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The impact of social media use on restaurant choice

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to examine the impact of social media use on consumers' restaurant choices. It presents data from a questionnaire developed for examining social media use and restaurant choice on a trip and home. Exploratory factor analysis was performed to explore the underlying theoretical structure of the phenomena. Four social media use factors were extracted. Then the measurement model and the structural model were tested. Findings show that three social media use factors (searching for services, social interactions, and searching for products) influenced individuals' restaurant choices on the trip (more) and at home. Based on the results, restaurants should appear more on social media. Restaurants are recommended to share the ambiance, foods, and menus on social media frequently.

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Social media; restaurant choice; consumer choice; search behaviour; social interaction

Introduction

With the progress in online social networks in the past two decades, the internet was transformed from a mere communication tool into a unique revolutionary technology, empowering consumers and businesses connectivity (Kotler & Armstrong, 2017). Social media, or online social networks, is a sharing system that relies on user-generated content. It is associated with participation and interaction between internet users and the web, which differs from traditional media platforms (Cooke & Buckley, 2008; Dedeoğlu et al., 2020; Kietzmann et al., 2011). Social media comes in many forms such as blogging (i.e. travel-blog), social networking sites (i.e. Facebook, LinkedIn), media sharing sites (i.e. Youtube, Dailymotion), review sites (i.e. Tripadvisor, Foursquare), collaborative projects (i.e. Wikipedia, Skylineswiki, Wikitravel) and microblogging (i.e. Twitter) (Fotis et al., 2012; Munar, 2012). Social interaction with others created new behaviours and affected consumers' daily purchase decisions (Rogers, 1983). Since consumers enjoy the interaction and communication with each other and engage in receiving advice about different products or services, virtual communities impact consumers' purchasing decisions (Darban & Li, 2012).

There is considerable interest in academic research of the social media phenomenon because the business and marketing fields want to discover the opportunities and challenges of this new communication system. Therefore, the relationship between technology and consumer's buying behaviour is the top trending subject of today (Groß, 2015; Kumar et al., 2020). To market their business, 97% of companies use a different form of social media (Vanmeter et al., 2015). Social media is now focusing on marketing strategies where companies are trying to identify ways to make a profit. Social media has provided a cheap and accessible marketing platform to reach thousands of customers instantly (Timilsina, 2017). The average daily social media usage of internet users worldwide amounted to 144 minutes per day. Recently, the worldwide social network penetration rate was 49%. Eastern Asia took the lead with 71% in the ranking of worldwide social media usage

by zone (Tankovska, 2020a). Information diffusion through social media platforms has resulted in raising awareness of brands, helping customers form attitudes, and affecting their decision-making (S. B. Park et al., 2016). Online consumer reviews have become an important opportunity for marketing communications since many consumers search for online reviews as the first step in shopping (C. Park et al., 2011).

Understanding the impact of social media use on customers' restaurant choices is crucial for the restaurant industry. It is believed that dining (out) is strongly related to peoples' lives. From this point of view, it is important to study the potential impact of social media use in this field. The majority of food and beverage brands also maintain social media accounts (Fleming-Milici & Harris, 2020). The advent of social media has led to investigating its role in restaurant choice. Thus far, a few studies have focused on the impact of social media on restaurant consumer-related issues: customers' restaurant experience (Mhlanga & Tichaawa, 2017); purchase intention, brand equity, and perceived image (Lima et al., 2019); purchasing behaviour (Kumar et al., 2020); and restaurant choice (J. Hwang & Park, 2015; Ramos et al., 2020; Tiwari & Richards, 2013). While Ramos et al. (2020) investigated social media factors (such as restaurant popularity, digital content generated by the organization) influencing restaurant selection, Tiwari and Richards (2013) compared the impact of anonymous social networks and peer social networks on restaurant demand. Only J. Hwang and Park (2015) explored the impact of social media use on restaurant choice with qualitative data.

Previous studies suggest that consumers use social media to find information about restaurants before deciding. Researchers have not treated social media use in much detail. Although extensive research has been carried out on social media, no study exists investigating the underlying theoretical structure of social media use on a restaurant choice. In addressing the issue of restaurant choice, studying the use of social media in depth can play an important role. Moreover, what is not yet known is if it makes a difference in the impact of social media use on restaurant choice on trips or at home.

There are two primary aims of this study: 1. To investigate the factors determining the impact of social media use on consumers' choice of restaurants. 2. To ascertain if it makes a difference on trips or at home. With these objectives in mind, the current paper seeks to find the answers to the following research questions:

- RQ-1: What are the factors determining social media use on restaurant choice?
- RQ-2: Does social media use influence individuals' restaurant choices during their trip/holiday?
- RQ-3: Does social media use influence individuals' restaurant choices in their place of residence?

Primary data were obtained through the questionnaires. Secondary data sources, i.e. related past studies, were utilized as theoretical background and literature review. Our main reason for choosing the restaurant industry consisting of both consumers and owners is because it turned to online trade with the effect of Covid-19 (Alkasasbeh, 2020; Dsouza & Sharma, 2020; Patma et al., 2020).

Literature review

Connecting individuals to others is among the most effective and substantial business involvement of the 21st century (Alsubagh, 2015). Online social networks have become a significant part of people's communication and interaction life, also affect people's behaviour and communication in many ways (Cheung & Lee, 2010). Furthermore, the popularity of social media is highly demonstrable by the number of people using them and also measured by the number of interactions per user taking place on the network (Cheung et al., 2011). On 31 December 2020, there are 5 billion active internet users estimated worldwide (Internet World Stats, 2021). According to statistics, social networking is

one of the most popular ways for online users to spend their time, enabling them to catch up with news and other content as well as staying in contact with friends and family. In 2020, over 3.6 billion people had a social media account (Tankovska, 2020b). In the past two decades, with the rapid progress on the internet, online social networks have become significant communication channels. Social media's growth has created a new place of interaction and communication among people (Darban & Li, 2012). In other words, people have found a new way to get connected to our globalized world through online social networks.

Many published studies describe social media use, such as social interaction (Correa et al., 2010; H. Hwang & Kim, 2015), information seeking (J. Hwang & Park, 2015; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010), pass time, entertainment, communicatory utility, convenience utility, expression of opinion, and information sharing (Whiting & Williams, 2013). Research shows that people are social nowadays and are more involved with social media, from consuming content to sharing opinions, knowledge, and experiences (Heinonen, 2011), from obtaining knowledge to achieving entertainment and self-actualization (J. Hwang & Park, 2015). Much of the current literature on social media use focuses on the phenomenon of service and product information search (Amaro & Duarte, 2017; Huang, 2011; Kaperonis, 2018; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Virtual communities, blogs, and online social networking sites provide a platform to influence consumers' purchase decisions. Individuals can share their experiences, opinions, and knowledge with one another due to the online social network provided features. They may affect people's behaviour in terms of communication and purchasing (Darban & Li, 2012). Thus, it is well judged to say that social media is one of the most frequently used tools to seek out services and products.

Restaurant choice

Consumers' purchases are influenced by different factors, including social factors such as the consumers' small group, family, friends, and co-workers (Evans et al., 2009; Kotler & Armstrong, 2017). Consumers tend to maximize the value of their choices for services and products comparing with other consumers' decision-making factors, which occur in a comparison context such as perceived quality versus perceived sacrifice for a service or product (Chung & Koo, 2015). Many consumers' choices are made within different social groups that impact their decisions, even if they decide independently (East et al., 2008). Solomon et al. (2010) state that consumers are involved in several online groups, and their purchasing decision behaviour is substantially influenced by those groups. Moreover, people may never meet in the physical world, but they can affect each other's behaviour, including purchasing decisions (Evans et al., 2009).

One of these purchasing decisions is related to restaurant choice. In restaurant decision-making, a range of alternative restaurants is available. Consumers face uncertainty while selecting a restaurant. Uncertainty concerns are not only the food offered in the restaurant but also the overall dining experience, such as service quality, food taste, menu choices, price, and the restaurant's location. Consumer uncertainty arises, especially when they have limited or no antecedent experience while choosing among available restaurants. To solve this uncertainty, customers search for various information sources, including marketer-controlled and marketer-uncontrolled sources (Richards & Tiwari, 2014). There are varied sources, such as friends, family, relatives, and past visitations, influencing restaurant choice (Gregory & Kim, 2004). Social media is one of the possible alternatives, not only for restaurant decision making but also for various firms providing services or selling products. Thus, with the opportunity of social media, it is necessary to gain an advantage of the power of both customers and stakeholders (Y. Kim et al., 2020).

Early studies indicated that real friends and relatives (Ghiselli & Ma, 2015; Gregory & Kim, 2004; Pantelidis, 2010; Tiwari & Richards, 2013), particularly experts (Bitter & Grabner-Kräuter, 2016) as information sources are more influential than any others. Ghiselli and Ma (2015) found that customers who do not use social media for restaurant choice rely mostly on recommendations from friends (69%). According to more recent research, photos (Oliveira & Casais, 2019), physical

evidence (Yang et al., 2017), comments (Kumar et al., 2020), the popularity of restaurants on social media (Mhlanga & Tichaawa, 2017; Ramos et al., 2020), and social media ads (Kumar et al., 2020; Saura et al., 2019) have a greater influence even than information provided by friends. The studies' common argument is that social media plays an increasingly important role as information sources on restaurant consumers' purchase intentions and attitudes.

Some of the current literature on social media use pays particular attention to restaurant decisions. Tiwari and Richards (2013) found that peer networks (social media) are more influential than anonymous networks in determining restaurant choice. A study conducted by Cornejo (2017) revealed that social media is a determinant of restaurant choice. Consumers' decisions affect other people, and on the internet, this can be determined by the number of shared images, likes, or posts. Another study (Santos, 2017) showed that consumers would not go to a new restaurant before checking the restaurant review and ranking. Aprilia (2018) argued that social media has a significant role in consumers' fine dining choices. Taken together, it seems that social media use plays an important role in restaurant decisions.

Methodology

The questionnaire was established after analysis of the literature review and consisted of four parts. Fifteen questions were composed to measure the subject of social media use in the first part. Six questions were composed to measure individuals' restaurant choices both during a trip and in their place of residence in the second and third parts. Lastly, six questions were asked to identify the demographics of the participants. Participants were asked to respond using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree (1)" to "strongly agree (5)". The questions asked participants to rate how strongly they agreed with each statement. The data collection process is also divided into sections. First, we examined the questionnaire with colleagues and several academicians for face validity and content validity. In group interviews, we changed hard-to-understand expressions to more intelligible expressions. After a preliminary examination and before the main research, we conducted an online survey with 80 internet users for the pilot test. It was observed that the average duration of the survey was three minutes. For the pre-test, Cronbach's alpha was determined as 0.92.

The target population of the study consists of restaurant clients who use social media. An online questionnaire was conducted in February and March 2019. We employed a simple random sampling method. We posted the online questionnaire URL (link) through social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram with an invitation message about the study's purpose. Randomness was ensured by posting the questionnaires on many social media platforms. To avoid repeated submissions, we set the survey to let participants submit only one response. We collected 497 valid responses in this study (see Table 1).

Data analysis

Data management and analysis were performed using a statistical program. First, Mahalanobis distance was calculated for the determination of the outliers. Because subjects with values other than the typical values or with extreme values may skew the results of the statistical tests (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007), nine subjects were excluded from the analysis. As the questionnaire was online, and all questions were required to complete the survey, there is no missing data in the analysis.

Skewness and kurtosis values of each item in the scales were analysed to check normal distribution. It has been noted that for each item, skewness and kurtosis should not exceed ± 2.0 (Field, 2013; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). The methodological approach taken in this study is based on a two-stage process. First, we performed an exploratory factor analysis to explore the underlying theoretical structure of the phenomena. After the variables were extracted from the data, we

Table 1. Sample Characteristics (N = 497).

		Frequency	Percentage (%)
<i>Gender</i>	Female	256	51,5
	Male	241	48,5
<i>Age</i>	15–25	133	26,8
	26–35	231	46,5
	36–45	75	15,1
	46–55	43	8,7
	56+	15	3
<i>Marital Status</i>	Single	255	51,3
	Married	239	48,7
<i>Education</i>	Primary	7	1,4
	Secondary	91	18,3
	Higher	399	80,3
<i>Dining Out</i>	Rarely	52	10,5
	Once in a month	122	24,5
	A couple of times in a month	203	40,8
	A couple of times in a week	101	20,3
	Everyday	19	3,8

performed structural equation modelling. The two-step approach suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) was performed to examine the structural equation model. In this approach, first, the measurement model and then the structural model is tested. Before proceeding to the tests, construct validity and construct reliability were examined with confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The maximum likelihood method was used in CFA. A p-value <.05 was considered significant.

Measurement reliability and validity

Reliability was calculated using internal consistency reliability analysis (Cronbach's alpha, inter-item correlation, and item-total score correlation coefficients). According to Cohen (1988), reliability coefficients of 0.60 and above in behavioural sciences are considered to be reasonably good. Ferretich (1991) recommended that corrected item-total correlations range between .30 and .70 for a good scale. We conducted an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to determine the underlying dimensions of the social media use scale. The analysis was conducted on 15 items. According to Hair et al. (2019), when the factor loading gap is less than 0.1 and, among different factors, the item gap in different factors is insignificant. Since two items' (3 and 14) factor loadings were lower than 0.5, and the factor loading gap was less than 0.1, they were removed. EFA for 13 items was conducted again. One item (15) was cross-loaded, so it was removed. Finally, four latent factors were extracted using varimax rotation to determine the relationship between the items and factors. After extracting the factors, based on the items with higher factor loadings in different factors, we named the factors. For instance, factor 1 was based on items (4, 11, 12, and 13) related to tourism service. Therefore, we named factor 1 "searching for services." Other factors were named "social interactions", "searching for products," and "searching information." In the EFA, the total variance explained was 69.51 %. KMO value was calculated as 0.80, and with a significance level of .000. Depending on the calculated values, it is acceptable to come up with four different dimensions for the social media use scale. However, when the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the searching for information factor is examined, it is seen that it is lower than the other factors. The decision regarding this factor (F4) will be made by checking convergent validity and composite reliability after confirmatory factor analysis. Table 2 shows internal consistency and exploratory factor analysis of the social media use scale.

After the EFA, we performed a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Factor loadings were observed from standardized regression coefficients. From the standardized regression-coefficients table, factor loadings vary between 0.86 and 0.49. The indices of factor analysis were examined. CFI (.935) and RMSEA (.81) were found to be close to an acceptable value. After covariance made

Table 2. Social Media Use EFA (N: 488).

	Items	Ext.	Load	Var.	CA.	I-I	I-T
F1	12. I follow hotels pages on my social account	.813	.885	20.82	0.80	0.56	0.62
	11. I follow travel agencies pages on my social account	.757	.840				
	13. I follow restaurants pages on my social account	.621	.644				
F2	4. I use social media to make travel plan	.470	.615	18.83	0.80	0.60	0.66
	7. I share/create photos and videos on social media	.795	.880				
	8. I share my experiences on social media	.783	.860				
F3	9. I use social media to communicate with people	.573	.724	17.41	0.78	0.48	0.52
	6. I use social media to be aware of special offers	.797	.854				
	10 I follow the product brands from my social media account.	.721	.761				
F4	5. I use social media to be aware of new products	.634	.733	12.44	0.60	0.44	0.44
	1. I use social media to read news	.706	.817				
	2. I use social media to check reviews and comments	.676	.777				

Ext: Extraction, Var: Variance, CA: Cronbachs alpha, I-I: Inter-Item correlation average, I-T: Item-Total correlation average

between the error terms of two items in the same factor, fit indices improved. Additionally, the correlations between the factors were not higher than the square root of the AVE value so that the discriminant validity was ensured. When the fit indices were examined, the four-factor social media use scale was validated by the data obtained in this research. After the fit indices, convergent validity and composite reliability were examined. However, we decided to exclude the “searching for information (F4)” factor from the analysis because the composite reliability (0.44) and AVE (0.42) values were both below 0.50. Table 3 shows the “social media use” CFA factor loadings, reliability, validity, and fit indices.

In addition, we performed internal consistency analysis for both dependent variables scales of individuals’ restaurant preferences during the trip and at home. Then, we performed exploratory factor analysis fixed to one factor for both scales. EFA for the “on trip” scale: all item extractions were above 0.50, and factor loadings were relatively high. Internal consistency analysis values were all acceptable. EFA for the “at home” scale: Only one item (21) extraction was below 0.50 (0.48). All items’ factor loadings were above 0.50. Internal consistency analysis values were all acceptable. We decided to proceed to CFA, although the extraction of item-21 was slightly below 0.50. Table 4 shows restaurant preferences scale EFA and internal consistency analysis results.

Measurement model

The measurement model is the model in which latent variables and all correlation relations are calculated (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). At this stage, the confirmatory factor analysis is performed to test the structural model. CFA was performed to test the measurement model, which included the dimensions “searching” for services, “social interactions”, “searching for products”, “restaurant choice on trip,” and “restaurant choice at home.” Two different CFAs were carried out as there are two different measurements (on trip and home). First, we performed CFA for the “on trip” measurement model. Standardized regression coefficients have been examined, and no factor loading was below 0.50. Some of the goodness-of-fit index values were not in the acceptable range. So, modification indices and the standardized residual covariance matrix have been checked. Instead of deleting any items, one covariance between error terms of item 15 and item 16 improved fit index

Table 3. Social Media Use Scale CFA (N: 488).

Factor	Searching for services				Social interactions			Searching for products		
	Item 12	Item 11	Item 13	Item 4	Item 7	Item 8	Item 9	Item 6	Item 10	Item 5
Factor Loadings	0.80	0.86	0.77	0.49	0.84	0.85	0.59	0.77	0.85	0.69
Composite Reliability	0.83				0.81			0.82		
AVE	0.55				0.59			0.60		

CMIN/DF: 4.134, GFI: 0.95, CFI: 0.95, NFI: 0.94, RMSEA: 0.080

Table 4. Restaurant preferences scale EFA (488).

Items	Ext	Load	Var	CA	ll.	I.T	
On Trip	14. Comments made on social media affect my choice of restaurant.	.533	.730	62.3	.87	0.53	0.67
	15. The restaurant I go to must have an account on social media.	.593	.770				
	16. The restaurant I go to must be known on social media.	.550	.742				
	17. The menu shared on the restaurant's social media accounts influence my decision.	.605	.778				
	18. The venue pictures shared on the restaurant's social media accounts influence my decision.	.715	.846				
	19. The food pictures shared on the restaurant's social media accounts influence my decision.	.744	.863				
At home	20. Comments made on social media affect my choice of restaurant.	.574	.758	61.2	.87	0.52	0.68
	21. The restaurant I go to must have an account on social media.	.485	.694				
	22. The restaurant I go to must be known on social media.	.526	.725				
	23. The menu shared on the restaurant's social media accounts influence my decision.	.712	.844				
	24. The venue pictures shared on the restaurant's social media accounts influence my decision.	.674	.821				
	25. The food pictures shared on the restaurant's social media accounts influence my decision.	.707	.841				

values to an acceptable range. Composite reliability and average variance extracted values were also acceptable. Also, it was found that the correlations between the factors were not higher than the square root of the AVE value so that the discriminant validity was ensured. Then, we performed CFA for the “at home” measurement model. There was no factor loading below 0.50 in the standardized regression coefficient table. Some of the goodness-of-fit index values were not in the acceptable range.

As in the previous measurement model, a covariance between error terms of item 21 and item 22 improved fit index values to an acceptable range. However, the covariance between these two items' error terms caused the factor loading of item 21 to fall to 0.467. Item 21 is: “(At home) the restaurant I go to must have an account on social media.” In this measurement model, it becomes meaningful why item 21's factor loading is low. We were in a dilemma about whether to delete this item or not. Since the fit-index was acceptable, we decided to check if composite reliability, AVE, and discriminant validity were acceptable. The composite reliability value was 0.86, AVE was 0.52, and correlations between the factors were not higher than the AVE value's square root. Moreover, some scholars (Hair et al., 2019; Stevens, 2009; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007) state that if the sample is large and if it is an exploratory study, a factor loading of 0.30 and above is acceptable. We decided to continue with model testing (see Table 5).

Results

Before proceeding to the model testing, we examined whether there was multicollinearity between the variables. For multicollinearity determination, the analysis of the variable variance inflation factor (VIF) and tolerance values are the most commonly used methods, according to Alin (2010). According to Hair et al. (2019), if the VIF value is below ten and the tolerance value is above 0.10, it can be stated that there is no correlation between variables. As for Rogerson (2014), the VIF value should not be higher than five. We also checked the scatter plots. They indicated a good linear relationship between the dependent variable and independent variables. The test results showed that tolerance values ranged from 0.684 to 0.867 for each independent variable. VIF values ranged from 1.154 to 1.463 for each independent variable.

After testing the measurement model, we proceeded to the test of the structural model. The estimation was carried out using the maximum likelihood method. The standard beta coefficients and standard regression weights obtained from the structural model test are schematically shown in Figure 1. Since the model is tested in the aspect of two different locations (at home and on a trip) in this research, there are two dependent variables. Therefore, Figure 1 shows the results of two

Table 5. The measurement models CFA (N: 488).

Constructs	Items	On trip					At home				
		Factor Load	t-values	CR	AVE	Items	Factor Load	t-values	CR	AVE	
Searching for services	12	0.855	18.27*	0.81	0.53	12	0.856	18.33*	0.81	0.53	
	11	0.795	***			11	0.798	***			
	13	0.695	15.23*			13	0.693	15.23*			
Social interactions	4	0.518	11.03*	0.81	0.59	4	0.514	10.95*	0.81	0.59	
	9	0.588	***			9	0.592	***			
	8	0.857	12.72*			8	0.849	12.78*			
Searching for product	7	0.839	12.73*	0.79	0.56	7	0.845	12.78*	0.79	0.56	
	5	0.614	***			5	0.613	***			
	10	0.770	12.60*			10	0.775	12.58*			
Restaurant Choice Decision	6	0.842	12.90*	0.87	0.54	6	0.837	12.84*	0.86	0.52	
	14	0.679	***			20	0.680	***			
	15	0.619	12.49*			21	0.467	9.52*			
	16	0.593	11.99*			22	0.507	10.41*			
	17	0.722	14.35*			23	0.819	16.12*			
	18	0.849	16.48*			24	0.844	16.53*			
19	0.888	16.99*	25	0.895	17.27*						

CMIN/DF: 3.678, GFI: 0.92, CFI: 0.94, NFI: 0.91, RMSEA: .074, ***fixed parameter, *p < 0.01

separate tests. The two dependent variables were not measured in the same model. Because the two dependent variables consist of the same statements, very high correlations may occur between the error terms that disrupt the fit index.

For each analysis, all the variables indicating that endogenous variables served as independent variables, and multiple regression analyses were used on different subsets of the variables to obtain the path coefficients. Figure 1 shows that SS, SI, and SP variables affect restaurant choice decisions both while on a trip or at home, positively and significantly. The standard beta coefficients in the model show the magnitude of a variable’s effect on another variable. The effect sizes in this study are based on the impact size classification proposed by Kline (2015). Kline (2015) classifies beta coefficients below 0.10 as a small effect, above 0.50 as a high effect, and between those two values as a medium effect. A summary of the results is given in Table 6.

Table 6 presents an overview of the effect of individuals’ social media use reasons on restaurant choice decisions both on a trip and at home. Social media use for searching service, social interactions, and searching products affects restaurant choice (p < 0.05) while on a trip. Each

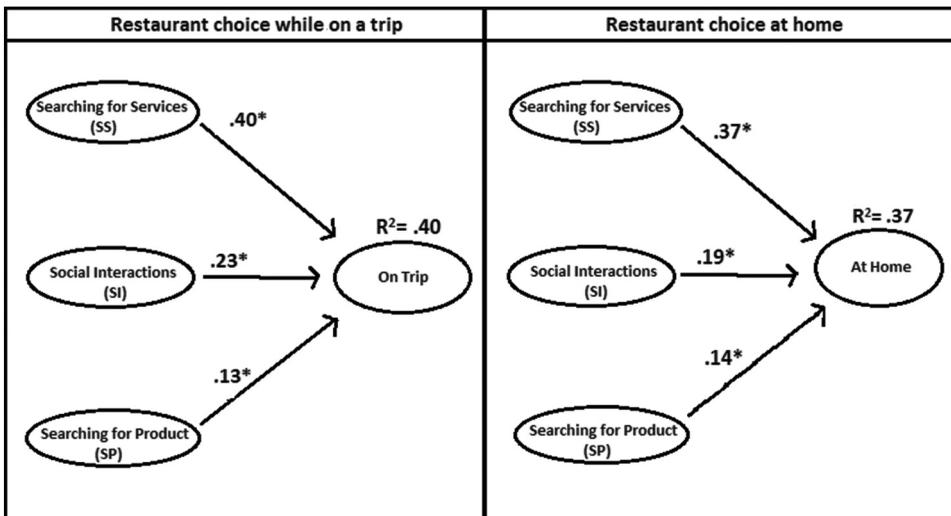


Figure 1. Estimated models (*p < 0.05).

Table 6. Restaurant choice variable regressed on SS, SI, and SP.

On Trip		Standard Beta	t-Value	p
Searching for Service	Restaurant Decision	0.402	5.17	**
Social Interactions	Restaurant Decision	0.234	4.465	**
Searching for Products	Restaurant Decision	0.134	1.971	0.049*
At Home				
Searching for Service	Restaurant Decision	0.374	4.825	**
Social Interactions	Restaurant Decision	0.195	3.705	**
Searching for Products	Restaurant Decision	0.143	2.055	0.04*

**p < 0.01 *p < 0.05

variable has a medium effect on restaurant choice decisions. The combined effects of variables achieved an explained variance (R^2) value of 0.40 predicting restaurant choice decisions while on a trip. In other words, three variables together explain about 40 percent of the total variance in the restaurant selection decision. From standard regression weights, the relative order of importance of the independent variables on the restaurant choice decision is the following: searching for service, social interactions, and searching for products.

Regarding the restaurant choice decisions at home, it is possible to say that the results are similar to decisions while on a trip. Table 6 shows that social media use for searching services, social interactions, and searching products affects restaurant choice ($p < 0.05$) at home as well. Only what stands out in the table are the combined effects of variables explaining restaurant choice decisions with a slightly lower rate. In other words, three variables together explain about 37 percent of the total variance in the restaurant selection decisions at home. From the standard regression weights again, the relative order of importance of the independent variables on the restaurant choice decision is the following: searching for service, social interactions, and searching for products.

Conclusion and implications

The present study was designed to determine the effect of social media use on individuals' restaurant choices. Structural equation modelling analysis with a sample of 488 social media users revealed that social media use influences individuals' restaurant choice decisions. Results are significant in at least two major respects. It provides insight into different social media use dimensions and their influence on individuals' restaurant choices both on a trip and at home. Regarding the first research question and conceptualizing social media's role in restaurant choice, this study has identified three-dimensional differences in social media use (searching for services, social interactions, and searching for products). The empirical findings in this study provide a new understanding of social media use on a restaurant choice. The study results show the markedly different uses of social media by customers through the various stages of the decision-making process, in both behavioural and motivational aspects.

Regarding the second research question, it was found that social media use influences individuals' restaurant choices during their trip. As for the third research question, it was found that social media use influences individuals' restaurant choices at home as well. Previous research that examined social media impacts on consumer behaviour already showed that it influences customers' choice of hotels, destinations, restaurants, etc. The findings reported here shed new light on social media use on a restaurant choice. The study findings also showed that consumers' social media use influences restaurant choices more on a trip than at home. The reason might be that they need to investigate places to eat or places to stay from different sources.

The research has also shown that either on a trip or at home, the relative order of importance of the independent variables on the restaurant choice decision is: searching for service, social interactions, and searching for products. In both models, "searching for services" had the highest relationship in restaurant choice decisions. These findings also have significant implications for understanding social media use dimensions' impact on restaurant choice. Therefore, some

implications can be made about the dimensions of social media use. Social media provides restaurants with the ability to create both service and interactivity, sometimes in the same post (Lepkowska-White et al., 2019). Foodservice posts are very important because they describe the restaurant's main objective: to create an anticipation of an enjoyable culinary experience. Since restaurants are places where people socialize, relevant posts are significant from the social interaction dimension. Posting restaurant products on social media is important in terms of social media use for searching products.

With changing the way millions of people and businesses connecting and communicating, their impacts on societies and firms have become significant (S. Kim et al., 2015; Vanmeter et al., 2015). This result reveals the importance of social media for restaurant businesses. If people decide to depend on the search from social media, businesses would want to show up where potential customers may come across. Social media nowadays is one of the sources which produce references depending on other people's opinions. People check on pictures, read comments, and reviews before purchasing. Restaurant businesses can turn it into an advantage. Photos, online reviews, and comments are a good source for feedback that most of the time, restauranters spend both considerable effort and money to collect data about it. This study strengthens the idea that restaurant businesses should use social media advantage since it is a booming phenomenon in the last decade.

Social media marketing is a powerful way for businesses of all sizes to reach prospects and customers. Social media allows firms to engage in timely and direct end-consumer contact at relatively low cost and higher efficiency levels than can be achieved with more traditional communication tools. This benefit makes social media not only relevant to large multinational firms (He et al., 2013) but also for small and medium-sized companies and even non-profit and governmental agencies (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). For instance, according to Timilsina (2017), restaurants that accept social media have seen an increase in sales and customer flow. However, according to Lepkowska-White and Parsons (2019), most small restaurants underutilize social media as a monitoring tool in their operations due to various challenges. To succeed by exploiting social media in the restaurant business, owners/managers need some capabilities and relevant competencies. Restaurants should increase their technological, relational, marketing, management, business and strategic, innovation, and dynamic capabilities related to social media management (Dossena et al., 2020). These results add to the rapidly expanding field of social media marketing. Especially restaurants that target non-resident customers should benefit from social media marketing more.

The generalizability of these results is subject to certain limitations. For instance, the study findings are limited to the sample selected in this research. Therefore, this study has limitations on its generalizability to other locations and sectors. Since research on the impact of social media use on restaurant choice is scant, this study is also limited by the lack of related secondary data. The study focuses on the effect of social media use on restaurant choices. Despite its limitations, the study adds to our understanding of the effect of social media use. Further research needs to examine the links between social media use and restaurant choice decisions. Similar research studies should be implemented to determine what affects restaurant choices using different theories, models, and methods.

Disclosure of potential conflicts of interest

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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