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Feeding the Need for Instagram

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Abstract

This research evaluated psychological motives of Instagram influencers to give insight on what elements a small independent restaurant may utilize to draw attention. A closer look into the connection of those motives and a comparison between the importance of aesthetics versus product quality was done, to aid small restaurants to maximize their efforts for more profitable decisions. Information within contains both quantitative and qualitative data, the latter being majority of the material. There is a myriad of motivators and reasons why and how millennial influencers use social media. Depending on a restaurant's target market, specific considerations may be more helpful than others.

Introduction

The development of the web 2.0 and growth of technology has changed the world significantly (Dubose, 2011). Social media, a byproduct of this growth, has revamped what information is created and available, enabling the average citizen to publish content that goes beyond fact to include opinions, perspectives and, even details infringing on their own privacy (Dubose, 2011). Yet, this exhibition of one's self, promotes grouping of like-minded individuals to develop common interest communities (Dubose, 2011). These communities allow individuals to participate in others' lives regardless of barriers (Lantos, 2014).

Social media encompasses many platforms that present their own functionality to exchanging information (Bae, Ham, Hayes, & Lee, 2019). Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are among the social media platforms available (Deng, Ferenczi, Hill, Lefringhausen, & Marshall, 2020; Fidan, 2019; Huang & Su, 2018). Facebook allows its users to exchange content within their network or the public by video, photo, shares and likes in a timeline presentation (Fidan, 2019). Twitter enables quick, shorter content that can be shared with a person's followers (Deng

et al., 2020). The social media platform Instagram made its debut in 2010 and featured the use of images to convey messages to followers (Huang & Su, 2018). To improve image presentation Instagram has included many options to filter photos with imbedded capabilities (Huang & Su, 2018). While Facebook allows users to elaborately communicate their lives, and Twitter enables users to share quick thoughts, Instagram allows users to visually introduce followers to their world (Deng et al., 2020; Fidan, 2019; Huang & Su, 2018).

In addition to these American social media platforms, other countries have their own applications which are utilized more in concert to their culture and society (Bostick, Lehnert, & Singh, 2012). There are a vast number of social media platforms around the world, a focus on the specific application of Instagram will be assessed, in relation to psychological fulfillment of their users. As well-established chain restaurants look into ways to capitalize on this incorporated technology, several marketing opportunities are available because of their prominent and more visible position of their establishment (Dipietro, Crews, Gustafson, & Strick, 2012). Small independent restaurants, however, will need to maximize their efforts by efficiently making decisions that can increase their profits, brand recognition and customer loyalty without over exceeding their resources (Lepkowska-White & Parsons, 2019).

Research pertaining to social media usage that relates to dining out, millennial preferences and psychological connections are already available. Specific research, however, that focuses on drawing attention of social network users through their psychological needs and expectations to generate new customer attention is limited. Further research of which aspect, aesthetics or food quality, would entice the Instagram user to seek out the independent small restaurant, and posting about themselves using the restaurant as the setting, is the focal point of this study.

Literature Review

The Digital Influencer

A growing number of vital users on the social media circuit to brands, are the digital influencers (Maden, 2018). A digital influencer is a “third party endorser who shapes audiences’ attitudes through blogs, tweets and the use of other social media” (Freberg, Freberg, Graham, & McGaughey, 2011, p. 90; Maden, 2018). These individuals have power to diffuse anything new to their network of followers, but in order to do this they must have a psychological connection to their audience (Maden, 2018). Staged professional posts do not have as much impact as real, personalized and natural sharing (Maden, 2018; Lantos, 2014).

Psychological Needs that Feed Social Media Usage

The ability for individuals to create or recreate their image, as well as connect with others by sharing specific information via text or visual inclusions occurs to satisfy a psychological need (Cipresso, Riva, & Wiederhold, 2016). Social media usage is applied to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs and, Cipresso et al. (2016), described different users may have different intentions and methods of incorporating social media, but they are still using social media to satisfy fundamental needs. Users can manipulate and highlight particular views or supporting images that cultivate their ideal self-concept (Holbrook 2001; Schmitt 1999). The social media platform Instagram has a prevalence of narcissism among its users and specifically fulfills the need of self-expression leading to a sense of self-actualization (Choi, Lee, Lee, Moon, & Sung, 2016; Cipresso et al., 2016). However, narcissism is not the only psychological need propelling social media users to maintain a constant presence on any platform. Other areas may be satisfied as well, such as offering support to those in their network, obtaining support, expressing one’s

self or witnessing others' selves are needs that can also be fulfilled (Cipresso et al., 2016; Lantos, 2014).

Aesthetic Appeal

While all social media platforms incorporate visual components, Instagram's main method of communication is through imagery (Huang & Su, 2018). At the International Communications Association Conference in 2015, Markus, identified Instagram as a platform used for personal use to display one's self more so than to connect with others (Huang & Su, 2018; Markus, 2015). The distinction between genders show that there are also more aesthetic considerations beyond generational differences. A woman is more likely to appraise a photo on the many details that compose the image, while men assess the space in which photos are taken (Kosslyn, Kozhevnikov, & Shephard, 2005). Restaurant aesthetics that aid in satisfying the aim for attractiveness will also contribute to Instagrammable elements of the selfie (Chan & Kirillova, 2018; Bazdan, Pecotic & Samardzija, 2014). Social media users not only want to look good when they present themselves, but they also want to display their attributes by advising, sharing and using products that positively reflect their self-concept (Gosling, Naumann, & Vazire, 2008; Holbrook, 2001).

The Foodie Millennial

Millennial consumers have overtaken the previous generation of baby boomers and are now the largest group of consumers (Chung & Yoon, 2018). The Restaurant, Food & Beverage Market Research Handbook 2020-2021 annotated that 71% of individuals surveyed, dine out either once a week or several times a month for lunch and 80% dine out within those same criteria for dinner (Richard K. Miller & Associates, 2020). Dining priorities have shifted from the preceding generation of consumers and favor unique flavors, great atmosphere, better quality

food and healthier eating (Richard K. Miller & Associates, 2020). Millennials preference of local eateries over causal chain restaurants indicate their appreciation for distinctive dining (Richard K. Miller & Associates, 2020). Understanding food and dining preferences to make a comparison between aesthetics and food quality is necessary to assess a hierarchy of importance between the two.

Methodology

A compilation of peer reviewed articles, conference proceedings, and market research data was compiled to collect information to conduct this study. Information which pertained to understanding psychological needs of social media users on Instagram and the millennial generation provided the base of information on which this assessment was made. Comparative research on food preferences and aesthetic motivators was used to assess the dominance of one aspect over the other when sharing an image on Instagram. This collection of information is used to determine how to maximize small independent restaurant's operational efforts with minimal resources. Collected article information includes both qualitative and quantitative data to address the question.

Findings

Millennials, who are the largest consumers and the generation being researched were born between 1982 and 2000 (Conley & Lusk, 2019; Chung & Yoon, 2018). These individuals compare vastly different from their predecessors in Generation X and have been generalized as opinionated, egocentric, and lazy yet harboring erudite minds (Conley & Lusk, 2019; Powers & Valentine, 2013). This is a stereotypical description that Lantos (2014) implored market strategists to progress from. Millennials are influential and very influenced through their network of friends and family (Lantos, 2014). They expect authenticity in relationships and

transparency in partnerships, insisting on the real state of things to be presented (Lantos, 2014). Millennials seek out experiences which include risk taking, novelty experiences or a cause that fulfill their lives (Gurau, 2012; Lantos 2014). Yet this very pursuit of such a life also requires a constant search for newer experiences (Bucuta, 2015). Marketing to this group of consumers is important because not only are they the largest spending consumers but they also consume more meals dining out than the previous generation (Chung & Yoon, 2018).

With the rapid growth of technology and implementation becoming the norm in daily life, users have been able to increase the connectedness to others, shrinking their worlds and increasing their reach (Lantos, 2014). Huang and Su (2018) conducted a study in Taiwan which concluded that 77% of their study subjects got on their smartphone as their initial actions, revealing the importance placed on technology. In the same study of Taiwan citizens, Huang and Su (2018) reported 90% of American teenagers in 2018 were users of Facebook, Snapchat or Instagram. Among the users of Instagram reported in 2018, over half of them were women between the ages of 18-29 years old (Huang & Su, 2018). The popularity of this platform is due to its visual method of communication, which allows users to reinforce concepts with visual aids (Huang & Su, 2018; Koufie & Kesa, 2020). Prior research on social media as a whole has connected its usage to an individual's personality and psychological needs (Christofides Desmarais & Muise, 2009; Ryan & Xenos, 2011). Huang & Su (2018) have indicated that Instagram is a platform to allow individuals to gain social validation. While Choi et al. (2016) designated self-expression and social interaction as the motives for using Instagram. Holbrook (2011) denotes the millennial generation is a group of exhibitionists by which social media is used to display their image. Bucklin, Pauwels and Trusov (2009) suggest that egoism, collectivism and altruism are motives for social media sharing.

Two aspects in connection with social media and dining out being researched are aesthetics and product quality. Millennials are reported to display relevant cues which aid in projecting the self-concept in which they see themselves (Holbrook, 2011). By picking and choosing what photos are displayed on their profile they are able to suggest an idea of what others should perceive (Chan & Kirillova, 2018; Creusen & Schoormans, 2005). Women better manage appearances, colors and other detailed components of an image than their male counterparts (Huang & Su, 2018). Color perception plays a role in subliminal suggestion and can elicit emotion, such as red and yellow attract and stimulate, while blue has a calming effect (Bazdan et al., 2014).

The other component being assessed is food and product quality. Food preferences is a large driver for engaging with a dining establishment (Conley & Lusk, 2019). Millennials sense of adventure encourage them to try new drinks and cuisines to expand their palette (Chung & Yoon, 2018). They are looking for new dining options that stray from the average and normal establishments and want to engage in an experience (Chung & Yoon, 2018). Not only is new and exciting important they are also putting a premium on the products that they do consume, such as beef, pork and poultry, fresh produce and eggs (Conley & Lusk, 2019). Americans between the ages of 18-35 years old consumed more protein sources and fresh produce, ultimately reducing their intake of frozen processed meals (Conley & Lusk, 2019). Millennials are extremely concerned in the food safety and cleanliness of a restaurant and is a requirement before considering the establishment (Bazdan et al., 2014). Once prerequisites of safe dining are met, food quality have been shown to be the most important factor of all when choosing a restaurant (Kesa & Koufie, 2020; Elisabete & Medeiros, 2013).

Psychological needs play a part for Instagram influencers and, an understanding of their psychological needs is a part of this research. Specifically, for Instagram, highly active users of the platform are connected with an increased level of narcissism or egocentrism but are still harboring insecurities (Choi et al., 2016; Fox & Rooney, 2015; Raskin & Terry, 1988). Majority of postings on Instagram are selfies, a term defining a picture taken of one's self or including one's self by their own hand (Huang & Su, 2018). Selfies by gender are attributed to different reasons; men are more likely to self-present online to denote a position they hold or seek, but women are driven by their need for enabling an attractive self-presentation of themselves or a need to belong (Frackowiaka, et al., 2015).

Limitations

All findings were part of researches that focused on a different perspective and did not derive any results as a direct association with psychological needs that propel highly active Instagram influencers to engage with small independent restaurants. Information regarding aesthetics did not have a specific link to what Instagram users preferred but instead generalizations of preferences. Product quality preferences were based on assessments of the millennial generation as a whole and did not specifically focus on what Instagram influences prefer. Aspects of components were used to collect an understanding of each element as individual themes and will conclude with applying compartmentalized information and applying it to the research question. Furthermore, inconsistent psychological reasonings are identified for social media and Instagram use because of the many facets of individual personalities and justifications made for social media activity. In the future, specifically targeted information relating to Instagram influencers should be conducted to gain a definitive understanding.

Implications

Marketing strategy has taken a liking to digital influencers, by associating with one individual a brand is connected to that person's numerous followers (Maden, 2018). By specifically addressing narcissistic Instagram users, small independent restaurants may be able to use minimal resources to draw attention by applying either aesthetic or product quality to entice digital influencers and exposing restaurants. By deciphering particular needs of Instagram influencers restaurants can create what they are looking for without unnecessary wastage to cover a multitude of possibilities. Narcissistic women want to display themselves in the most attractive way (Sorokowskia, et al., 2015; Gosling, Naumann & Vazire, 2008). Lighting, décor and atmosphere decisions can be considered to present an amazing photo opportunity. Dishes should not only be delicious, but it must be in line with the views to suggest that influencers are particular about what they consume (Conley & Lusk, 2019; Kesa & Koufie, 2020; Elisabete & Medeiros, 2013). In addition to fresh and organic there must be a sense of excitement that sets this dish apart from others (Chung & Yoon, 2018; Lantos, 2014). The composition of the plate must reflect beauty in itself to draw these influencers attention (Chan & Kirillova, 2018; Alba, Dah & Hoegg, 2010; Kirillova & Chan, 2018). The findings in this research paper can aid small independent restaurants to design and operate with maximum results and minimal costs to elevate the photo opportunities for Instagram sharing potential. This will also suggest what to capitalize on and what can be replaced for newer possibilities. By focusing on grasping the attention of Instagram influencers, utilizing their exposure of small restaurants can generate recognition among potential customers within their immense number of followers (Goldsmith, Litvin, & Pan, 2008; Peltier & Schultz, 2013).

Conclusion

This research prompted discussion on small independent restaurants maximizing their resources to compete with larger food chain establishments. In terms of financial resources, access and reachability of potential new customers, small restaurants are limited (Lepkowska-White & Parsons, 2019). Marketing strategies geared towards utilizing social media are already a consideration (Dipietro et al., 2012). There are methods that allow brands to target specific groups of people to sell their brand and gain new customers (Goldsmith et al., 2008). This research is not about marketing using social media but on drawing in Instagram influencers to their establishment and enticing these influencers to become ambassadors for restaurants. How can individuals be prompted to expose the restaurants of their own choosing without additional coercion from the restaurant staff? A focusing on how front of the house operations and environment design can create a stage for these users to implement their own marketing, based on satisfying their psychological needs they are trying to fulfill on social media, is the premise of this research.

The importance of aesthetics for image collectors from an image primary platform was discussed. Research on aesthetics included what each gender recognizes primarily and how these observations can catch their eye. Food quality and product preference were researched to determine what aspect of food the largest group of consumers are in search of. This information indicated that there was a change in how majority of spending individuals have realigned their food preference (Conley & Lusk, 2019). Most important the psychological needs of highly active Instagram users were assessed to determine why they post information on social media and how to gain their attention, resulting in initiating marketing themselves (Leung, 2013). Millennial consumers find online reviews from others' experiences to be more credible than other marketing strategies, determining how to expose small independent restaurants through

these means is more resourceful (Kesa & Koufie, 2020). In conclusion a clear distinction between which aspect, aesthetic or product quality, would draw the most attentions of Instagram influencers could not be determined by the available research material. Both components have specific contributions but based on the variety of personalities and psychological reasons an influencer could possess, a finite choice between one or the other could cause a detriment to a small restaurant. Instead, striking a balance between the two by incorporating physically attractive designs allowing for potential photographic opportunities and including a menu that engages the adventurous diner would be a generalized solution.

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