media influencers.
- Extremely Likely: I have complete trust in restaurant recommendations from social media influencers.

How likely are you to recommend a restaurant based on its positive social media image? \*

- Not likely at all
- Average. It depends
- Very likely