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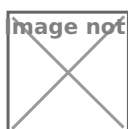
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Social Media Marketing for Restaurant Industry in Dubrovnik: Customers' Perspectives and

Restaurant Practices

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Abstract

This study explores the use of social media marketing within the restaurant industry, with a specific focus on restaurants located in the Dubrovnik area. Using the snowball sampling method, a survey looking into social media use by customers in researching restaurants was administered via various social media platforms. The findings from 106 valid responses suggest that Google is the most commonly used platform, followed by Instagram, TripAdvisor, Travel Sites, and Tik Tok. The reported reasons for use of particular social media expectedly differ, with Google mostly being used because of visuals, but participants stated as well menu details and price availability as their reasons of its usage. Secondly there was Instagram which participants stated that they mostly use as well because of presence of visuals of food, venue and experiences of other people. And last but not least they are using TikTok for restaurant search because of visuals and other people experience.

Additionally, content analysis on TikTok and Instagram profiles associated with restaurants listed by the Dubrovnik Tourist Board was conducted. Interestingly, it was found that only 61.0% of restaurants have an Instagram presence, while only 0.9% have TikTok. This research contributes to understanding the role of social media in restaurant marketing and provides valuable insights for restaurants seeking to enhance their online presence and attract customers in the competitive Dubrovnik market.

Key words:

Marketing, Social Media Platforms, Food & Beverage Industry, Instagram, TikTok, Tourist Engagement

INTRODUCTION:

Social media started in 1970, with MySpace becoming the first platform that reach a million monthly active users by early 2000s (Ortiz-Ospina, 2019). With that social media era started. Currently, Facebook is still the biggest social media platform with 3.05 billion users, Whatsapp is next with 2.7, followed by You tube with same number of 2.7. Instagram follows with 2.5 billion users. And lastly there are WeChat and TikTok with 1.67 users (Shewale, 2024). And the social media continue to grow. TikTok gained 20 million new users per month by mid-2018 and in 2019, Facebook led with 2.3 billion users, followed by YouTube, Instagram, and WeChat, each boasting over a billion users (Ortiz-Ospina, 2019).

With the pace of technological innovation, it was to be expected that corporations would use social media in promotion and advertising as well (Sherly, 2020). Restaurants started to use social media as an advertising tool in 2006. The first restaurant chain to use it was Burger King who created a MySpace page to promote its Whopper sandwich (“The evolution of,” 2023). It’s used to connect with customers, promote products and services, and conduct market research.

In today's competitive restaurant industry, embracing social media is crucial for success. Numbers suggest that 82% of U.S. restaurant owners utilize social media platforms for marketing, emphasizing its pivotal role in gaining customer attention (Bhaduri, 2023; “Restaurant Social Media,” 2023). The statistics reinforce social media's influence, with 94% of restaurants actively monitoring online reviews, showcasing its impact on shaping industry reputations.

With over 4.95 billion social media users (Shewale, 2024), platforms like Instagram, with an 84 times higher engagement rate than Twitter, provide vast opportunities for restaurant

branding (“Restaurant Social Media,” 2023), especially since 80% of people who go to restaurants have a social media account (Bhaduri, 2024).

The average person spends 144 daily minutes on social media, so this might be a prime channel for reaching customers, as 50% claim it significantly influences restaurant choices (“Restaurant Social Media,” 2023). A compelling social media presence drives repeat visits, with 22% of customers motivated to revisit based on an engaging online profile, and 71% of users being more likely to recommend restaurants which practice quick social media responses.

Effective social media strategies are vital for business growth, as 88% of customers trust online reviews over personal recommendations (Bhaduri, 2024). Customers actively share feedback on restaurant social media pages, making benchmarking a prime opportunity for enhancing visibility and brand loyalty. This core aspect of digital marketing involves creating official social platform pages to boost online presence, reducing marketing costs through faster, often free campaigns (“Restaurant Social Media,” 2023). Beyond popularity, these strategies indirectly contribute to Search Engine Optimization [SEO] by influencing website authority and customer engagement. Consistently showcasing valuable content builds trust and encourages repeated visits, making an impactful case for the essential role of social media in a successful restaurant marketing plan.

Social media plays a pivotal role in customer-related aspects for businesses (Manalo, 2020). Travelers gain insights about a place through social media and review sites, influencing their purchase decisions based on firsthand experiences shared by others. The modern consumer values instant access to information and customer service. Brands, in the era of declining loyalty, benefit from customers sharing preferences and needs. Online brand loyalty is cultivated through engaging conversations, listening to customer behaviors, and providing excellent online customer service. These elements collectively contribute to building and sustaining customer loyalty in the digital landscape.

Restaurants strategically showcase visually appealing dishes on social media, attracting customers with vibrant colors and enticing appearances (Manalo, 2020). Posts featuring photos, links, and videos often garner status updates and comments. Images, pleasing to the eye, are particularly popular, drawing attention and creating curiosity. Social media serves as a vital platform for disseminating news and updates, reaching potential customers from distant locations. Sharing photos and videos from satisfied customers fosters a positive image, enticing new visitors. Beyond marketing, social media streamlines reservations and facilitates customer interaction, fostering long-term relationships. Ultimately, it proves to be an effective tool for increasing product and service sales by creating curiosity and engagement.

Given that social media like Instagram and TikTok are becoming so important in reaching customers, this must result in a different type of use of review sites, e.g. Tripadvisor. There seem to be more concerns about trustworthiness and transparency of Tripadvisor reviews (Cope, 2021). A study indicated that a substantial number of young adults would avoid a restaurant with a weak Instagram presence, emphasizing the platform's significance. That is because of a variety of content that restaurants use on Instagram platform, they offer visual content and important information. People seem to trust more this type of content because it is visible to them and they can have their own opinion about it, while with Tripadvisor they can only make assumptions based on someone's comment, and in a lot of cases the assumption does not have to be true.

Even though these platforms are increasingly important and used, there are concerns regarding their use as well. One such concern is privacy concern, especially in form of negative posts which can harm businesses (Manalo, 2020).

While social media marketing has benefits such as low costs, fast communication, global reach, direct consumer connections, and improved customer relationship management, there are drawbacks as well: time-consuming nature, the need for continuous online presence, rapid

spread of negative messages, challenges in targeting diverse social sites, and a lack of control over posted content (Dumitrescu, Fuciu, & Gorski, 2018). Content marketing, another significant tool, has advantages like evoking emotional responses, potential virality, becoming a reliable information source, and attracting consumers with relevant content. On the flip side, content marketing may incur costs, demands time and dedication, and can lead to conflicts due to its innovative nature conflicting with traditional marketing approaches.

Knowing the advantages and disadvantages of maintaining a social media presence is essential for crafting an effective marketing strategy (Kuofie & Cooper Hakim, 2015). Social media offers flexibility with quick post modification, broad audience reach across demographics, active consumer engagement, two-way dialogue for feedback, integration capabilities driving traffic, and improved metrics and research opportunities. As well, social media advertising proves cost-effective compared to traditional methods such as a 30-second television advertisement. Some crucial concerns are privacy and censorship, potential impacts on productivity due to addiction and fatigue, the presence of meaningless comments, susceptibility to hackers and fraud, and the challenge of managing negative (viral) comments.

Influencers have a significant impact on customers because customers value their recommendations and advice. Cristiano Ronaldo made headlines when he displaced two Coca-Cola bottles during a Euro 2020 press conference, favoring water (Larkin, 2022). The gesture impacted Coca-Cola's market value, plummeting by \$4 billion. Ronaldo's health-conscious image influenced this move, and fellow player Paul Pogba later mirrored the act.

Use of Instagram in restaurant industry

Instagram is a social media platform for businesses that gains a 2 billion monthly users globally (Kuligowski, 2024). With a focus on photo and video sharing, Instagram provides a versatile array of features, including posts, stories, reels, live videos, and in-app shopping. Targeting a predominantly younger demographic, with nearly 60% of users under 34, it

becomes an ideal platform for engaging millennials, Gen Z, and diverse market segments. The platform's significance extends beyond its massive user base, offering monetization opportunities through direct sales, shoppable posts, and influencer partnerships. Businesses of all sizes can thrive on Instagram, humanizing their brand through stories, live events, and effective use of hashtags, contributing to brand relatability. Instagram's mobile-first design aligns with the preferences of 88% of mobile users, while its ad capabilities, customizable campaigns, and trackable metrics enhance marketing strategies. However, success on Instagram requires strategic considerations, including consistent posting, thoughtful use of hashtags, and genuine engagement. Neglecting this powerful platform may result in missed exposure, opportunities, and a failure potentially influence business growth.

Instagram marketing is the strategic use of the platform to enhance brand visibility, reach a wider audience, and drive leads and sales (McLachlan, 2023). This involves employing various strategies such as organic content creation (photos, videos, Reels, Stories) and paid content approaches like ads, influencer marketing, and shopping tools. With over 2 billion monthly users, Instagram stands as the third most-used social media globally, where users spend an average of 12 hours monthly. Setting up Instagram for marketing involves accessing the profile, switching to a professional account, choosing a category, and updating contact information. Crafting an effective marketing strategy on Instagram involves understanding your audience, optimizing your profile, aligning social strategy with business goals, creating a content calendar, scheduling posts, and experimenting with different content formats.

Businesses can utilize features like Instagram Stories, Reels, livestreaming, and shopping tools to engage their audience effectively (McLachlan, 2023). Measuring performance through analytics tools like Instagram Insights and Hootsuite Analytics provides valuable insights for refining content strategies. Various Instagram marketing tools such as

Hootsuite, Ads Manager, Hashtag Generator, and Canva assist businesses in managing and optimizing their Instagram presence efficiently.

Use of TikTok in restaurant industry

TikTok captivates audiences across age groups, fostering rapid growth with diverse content like dancing, funny videos, and short tutorials (Grome, 2022). It is recognized as one of the fastest-growing social apps. Beyond personal expression, many use TikTok as a launchpad for expanding social media presence and even establishing businesses. Cloudflare crowned TikTok the most popular website in 2021. The platform played a pivotal role in empowering individuals, creating new career paths, and showcasing talents.

As a marketing tool, TikTok's youthful audience makes it ideal for businesses aiming for visibility, offering a versatile platform for creative video content that explains brands and attracts attention (Grome, 2022). While particularly effective for younger demographics, businesses targeting older audiences may find alternative platforms more suitable. TikTok, with its blend of innovation and popularity, stands as a powerful tool for businesses seeking both engagement and income generation.

TikTok Marketing is the strategic promotion of a brand, product, or service through this popular video-sharing platform. Utilizing influencer marketing, TikTok advertising, and creating viral organic content are key tactics (Hirose, 2024). The benefits include increasing brand awareness, building communities, selling products, gathering feedback, providing customer service, and targeted advertising. Influencer marketing involves collaborations with creators to promote brands, while TikTok affiliate marketing, an official platform-sanctioned strategy, sees creators earning commissions on product sales. To start TikTok marketing, one needs to create a TikTok Business account, explore features, and implement a strategy based on understanding the platform, its algorithm, and the target audience. Regular posting, analytics monitoring, and a willingness to experiment contribute to success. Inspiring examples include

using captivating hooks, encouraging comments, leveraging the algorithm, responding to comments with more TikToks, sharing behind-the-scenes content, and creating shareable, engaging material. Three essential tools for 2024 are Hootsuite for scheduling and monitoring, Canva for video design and graphic editing, and Link Trees for guiding TikTok traffic to external sites. With these strategies and tools, businesses can effectively navigate and harness the power of TikTok for marketing success.

Success strategies in content use on Instagram (content which attracts customers)

There are three essential elements of a successful 2024 Instagram strategy: expanding your audience via partnerships, Reels, and giveaways; winning over new followers with captivating profiles and content pillars; and creating a lively community with interactive stories, live sessions, and memes (Warren, 2023). Excellent advice for Instagram success, highlighting consistency, experimenting, and putting quality before quantity when creating posts.

Success strategies in content use on TikTok (content which attracts customers)

Crafting a successful TikTok marketing content strategy in 2024 involves navigating the dynamic landscape of the platform (Patindol, 2024). Key components include leveraging TikTok's diverse ad formats such as TopView, FullPage Brand Takeover, In-Feed Ads, Branded Hashtag Challenges, and Branded Effects. The pillars of TikTok content success encompass understanding the audience, defining the brand, storytelling, creating fresh content consistently, and strategic use of sounds and hashtags. Additionally, embracing analytics, staying attuned to key dates and trends, and learning from competitors are vital. A balance between planned content and spontaneous creativity is encouraged. TikTok's surge in growth, particularly among younger demographics, emphasizes its potential for businesses, underlining the importance of aligning content with target audience interests and values. TikTok's unique features, such as its ad formats and influencer marketing, offer substantial opportunities for brands to connect with

users in an authentic and engaging manner, making it a crucial platform in the digital marketing landscape.

Methods

This study is about the social media marketing within the restaurant industry, specifically focusing on restaurants in the Dubrovnik area, with a focus on two social media platforms, Instagram and TikTok. The purpose of the study is twofold - it looked into the extent to which individuals use social media platforms in looking up restaurants, which trait of that social media drives their use, and which characteristics (content) interests them. Further question answered by the present study was the extent of use of social media, specifically Instagram and TikTok, by restaurants in Dubrovnik, to attract potential customers.

To address the first question questionnaire was administered to determine the preferred social media platforms among consumers when seeking restaurant options. Additionally, the questionnaire was designed to investigate key factors that influence their decision-making process while perusing restaurant-related content on social media platforms. To explore the second research question, a content analysis was conducted. This approach investigates the use of Instagram and TikTok by restaurants in Dubrovnik.

The analysis aimed to determine the frequency of restaurant profiles on these platforms and to discern the common types of content shared by these establishments.

This study uses surveys and analyzing content to compare how people behave and how restaurants market themselves on Instagram and TikTok.

Questionnaire

The aim of the questionnaire, as previously mentioned, was to determine customers' preferred social media platforms when seeking restaurants. The questionnaire was administered online using the Qualtrics platform, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality to minimize potential risks. The research purposefully refrained from specifying the focus on Instagram and

TikTok platforms to encourage honest responses. The data collection procedure involved distributing the questionnaire on Facebook and Instagram platforms. Using the snowball sampling method which involves asking respondents to further distribute the questionnaire to their contacts.

The questionnaire presented various social media platforms, including Facebook, Google, Instagram, Tripadvisor, travel sites, TikTok, Twitter, YouTube, and WeChat. Initially, participants rated the frequency of their usage of these platforms while searching for restaurants on a scale ranging from "1 - never" to "5 - always".

In the second question, participants were prompted to indicate their reasons for using each of these platforms, choosing from options such as speed, ease of use, visual content (photos and videos), trust in media content, influencer postings, and availability of current information.

The final question was focused on identifying the most significant factors influencing customers' decision-making processes for each platform. Participants were asked to individually rank the importance of various aspects, including visual content (photos, videos), price availability, experiential offerings (events, workshops, performances), design, menu details, and location in looking up the restaurants on each social media site.

Questionnaire included demographic questions in which participants had to state their: gender, age, status, and country in which they currently live (Table 1). By the end, survey was completed by 134 participants. There were 106 valid responses which were used in the analysis. Results stated that there was 34 male participants (32%) and 71 female participants (68%). In terms of employment status 53.3 % of participants were students, 47 of them (44.8%) were employed and 2 of them (1.9 %) were unemployed. In terms of age, youngest individual was 18, and the oldest participant reported being 63 years old ($M=26.88$, $SD=9.74$). Participants were further categorized as Generation Z (younger than 27 years of age, 60.4%), and 28 and older category (39.6% of participants).

Content analysis

The aim of the content analysis, as previously mentioned, was to determine the frequency of restaurant profiles on focus platforms Instagram and Tik Tok and to recognize the common types of content shared on them.

The research included the 112 restaurants retrieved from the Gastronomy list published by Dubrovnik Tourist Board ("Restaurants,"n.d.). The focus was within three main Dubrovnik areas: Old Town, Lapad and Gruž.

By analyzing the list, research shows that 62.3% of restaurants have their own Instagram profile and only 9 (0.9%) have their own TikTok profile. Further analysis of Instagram included mentions, dish and beverage visuals, venue ambiance, staff portrayal, menu presentation, overall dining experience, pricing, location details, menu specifics, highest view counts, number of posts, and follower counts. For Tik Tok content analysis was slightly different because restaurants for most part did not have their own account on Tik Tok, so additional research was focused on posts from people who mentioned that restaurant and type of content they posted.

Results

Social media use: Survey results

The participants were asked to rank the frequency of their use of various social media platforms in looking up restaurants (Table 2). The findings revealed that Google ($M=2.5$, $SD=3.2$) was predominantly utilized for searching restaurants. Following closely, Instagram ($M=2.8$, $SD=1.342$) ranked second and Tripadvisor ($M=2.39$, $SD=1.236$) secured the third place, with TikTok ($M=2.08$, $SD=1.136$) on the fifth position. The platforms least used for restaurant searches are WeChat ($M=1.04$, $SD = .237$) and Twitter ($M=1.06$, $SD =.437$).

The effect of age was detected only in ratings of Tik Tok, with Generation Z rating it higher ($M=2.03$, $SD=1.414$) and older generation lower ($M=1.56$, $SD=1.001$) (Table 3).

When it comes to gender, women reported using Instagram more ($M=3.06$, $SD=1.206$) than men ($M=2.50$, $SD=1.542$) (Table 4). Same is true of Tik Tok, women used it ($M=2.03$, $SD=1.362$) more frequently than men ($M=1.47$, $SD=2.03$) (Table 5).

Since the focus of this study was the use of Instagram and TikTok, results for that social media is presented first. Data for other social media sites used is also described below.

Use of Instagram in researching restaurants

Participants who are using Instagram platform (81.1%) for restaurant search provided insights of why it is beneficial for them. The primary reason stated was the appeal of visuals (65.1%). Many participants acknowledged the influence of influencers' posts (34.9%) and how it is easy to use Instagram platform (36.8%). Participants express that they value the current information accessible on the platform (31.1%). Additionally, they highlighted the platform's convenience, emphasizing its speed (25.5%). When searching for restaurants on Instagram, participants primarily seek out photos and videos (60.4%) as well as insights into others' experiences (40.6%). They also indicated an interest in menu details (30.2%) and location information (30.2%), while expressing a desire to view prices (26.3%) and the restaurant's design (23.6%).

Use of TikTok in researching restaurants

While most participants indicated that they do not use TikTok (56.6%) for restaurant searches, those who do highlighted its appeal due to the availability of visuals (30.2%). Ease of use (19.8%) and the accessibility of current information (19.8%) were also noted as significant factors. They as well appreciate how fast they can get the information through Tik Tok (17.8%). When utilizing TikTok for restaurant search, participants primarily want photos and videos (29.2%) and insights into others' experiences (29.2%). They also have an interest into menu details (17.9%) and location information (15.1%), while expressing a desire to view prices (14.2%).

Use of Google in searching restaurants

All 106 Participants stated that they are using Google while searching restaurants. Reasons for using google for searching restaurants was mainly because of ease of use (60.4%) of the platform and visuals (58.5%). While searching restaurants through google participants mostly are looking for menu details (62.3%) and price availability (60.4%).

Use of YouTube in searching restaurants

Even though participants mostly stated that they are not using YouTube (60.4%) as their source for restaurant search, those who do use it, use it because of visuals (19.8%) and because of influencer posting (15.1%). What they looked for is visuals (21.7%) and because of experience posts (12.3%).

Use of travel sites in searching restaurants

Even though a lot of participants stated that they are not using Travel sites (41.5%) as their source for restaurant search, those who do use it, use it because of current information available (30.2%) and visuals (26.4%). They also reported ease of use (19.8%) and trust in media content (19.8%) as reasons for their usage. What they looked for is visuals (31.1%) and experience posts (28.3%).

Use of TripAdvisor in searching restaurants

Participants stated reasons for using TripAdvisor (33.0%) for searching restaurants and it was mainly because of ease of use (36.8%) of the platform and visuals (38.7%). While searching restaurants through TripAdvisor participants mostly are looking for photos and videos (38.7%) and price availability (36.8%).

Use of Facebook in searching restaurants

Even though a lot of participants stated that they are not using Facebook (49.1%) as their source for restaurant search, those who do use it, use it because of ease of use (17.9%) and visuals (33.0%). What they looked for is visuals (31.1%) and menu details (20.8%).

Use of WeChat and Twitter in searching restaurants:

Majority of participants stated that they do not use WeChat (90.6%) and Twitter (89.6%) while searching restaurants.

Social media engagement: Content analysis

Instagram

In an examination of social media marketing within the restaurant industry in the Dubrovnik area, findings revealed that out of a total of 106 restaurants, 62.3% have their own Instagram accounts, while 37.7% do not. Of all the restaurants included in this study 62.3% were mentioned by their customers, leaving 37.7% without mentions.

Restaurants which do have an Instagram page mostly post visuals of dishes ($MAX=441$, $M=78.591$, $SD=98.1542$), followed by visuals of venue ($MAX=168$, $M=29.606$, $SD=38.7143$), visuals of experience ($MAX=356$, $M=25.424$, $SD=52.1704$), visuals of drinks ($MAX=129$, $M=18.409$, $SD=27.8496$), visuals of employees ($MAX=149$, $M=11.500$, $SD=25.5591$), visuals of menu ($MAX=38$, $M=2.985$, $SD=7.3369$) and least visuals of menu details ($MAX=32$, $M=1.561$, $SD=4.8202$). Among all restaurants, during the period from April 1st to April 15th, 2024, the highest number of views on videos was 450,000, with an average of 18,917.58 ($SD=2,235.10$), and the maximum number of followers was 11,900, with an average of 2,219.12 ($SD=2,568.39$). Although some restaurants maintain Instagram accounts, they may be considered inactive as they do not have any content (19.7%). The most viewed content posted by restaurants includes visuals of food (47.0%), followed by visuals of experiences (9.1%) and venue visuals (7.5%).

Tik Tok

Regarding the TikTok platform, a significant number of restaurants (91.5%) do not possess their own TikTok accounts, with only 8.5% maintaining a profile. Interestingly, 52.8% of restaurants were mentioned by their customers on the TikTok platform, while 47.2% did not.

Customers that mentioned restaurants in Dubrovnik primarily shared their feedback about their personal experience (41.2%), while other restaurants have not been mentioned (58.8%).

For restaurants with their own TikTok accounts, the content they typically share consists mostly of visuals of their venue (44.4%), followed by visuals of their dishes (33.3%), and lastly, visuals of the overall dining experience (33.3%). Additionally, the majority of these restaurants mention their location on their profile (55.6%).

The maximum number of posts included on a restaurant's TikTok profile is 39, with an average of 10.7778 ($SD=11.48761$). The maximum number of followers a restaurant gained on TikTok is 5634, while the average for restaurants in Dubrovnik is 2034.0 ($SD=1726.03578$).

The number of likes ranges from a minimum of 55 to a maximum of 198, with an average of 75.444 ($SD=70.44876$) and the content that they liked the most was visuals of food.

Discussion

The present research was about social media marketing within the restaurant industry in Dubrovnik, focusing on Instagram and Tik Tok platforms. The research focus were social media habits of users in making a restaurant choice, and use of social media marketing through Instagram and Tik Tok by restaurants in Dubrovnik.

One part of research conducted was a survey of 106 participants that stated various reasons for using these platforms, including the appeal of visuals showcasing food, the experiences of others, venue ambiance, availability of price information, and menu details, as well as the access to current information.

Moreover, content analysis was conducted, examining 112 restaurants across three main areas in Dubrovnik: Lapad, Old Town, and Gruž. The analysis of Instagram and TikTok content included a wide array of factors such as mentions, visuals of dishes and beverages, venue ambiance portrayal, staff representation, menu presentation, overall dining experiences, pricing, location details, menu specifics, highest view counts, number of posts, and follower counts.

The research revealed that Google emerged as the primary platform for restaurant searches, closely followed by Instagram, with TripAdvisor securing the third position, while TikTok ranked fifth. While Google was predominantly utilized for obtaining menu details and prices, Instagram stood out as a popular choice for restaurant searches due to its visually appealing content showcasing food, venues, and experiences. Participants also emphasized the influence of influencer posts on Instagram.

Examining social media marketing within the Dubrovnik restaurant industry, the findings indicated that a majority of restaurants maintained Instagram accounts. Visuals featuring food, venues, and experiences dominated the content posted by these establishments, aligning with the trend of showcasing visually appealing dishes to attract customers (Manalo, 2020). Additionally, the study supported the notion that influencers wield significant influence on customer behavior, with participants valuing their recommendations and advice (cf. Larkin, 2022).

Although TikTok was not the top choice for restaurant searches among participants, it enjoyed popularity among younger demographics, much like previous research suggests (cf. Grome, 2022). Despite the majority of restaurants not having a presence on TikTok, participants who used the platform appreciated its visual content and ease of use, highlighting the influence of influencers' postings in shaping their dining decisions.

Participants primarily relied on Google for menu details and price availability, which could explain its top ranking as a search platform, as neither Instagram nor TikTok provide such information.

Leveraging social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok strategically can enhance brand visibility, engage with a wider audience, and drive business growth within the restaurant industry (Hirose, 2024). However, neglecting these platforms or failing to adopt effective marketing strategies may result in missed opportunities for exposure and growth (Kuligowski, 2024).

It is crucial for restaurants to prioritize social media content that includes visuals of food, experiences, and venues, while also providing essential information such as location, menu details, and prices to enhance brand visibility and foster customer loyalty.

A valuable piece of advice for restaurants would be to collaborate more with influencers in their social media marketing efforts. Additionally, it would be beneficial for them to focus more on creating their own presence on TikTok, as it has become a significant trend in recent times (cf. Ortiz-Ospina, 2019; Grome, 2022).

Regarding the type of content, participants' responses aligned with the content typically posted by restaurants on these platforms. However, it would be advantageous for restaurants to incorporate menu details and price availability into their content. This research underscores the importance of examining this topic more frequently and making it accessible to an even broader range of participants.

Limitations and Future research

The present descriptive study was conducted in 14 weeks, and the findings of this study are not necessarily generalizable, given the small sample size (106 participants), and the snowball

sampling which may have impacted the profile of participants. Further, large scale study, with a representative sample and sample size would need to be conducted to obtain generalizable results. Also, a large scale, comparative study of Instagram profiles and TikTok profiles of restaurants in similar tourism-oriented locations, might offer broader insight into the manner in which such social media is utilized in tourism and extent of its use.

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Table 1. *Demographic data*

| | | Frequency |
|--------|------------------------|-----------|
| Gender | Male | 32.1% |
| | Female | 67.6% |
| Age | Generation Z | 60.4% |
| | Older than Gen Z | 39.6% |
| Status | Student | 53.3% |
| | Employed/Self-employed | 44.8% |
| | Unemployed | 1.9% |

Table 2. *Social media use in researching restaurants: Descriptives.*

| | Minimum | Maximum | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|--|---------|---------|----------|-----------|
| Google | 2 | 5 | 3.88 | .933 |
| Instagram | 1 | 5 | 2.88 | 1.342 |
| Tripadvisor | 1 | 5 | 2.39 | 1.236 |
| Travel/ tourist sites (GetYourGuide, Lovci Na Putovanja, etc.) | 1 | 5 | 2.08 | 1.136 |
| TikTok | 1 | 5 | 1.85 | 1.284 |
| Facebook | 1 | 5 | 1.83 | 1.096 |
| YouTube | 1 | 5 | 1.48 | .853 |
| Twitter | 1 | 5 | 1.06 | .437 |
| WeChat | 1 | 3 | 1.04 | .237 |
| Valid N (listwise) | | | | |

Table 3. *Use of TikTok by different age groups*

| | | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>Sig.</i> |
|---|-------|----------|-----------|----------|-------------|
| Please state how often you use a platform to find/research a restaurant. - TikTok | Gen Z | 2.03 | 1.4 | 1.993 | .044 |
| | Older | 1.56 | 1.0 | | |

Table 4. *Gender differences in use of Instagram for restaurant research*

| | | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>Sig.</i> |
|--|--------|----------|-----------|----------|-------------|
| Please state how often you use a platform to find/research a restaurant. – Instagram | Male | 2.50 | 1.5 | -2.016 | .046cx |
| | Female | 3.06 | 1.2 | | |

Table 5. *Gender differences in use of TikTok for restaurant research*

| | | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>Sig.</i> |
|---|--------|----------|-----------|----------|-------------|
| Please state how often you use a platform to find/research a restaurant. – TikTok | Male | 1.47 | 1.0 | -2.116 | .037 |
| | Female | 2.03 | 1.3 | | |

Appendix 1: Survey

Dear Survey Participant:

My name is Kristiana Sain and I am a senior student at RIT Croatia Dubrovnik, a global campus of Rochester Institute of Technology, based in Rochester, New York. For my final research project in Hospitality and Tourism Management program, I am examining the media people use in looking up/ researching restaurants online.

I am inviting you to participate in this research study by completing the survey. It will require approximately 10 minutes to answer all the questions.

Your participation is completely voluntary. The information you provide on this survey will be kept completely anonymous and confidential, in accordance with the EU General Data Protection Regulation. There is no risk to you. If you choose to participate, please answer all questions as honestly and accurately as possible.

Thank you for taking the time to assist me in my educational endeavors. If you would like additional information about this survey or my research project, please contact me at ks4426@g.rit.edu or my mentor, dr. sc. Vanda Bazdan, at vxbsck@rit.edu.

Sincerely,

Kristiana Sain

Please state to which extent you use the following platforms to find/research the restaurant. For the platforms that you do use in looking up restaurants, please mark the reasons for your use, and the characteristics that play the most significant role in choosing a restaurant.

1. Please state how often you use each platform to find/research a restaurant.

| | | | | | | | |
|----------------------|------------|---|---|---|---|---|-------------|
| Google | 1 Never | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 Always |
| YouTube | 1 Never | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 Always |
| Travel/tourist sites | 1 Never | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 Always |
| Tripadvisor | 1 Never | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 Always |
| Facebook | 1 Never | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 Always |
| Instagram | 1 Never | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 Always |
| TikTok | 1 Never | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 Always |
| Twitter | 1 Never | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 Always |
| WeChat | 1 Never | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 Always |
| Other: _____ | 1 Never | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 Always |

2. Please mark the reasons for your use of this platform.

| | | | | | | | |
|---|-------|-------------|--------------------------------|------------------------|---|-----------------------|--------------------------------|
| Google | Speed | Ease of use | Visual content (photos/videos) | Trust in media content | Current information available (updates, events, etc.) | Influencer's postings | Not applicable (do not use it) |
| YouTube | Speed | Ease of use | Visual content (photos/videos) | Trust in media content | Current information available (updates, events, etc.) | Influencer's choice | Not applicable (do not use it) |
| Travel/tourist sites (GetYourGuide, Lovci Na Putovanja, etc.) | Speed | Ease of use | Visual content (photos/videos) | Trust in media content | Current information available (updates, events, etc.) | Influencer's choice | Not applicable (do not use it) |
| Tripadvisor | Speed | Ease of use | Visual content (photos/videos) | Trust in media content | Current information available (updates, events, etc.) | Influencer's choice | Not applicable (do not use it) |
| Facebook | Speed | Ease of use | Visual content (photos/videos) | Trust in media content | Current information available | Influencer's choice | Not applicable (do not use it) |

| | | | | | | | |
|-----------------|-------|-------------|--------------------------------|------------------------|---|---------------------|--------------------------------|
| | | | | | (updates, events, etc.) | | |
| Instagram | Speed | Ease of use | Visual content (photos/videos) | Trust in media content | Current information available (updates, events, etc.) | Influencer's choice | Not applicable (do not use it) |
| TikTok | Speed | Ease of use | Visual content (photos/videos) | Trust in media content | Current information available (updates, events, etc.) | Influencer's choice | Not applicable (do not use it) |
| Twitter | Speed | Ease of use | Visual content (photos/videos) | Trust in media content | Current information available (updates, events, etc.) | Influencer's choice | Not applicable (do not use it) |
| WeChat | Speed | Ease of use | Visual content (photos/videos) | Trust in media content | Current information available (updates, events, etc.) | Influencer's choice | Not applicable (do not use it) |
| Other: _____ | Speed | Ease of use | Visual content (photos/videos) | Trust in media content | Current information available (updates, events, etc.) | Influencer's choice | Not applicable (do not use it) |

3. What aspects play the most significant role in your decision to choose a restaurant through this platform?

| | | | | | | | |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------|---|--------|--------------|----------|--------------------------------|
| Google | Visuals (photos, videos) | Price availability | Experiences (events, workshops, performances) | Design | Menu details | Location | Not applicable (do not use it) |
| YouTube | Visuals (photos, videos) | Price availability | Experiences (events, workshops, performances) | Design | Menu details | Location | Not applicable (do not use it) |
| Travel/tourist sites (GetYourGuide, Lovci Na Putovanja, etc.) | Visuals (photos, videos) | Price availability | Experiences (events, workshops, performances) | Design | Menu details | Location | Not applicable (do not use it) |
| Tripadvisor | Visuals (photos, videos) | Price availability | Experiences (events, workshops, performances) | Design | Menu details | Location | Not applicable (do not use it) |
| Facebook | Visuals (photos, videos) | Price availability | Experiences (events, workshops, performances) | Design | Menu details | Location | Not applicable (do not use it) |
| Instagram | Visuals (photos, videos) | Price availability | Experiences (events, workshops, performances) | Design | Menu details | Location | Not applicable (do not use it) |
| TikTok | Visuals (photos, videos) | Price availability | Experiences (events, workshops, performances) | Design | Menu details | Location | Not applicable (do not use it) |
| Twitter | Visuals (photos, videos) | Price availability | Experiences (events, workshops, performances) | Design | Menu details | Location | Not applicable (do not use it) |
| WeChat | Visuals (photos, videos) | Price availability | Experiences (events, workshops, performances) | Design | Menu details | Location | Not applicable (do not use it) |

| | | | | | | | |
|-----------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|--|--------|-----------------|----------|---|
| Other: _____ | Visuals (photos, videos) | Price availabili ty | Experiences (events, workshops, performances) | Design | Menu details | Location | Not applicable (do not use it) |
|-----------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|--|--------|-----------------|----------|---|

4. Please state your age: _____

5. Please state your gender:

A. Male B. Female C. Non- binary D. Prefer not to answer

6. Please state your current status:

A. Student B. Employed/self-employed C. Unemployed D. Retired

7. Please state your country of residence: _____