

Impact of Social Media Marketing On the Consumer Preferences in Restaurant Industry: An Empirical Study of Pakistan

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Abstract: Social media refers to the means of interactions among people in which they create, share, and exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks. It has become the part of society and organizations consider it as part of their entity. In the age of information it is not possible for organizations to achieve their objectives without their presence on Social media. Consumers are becoming knowledgeable and share their feelings, thoughts and experiences on Social media. This interaction has a faster pace now as the word of mouth spreads with the speed of light. Consumer's interactions regarding their experiences in restaurants on Social media are also very valuable. It could be used to improve services, facilities and infrastructure in restaurant industry.

For this research, information is gathered from marketing managers of different restaurants and visiting customers. Primary data is collected with the help of questionnaire. There were 191 questionnaires distributed among customers out of which 161 were returned. After the questionnaires were completed, statistical package for social sciences software (SPSS) is used to analyze the data.

Key words: Social Media, Marketing, Service Industry, Consumer Interaction, Consumer Preferences, Profitability, Growth, Restaurant Industry

I. Introduction

Social media was changed with the invention of first commercial internet service in 1969 (Curtis, 2013) and following years have brought immense changes that people haven't dreamt of. People communicate freely and share information by using a mix of words, pictures, audio and video over the provided media. Social media websites such as Facebook, Youtube, Twitter, LinkedIn etc have become popular and have the ability to influence decision-making power of the people. We network together around the globe with friends, family, and even strangers who may eventually become our friends. We recommend products and services by becoming "fans" of the brand. These websites have hobbled many established business and marketing models as a great change in consumer behavior. Social media websites have become the hub of attention and have challenged the prior systems even on a managerial level to change their monotonous methods of marketing.

II. Literature Review

Social media is an amalgamation of application over the internet that aids consumers and prospective consumers to share opinions, knowledge about products and their experiences with each other (Kaplan and Haenlein 2009). The projects include blogs, social networking sites, content communities and virtual social world. These platforms have created a new horizon of communication that has become more transparent (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010). Old mediums of marketing are not dying, they are dead (Zyglidopoulos, Leonard-Barton and Sway 1999). These sites have been one of the most acclaimed sources for having huge influences on consumer decision-making process as well as influencing general opinions and attitudes of people (Mangold and Faulds 2009). Large numbers of consumers are contacting brands around the world through social media (Derikson, 2013). A brand that has established with consumers' choice has preference while purchase decision is made.

Social media websites function differently from previously utilized marketing techniques. People are reluctant to adopt digital revolution who are used to old marketing techniques and communication methods because it makes their experience less applicable (Dilenschneider, 2013). Consumers' attention span has decreased towards old mediums. Buyers are connecting with the product and services in their own way and Internet is one of the major utilized tools, along with word-of-mouth and customer reviews (Lee, 2012). Social media has engaged consumers, and fan-based followers steadily toppled the industrial age model (Jenkins, Krauskopf, and Grean 2009).

Hi-tech developments have changed markets and marketing dramatically. Consumers have the opportunity to involve with brands (Erdem, Keller, Kuksov and Pieters 2014).

Social media is different from old mediums of marketing in many aspects such as:

- Quality of medium
- Reachability
- UsageFrequency
- User friendly
- Immediate coverage
- Permanence of medium

Businesses can get advantage from utilizing social media marketing, but it's significant to categorize key demographic factors (Weisman, 2013). Social channels help to maximize charisma, generate followers and amplify profits. Social media Websites like Twitter, Facebook, Foursquare, LinkedIn, etc. have proved to be the most convenient and proven source of connecting present and prospective customers. The concept that "content is king" has changed and now it only takes one picture to say it all (Walter, 2012). Every day 684,478 contents are put up on Facebook, 100,000 tweets are made, 2 million search queries on Google, 48 hours of video on YouTube and 571 websites are made (Spencer 2012). Social media marketing could become effective medium for restaurants to establish brand loyalty (Jackson, 2011). At least half of the population using Twitter and Facebook has expressed to become more probable to advice through Social media websites (Jackson, 2011). Financial performance of many successful companies depends on their strong brands that come with their strong relationship with customers. These relationships are the end result of all the experiences that consumers have with brands. All of these experiences create brand associations that are consciously utilized when a consumer is making a purchase decision (Gordon, 2009).

Social media campaigns are getting successful because easy access of target population along with its cost effective edge (Manyikaet, Chui, Brown, Bughin, Dobbs, Roxburgh and Byers, 2011). Old advertising is on decline or moving towards new horizons (Zyman, 1999). Technology has provided many options to the users, creating a direct platform for the consumers in which people around the world are constantly learning and sharing information from discussing consumer products to raising funds for a noble cause (Manyikaet, Chui, Brown, Bughin, Dobbs, Roxburgh and Byers, 2011)

Social media marketing has certain direct benefits such as Engagement enhances customer experiences and improves trust and loyalty (Edward, 2013). Brands have become irresistible and inimitable, as they achieve a prominent place in the minds of consumers. Brand loyalty is the source of increasing profitability and earning revenues which in return helps the restaurant to grow or maintain (Keller, 2008). Various marketing techniques have been employed by the marketers to maintain the brand loyalty (Kotler and Keller 2007). Amplification of word of mouth is the reason that has earned this medium a prominent place (Divol, Edelman and Sarrazin, 2012). Facebook popularity could boost restaurant's overall presence and even cover page of Facebook could get customers to venue (Ivanov, 2013).

Around 1 billion Smartphone's are being used around the globe (Five star equities, 2012) with chances of almost 50% of all smart phone users being the most frequent restaurant goers. And a large chunk of 49% of consumers use Facebook while searching for restaurants. And a massive quantity of 15.1 million people goes to social media sites before making a purchase decision (Beaulieu, 2013). Many users have admitted to use this social media years long. 62% of businesses with less than 10 employees agreed that social media has declined their advertising expenses and 78% of participants also said that website traffic amplified with only 6 h/w spent on social media marketing (Bennett, 2013). The basic element is to remain customer-focused, not marketing-focused. Social media can be used to build customer loyalty and nurture repeat business. So keep an eye on social media during service (Fisher, 2013). Nearly nine out of 10 restaurants used social sites this year (E marketer, 2013). Social media empowers the restaurants to establish their brands, tap the old and new customers, and generating buzz by creating and sharing relevant contents (Szkolar, 2013).

Social media has gifted with the power of word-of-mouth to a large population. That mean your opinion can have great influence and can pursue decisions. In particular, you can talk about products and services you will either recommend or tell people to avoid (Solhaug, 2012). Consumers have always valued opinions expressed directly to them. Word of mouth is doubtlessly one of the primary factors behind 20% to 50% of all purchasing decisions (Bughin, Doogan and Vetvik, 2010). Influence, personalization, social gaming are all part of social media marketing. This marketing medium is evolving and becoming readily available and accessible. Therefore restaurants can use these new trends to get better access to the conversations people are having.

1. Influence: It is a generative source for catering the "influencers."

2. Influencers: It is an individual or a group of individuals who influences the opinions of other customers or potential customers:

- Remain objective focused while looking for influencers

- Utilize social review websites
- Information about food bloggers in surroundings

3. Personalization:

The key to effective personalization is to earn customer’s trust and maintain it over the period.

- Target particular online groups for limited time deals
- Create a special event for a restricted number of guests
- Bridge a connection between your business and your customer (Moulatsiotis, 2012)

Some techniques that are getting popular on the Social media include Gamification, for improving user engagement (Herger, 2012). Gamification has been utilized globally by companies as a marketing technique for the purposes of retaining their customers (Grove, 2011).

III. Research Methodology

A survey questionnaire designed to identify relation between customer experience with social media marketing. Data collection for this research is divided into two parts. The first phase is the data collection for quantitative research through a self administered questionnaire. There were 161 questionnaire distributed among customers out of which 142 returned. After the questionnaires were completed, statistical package for social sciences software (SPSS) is used to analyze the data.

3.1) Analysis and interpretations

Test: 1

I like different pages and communities of brands and restaurants because they provide relevant info on Product launch, Promotional news & Product reviews

Count		I like different pages and communities of brands and restaurant because they provide relevant info on Product launch, Promotional news & Product reviews		
		No	Yes	Total
Gender	male	1	49	50
	female	0	92	92
Total		1	141	142

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1.853 ^a	1	.173		
Continuity Correction ^b	.097	1	.756		
Likelihood Ratio	2.101	1	.147		
Fisher's Exact Test				.352	.352
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.840	1	.175		
N of Valid Cases	142				

a. 2 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .35.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Test 2:

I get influenced to buy the product or service based on info through social media

Count		Get influenced to buy the product or service based on info through social media		
		No	Yes	Total
gender	male	21	29	50
	female	29	63	92
Total		50	92	142

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1.559 ^a	1	.212		
Continuity Correction ^b	1.134	1	.287		
Likelihood Ratio	1.543	1	.214		
Fisher's Exact Test				.270	.144
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.548	1	.213		
N of Valid Cases	142				

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 17.61.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Interpretation:

Test 2 depicts as well that there is no significant difference across the gender and both male and female get influenced to buy the product and services based on information through social media marketing.

Test 3: Social websites helped me for an easy interaction with the brands to which I follow
Count

		Social websites have helped me to have an easy interaction with the brands I like and follow		Total
		No	Yes	
gender	male	8	42	50
	female	7	85	92
Total		15	127	142

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	2.414 ^a	1	.120		
Continuity Correction ^b	1.608	1	.205		
Likelihood Ratio	2.307	1	.129		
Fisher's Exact Test				.154	.104
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.397	1	.122		
N of Valid Cases	142				

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 5.28.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Table 1:

Access to internet

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid yes	142	88.2	88.2	88.2
no	19	11.8	11.8	100.0
Total	161	100.0	100.0	

Table 2:

Internet usage frequency

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid daily	142	88.2	100.0	100.0
Missing System	19	11.8		
Total	161	100.0		

Table 3:

Gender		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	male	52	32.3	32.3	32.3
	female	109	67.7	67.7	100.0
Total		161	100.0	100.0	

Table 4:

Age groups		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18-24	142	88.2	88.2	88.2
	25-34	19	11.8	11.8	100.0
Total		161	100.0	100.0	

Table 5:

Occupation of respondents		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	manager	30	18.6	18.6	18.6
	Clerk	19	11.8	11.8	30.4
	unemployed	112	69.6	69.6	100.0
	Total	161	100.0	100.0	

Table 6:

Respondents education		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	intermediate	36	22.4	22.4	22.4
	bachelors	78	48.4	48.4	70.8
	masters	47	29.2	29.2	100.0
	Total	161	100.0	100.0	

Table 7:

I use social media websites frequently

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Neutral	20	12.4	14.1	14.1
	Agree	63	39.1	44.4	58.5
	strongly agree	59	36.6	41.5	100.0
	Total	142	88.2	100.0	
Missing	System	19	11.8		
Total		161	100.0		

Table 8:

I use face book, twitter and YouTube mainly

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	20	12.4	14.1	14.1
	neutral	15	9.3	10.6	24.6
	agree	58	36.0	40.8	65.5
	strongly agree	49	30.4	34.5	100.0
	Total	142	88.2	100.0	
Missing	System	19	11.8		

I use face book, twitter and YouTube mainly

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	20	12.4	14.1	14.1
	neutral	15	9.3	10.6	24.6
	agree	58	36.0	40.8	65.5
	strongly agree	49	30.4	34.5	100.0
	Total	142	88.2	100.0	
Missing	System	19	11.8		
Total		161	100.0		

Table 9:

The main purpose of using internet is work related, entertainment or others

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	agree	142	88.2	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	19	11.8		
Total		161	100.0		

Table 10:

Connecting with friends and family on social media is an appealing factor

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Neutral	36	22.4	25.4	25.4
	Agree	106	65.8	74.6	100.0
	Total	142	88.2	100.0	
Missing	System	19	11.8		
Total		161	100.0		

Table 11:

I use social websites also as a source of information

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	4	2.5	2.8	2.8
	neutral	18	11.2	12.7	15.5
	agree	85	52.8	59.9	75.4
	strongly agree	35	21.7	24.6	100.0
	Total	142	88.2	100.0	
Missing	System	19	11.8		
Total		161	100.0		

Table 12:

I like following brand groups and pages

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	20	12.4	14.1	14.1
	neutral	39	24.2	27.5	41.5
	agree	83	51.6	58.5	100.0
	Total	142	88.2	100.0	
Missing	System	19	11.8		
Total		161	100.0		

Table 13:

I like different pages and communities of brands and restaurants because they provide relevant info on product launch, promotional NEWS and product reviews.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	neutral	1	.6	.7	.7

	agree	141	87.6	99.3	100.0
	Total	142	88.2	100.0	
Missing	System	19	11.8		
Total		161	100.0		

Table 14:

Product or service review is trustworthy only when it comes from friends and family

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	26	16.1	18.3	18.3
	neutral	48	29.8	33.8	52.1
	agree	68	42.2	47.9	100.0
	Total	142	88.2	100.0	
Missing	System	19	11.8		
Total		161	100.0		

Table 15:

Many positive reviews and vice versa can change my perception about the brand

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	neutral	46	28.6	32.4	32.4
	agree	96	59.6	67.6	100.0
	Total	142	88.2	100.0	
Missing	System	19	11.8		
Total		161	100.0		

Table 16:

I get influenced to buy the product or service based on info through social media

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	neutral	50	31.1	35.2	35.2
	agree	92	57.1	64.8	100.0
	Total	142	88.2	100.0	
Missing	System	19	11.8		
Total		161	100.0		

Table 17:

It is difficult to get the official pages of the restaurants as many are present on the social sites

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	neutral	56	34.8	39.4	39.4
	agree	86	53.4	60.6	100.0
	Total	142	88.2	100.0	
Missing	System	19	11.8		
Total		161	100.0		

Table 18:

The info available is not clear to understand

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	74	46.0	52.1	52.1
	neutral	68	42.2	47.9	100.0
	Total	142	88.2	100.0	
Missing	System	19	11.8		
Total		161	100.0		

Table 19:
Cannot rely on the information blindly

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid agree	141	87.6	99.3	99.3
44.00	1	.6	.7	100.0
Total	142	88.2	100.0	
Missing System	19	11.8		
Total	161	100.0		

Table 20:
I prefer other sources such as TV, News papers, radio & magazines for info about brands

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid disagree	31	19.3	21.8	21.8
neutral	57	35.4	40.1	62.0
agree	54	33.5	38.0	100.0
Total	142	88.2	100.0	
Missing System	19	11.8		
Total	161	100.0		

Table 21:
Social media websites help me to reach for the restaurant brands I like and keeps me updated

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid neutral	15	9.3	10.6	10.6
agree	57	35.4	40.1	50.7
strongly agree	70	43.5	49.3	100.0
Total	142	88.2	100.0	
Missing System	19	11.8		
Total	161	100.0		

Table 22:
Review of family, friends and peers help me while making a purchase decision

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid agree	81	50.3	57.0	57.0
strongly agree	61	37.9	43.0	100.0
Total	142	88.2	100.0	
Missing System	19	11.8		
Total	161	100.0		

Table 23:
Social websites have helped me to have an easy interaction with the brands I like and follow

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid neutral	54	33.5	38.0	38.0
agree	88	54.7	62.0	100.0
Total	142	88.2	100.0	
Missing System	19	11.8		
Total	161	100.0		

Table 24:

I don't have access to internet

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid strongly disagree	142	88.2	88.8	88.8
agree	8	5.0	5.0	93.8
strongly agree	10	6.2	6.3	100.0
Total	160	99.4	100.0	
Missing System	1	.6		
Total	161	100.0		

Table 25:

I find web browsing complicated

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid disagree	142	88.2	88.8	88.8
neutral	9	5.6	5.6	94.4
agree	8	5.0	5.0	99.4
22.00	1	.6	.6	100.0
Total	160	99.4	100.0	
Missing System	1	.6		
Total	161	100.0		

Table 26:

The restaurant I like are not present on the social sites

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid disagree	137	85.1	96.5	96.5
neutral	5	3.1	3.5	100.0
Total	142	88.2	100.0	
Missing System	19	11.8		
Total	161	100.0		

IV. Conclusion

This study investigated the impact of social media (social sites) on consumer preferences in culinary industry specifically restaurants in the city of Lahore, Pakistan. It included different components straight from the brand image to dine in, products, level of service, ambience etc and in total of their presence on social media. Social media is a relatively new tool of marketing and seeping into the roots of service industry steadily. Social media is the convenient tool in this era of digitalization where technological advancement is rapid and increasing gushingly. A pool of consumer visits and interactions on Social media websites helps organizations to know the customer preferences and in the case of absence, there are chances of losing customers and competitive edge in the service industry. Brands are being adopted as one of the tools of marketing and catering to their customer's social needs and managing their perceptions. According to data 85% respondents said that they use Social media websites on daily basis. Pages of restaurants and communities are liked by 88% because they provide relevant information on product launch, promotional news and product reviews. Majority of respondents agreed that social media has played a vital role in empowering customers and helped them in shaping their perceptions in the restaurant industry of Lahore, Pakistan.

V. Recommendations

Social media websites have revolutionized the mode of brand interactions and has led to improve visibility and sales in the service industry, particularly the restaurant industry. The viral nature of some social media websites like YouTube has created immense brand awareness. In future, the methods of utilizing the Social media websites and the tools could be analyzed. It is important to keep upto date with changes in the social media as changes in information technology would cause new players to enter the market. Consumer's visit to Social media websites could be utilized effectively if they are related to their needs and wants. Website could be accurately utilized especially in visual manner by presenting images of food and other facilities. Restaurants have to take their ratings on search engines and their presence on Social media websites will improve their organic rating as well.

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