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Seinäjoen ammattikorkeakoulu
Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences

Rekha Ghimire

The role of Digital marketing in the growth of Food Businesses: A case study of Nepal

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Thesis abstract

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Author: Rekha Ghimire

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This thesis investigates the influence of digital marketing strategies on customer engagement within Nepal's urban food service sector, using Hideaway Restro Bar in Kathmandu as a single-case study. The rapid expansion of internet access, social media usage, and food delivery platforms have created new opportunities for restaurants to connect with customers; however, empirical evidence remains limited regarding which digital strategies foster meaningful engagement rather than mere online visibility. Drawing on the Technology Acceptance Model and customer engagement theory, the study focuses on key digital touchpoints, including social media marketing, influencer collaborations, user-generated content, and platform-based promotions.

The study adopts a quantitative research approach using a structured survey administered to customers of the case organisation. The survey measures perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use of digital channels alongside the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural dimensions of customer engagement. Statistical analyses were employed to examine the relationships between specific digital marketing tactics and engagement outcomes such as participation, loyalty, and advocacy, while also accounting for contextual factors including platform regulation and small and medium-sized enterprise resource constraints.

The findings indicate that digital marketing strategies perceived as useful and easy to use are positively associated with higher levels of customer engagement. Visual and interactive content on social media platforms emerges as particularly effective in stimulating cognitive and emotional engagement, while behavioural engagement is more strongly influenced by perceived practicality and convenience. Overall, the study provides practical guidance for Nepalese food businesses seeking to prioritise high-impact digital initiatives and contributes to academic understanding of digital customer engagement in emerging market contexts.

[1] Keywords: Digital marketing; Customer engagement; Food Businesses; Nepalese restaurants; Technology Adoption

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Terms and Abbreviations

TAM	Technology Acceptance Model
PU	Perceived Usefulness
PEOU	Perceived Ease of Use

1 Introduction

1.1 Background of Study

Modern consumers now use digital tools to find, compare, and buy food, so food businesses rely heavily on digital marketing to reach and involve customers (Kowalczuk et al., 2021; Talukder et al., 2024). Websites, search engines, social media, mobile apps, and delivery platforms help firms promote their offers and interact with customers through simple actions such as likes, comments, shares, and repeat visits, which differ from one-way traditional advertising (Srivastava et al., 2023). Customer engagement means a person's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral connection with a brand across different contact points, and it strongly predicts loyalty and business performance (Lim & Rasul, 2022; Ng et al., 2020). In Nepal, rising internet and social media use has created good conditions for digital food marketing, with around 16.5 million internet users and an online penetration of about 55.8 percent in January 2025, showing strong potential for online promotion and ordering (Kemp, 2025). Local food-tech services such as Foodmandu, the country's first major online food delivery platform, now link many restaurants with urban customers across several cities, illustrating both consumer willingness to order food online and merchants' adoption of platform-based distribution (Shrestha et al., 2025; Pokhrel & Shah, 2022; Ratopati, 2023).

Studies from emerging economies show that digital marketing can improve the performance of small and medium-sized enterprises, especially when online efforts create real customer engagement rather than only more visibility (Amin et al., 2025; Deku et al., 2024; Sharabati et al., 2024). However, higher digital use also leads to problems such as limited skills, scarce resources, and weak systems for tracking engagement results (Samara & Terzian, 2020). Strong engagement can help increase sales and keep customers for longer, but not every digital activity produces this effect because the nature and quality of online actions shape the final outcome (Sharabati et al., 2024).

1.2 Research Problem and Rationale

Although Nepal's business environment has transformed because of rapid digitalisation, it is still uncertain how effective digital marketing strategies are in driving customer engagement in terms of food brands. Many Nepalese SMEs are still using digital marketing as a tool for promotion, whereas it can be utilised for strategic engagement. This is depriving the businesses of having stronger relationships with customers, more brand loyalty and digital visibility. There are many delivery platforms rising in Nepal such as Foodmandu, Bhojdeals and Pathao Food. However, academic research analysing how customer engagement behaviour in Nepal's food industry is shaped by digital marketing, is limited.

Studies have mainly focused on levels of digital adoption or online sales growth (Lim et al., 2022). However, interactive and emotional dimensions of customer engagement (e.g., satisfaction, participation, brand advocacy, long-term brand loyalty) have been overlooked. A clear problem is presented via this research gap. Although Nepalese food businesses are investing more in digital marketing, the understanding of which strategies are good in fostering customer engagement is not sufficient. How consumers perceive and respond to these marketing efforts are also to be evaluated.

There is a gap in empirical work emphasising how various digital marketing strategies affect customer engagement in Nepal's food sector. Majority of relevant scholarly works talk about adoption or growth of platform in a descriptive manner (Ghimire et al., 2023; Sharma & Paudel, 2025; Jadhav et al., 2023). Upadhyay (2025) looks at online food delivery services and the drivers of behavioural intention to use them in semi-urban Nepal, not customer engagement. There are some studies offering quantitative evidence, finding connection between certain channels, engagement metrics and business outcomes. Sthapit et al. (2023) survey tourists at restaurants in Kathmandu Valley and utilises descriptive and inferential statistics to the positive impact of social media brand coverage on customer value creation. Jaishi et al. (2024) discuss the qualities of online reviews that influence the selection of restaurants. Balampaki & Rawat (2025) explore the influence of digital marketing on the purchase decision in Kathmandu. Therefore, consumer engagement via digital marketing is something overlooked in recent studies related to the Nepalese food industry, and the current survey-

based study aims to fill this gap by focusing on a specific restaurant known as Hideaway Restro Bar.

Food businesses work in a competitive market where engagement is must for survival. Cafes and restaurants are highly reliant on social media promotions and customer reviews to appeal to digitally active audiences like younger consumers. Nevertheless, there would be risks like resource misallocation or failure in converting online attention into actual engagement if businesses do not have clear evidence on these strategies' effectiveness. Literature on digital consumer behaviour in developing countries will be enriched by investigating the connection between digital marketing strategies and customer engagement in the unique context of this Nepalese restaurant business.

1.3 Background of Case Organization: Hideaway Restro Bar

The new establishment is HideAway Restro Bar (2025), a small to medium, casual dining and night life restaurant. The restaurant is situated in Kathmandu, Nepal, Old Baneshwor (Bhimsengola). The location is a combination of restaurant, cafe and bar offering international foods in addition to drinks such as coffee, cocktails and light foods. The diner has the brand identity, intimate and escape, which appeals to young adult individuals and urban professionals. The internet presence of the business is manifested by its active Facebook page and Instagram account. In these platforms, the venue has menus, updates, reels and event or holiday announcements.

As the venue's social media accounts reflect to be the operational indicators, typical and medium enterprise (SME) practices within Nepal's hospitality industry can be noticed. The posting schedule, announcement and utilising social media platforms for reservations and direct messaging are limited but consistent. These strategies in digital marketing are the exact activities improving local engagement for restaurants in urban markets of South Asia.

This establishment is a useful case for this research because it will allow for the examination of digital marketing effectiveness in the Nepalese market, where online reach has become a meaningful strategy for urban food businesses. There is an important contextual risk for digi-

tal strategies that HideAway's analysis can shed light into. In September 2025, the government of Nepal banned several key social sites due to the failure to follow the registration regulations. Access restrictions are affecting platforms such as Facebook, X and YouTube (Gurubacharya, 2025; Sharma, 2025). This shift in regulation affects how local restaurants plan and deploy digital marketing (i.e., choice of platform, content strategy, paid advertising, customer service through social DM etc.). Therefore, this analysis of HideAway's digital engagement will take into account both platform performance and regulatory stability as co-determinants of strategy success.

1.4 Research Question and Objectives

With the changing digital landscape, food businesses are also going under significant transformation. Social media penetration has increased, so has mobile connectivity and number of online food delivery (OFD) platforms. These shifts have changed the way restaurants are engaging with consumers and building brand loyalty. Dining preferences today are influenced by digital interactions like food content on Instagram, user-generated reviews etc. Restaurants today must rethink strategies to attract and retain customers. As existing academic literature does not explore the effectiveness and customer impact of digital marketing strategies among Nepalese food businesses, the case SME HideAway Restro Bar (HRB from now on) can apply this study's findings to understand how these initiatives can lead to customer engagement and loyalty. Based on this understanding, the following research question and objectives are determined for this study.

Research Question:

1. How do digital marketing strategies impact customer engagement in Nepal's food business sector?

Research Objectives:

- To determine the major digital marketing strategies adopted by food businesses in Nepal.
- To examine the impact of these strategies on customer engagement levels.

- To give an opinion on how the procedures of digital engagement can be enhanced within the Nepal food business environment.

1.5 Significance of Study

The importance of the study has been associated with the academic, practical, and societal levels. In the academic area, the study will contribute to the limited body of knowledge regarding digital marketing and customer engagement in emerging economies. Nepal is a country with a distinctive combination of increasing digital penetration, a young population, and the growing food service industry, which is why there is a gap in the number of studies dedicated to developed markets. This background is thus useful in understanding ways of online marketing strategies on influencing consumer engagement behaviour. This research will also contribute to the theoretical perspectives by connecting digital marketing strategy and customer engagement theory and provide new facts that will inform future studies in the South Asian settings.

Practically, the findings of this study can have practical implications on food business owners, marketers, and entrepreneurs in Nepal.

Practically, the findings of this study can provide actionable knowledge to the food business owners, marketers and entrepreneurs in Nepal. It will identify which digital marketing strategies are the most effective in increasing customer engagement, so that businesses can ensure more effective distribution of resources and establish stronger customer relationships. The findings of the research can also inform digital marketing agencies and consultants to develop campaigns that will appeal to the likes and online behaviour of the Nepalese consumer.

Within policy and societal aspect, the study endorses the broader agenda of Nepal in the area of digital transformation since it enhances digital literacy and innovation with SMEs. As the level of digital activity increases, so does customer satisfaction, this may create an entrancepreneurial environment, and bolster the food tourism and service industries in Nepal.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This paper shall examine how digital marketing efforts influence the interaction of customers within the Nepalese food industry. The scope of the study is limited to urban food enterprises like restaurants, cafés and food delivery services in major cities of Nepal (e.g., Kathmandu, Lalitpur & Pokhara). The urban setting is chosen because the adoption of digital marketing is most significant there.

The digital marketing strategies on which this research will focus on include social media marketing, influencer promotions, online advertisements and app-based marketing. Traditional marketing techniques like print, radio and television are not included because the main interest is in digital interaction and engagement.

Data for this research will be gathered using a quantitative, survey based methodology. It will be aimed at customers of food businesses, not business owners. The study's objective does not include assessment of profitability or financial performance; rather it involves exploration of customer engagement aspects (e.g., attention, participation, satisfaction, loyalty) arising from digital marketing initiatives.

1.7 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis has been divided into 6 chapters. All of them are concerned with one of the stages of the research process and assist in the comprehensive conceptualization of the study subject.

The first chapter introduces the background, research problem, rationale, objectives, significance, scope and overall framework of the study. Then comes Literature Review, where prior academic research and theoretical frameworks pertinent to digital marketing, customer engagement and food business development are reviewed. The second chapter also identifies deficiencies in current research and lays the conceptual groundwork for the study.

The third chapter is called research methodology where this study's design, philosophical standpoint, sampling approach, data collection techniques, and analytical methods are outlined. The results derived from the gathered data are displayed and interpreted in chapter 4. The following chapter is known as 'discussion' which contrasts the results with existing literature and theories to elucidate their implications. Lastly, Finally, chapter six summarizes the key findings, which are concluded and practical implications outlined. The limitations of this research are acknowledged in this last chapter along with suggestions for future research.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This literature review will be the conceptual and analytical basis for this study. It will incorporate theories as well as empirical evidence related to digital marketing and customer engagement in the food business sector. The main goal is to critically evaluate how extant research sheds light on the relationship between digital marketing practices and customer interaction behaviours. The theoretical and contextual gaps are also to be pinpointed here.

2.2 Digital Marketing in the Food Service Sector

2.2.1 Digital Marketing

In this digital era, strategies of digital marketing are essential to engagement customer and promote brands. Businesses can now create customised experiences and reach their target demographics through the use of various digital platforms and tools (Wan, 2023). Marketing is the understanding of what consumers require, creation and promotion of products/services, fixing prices and allocating them efficiently to build long-lasting connections with customers (Mehdipour & Shirini, 2021). Digital marketing is conducted through the employment of internet and digital platforms like computers, mobile devices as well as social media for product or service promotion (Ritz et al., 2019; Yuvaraj & Indumathi, 2018). According to Mathew and Soliman (2020), digital marketing is capable enough to ensure better customer engagement and brand visibility in the hospitality sector.

There is no scope to treat digital marketing as a secondary strategy at this point. It is a central operational and strategic channel shaping discovery, framing of experience and post-visit advocacy toward customers. A mix of social media, UGCs or review management, online ordering and reservation systems, as well as email or loyalty programmes are used by restaurants and bars to reach customers (Tang et al., 2022). Bragg et al. (2020) showed that there was a dramatic increase in social media ad expenditure leading to enormous view volumes in

the early 2020s. This indicates that this sector sees social platforms as a primary engine to acquire customers and experience growth in revenue (Kanaan et al., 2023).

2.2.2 Grouping Digital Marketing Strategies in Food Service

Major digital strategies fall into five practicable categories. First of all, social media platforms allow storytelling through content, such as Instagram reels and Facebook posts. These contents emphasise visual identity and experience cues to get consumers' attention and facilitate viral discovery. As found by Alboji et al. (2024) after surveying non-Turkish people in Turkey with Instagram accounts, this social media platform serves as a channel for discovery as well as pre-consumption experience via visual anticipation, which raises intention to visit restaurants. The second one is the influencer and creator marketing where third party endorsement by trusted parties is employed in obtaining awareness and credibility within a short time. Study in the Portuguese restaurant sector by Anjos et al. (2022) reveal that authentic and high-quality content created by influencers have significant and quantifiable impacts on visit intention and restaurant footfall.

The third bucket encompasses the user-generated content (UGC) and review sites such as TripAdvisor and Google Reviews. These are decisive in the formation of consumer trust. UGC analysis by Mondo et al. (2022) shows that volume and sentiment of review affect choice of consumers across numerous restaurants. Food service businesses also might have owned-channel systems, which is the fourth category of digital marketing in this case. This could mean websites, online menus, reservation apps and engines, etc. (Jun et al., 2023). These platforms serve transactional requirements and make perceived convenience better for customers which is vital for technology acceptance. astly, repetitive patronage is offered through retention devices like SMS, email and loyalty apps (Jose & Joseph, 2025).

2.2.3 Measuring Digital Marketing Effectiveness

Nevertheless, it is evident that meaningful engagement cannot be ensured by all digital activity. As it has been done in literature, one should not compare the superficial indicators, including likes and the number of followers, to the intensive metrics, including advocacy and

emotional attachment (Barbosa et al., 2024). The trap of ‘vanity metric’ is critiqued by hospitality research, which means content attracting views might not contribute in the improvement of revisit intention or spending. For it to work, customers’ cognitive and emotional investment have to be triggered through interactivity and perceived value (Ibrahim, 2022; Kulikovskaja et al., 2023). Businesses in the service contexts need to consider behavioural indicators like reservations, repeat visits and referral behaviour instead of just exposure metrics. According to Famurewa (2025), creators of output-only content run the risk of squandering resources on a fad of temporary virality, even though the initial business contribution will be minimal.

2.2.4 Contextual Moderators in Digital Marketing Impact

Context is a significant issue in this case since in new markets such as cultural norms, digital literacy, and platform access can facilitate the efficiency of digital marketing. Tamirat and Zewdie (2023) found that developing economies face three limitations constantly, which include uneven access to the internet with high cost of mobile data, lower digital marketing capabilities within SMEs, and more sensitivity to word-of-mouth (WoM) and offline recommendations. This implies that an Instagram campaign that will have strong booking rates in a Western city might perform weaker in an urban market in South Asia, unless it is adjusted to the local trends in platform usage and content preferences (Jayawardena et al., 2024). These are contextual moderators with direct relevance to the Nepalese restaurant sector, and these should be kept in mind while evaluating HRB’s digital marketing strategy effectiveness.

2.3 Customer Engagement in Digital Context for Food Services

2.3.1 Consumer Engagement

Marketing and services research is not limited to only service usage and loyalty anymore. Customer Engagement (CE) is now a major concept in this domain. According to Kumar et al. (2019) and Barari et al. (2020), CE is the behavioural manifestations a customer focused on a business or a brand beyond purchase, originated from motivational factors. There are

generally three dimensions of CE, which are cognitive, emotional and behavioural (Roy et al., 2020). Cognitive dimensions might involve consumers' attention and absorption, emotional or affective domain is about their enthusiasm or attachment to brand, and participation and advocacy are examples of behavioural dimension of customer engagement. As explained by Islam et al. (2019), customer engagement in a service context includes recurring interactions between a business and a customer which leads to deeper psychological investment.

In digital marketing, customer engagement is when individuals with the help of digital platforms participate in interactivity in high levels with others to fulfil personal or shared goals (Bozkurt, et al., 2021; Tong &Chan, 2023). As digitalisation is changing the foodservice sector for customers in ASEAN nations (Dhingra, 2024), it is important for them to have an enjoyable experience while buying food. For omnichannel food businesses, customer engagement could be a source of competitive advantage (Chen et al., 2022). Therefore, it is clear how customer engagement theory is relevant to digital marketing. Various strategies like interactive posts, user-generated content (UGC), shared, likes, comments etc. offer the stimuli that trigger cognitive, emotional and behavioural path of CE. This theory will be able to explain what occurs after digital touchpoints are adopted, which means how consumer engage.

2.3.2 Customer Engagement through Social Media

According to Fatorachian et al. (2025), customer engagement is one of the factors determining brand in this digital age. SMEs are finding social media platforms to be direct channels for establishing brand communities and facilitating two-way communication with consumers. What makes social media different from conventional one-way advertising is participatory engagement. Here, Customers, in this case, are not passively receiving messages, they are contributing actively to brand stories through contributions of their actions.

According to Harris and Dennis (2011), social media engagement happens on three major dimensions which are participation, interaction and co-creation. This framework is helpful in analysing the social media marketing strategies that case organisation HRB is using. Various consumer behaviours such as liking, sharing or commenting on brand content make up their participation. Interaction is communication happening on both sides promoting dialogue and

responsiveness. The third dimension, co-creation, refers to the active contribution of consumers in brand narrative using UGC. As SME food businesses have smaller budgets for advertising, these dimensions are crucial for them to establish deeper emotional connections with customers.

2.3.3 Consumer Engagement through Content Marketing

In the realm of hospitality, content on social media is the most widely researched digital strategy (Kulkarni, 2024). Contents posted on Instagram, Facebook, TikTok and YouTube help tell brand story visually, improving consumers' cognitive attention as well as emotional attachment (Wang et al., 2025). As demonstrated in Zhao et al. (2023), rich imagery posts that are accompanied by storytelling and interactive can be more engaging than the text posts, since visuals attract their emotional appeal and anticipation. However, participation will depend significantly depending on the platform. The same content can yield different outcomes based on audience demographics and functions of a specific platform (Celimli & Adanacioglu, 2021). This means that designing generic content will not be very effective as both customer preferences and platform features should be in alignment.

The digital era gives customers many information and marketing content. Businesses keep on looking for effective approaches to attract and maintain the focus of their consumer base (Liang & Turban, 2011). Content marketing is creating and sharing relevant, valuable content to gain attention of a certain audience base, with a view to stimulating profitable customer engagement (Lopes & Casais, 2022; Weerasinghe, 2019). How consumers perceive a brand or platform decides their buying choices, acting as a core standard for firms to design competitive strategies (Cennamo, 2021). Thus, digital trust on content quality affects engagement significantly.

Digital trust in online food service environment lowers uncertainty regarding safety, motivating consumers to keep on using various platforms for interaction (Park et al., 2025). Quality of information offered, along with audience trust in digital platforms, can result in loyal customers who continue to purchase from a business (Tseng et al., 2022). Moreover, trust that comes from high-quality information affects behavioural intentions among customers, such as their interest in taking part in food delivery services our to buy healthy food items (Pillai et al.,

2022). Many scholars applied the S-O-R framework (Stimulus-Organism-Response) and found that online content quality is a stimulus that positively affects customer engagement which is the organism (Ali et al., 2025; Turkay et al., 2022; Zhu et al., 2020).

From a cognitive point of view, good quality content gives reliable information and product details (Singh et al., 2022). In an emotional sense, visually attractive narratives evoke enjoyment and reassurance, along with a feeling of alignment with the lifestyle goals of consumers (Vermeir & Roose, 2020). From a behavioural lens, engaging content acts as stimulants for active participation from consumers (e.g., review sharing, product recommendations, interaction within online communities etc.). Therefore, online customer engagement is shaped by content quality, which not just gives information but also affects trust, emotions and participatory behaviours.

2.4 Impact of Digital Marketing Strategies on Customer Engagement

2.4.1 Social Media and Content Marketing

As pointed out by Acar et al. (2021), actively engaged consumers with food and beverage related content on social media are generally persuaded by social media ads where consumer experiences and choices are shared. In a similar vein, it is stated by Wareebor et al. (2024) that restaurants' promotional advertisements on social media affect consumer intention to share posts or promotions highly. This engagement later turns into a strong predictor of consumers' food buying intentions. According to (Yang et al. (2022) and Elder et al. (2025), social media video ads are seen as creative elements of promotion, advancing effectiveness by persuading responses from consumers through media involvement and customer engagement. Similarly, it was found by Sreejesh et al. (2020) that informational content on social media employ the most effect on responsiveness of consumers.

As highlighted by Lam (2023), likelihood of customers showing positive response to food and beverage brands increases when they find social media tools to be user-friendly and useful. In alignment with this is the view of Singh (2022), who offers a refined study framework for digital engagement approach in the food and beverage sector. Alagappan (2023) highlights

the strategic necessities for food service brands to improve engagement and responsiveness among consumers via strategic digital efforts, reflected through likes, comments, shares, views in videos etc.

2.4.2 Influencer Marketing

There is high potential offered by influencer marketing while promoting food options through robust online connections as well as parasocial communications done with their followers, which results in online trust (Folkvord & Hermans, 2020). Vrontis et al. (2021) and Manaf (2021) mention that social media influencers have a deep impact on consumer responsiveness in food and beverage sector. The content published by influencers have significant power on the buying decisions of consumers when they explore and experience various food offerings (Satı & Kazancoglu, 2020). Influencers are trustworthy which is why followers use them as guides when trying to experience different cuisines (Chen et al., 2018). They also lead their followers toward the discovery of new menus, dishes or establishments (Silver et al., 2019).

After this, social media influencers' influence on customer engagement in the food industry was explored by Jamil et al. (2022), who identified how the existence, promotions and partnerships with influencers improve brand engagement. In recent years, food influencers have been identified who utilise their social media accounts to offer recipes, cooking tips and restaurant reviews with audience (Weber et al., 2021). Similarly, Sokolova et al. (2024) state that food-related buying decisions of social media users are based on what food influencers recommend.

2.4.3 User-Generated Content and Review Platforms

Online reviews and user-generated content (UGC) serve as an incentive and social validation to customers. According to Lu et al. (2019), how many reviews are available, what their sentiment reflect, quality of images etc. affect cognitive evaluation, perceived credibility and intentions to engage. In the restaurant sector, visuals emphasising the process (like dish preparation) can ensure more cognitive engagement in comparison to visuals focusing on the end

result (final presentation of dish). However, UGC also comes with some unpredictable things. Negative reviews or complaints can lower engagement established earlier which means these strategies are both powerful and risky.

Electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM) is now an integral tool for information sharing and communication because it helps gain access to expected information and arranges quality and structure of information that is going around (Bushara et al., 2023). Hao et al. (2023) found that the level of competition faced by businesses in the catering sector affect e-WOM negatively. On the other hand, e-WOM has a positive association with reservation services and group buying. Authenticity of restaurant shapes e-WOM intention among customers, with service quality and consumer satisfaction playing a mediating role. Shashikala & Thilina (2020) conceptualized e-WOM as an influential factor in fast-food purchase intention.

2.5 Theoretical Foundations

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) by Davis (1989) explains why people decide to use a new system through two main beliefs: perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEOU). PU is the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system will improve performance, while PEOU is the degree to which a person believes that using the system will require little effort (Davis, 1989). These beliefs shape the user's attitude toward using the system, which then influences intention to use and finally actual use. When attitudes are not changed by outside factors, they act as a bridge between PU, PEOU, and behavioral intention, guiding whether people will really adopt the technology.

TAM is highly relevant to hospitality and food service because many activities now depend on digital tools such as websites, booking platforms, mobile apps, menus and reservations online, and social media marketing. Consumers must accept and feel comfortable with these technologies before they can use them to search, book, order, and review services. A review by Archi and Benbba (2023) examined 40 studies from 2017 to 2022 and showed that TAM and related UTAUT models are widely used to study social media and mobile app use in hospitality. Using TAM, Xu et al. (2024) found that in mobile instant-messaging restaurant communities, informational support and social presence increase both PU and PEOU, while emotional support

mainly raises PU, and An et al. (2023) reported that PU and PEOU both strengthen consumers' intention to use food delivery apps in Korea.

In restaurant research, Yean et al. (2019) extended TAM by adding perceived enjoyment and found that enjoyment strongly drives acceptance of smart services in restaurants. Studies in Nigeria and South Africa by Okwong (2024) also confirmed that PU and PEOU are strong predictors of intention to use hospitality mobile apps, supporting TAM across different markets. However, TAM focuses on the decision to use or not use a system and says little about what happens after adoption, so it does not explain ongoing customer engagement, such as repeated interactions, emotional bonds, or co-creation of content. TAM also overlooks important contextual factors like culture, infrastructure, and digital literacy, which play a large role in emerging markets such as Nepal, and many studies in these settings still emphasise system usage rather than marketing interactions (Archi & Benbba, 2023). In this study, TAM offers a basic logic that digital marketing tactics can only produce engagement when customers first accept and adopt the digital touchpoints, but another theoretical lens on customer engagement is required to explain post-adoption cognitive, emotional, and behavioural interactions within Nepal's specific market conditions.

Figure 1 represents the combined conceptual framework of the study, demonstrating how the strategies of digital marketing affect customer engagement outcomes using the components of Technology Acceptance Model, and customer engagement theory describes post-adoption mental, emotional and behavioural reactions, moderated by the contextual factors that would be the case in the Nepalese emerging market environment.

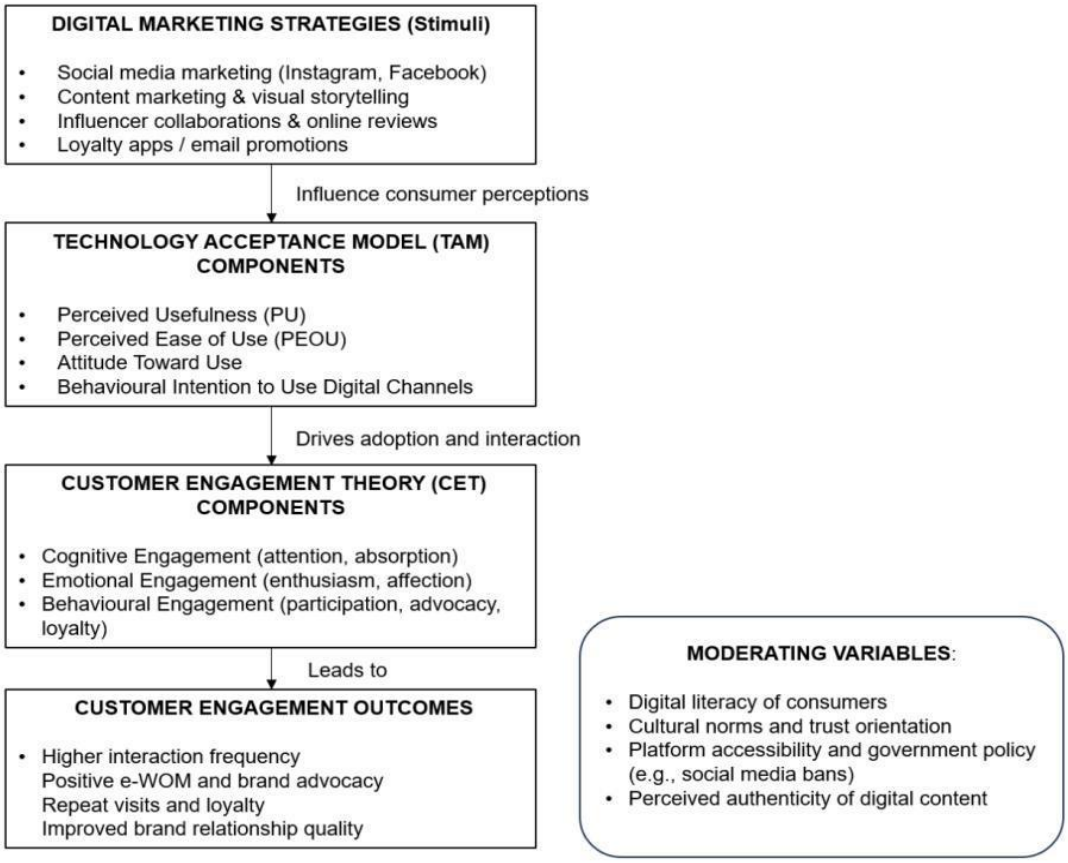

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework (Source: Author).

This synthesized framework aligns with the research objectives; (a) to identify digital marketing strategies (stimuli); (b) to assess their effect on customer engagement (outcome); (c) to make the recommendations.

3 Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The chapter establishes the methodological background upon which the proposed chapter is going to be used to unearth the answers to the question: “How do digital marketing strategies impact customer engagement in Nepal’s food business sector?” The study will be designed in a manner that it will be methodologically consistent with the research objectives and philosophical foundations discussed in the first section. Although, as seen in Section 1.5, quantitative survey is the dominant methodological background, one-sided approach of explanatory depth to be demanded by the objectives of the research would have been to the inadequate. That is why the study will be quantitatively motivated (mixed-method survey) and will enable the collection of structured quantitative data and put more emphasis on thematic description of the open-ended answers. Its general strategy is guided by pragmatism, which offers the opportune to strike a balance between deductive reasoning, which is based on theoretical constructs and inductive investigation of stories of participants. Thematic analysis is going to be the key part and it will be applied in the interpretation of meanings, behaviours and experiences since the quantitative information will be summarised through descriptive analysis. This chapter describes philosophical position, design, sampling, instruments, procedures, analysis, rigour, and ethical issues that informed the study .

3.2 Research philosophy and rationale

The research is in pragmatic research philosophy. Pragmatism does not disarm the idea of methodological pluralism and is more concerned with the research questions and practical implications as opposed to epistemological or ontological purity (Creswell & Hirose 2019; McBeath & Bager-Charleson, 2020). The pragmatic approach allows the researcher to blend both the deductive lines of reasoning (testing propositions depending on the literature and conceptual frame) and induction lines of reasoning (making themes of interpretation depending on the reactions of participants) without foregoing theoretical coherence. Pragmatism justification is also the part of using numerical descriptive summaries to describe the sample and patterns of distribution and providing priority to the thematic interpretation of achieving

the research objectives related to the processes and implications of the customer engagement (Taherdoost, 2022; Pregationer, 2024).

Deductive-inductive consistency is achieved by obtaining initial coding categories and propositions based on theory and other studies, including types of social media, influencer marketing, UGC, and app-based marketing, and then running the categories to sensitise the analysis but not definitive of new themes that are occurring in the data (Kumar, 2024; Love & Corr, 2022). This process of logic is distinctly defined in the plan of analysis and formalised by a two-part analytical process: part one descriptive statistics to characterize the distribution of the sample and distribution of items, part two to theme code open-ended answers and combinations of empirical data with theory.

3.3 Research design

The survey is a mixed research design. The main data collection instrument is an organised online questionnaire that constitutes closed (Likert scales and multiple-choice) questions to determine prevalence and patterns of exposure to digital marketing practice and homogenous indicators of engagement dimensions (cognitive, emotional, behavioural). The questionnaire (see - Appendix A) will also include open-ended questions, where asking the respondents to elaborate on experiences, motives and meaning of digital marketing and engagement behaviours will be asked. The design is grounded in the existing precedents of applying surveys as measuring cars and source of qualitative content in writing thematic analysis (Leake et al., 2021; Machleid et al., 2020; Strohacker et al., 2019).

The data collection tool to be used will be survey and together with the open responses; this will lead to high coverage in terms of urban consumers in Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Pokhara and around which thematic analysis will be done. This design conforms to qualitative motivated mixed methods where the qualitative interpretation of the analysis turns out to be the primary priority of the analytic role, irrespective of the presence of quantitative measurements to support triangulation and profiling (Creswell & Hirose, 2019; Love & Corr, 2022).

3.4 Research objectives operationalised into instruments

The operationalisation of all the research objectives is in terms of measurable items and open prompt. The objective one (identify material digital marketing practices done) is operationalised in terms of checklists and frequency scales regarding exposure to social media content, influencer content, UGC/reviews, platform applications and loyalty messages. Multi-item scales that bring objective two (investigate effect of engagement) to operationalisation consume validated scales in the hospitality and marketing realms and respondent questions are also open-ended in nature wherein respondents are expected to further explain how various digital based inputs impacted on their thoughts and behaviours. The objective three (recommendations) is achieved with not only the help of focused open-ended questions based on soliciting ideas on how it could be improved but also with the help of thematic questions based on barriers to meaningful engagement and enablers. The construction of instruments is the generalisation of the past behaviour and situational adaptations using the existing literature (Acar et al., 2021; Taherdoost, 2022; Zhao et al., 2023).

3.5 Sampling strategy and sample size justification

Such city customers as food business in Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Pokhara will be used as sampling frame. Sampling will take a purposive quota sampling, whereby it will be objective in representing age categories, gender and frequency of eating out/ ordering online and convenience selection of the sample by social media groups, on the aggregator platform messages and invitations of QR codes in the location. Purposive quota sampling will suffice because the study is all about identifying dissimilarity between participation in digital-active grouping of consumers, and indeed not in reference to inference to rigid probability (Strijker et al., 2020; Taherdoost, 2022).

The sample size will be established to get adequate diversity of qualitative contribution and provide uniform descriptive summaries. It proposes a sample of a 50 filled surveys. It is a proper sample size to provide the practical aspects of field research and the need to gain sufficient variation of the open answer to television to saturate its themes and to generate credible descriptive statistics (Creswell & Hirose, 2019; Taherdoost, 2022). it is also proper to address the essential restrictions of relying on a limited number of answers of different people

to generate correlation. The existing literature has demonstrated that thematic analysis of open-ended surveys is usually saturated at a significantly earlier stage than a relatively small size in terms of numbers of responses devoted to a particular area and a larger sample has been known to produce a broader range of context and external plausibility (Karavadra et al., 2020; Strohacker et al., 2019). s

3.6 Data collection procedures

The survey will be carried out through Google Forms, which will be set up to protect respondent anonymity. Participants will be recruited through several routes: targeted social media adverts for specific cities, collaborations with local food delivery apps to promote the survey inside the apps, and QR-code flyers placed in partner restaurants and cafés. The online form will include consent information and short screening questions to ensure that respondents are at least 18 years old and have recently ordered or bought food online in the target cities, so that only eligible participants take part (Creswell & Hirose, 2019; Machleid et al., 2020).

To improve answer quality, the questionnaire will be optimised for mobile phones, kept to a length that takes about 12–15 minutes to finish, and organised into clear thematic sections with a visible progress bar. Where recruitment channels allow, reminder messages will be sent to people who started but did not complete the survey, while always following ethical guidelines and good practice for online mixed-methods research (Creswell & Hirose, 2019; Machleid et al., 2020).

3.7 Analytical strategy

The analytic method is a qualitative and calculated method. The quantitative survey items will be analysed only with the help of the descriptive statistics. The descriptive statistics will offer data about sample demographics, the frequency of exposure to digital marketing strategies, the mean of dimensions of engagement scores and cross-tabulations according to the major demographic variables (age groups, gender, frequency of online ordering). The goal of de-scriptive stage is to describe empirical space and filter outlier and purposive subsampling and read more intely (Pregationer, 2024; Taherdoost, 2022).

During the main analysis, they are thematically analysed through open responses scrutiny, and synthesis interaction of closed ones in situ. Thematic analysis entailed will include six steps which are developed based on best practices familiarisation, initial codes generation, theme searching, theme reviewing, theme defining and naming and report generation (Braun and Clarke tradition: applied in mixed-methods surveys (Kumar, 2024; Love & Corr, 2022). The coding will be done on the qualitative data analysis software in a bid to identify traceability. The hybrid approach as a form of coding will be taken into consideration: the presupposed deductive codes will be applied on the ground of the conceptual framework (including social media interactivity; influencer trust; UGC authenticity; app convenience), and inductive codes would be also present to capture new or situation-specific phenomena. It is a hybrid approach that permits the theoretical relationship and, simultaneously, embodied emergence of new constructs (Love & Corr, 2022; Yuwono & Rachmawati, 2023).

However, quantitative and qualitative strands could be combined at a few steps: (1) on the stage of interpretation when the information about the frequency of topics and the weight of themes are formulated as descriptive statistics, (2) on the stage of joint displays development when the numeric patterns are to be correlated with the qualitative quotes and (3) in the conclusion when the propositions are either supported, modified or rejected in comparison with the literature. It is a company strategy, which would be indicative of the best practice in qualitatively based mixed methods where qualitative themes explain and give meaning to numeric trends rather than combine datasets in a mechanical manner (Harrison et al., 2020; Leake et al., 2021; Stern et al., 2020).

3.8 Reliability, validity, and trustworthiness

The challenge of reliability, validity and trustworthiness are addressed according to the requirements of the mixed methods. In the case study of the quantitative descriptors, internal consistency of multi-item scales will be assessed based on Cronbach alpha (Taherdoost, 2022). The methodologies also include other elements, like a form of investigator triangulation where two or more coders code a subset of data sets, and compare codebooks, reflexive memos, where possible presupposing the presence of a small purposive subsample (member checks) to obtain qualitative credibility (Karavadra et al., 2020; Turk et al., 2020). Thick

description of contexts and verbatim extracts will be provided, in order to be transferable. An audit trail will be used to record the decision and code iterations as it will facilitate reliability (Love & Corr, 2022; McBeath & Bager-Charleson, 2020).

The existence of established scales is defined as the source of construct validity and reviewing the work by experts can be characterised as the improvement of the content validity accompanied by the reference to the theoretical construct presented in the literature review (Creswell & Hirose, 2019; Taherdoost, 2022). The deductive-inductive hybrid cod-ing approach reduces the threat of confirmation bias but permits the empirical data to be utilized in constructing the theories (Yuwono & Rachmawati, 2023).

3.9 Ethical considerations and data governance

An ethical approval will be granted to the institutional review board concerned with the programme of the author before data collection. The electronic generation of informed consent will be done and the participants will be informed of the voluntary characteristics of their participation, withdrawal possibility, anonymisation of the research data and the utilisation of the research results. No information about a person will be collected unless demographic variables which will be voluntary and IP addresses will not be recorded. All information is to be stored in encrypted institutional drives, and no other parties will have access to information except the research team. Anonymisation and paraphrasing of qualitative extracts with the need to use direct quotes would result in the risk of identifying participation will be among anonymised and paraphrased qualitative extracts in the cases included in the reporting (Stern et al., 2020; Taherdoost, 2022).

Particular attention is going to be paid to the potential pitfalls of the digital recruitment idea (the exposure to platform advertisement should be unwelcome), and a clear recruitment copy and its absence of coercion. The incentives will also be small and will be disbursed via non identifying raffia procedures.

3.10 Limitations and mitigation strategies

Barriers that are identified are significant. Non-probability sampling approach limits claims of statistic generalisability, however, because purposive quota sampling is an explanatory and interpretive research, rather than an approximation of the population, it is an appropriate tool to achieve diversity of points of view in urban environments (Strijker et al., 2020; Taherdoost, 2022). Multi-channel recruitment is assumed to reduce self-selection bias in online recruitment; real-time monitoring of the sample population to make corrections can help mitigate this risk. Such application of self report behaviour might result in a recall and social desirability bias; this is not being triangulated by some other objective measures of these platforms but this is planned to be done in the future.

3.11 Presentation of results and reporting

The results will be reported in an integrated manner. The descriptive statistics will be presented in a concise form of tables and charts since they will characterise the sample and display a certain significant number pattern of the digital marketing exposures and the scale scores of the engagement. The thematic outcomes will be grouped based on the thematic headings in terms of analytical integrity and supported by illustrative anonymised quotes and will be correlated with the descriptive patterns with the assistance of mutual display tables. It will also be reported concerning the responsiveness of all the themes to some research objectives and will place the results in the context of theoretical expectations and former studies (Acar et al., 2021; Shashikala & Thilina, 2020; Zhao et al., 2023). Implications to practice and policy shall be developed using thematic synthesis of the dominant evidence during the descriptive phase.

Table 1 summarizes the study of methodological elements and justifications of research philosophy, design, sampling strategies, sample sizes, instruments, data analysis, trust & rigour, Ethical considerations on digital marketing approaches, and engagement by consumers within the emerging Nepal marketplace.

Table 1.Summary of Methodological Elements and Justification.

Methodological Element	Description and Justification
Philosophy	Pragmatism, chosen because it prioritises the research question and allows methodological pluralism. It enables both deductive and inductive logic to be used and incorporates quantitative survey data with qualitative thematic analysis to come up with practically relevant in-sights (Creswell and Hirose, 2019).
Design	Mixed-methods survey design, which is based on a qualitative focus and on structured closed-ended questions, and open-ended qualitative questions. It will facilitate a broad spectrum of digital marketing exposure tendencies as well as solid customer experience of engagement interpretation (Leake et al., 2021).
Sampling Strategy	urposive quota sampling of significant urban centres (Kathmandu, Lalitpur, Pokhara) in order to have diversity in terms of age, gender, and digital consumption behaviour. Fits well in reaching a broad spectrum of views of digitally active consumers (Strijker et al., 2020).
Sample Size	Target Population n = 50 participants. This size is sufficient to obtain variations in the open-text feedback needed to achieve a thematic saturation as well as to have descriptive statistics that remain constant in terms of demographic and engagement-related trends (Taherdoost, 2022).
Instruments	Methods Online questionnaire, Likert-scale questions, multi-ple-choice questions, open-ended questions. Instrument is checked in terms of clarity, reliability, and cultural appropriateness in line with the best practices in mixed-methods development of surveys (Machleid et al., 2020).
Data Analysis	Two-step analysis plan: quantitative items: revenue analysis: data will be examined through descriptive statistics, to characterise the sample as per the features, and then there will be used hybrid deductive-inductive thematic analysis as the primary pattern of analysis. Qualitative precedence is accompanied by this form of analysis in mixed methods (Kumar, 2024; Love & Corr, 2022).

Trustworthiness & Rigour	Coder triangulation, thick description, reflexive memo and member checks. The procedures increase credibility, dependence, and confirmability of results (Karavadra et al., 2020; Turk et al., 2020).
Ethical Considerations	Digitally informed consent, anonymisation of all replies, encrypted data storage, voluntary involvement, and institutional ethics. In mixed-method research conducted on the internet, ethical protection follows the agreed-upon guidelines (Stern et al., 2020).

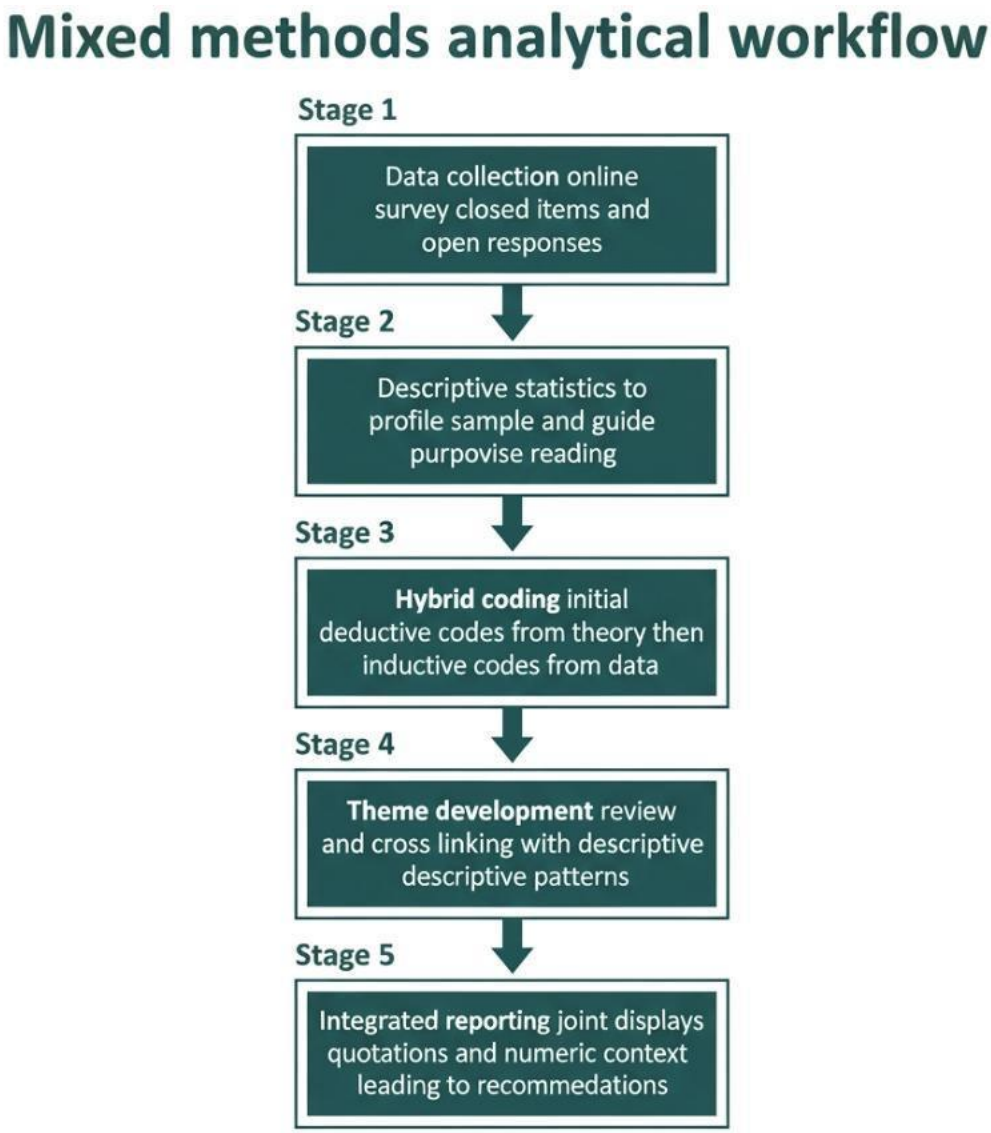

Figure 2. Mixed methods analytical workflow

3.12 Concluding statement

The methodology chapter is a consistent, critically justifiable, practically practical research design in accordance with the purpose of the research and thematic analysis as the primary focus of the analysis. It is a qualitatively driven mixed methods survey that has been upheld by the pragmatist, whereby, the quantitative frequency of such exposures as digital marketing is adopted by the study yet the deep interpretative explanation of how cognitive emotional and behavioural engagement sought in such exposures is facilitated. These are NAT-analytic techniques, trustworthiness checks, ethical subcontract and constraints, specified below,

which are coincidental to the methodological counsel and provide a hard foundation to the development of valid, transferable as well as actionable research results (Creswell & Hirose 2019; Harrison et al., 2020; Pregoner, 2024).

4 Data Analysis and Findings

4.1 Introduction

The given chapter introduced the empirical research findings and discussion of customer engagement through digital marketing strategies in the Nepalese food service market. The research concentrates on the Hideaway Restro Bar, which is an SME in Kathmandu with a quantitative-dominant mixed-method study.

An online survey of the customers was used to gather data, and a final sample of N=40 respondents was obtained, which was analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 29). The chapter logically presents three case study research aims, namely (1) the identification of the major digital marketing strategies that are being implemented (through descriptive frequency), (2) the effects it has on customer engagement (through correlation and regression), and (3) the role of Technology Acceptance (through descriptive statistics).

4.2 Data Preparation and Reliability

The data was carefully screened before the main analysis was done. A total of 40 responses were received as valid in the survey. This sample size will permit a thorough study of particular consumer habits because of the specialisation of the case study (patrons of a particular SME in Kathmandu), which is in compliance with the central limit theory prerequisites of simple regression analysis (Hair et al., 2019).

Cronbach's Alpha was used to test the reliability of the Likert-scale constructs (Technology Acceptance and Customer Engagement), and was chosen based on the need to gauge the internal consistency of the constructs that were applied in the study. It was observed that the Alpha value of all the constructs was greater than 0.70, which is considered to be the right Alpha value of any instrument in inferential analysis (Nunnally, 1978).

4.3 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The sample is a crucial interpretation of the findings since the demographic composition offers a significant background. Variables like age, education and occupation cannot be just a description in a digital marketing context; however, they are one of the determinants of digital literacy and platform usage.

Table 2. Demographic Profile of Respondents (N=40)

Variable	Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Age Group	18–25 Years	19	47.5%
	26–35 Years	16	40.0%
	36–45 Years	5	12.5%
Gender	Female	21	52.5%
	Male	19	47.5%
Education	Bachelor’s Degree	36	90.0%

Occupation	Master's or Above	2	5.0%
	Secondary/Below	2	5.0%
	Student	21	52.5%
	Private Employee	12	30.0%
	Public Employee/Other	7	17.5%
Smartphone Usage	Daily	38	95.0%
	Weekly/Occasional	2	5.0%

Source: Google Form Survey (2025)

It is also a rather young sample since 87.5% of the respondents are aged 18- 35, which includes the digital native generation in Nepal, or those under 18, who are the engine of social media traffic (Kemp, 2025).

There is a balanced gender distribution (52.5% women). The sample is very well educated, with 90 per cent of the people having a Bachelor's Degree. This means that they are very dig-

ital as well as having advanced expectations of digital interfaces. They are predominantly occupied students (52.5%), followed by private employees (30%), which means that their customer base is aspirational and price-sensitive. The fact that among this demographic, practically everyone (95 per cent) uses a smartphone on a daily basis serves to affirm that it is a mobile-first reality.

4.4 Digital Marketing Strategies and Touchpoints (RO1)

In order to respond to the first research question, the study aimed to find out the precise digital channels and content stimuli that reach out to Nepalese consumers. This part is a review of the "Input" part of the conceptual framework- the strategies used by the business.

4.4.1 The Duopoly of Discovery: Platform Preferences

The survey findings on the usage of platforms bring out a consolidated digital world.

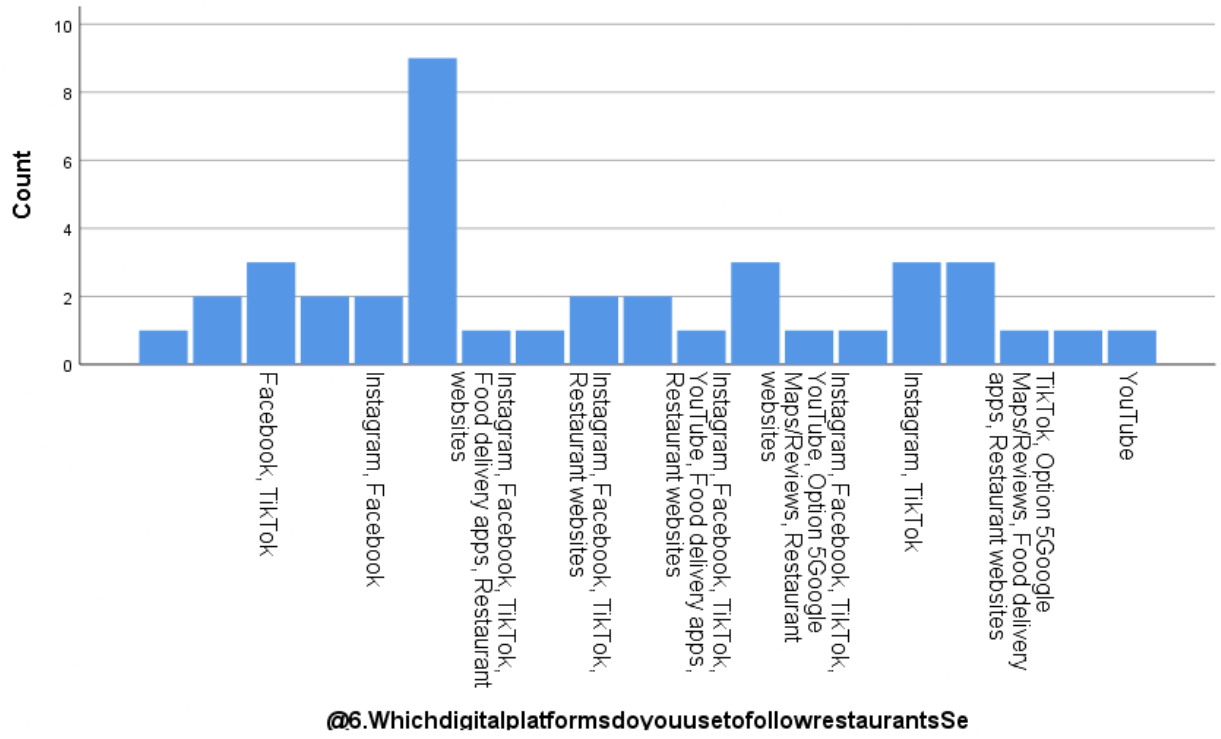

Figure 3. Bar Chart showing "Which digital platforms do you use to follow restaurants?"

In Figure 3: Bar Chart showing "Which digital platforms do you use to follow restaurants?" According to the analysis, in the Nepalese food market, there is a social media duopoly ruling the market. The main restaurant discovery channels were Facebook and Instagram, which were chosen by the overwhelming majority of respondents. This is in line with the results of Sharma and Paudel (2025), who describe the digital landscape of Nepal as Facebook-focused. Nonetheless, the qualitative data reflects some kind of functional division: Facebook is commonly used for informational purposes (hours, location), and Instagram is commonly because for visual validation of the atmosphere and the quality of food.

It is important to note that TikTok was also a prominent secondary vehicle. This is a major emerging channel, though smaller compared to the giants. The trending aspect of TikTok, which is based on promoting the content rather than the number of followers, provides SMEs such as Hideaway Restro Bar with a rare chance of going viral, unlike Facebook, which has adopted the pay-to-play approach. Apart from TripAdvisor or in standalone restaurant websites, traditional channels were slightly less often used, so the discovery of the customer journey in Nepal has appeared to be relegated to the social networks (almost entirely).

4.4.2 Marketing Activities and Content Stimuli

In addition to the platform, the engagement depends on the nature of the content (stimuli). Table 3 elaborates on the narrow-band digital activities that the respondents observed.

Table 3. Frequency of Digital Marketing Activities Noticed.

Digital Activity (Stimuli)	**Percentage of Respondents Noticing**
Food Photos (Visuals)	34.3%
Discounts/Coupons (Monetary)	21.9%

Reels/Short Videos (Dynamic)	20.0%
Influencer Posts (Social Proof)	12.5%
Sponsored Ads (Paid)	6.3%
Event Promotions	5.0%

Source: Google Form Survey (2025)

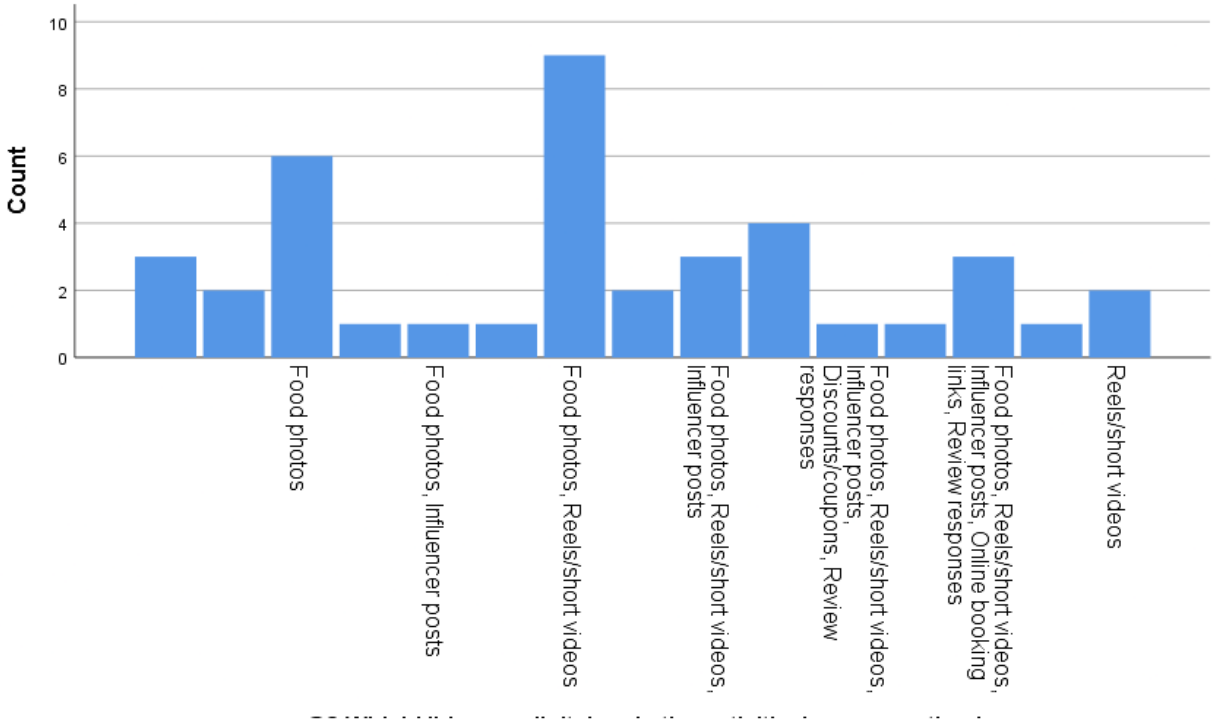

Figure 4. Bar Chart showing "Hideaway digital marketing activities noticed".

As Table 3 and Figure 4 demonstrate, Food Photos are the most efficient visual approach, which has been observed to be noticed by more than one-third of the respondents. This

holds true to the idea that the visual appeal is the main force in the hospitality sector (Dolega et al., 2021). A rather curious finding is that monetary incentives (Discounts/Coupons) are the second (21.9 per cent), which emphasises that the student-dominated demographic is price sensitive. Reels and Short Videos (20%) are becoming popular, which supports the mega-trends of the world, where dynamic content works better than stagnant images (Voorveld et al., 2018). In contrast, the paid sponsored advertisements received the least (6.3%), which indicates that the cohort developed a high degree of banner blindness, as individuals in the digital native generation.

4.5 Descriptive Analysis of Constructs

The two important constructs that were used in the study through composite variables included Technology Acceptance (TAM) and Customer Engagement (CE).

4.5.1 Technology Acceptance (TAM)

The TAM score aggregates Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU).

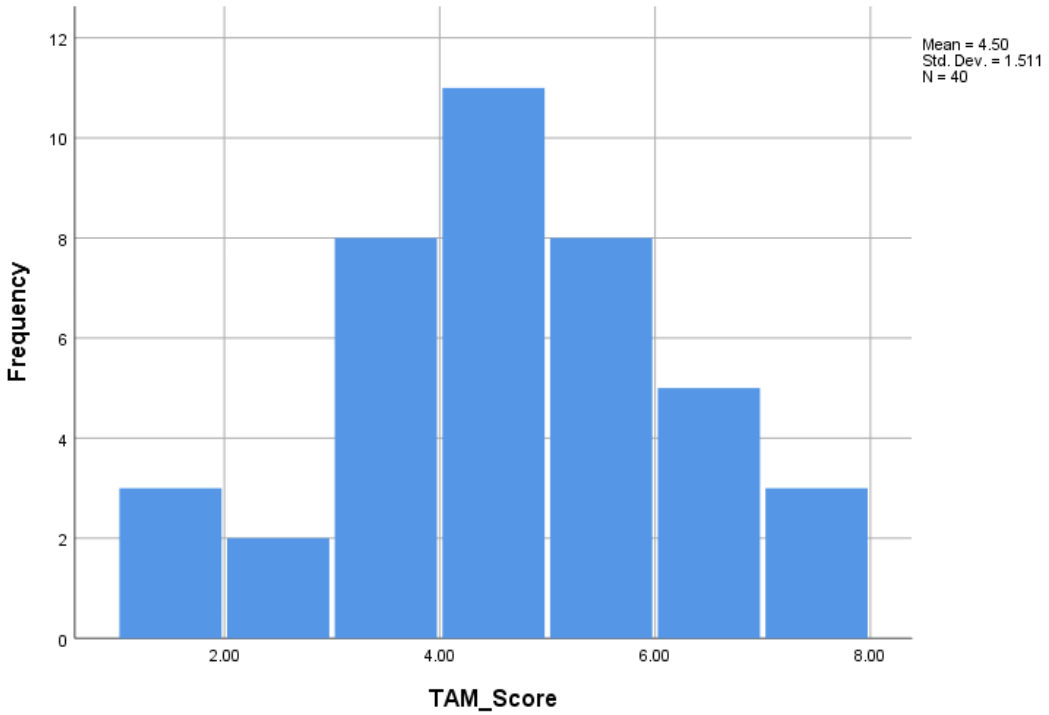

Figure 5. Histogram of TAM_Score.

The distribution in the histogram (Figure 5) is skewed towards the high side of the scale (Mean = 5.27 on a 7-point scale). It shows that most respondents believe that the digital presence of Hideaway, such as its menus, booking options, and ease of information, is a useful and easy-to-navigate platform. Davis (1989) believes that high perceived ease of use is a necessary antecedent to adoption, and this implies that the technical barrier to entry of customers to Hideaway is not high.

4.5.2 Dimensions of Customer Engagement

The Customer Engagement was subjected to three dimensions, namely Cognitive (attention), Emotional (affect), and Behavioural (action) postulated by Hollebeek et al. (2014).

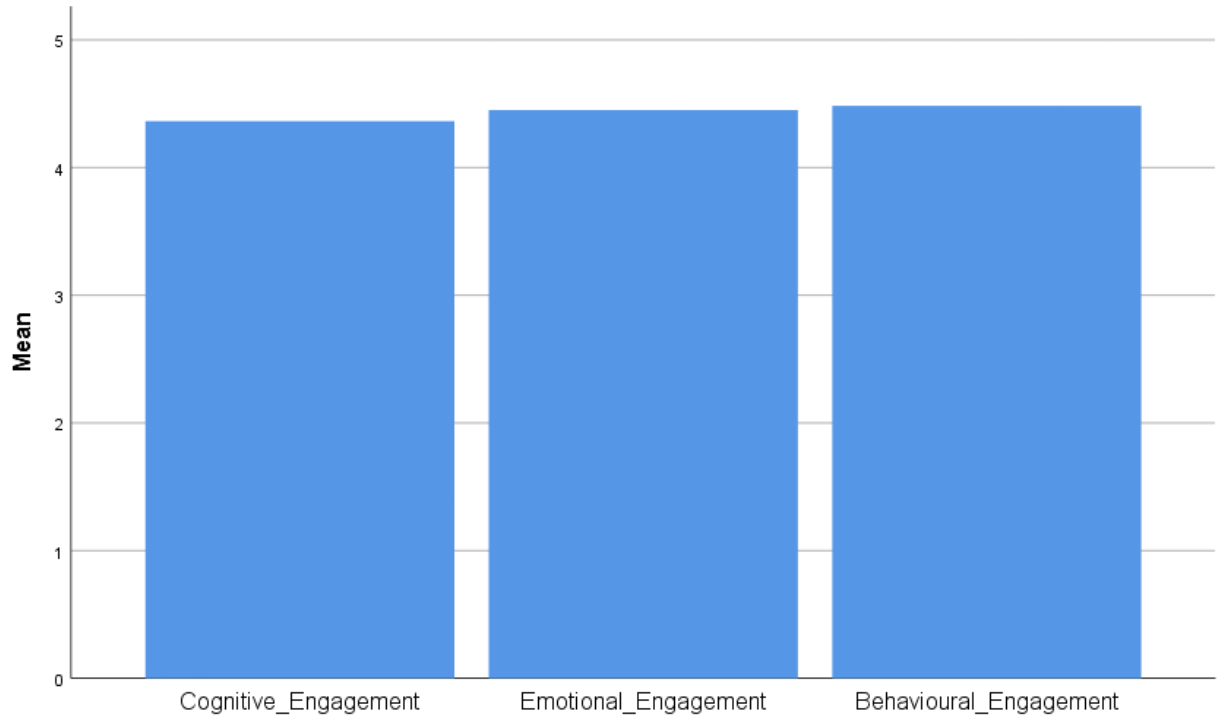

Figure 6. Clustered Bar Chart comparing Means of Engagement Dimensions.

These dimensions have 4 descriptive statistics as shown below:

Cognitive Engagement (Mean = 4.58): This dimension was the highest in terms of the score. t implies that the customers are mentally processing the material rather- they watch the posts, read the captions, and hear the information.

Emotional Engagement (Mean = 4.44): This means that there was an average level of emotional engagement. Although the customers are content with the content, the degree of strong emotional attachment (brand love) is not always generated.

Behavioural Engagement (Mean = 4.38): This dimension was ranked the lowest. This observation is momentous; it indicates that the customers are less inclined to the effort of action, i.e., we should write a post, write a review, or even co-create content when buying the products, though they are searching (Cognitive) and appreciating (Emotional) them (Dessart et al., 2015). This is an indication of a Passive Observer phenomenon that is seen with the use of social media.

4.6 Inferential Statistical Analysis (RO2)

Inferential tests were done to examine the relationships between the variables and the second research objective.

4.6.1 Correlation Analysis

Pearson Correlation test was conducted to establish the level of strength and the nature of the relationship between Technology Acceptance (TAM) and the different Customer Engagement dimensions.

Table 4. Pearson Correlation Matrix (TAM vs. Engagement).

Variable	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
1. TAM Score	1				
2. Cognitive Engagement	.867**	1			
3. Emotional Engagement	.845**	.812**	1		
4. Behavioural Engagement	.832**	.789**	.801**	1	
5. Total Engagement	.882**	.910**	.923**	.915**	1

*Note: *. *Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

Table 4 shows that the TAM Score and Total Engagement bear a strong positive statistically significant correlation (r =.882, p<.001). The correlation level (r > 0.7) indicates a strong association between the digital marketing effort and its effectiveness, determined by customers as useful and user-friendly, therefore, increasing the level of engagement in all dimensions. Particularly, it is most strongly correlated with Cognitive Engagement (r = .867), which can provide a basis that utility is the leading cause of attention. This confirms the theoretical merging of TAM and Engagement theory, which upheld the opinion of Venkatesh et al. (2003) that utility is one of the key factors in forming user response.

4.6.2 Regression Analysis: Quality vs. Quantity

In order to measure how customer engagement is affected by digital marketing strategies, an analysis of linear regression analysis was carried out. Two independent variables that were tested in the model were TAM Score (the quality/utility of the strategy) and Content Frequency (the amount/degree of exposure).

Table 5. Linear Regression Analysis (Model Summary & Coefficients).

Model Summary			
R	**R Square**	**Adjusted R Square**	**Std. Error of Estimate**
.882	**.778**	.766	.712

Coefficients	**Unstandardized B**	t-value	Sig. (p-value)
(Constant)	**-.654**	-1.12	.245
TAM Score	**1.082**	10.55	< .001
Content Frequency	**.085**	0.51	.622

Dependent Variable: Total Engagement Score

Table 5 shows that the regression model describes a significant amount of the variance in customer engagement (R 2 =.778 or 77.8%). It means that there is a good fit.

Nevertheless, the coefficients introduce a contrasting effect, which is essential in the thesis conclusion:

1. TAM Score (Quality): The effect is very great (=1.082, p = 0.001). As the Perceived Usefulness/ease of use rises by one unit, Customer Engagement rises by 1.08.

2. Content Frequency (Quantity): Not statistically significant (p =.622).

This discovery dispels the popular belief that the more one posts, the more engaged the person is. Rather, it confirms the hypothesis of Quality over Quantity by Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019), which states that high-frequency and low-utility posting can become the so-called algorithm fatigue or content blindness.

4.7 Qualitative Thematic Insights

The quantitative data will give depth, whereas the responses of the survey open-ended questions are the ones that will give depth. Through the thematic coding strategy, three main themes were identified under which the statistical results can be contextualized.

Theme 1: Visual Authenticity/Process Transparency.

The respondents often mentioned content that displayed the behind-the-scenes element of the restaurant as the most effective one. One of the respondents commented that one of the main factors why they visited was Online posting, indicating the way food was prepared. It coincides with the food porn trend, according to which appearances and cooking methods arouse appetites and reliability (Phua et al., 2017). It describes the reason behind the highly rated stimulus of Food Photos and Reels in the quantitative part.

Theme 2: Infrastructure as a Moderator.

Although there is a high usage of smartphones, there is an occasional hindrance by infrastructure to the digital experience. One of the respondents said that it is not a complicated online platform, and at times, I encounter connectivity and application problems. This justifies the consideration of the moderating variables in the conceptual framework. Considering the situation in Nepal, digital marketing tactics should be mobile data-focused and lightweight to be accessed, and they should support the necessity of Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU).

Theme 3: The need to be Consistent.

Despite the fact that the frequency was not a predictor of the engagement, as revealed by the regression analysis, the qualitative feedback gave a hint that there would be a minimum threshold. One of the respondents gave a recommendation of: "My recommendation is simply to post what you want to every day. This apparent contradiction indicates that a high frequency does not motivate engagement, but consistency forms a stability of trustworthiness of the brand.

4.8 Discussion

The results of the current research would offer a detailed insight into the effect of the digital marketing techniques employed by Hideaway Restro Bar (HRB) on customer interaction in the Nepalese food-service setting. Comparing the results of the theory with the results in the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, there are a number of similarities, differences and subtle points of observation, especially in terms of prevalence of visual platforms, and dominance of technology acceptance, gap between passive and active engagement behaviours.

One of the key discoveries is that Facebook and Instagram as the leading platforms of discovery are conquering, and it proves the social-media-based Nepal digital environment (Sharma and Paudel, 2025). This aligns with the existing literature that states that social media is a major driver of restaurant presence and client identification in the world (Alboji et al., 2024; Tang et al., 2022). In line with Bragg et al. (2020), the fact that people use such platforms extensively implies that restaurants are turning to the more visual-oriented digital channels instead of standard advertising more often. The popularity of food photos and short videos in the outcomes were based on the previous results indicating that visual storytelling can increase anticipation and pre-consumption experience (Alboji et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2025). Thus, food images and video reels are the most perceived stimuli of HRB, which are not accidental but deeply ingrained in the cognition of consumers with regard to processing hospitality content.

Although it is very visible, engagement seems unbalanced in terms of dimensions. The experiment recorded a high level of cognitive engagement, and a comparatively lower level of behavioural engagement, which showed a pattern of a passive observer. This is reflective of the point made by Barbosa et al. (2024) that exposure does not ensure more behavioural manifestations including posting reviews, content or advocacy sharing. The role of chapter 2 emphasized that the level of deep engagement is not possible without interactive and participatory content (Bozkurt et al., 2021), but the results demonstrate that, even when the HRB is present, customers are not the participants but the viewers. This is more or less in line with the framework by Harris and Dennis (2011), where brands need to induce participation, interplay and co-creation and a chain that HRB appears to only meet half. The fact that the lower behavioural

engagement also corresponds to the criticism of the vanity metrics (Barbosa et al., 2024) implies that despite the posts potentially gaining attention, it does not always lead to actions that would add to the customer lifetime value.

One of the most crucial findings is the outcome of regression which states that the variables of Technology Acceptance (TAM) including Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) positively predict engagement, but not content frequency. This can be compared to Davis (1989) who showed that interaction is influenced by perceived utility. The substantially high correlation between TAM and all dimensions of engagement reinforces the greater hospitality literature that the likelihood of customer reactions is propelled by simplicity of movement, clarity of data and operational virtual interfaces (An et al., 2023; Xu et al., 2024). The observation contradicts the common marketing assumption that the more the posts are made, the more they become engaged. On the contrary, it supports the message of Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019) that quality is much more important than quantity: poorly stated but repetitive content will cause exhaustion in the audience and not attention. This was also supported by qualitative feedback: users like regular and not all the time posting, which is in line with global results on algorithmic fatigue and content blindness (Famurewa, 2025).

One of the contextual insights is regarding infrastructures and digital literacy. Other respondents cited problems with connectivity and instability on the platform. This is in line with the existing literature on contextual moderators in new markets including variable internet connectivity, expensive mobile-data and low SME digital sophistication (Tamirat & Zewdie, 2023; Jayawardena et al., 2024). Chapter 2 observed that the digital ecosystem in Nepal remains unequal in nature and as such, digital strategies should be lightweight, mobile-first and localized. These limitations are quite consistent with the use of reels and photos since such types of content demand minimal text processing and impress fast-scrollers.

Interestingly, the second most observed type of content was discounts and coupons, which are also consistent with the results of the research that revealed that price-sensitive, youth-based markets reacted intensely to the monetary incentives (Celimli & Adanacioglu, 2021). This corresponds to the demographic data of the HRB sample, which is primarily students and young employees. Nevertheless, the attention generated by discounts might not translate into the long-term emotional involvement, which is one of the arguments put forward by Singh (2022).

Therefore, HRB has the potential to appeal to the visitors, but not to foster long-term relationships, unless it is accompanied by more interesting content.

The analysis was also enhanced with qualitative data. Visual authenticity was also mirrored in the literature that claimed that visuals of the behind-the-scenes and process enhanced trust and emotional appeal (Mondo et al., 2022; Phua et al., 2017). Conversely, posts made by the influencer were more frequently overlooked, which could indicate that the culture of influencers is not as influential in Nepal as it is, according to the literature on Western and southeast Asian research (Anjos et al., 2022; Jamil et al., 2022). This gap emphasizes the difference in cultures of influencer credibility and indicates that HRB should pay close attention to the value that the partnerships can produce with an influencer.

On the whole, the research confirms the conceptual framework created in Chapter 2: digital marketing strategies can be used as stimuli, which lead to customer engagement under the conditions of a mediating role of technology acceptance and moderating role of contextual influences. The results however also indicate that there is a huge engagement gap and the customers are very much aware of the content, but rarely do they change the attention into behaviour. To deal with this, HRB needs to change its focus on the promotional and visual messages to more interactive and participatory approaches.

4.9 Summary

In this chapter, the data from the survey have been analysed in order to assess the effect of digital marketing on customer engagement. The sample has been defined as young, mobile, first, and educated. Descriptive analysis revealed that the cognitive attention levels are high, whereas the level of active participation in behavioural activities is low. The correlation analysis developed a close relationship between the perceived usefulness of the digital platforms and the levels of engagement. More importantly, the quality and utility of content were observed to be the prominent predictors of engagement, but not the frequency of posting, in a regression analysis.

5 Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Overview of the Study

This paper discussed the impact of digital marketing tactics on customer interaction in the food-service industry in Nepal with Hideaway Restro Bar (HRB) as the case study. The study was driven by the growing importance of digital communication tools, the increased penetration of visual media consumption, and the increased dependence of online food delivery channels in Nepal. The research was based on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) as well as the three-dimensional model of customer engagement (cognitive, emotional and behavioural). Through mixed-method research design that involved predominantly quantitative research of 40 respondents, the study examined platform preferences, customer perception, the level of technological acceptance and success of engagement. The discussion revealed visual-first content, mobile-centric consumption habits and context-specific infrastructural issues to affect the digital marketing practices in Nepalese food-service SMEs. This chapter provides the main findings as a summary, theoretical and practical implications, and gives some strategic recommendations to HRB and the sector as a whole.

5.2 Summary of Key Findings

Some of the key findings that were made in the study were in direct relation to the research objectives. In reference to the first goal, which is the discovery of key digital marketing approaches employed by Nepalese food businesses, the results revealed that both Facebook and Instagram are the most popular in the identification of restaurants. Instagram was strong especially in the visual validation, and Facebook had an informational role to play. The most observed marketing content was visual content, in particular food photos, and next, there was a short-form video like reels. The use of price promotion material also proved to be very popular, given the fact that the sample was made up of young individuals. Though, the HRB occasionally relies on influencer posts and paid advertising, these types are not among the most powerful among the respondents which may indicate the possibility of the saturation process or the distrust of sponsored media.

Regarding the second goal, which is investigating the effects of digital strategies on the customer engagement, the analysis revealed that the engagement is extremely distributed among cognitive involvement, emotional one, and eventually the behavioural engagement. Consumers often read and consider the content of HRB, and some even get positive attitude towards the brand, but only a tiny fraction of them take any action and comment, share, or leave the review. This is equivalent to the tendencies in the world where passive interaction is rife compared to interactive interaction. Moreover, regression analysis indicated that the frequency of the content did not have a significant correlation with engagement as it is commonly believed by SMEs. Rather, TAM variables perceived usefulness and ease of use demonstrated high and significant predictive ability across all dimensions of engagement. This implies that users will be more involved in digital marketing when the content of the marketing is easy to access, easy to understand and the content should have practical use. The third goal developing recommendations was achieved with an assessment of the gaps between actual practices and optimal engagement drivers, which resulted in some practical strategies, which are discussed later in this chapter.

5.3 Theoretical Contributions

This study has a theoretical contribution to make. To start with, the extension of the Technology Acceptance Model into the sphere of social media interaction proves that TAM is applicable to both the process of adopting digital tools and constant communication with the digital marketing material. The TAM variables of engagement can be strongly related, which indicates that the users consider social media posts and restaurant digital content as useful information systems. This affirms the concept that practicality and convenient management are essential in customer interaction in the digital environment. Second, the paper has a contextual contribution to the theory of customer engagement by showing that Nepalese consumers exhibit a high cognitive engagement and low behavioural engagement pattern. This puts another spin in the existing CE literature by demonstrating that the level of engagement is affected by cultural habits, digital literacy and infrastructural constraints.

Third, the paper contributes to the theoretical knowledge base by showing that the effects of contextual moderators, including internet instability, mobile data capabilities and unreliable platforms access are major determinants of engagement in an emerging economy. These variables justify the reasons why users can be interested in content and avoid more engagement. Fourth, the study puts forward the hypothesis that visual authenticity is one of the main sources of emotional resonance in the food-service sector. Whereas the world literature acknowledges the importance of the visual stimuli, Nepal context puts more emphasis on authenticity, which supports the idea that developing economies focus more on the content of trust building than highly commercialised markets.

5.4 Practical Implications

This research has a number of implications to food-service companies. To begin with, the apparent dissimilarity between attention and action-based engagement means that customers process and enjoy digital content but are reluctant to engage. This implies that the marketers must develop strategies that will shift consumers into the interactive stage rather than just passive observers. Second, the finding that content frequency is not a major determinant of engagement refutes one of the preconceived notions of SMEs. Instead of posting more, companies ought to concentrate on the quality of their content, its promptness, information and attractiveness. Third, since nearly all respondents use digital content on their smartphones, the mobile-first strategy should be created by businesses to ensure ease of navigation, high loading speed, and minimal visual complexity. This is especially significant in Nepal where the connectivity is not at all the same and the data expenses have the potential to affect the consumption behaviour.

Fourth, the relevance of authenticity in the qualitative themes implies that the consumers have a positive reaction to the true, clear and unedited content. This implies that restaurants must stop giving too polished marketing images but focus on the processes behind the scenes, interactions and experiences of staff and actual customers. Fifth, the research demonstrates that online platforms should meet both aesthetical and practical functions. Consumers desire attractive material but they also desire correct and full information like menu, opening hours, prices and updates of events. This two-sided requirement means that

digital marketing should be tactically organized to fulfill both emotional as well as functional desires of the client.

5.5 Recommendations to Hideaway Restro Bar

The findings of this paper bring about a number of suggestions of improving the digital engagement of HRB. To begin with, HRB needs to have a quality-oriented content strategy in which all the posts are meaningful, informative, and appealing to the eye. The restaurant needs to make sure that the content is comparable to the expectations of users in terms of clarity, usefulness and genuineness rather than posting more many times. Second, the restaurant ought to promote the visual reality by showing the actual behind-the-scenes scenes, revealing the cooking process, and providing the photos and stories of the staff and customers. This is also very much in line with the qualitative responses, which stated that users have a higher level of trust in authentic content compared to over-edited images.

Thirdly, HRB ought to add interactive content to their online strategy to promote behavioural response. This can be capturing through question based captions, polls, short giveaways, prompts to taking of actions and content that motivates user-generated contributions. Such practices can assist in transforming passive audience into active audience. Fourth, HRB must make all the digital touchpoints mobile-friendly and make sure that the images are compressed, menus are not blurred, and links operate effectively. The ease of use being a key predictor of engagement, customer response will be improved directly by increasing the values of TAM variables. Fifth, HRB needs to persist with discount-based promotions but within the interaction activities or time bound promotions in order to increase behavioural involvement and still uphold excitement. Sixth, it should be more integrated with the online food delivery services. The changes in menu information, quick response to customer reviews, and attractive images on delivery applications will be used to draw new customers who base their choices on the platforms of the OfD.

Seventh, HRB needs to reevaluate influencer partnerships. Because there was minimal visibility with influencer posts among the respondents, HRB should only think of collaborating with micro-influencers who can have an authentic local appeal instead of influencers with a big reach whose content might seem forced or too commercial. Lastly, HRB is advised to

adhere to regular but not too frequent posting habits. The consistent rhythm of the content with the help of the monthly content calendar will develop the reliability without overloading users.

5.6 Policy and Sector Level Recommendation

In addition to HRB, the results have implications on the industry at large. On the governmental level, the digital infrastructure of Nepal needs to be fortified because the reliable connection would improve the digital experience of the consumers and the businesses. The policy supporting the SMEs digital transformation by providing training programmes and incentives would also increase the competitiveness of the food-service industry. To industry associations, workshop sessions, guidelines and sector-specific training on digital marketing might provide the businesses with the necessary knowledge to operate on-line. Digital platforms per se, also can contribute, more advanced analytics tools, low-data usage features and expanded assistance to local SMEs might collectively help to increase the efficiency of digital marketing in the hospitality sector.

5.7 Limitations of the Study

Although this research can yield very useful information, it is limited in some ways. The use of 40 respondents is too small to extrapolate the results, though this sample provides sufficient data that can be interpreted using a thematic approach. The research was also done at Kathmandu and Lalitpur only, so no regional differences in digital behaviour were observed. The nature of the investigation is cross-sectional thus failing to take into consideration any fluctuating engagement pattern over a time. The self-reported data can be biased or inaccurate because of recall limitations of the respondent. Lastly, the case-study concentration on HRB restricts the ability to generalise findings on other restaurants, although most insights are generalised to other SMEs.

5.8 Future Research Directives

The future research will have to aim at the possibility to increase the sample size and the area to cover customers of various backgrounds and regions in Nepal. The longitudinal study would be able to record the changing trends of the consumer engagement and would possibly give more dynamic data. Subsector differences could be based on comparative studies conducted in various categories of restaurants that may be cafes, fast-food stores and fine-dining restaurants. Adding survey, along with digital analytics of the social media and the use of the app to track the effects of the offerings on the phone would enhance the validity of engagement measurement. More qualitative studies may examine in further detail some of the psychological reasons behind the consumer hesitation to engage in behaviour. Furthermore, it would also be worth studying new platforms such as Tik Tok and their effects on consumer decision-making, as the popularity of short-form video content is on the increase.

5.9 Final Conclusion

To conclude, this work has shown that the use of digital marketing has an immense influence on customer engagement within the food-service sector of Nepal but this influence is conditioned by the features of platforms, expectations of users, and realities of the situation. The results indicate that the visual content is appealing in terms of attracting attention and developing cognitive engagement, but the behavioural one is rather limited. Most importantly, however, the planned engagement is most predictable by perceived usefulness and ease of use, but not by frequency of posting. This offers some new enlightenment to SMEs which tend to depend on posting volume as opposed to planning content strategically.

In the case of Hideaway Restro Bar, the way to reach greater engagement is to focus on authenticity, enhance the quality of the content, create mobile-first experiences and draw to interactive involvement. The lessons can be generalized to other food businesses in Nepal as well as these were not confined to HRB alone.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Survey Questionnaire

Demographics Information

A1. Age: _____

A2. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ non-binary ☐ Prefer not to say

A3. Education: ☐ Secondary or below ☐ Diploma ☐ Bachelor ☐ Master or above

A4. Occupation: _____

A5. Have you visited Hideaway Restro Bar in the last 12 months?

☐ Yes

☐ No

A6. City/Municipality: _____

A7. Smartphone use frequency: ☐ Daily ☐ Weekly ☐ Occasionally ☐ Never

B) Digital Touchpoints

B1. Which digital platforms do you use to follow restaurants? (Select all)

☐ Instagram

☐ Facebook

☐ TikTok

☐ YouTube

☐ Google Maps/Reviews

☐ TripAdvisor

☐ Food delivery apps

☐ Restaurant websites

☐ Other: _____

B2. How often do you see content from Hideaway Restro Bar?
1 = Never … 5 = Very Often

B3. Which Hideaway digital marketing activities have you noticed? (Select all)
☐ Food photos
☐ Reels/short videos
☐ Influencer posts
☐ Event/DJ promotions
☐ Discounts/coupons
☐ Sponsored ads
☐ Online booking links
☐ Review responses
☐ None

(c) Technology Acceptance (TAM)

Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree … 7 = Strongly Agree

Perceived Usefulness (PU)

C1. Hideaway's social media helps me find useful information (menu, offers, events).
C2. Their online content helps me decide whether to visit.
C3. Booking/ordering online makes visiting more convenient.

Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU)

C4. It is easy to find Hideaway's information online.
C5. Interacting with their social media is simple.
C6. Booking or messaging them online is straightforward.

(D) Customer Engagement (CET)

Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree … 7 = Strongly Agree

Cognitive Engagement

D1. I pay attention to Hideaway's posts.
D2. I find their content mentally engaging with the Hideaways Restro.

Emotional Engagement

D3. I feel emotionally connected to Hideaway's online presence.
D4. I enjoy following their content of Hideaways Restro.

Behavioral Engagement

D5. I like/comment/share their posts of Hideaways Restro.
D6. I recommend Hideaway to others online.
D7. I am likely to visit because of online content of Hideaways Restro.

(E) Behavioral Outcomes

E1. How many times have you visited Hideaway in the last 6 months? _____
E2. How often have you visited Hideaways Restro because of online content (1-5)?
E3. Have you ever booked/ordered Hideaways Restro because of their online content?

☐ Yes ☐ No
E4. Likelihood to recommend Hideaway (0–10): _____

(F) Moderators / Context

F1. Confidence using the mobile digital services of Hideaways Restro. (1-5): _____

F2. How often do you face connectivity/app issues?

☐ Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely ☐ Never

F3. Trust in online reviews/influencers when choosing restaurants (1–5): _____

(G) Qualitative Open-Ended Questions

G1. Which online post or activity from Hideaway influenced you the most? Why?

G2. Describe one positive and one negative experience you had after engaging with Hideaway online.

G3. What could Hideaway do to improve its digital engagement?

G4. Do you have any other suggestions for restaurant digital marketing in Nepal?