



DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGIES AND CUSTOMER RETENTION IN SMALL FOOD BUSINESSES: A CASE STUDY OF SMOKED OUT BBQ, VIJAYAWADA, ANDHRA PRADESH

Dr. D.Prasanna Kumar¹, E.Venkateswara Reddy²

Associate professor

² Co-Author

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.55248/gengpi.07.1026.3271>

ABSTRACT :

This study explores the role of digital marketing activities on customer retention at a small food enterprise called Smoked Out BBQ in Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh. Data were gathered through a Google Form and 76 responses were included in the study. This paper addresses the characteristics of the respondents, use of digital platforms, perception of the content on social media, perceived usefulness of digital information, influence of promotions and reviews, engagement, satisfaction, revisit intention and recommendation intention. Instagram emerged as the most used digital platform whereas offers and discounts were the preferred activities for revisiting the business. The study revealed positive perspectives of respondents towards the digital-marketing activities. A Pearson-product moment correlation of a composite digital-marketing measurement constructed from Q10–Q17 and a composite measurement for retention/recommendation developed from Q18–Q19 revealed a positive association ($r = 0.882$, $p < 0.001$). This finding supports the hypothesised relation at the level of statistical association, but no causal inferences should be drawn. This paper concludes with a set of suggestions for improving the content of the social-media posts, promotions, reviews, engagement and loyalty-building digital communications.

Keywords : Digital marketing; customer retention; social media marketing; restaurant marketing; customer engagement; Instagram; promotions; Smoked Out BBQ; Vijayawada.

Introduction of the Study

Digital marketing is increasingly serving as a mechanism of communication and engagement for small food enterprises. Through social media platforms, online reviews, food-delivery applications, promotional offers and digital conversations, restaurants engage with customers outside their premise. For small businesses, these digital avenues can be important to raise awareness and encourage repeat visits and recommendations.

The current study was conducted with Smoked Out BBQ in Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh. It aims to understand the customers' perspectives of the business's digital-marketing activities and how these activities are associated with their intention to revisit and recommend the restaurant. By exploring the respondents' answers, this study identifies the digital channels that customers are familiar with, the content and offers that they find appealing and the factors that contribute to their decision to return to the business.

The paper is significant because food enterprises can increase customer retention if the factors identified are considered. Although food quality, taste, pricing and service are integral to the restaurant experience, digital marketing can strengthen customer relationships before and after the point of sale.

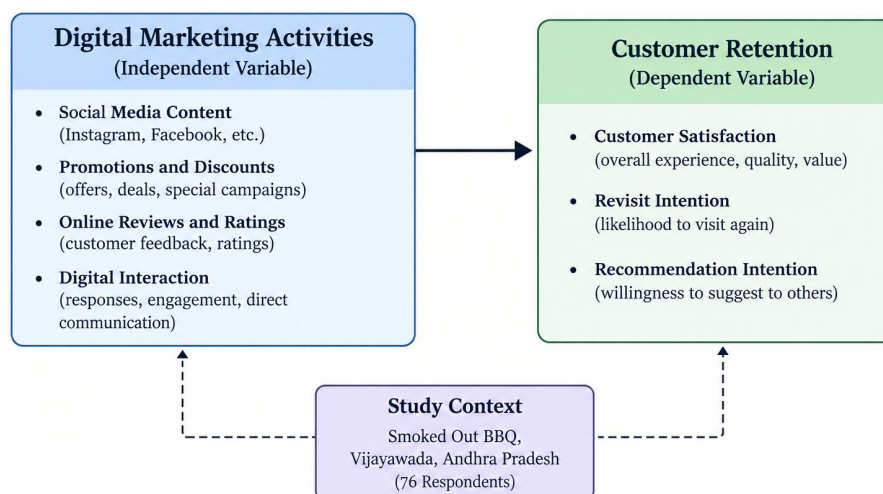
Research Gap

The supplied literature demonstrates that previous research has explored restaurant social-media adoption, social-media strategies, digital marketing and business growth, social-media monitoring, hospitality social-media influence, brand trust and loyalty, and Facebook-based customer engagement. Those studies, however, primarily focus on engagement, awareness, business growth or brand loyalty, rather than directly investigating customer retention in a small Indian food business.

Another gap relates to contextual factors. Some of the reviewed studies were conducted abroad or focused on restaurant chains, whereas the Indian study in the supplied literature examined digital marketing at a broader SME level rather than specifically connecting digital marketing activities with retention in a local food business. The present study aims to address this gap by analysing customers of a specific small food business in Vijayawada and combining digital-marketing perceptions with satisfaction, revisit intention and recommendation intention.

Review of literature:

No.	Year	Context	Study	Author(s)	Objective	Key finding	Identified gap
1	2017	Abroad (USA)	Exploring the Challenges of Incorporating Social Media Marketing Strategies in the Restaurant Business	Elzbieta Lepkowska-White	To examine the adoption and challenges of social media marketing in restaurants.	Social media improved customer communication, brand awareness, and restaurant visibility.	Did not examine customer retention in small Indian food businesses.
2	2017	Abroad (USA)	Marketing Strategies: How Small Restaurant Businesses Use Social Media	Tasheenia Bennett	Identify successful social media strategies.	Effective social media marketing increased engagement and sales.	Customer retention not studied.
3	2018	India	Digital Marketing: A Tool for Business Growth	A. Yasmin, S. Tasneem & K. Fatema	Study effectiveness of digital marketing.	Digital marketing provides wider reach at lower cost.	Not specific to food businesses.
4	2019	Abroad (USA)	Strategies for Monitoring Social Media for Small Restaurants	Elzbieta Lepkowska-White & Amy Parsons	Identify monitoring strategies.	Responding to reviews improves engagement.	No retention analysis.
5	2020	Abroad	Theoretical Foundations of Social Media Power in Hospitality and Tourism	Fuad Mehraliyev et al.	Explain influence of social media.	Social media influences decisions.	No small restaurant focus.
6	2020	Abroad	Antecedent Factors That Affect Restaurant Brand Trust and Brand Loyalty	Jinyoung Kim et al.	Examine brand trust and loyalty.	Brand trust improves loyalty.	Restaurant chains only.
7	2020	Abroad (USA)	Engaging Restaurant Customers on Facebook	Richard Gruss et al.	Examine Facebook marketing.	Community posts generated higher engagement.	Engagement not retention.

Conceptual framework**Objectives of the Study**

Customer Retention Research Essay

Objective

- To identify the major digital platforms through which customers receive information and promotions from Smoked Out BBQ.
- To analyse the influence of digital promotions, social-media posts, online offers and reviews on customer behaviour.
- To examine customer satisfaction, revisit intention and recommendation intention.
- To provide practical suggestions for improving digital marketing and retaining customers.

Hypothesis

- H0: There is no significant association between customers' digital-marketing perceptions and customer retention-related indicators.
- H1: There is a significant positive association between customers' digital-marketing perceptions and customer retention-related indicators.

For analysis, the digital-marketing perception index was constructed from Q10–Q17, while the retention/recommendation index was constructed from Q18–Q19. Pearson correlation was used as an exploratory test of association.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The study follows a descriptive and analytical cross-sectional survey design. It describes respondent characteristics and perceptions and examines the association between digital-marketing perceptions and retention-related responses.

Sample Design

The study uses 76 valid survey responses. A non-probability convenience/voluntary response approach is treated as the practical sampling method because the data were obtained through a Google Form. The sample should not be interpreted as statistically representative of all customers in Vijayawada.

Data Collection

Primary data were collected through a structured Google Form containing demographic questions, multiple-choice questions on digital-media exposure and customer behaviour, 5-point Likert-scale statements, satisfaction and revisit measures, and open-ended questions.

Questionnaire Preparation

The questionnaire moves from respondent profile to digital awareness and usage, perceptions of digital communication, behavioural influence, retention indicators, and open-ended feedback. Likert-scale statements use a five-point response structure where higher values represent stronger agreement.

Data Analysis

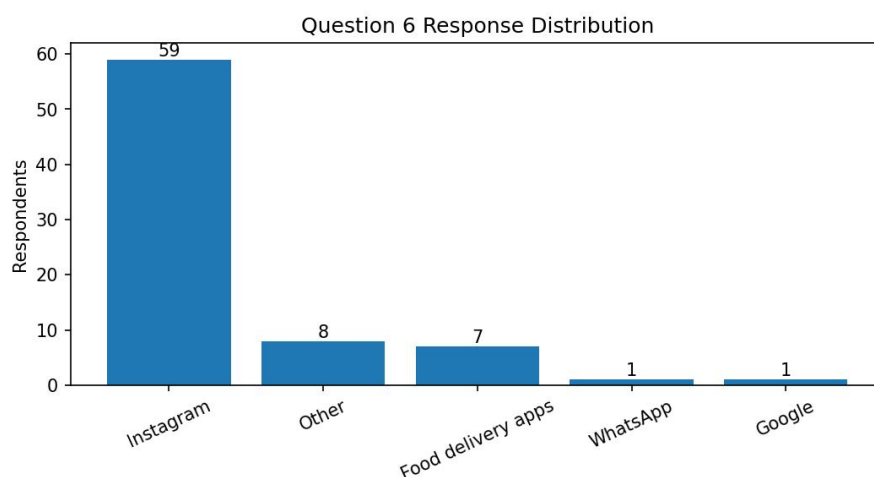
The analysis uses frequency counts, percentages, Likert-scale means, descriptive interpretation and Pearson correlation. Graphs are provided for every survey question. Open-ended responses are summarized descriptively. The statistical association is interpreted cautiously because the design is cross-sectional and the sample is non-probability based.

Indicator	Result
Sample size	76 valid responses
Main digital platform	Instagram – 59 (77.6%)
Main revisit digital activity	Discounts/Others – 48 (63.2%)
Mean digital-marketing index (Q10–Q17)	4.04/5
Mean retention/recommendation index (Q18–Q19)	4.21/5
Pearson correlation	$r = 0.882, p < 0.001$

Data interpretation:

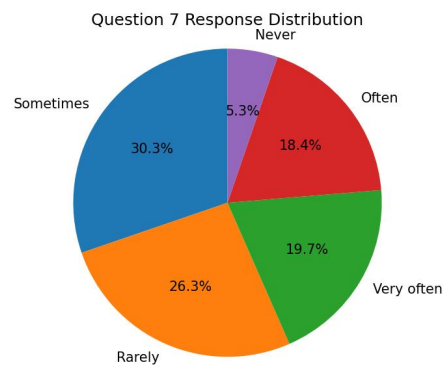
Analysis 1: Which digital platform do you mainly use to see Smoked Out BBQ's promotions

Interpretation: The largest response category is "Instagram", representing 77.6% of respondents.

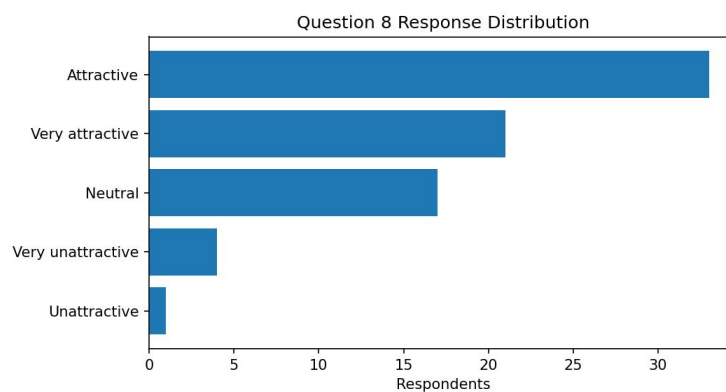


Analysis 2: How frequently do you see Smoked Out BBQ's online advertisements or promotions

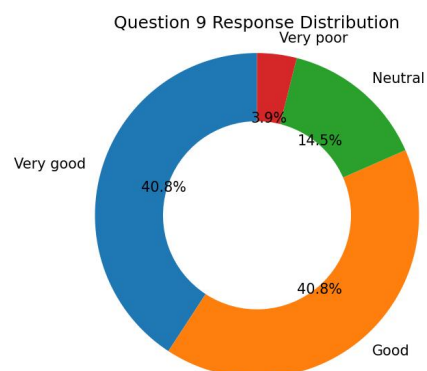
Interpretation: The largest response category is “Sometimes”, representing 30.3% of respondents.

**Analysis 3: How attractive do you find Smoked Out BBQ's social media content?**

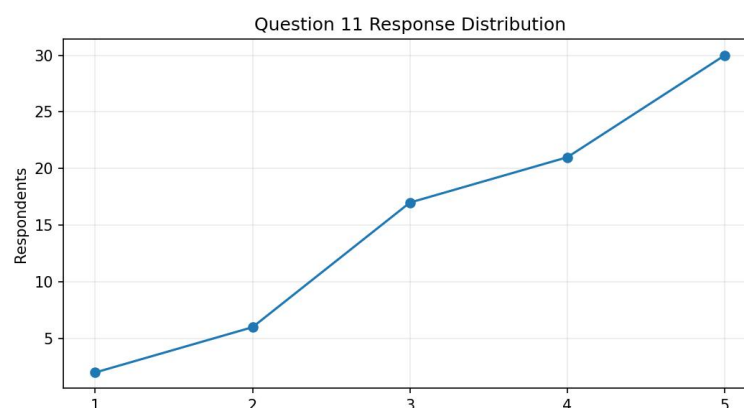
Interpretation: The largest response category is “Attractive”, representing 43.4% of respondents.

**Analysis 4: How useful is the information provided by Smoked Out BBQ through digital platforms**

Interpretation: The largest response category is “Very good”, representing 40.8% of respondents.

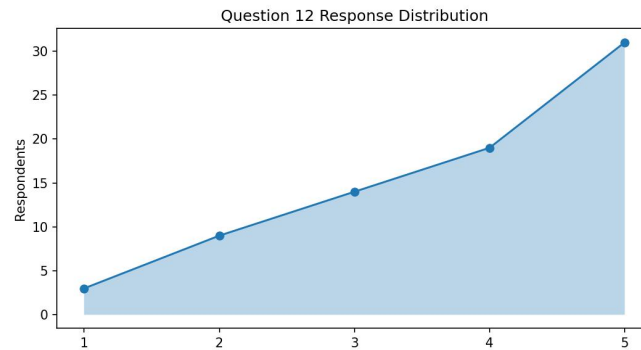
**Analysis 5: Digital promotions encourage me to visit Smoked Out BBQ.**

Interpretation: The largest response category is “5”, representing 39.5% of respondents.

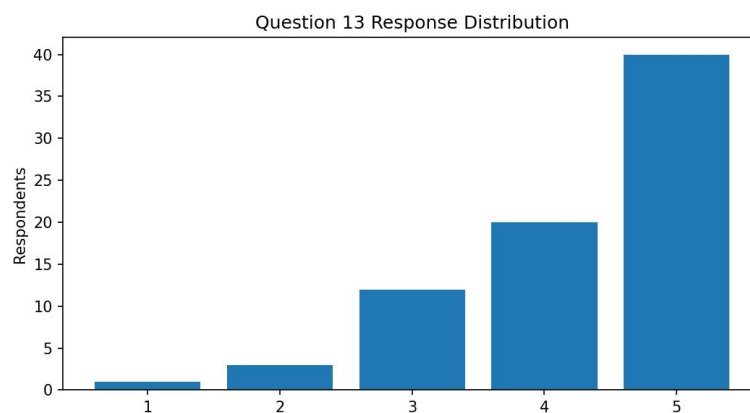


Analysis 6: Social media posts influence my decision to purchase from Smoked Out BBQ.

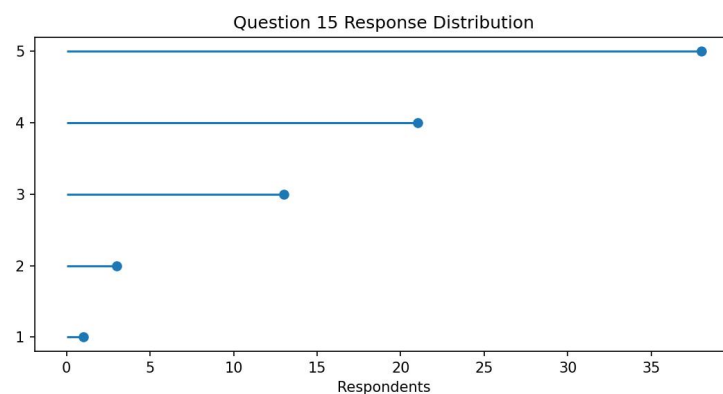
Interpretation: The largest response category is “5”, representing 40.8% of respondents.

**13: Analysis 7: Online offers and discounts encourage me to make repeat purchases.**

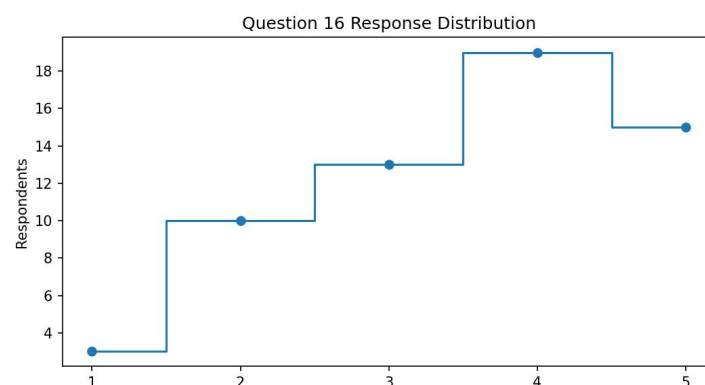
Interpretation: The largest response category is “5”, representing 52.6% of respondents.

**Analysis 8: Online reviews and ratings influence my decision to revisit Smoked Out BBQ.**

Interpretation: The largest response category is “5”, representing 50.0% of respondents.

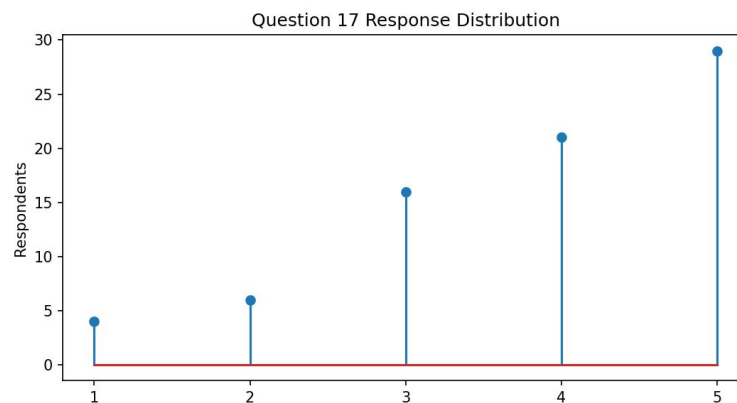
**Analysis 9: Interactions through social media make me feel connected to Smoked Out BBQ.**

Interpretation: The largest response category is “4”, representing 31.7% of respondents.

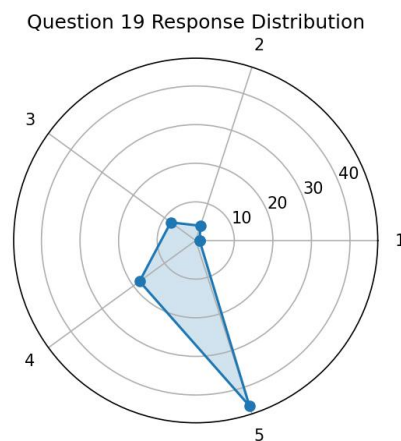


Analysis 10: Digital communication improves my overall relationship with the business.

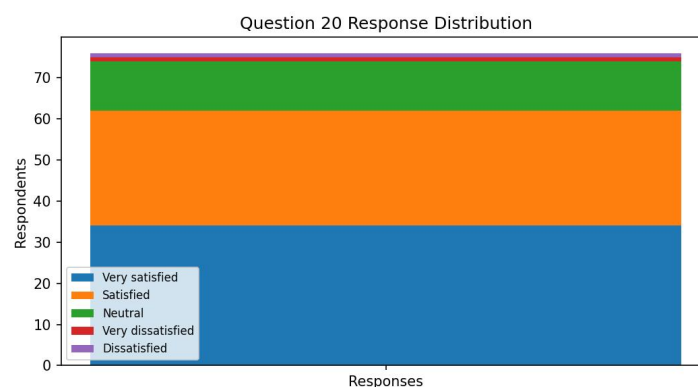
Interpretation: The largest response category is “5”, representing 38.2% of respondents.

**Analysis 11: I would recommend Smoked Out BBQ to others because of my positive experience.**

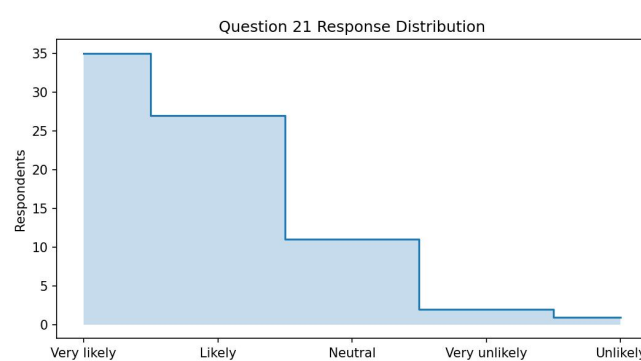
Interpretation: The largest response category is “5”, representing 59.2% of respondents.

**Analysis 12: How satisfied are you with your overall experience at Smoked Out BBQ?**

Interpretation: The largest response category is “Very satisfied”, representing 44.7% of respondents.

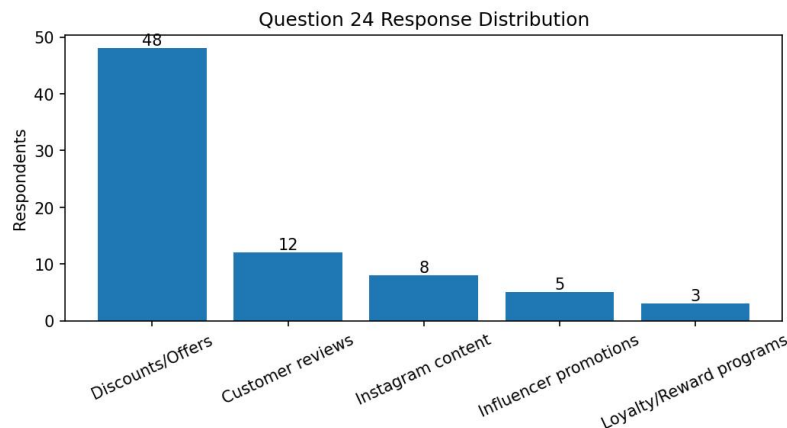
**Analysis 13: How likely are you to visit Smoked Out BBQ again?**

Interpretation: The largest response category is “Very likely”, representing 46.1% of respondents.



Analysis 14: Which digital marketing activity would most encourage you to revisit Smoked Out BBQ?

Interpretation: The largest response category is “Discounts/Offers”, representing 63.2% of respondents.



Hypothesis Testing and Interpretation

The digital-marketing perception index based on Q10–Q17 has a mean of 4.04/5, while the retention/recommendation index based on Q18–Q19 has a mean of 4.21/5. Pearson correlation between the two indices is $r = 0.882$, $p < 0.001$. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected for this exploratory association test and the alternative hypothesis is supported. The result means that higher digital-marketing perception scores are statistically associated with higher retention/recommendation scores in this sample. It does not prove that digital marketing causes retention because the study is cross-sectional, the sample is non-probability based, and other factors can affect customer behaviour.

Findings

- The study contains 76 valid responses, with students forming the largest occupational group.
- Instagram is the dominant platform used by respondents to see Smoked Out BBQ promotions.
- Social-media presence has a high association with product awareness; Q10 has a mean of 4.38/5.
- Online offers and discounts receive a high response for repeat purchases; Q13 has a mean of 4.25/5.
- Online reviews and ratings are important to revisit decisions; Q15 has a mean of 4.21/5.
- Food quality, taste and price/value are frequently selected as reasons for returning, showing that digital marketing complements rather than replaces the core customer experience.
- Discounts/offers are the most selected digital activity for encouraging revisits, followed by customer reviews and Instagram content.

Suggestions

- Maintain a consistent Instagram content calendar with attractive food photography, short videos, menu highlights and customer-oriented posts.
- Use targeted digital offers for repeat customers, such as limited-time discounts, combo offers or digital coupons.
- Encourage satisfied customers to post genuine reviews and respond professionally to online feedback.
- Use relevant local creator collaborations selectively and track reach, engagement and resulting visits.
- Continue improving food quality, taste, value and service because these are major reasons for returning customers.

Conclusion

The study indicates that digital marketing is an important component of the customer relationship for Smoked Out BBQ. Respondents report high levels of awareness through social media, positive perceptions of digital information, and substantial influence from offers and online reviews. Instagram is the dominant digital platform in the sample, while discounts and offers are the most frequently selected digital activity for encouraging revisits. The strong positive correlation between the digital-marketing perception index and the retention/recommendation index suggests that stronger digital experiences are associated with stronger retention-related responses among the surveyed customers.

At the same time, the findings show that digital marketing should work in conjunction with the fundamental restaurant experience. Food quality, taste and value are major return reasons. An integrated approach of good food and service alongside consistent digital communication, attractive content, credible reviews, personalized offers and loyalty-oriented engagement are therefore indicated by the survey.

The study has limitations: the sample consists of 76 voluntary respondents, the survey is cross-sectional and self-reported, and the correlation analysis identifies association rather than causation. Future research can use larger probability-based samples, longitudinal data and objective business indicators such as repeat-purchase records, campaign redemption and customer lifetime value.

References / Literature Used

- Elzbieta Lepkowska-White (2017). Exploring the Challenges of Incorporating Social Media Marketing Strategies in the Restaurant Business. *Journal of Internet Commerce*.
- Tasheenia Bennett (2017). *Marketing Strategies: How Small Restaurant Businesses Use Social Media*. Walden University.
- Yasmin, S. Tasneem & K. Fatema (2018). Digital Marketing: A Tool for Business Growth. *IJRET*.
- Elzbieta Lepkowska-White & Amy Parsons (2019). Strategies for Monitoring Social Media for Small Restaurants. *Journal of Foodservice Business Research*.
- Fuad Mehraliyev et al. (2020). Theoretical Foundations of Social Media Power in Hospitality and Tourism. *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly*.
- Jinyoung Kim et al. (2020). Antecedent Factors That Affect Restaurant Brand Trust and Brand Loyalty. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*.
- Richard Gruss et al. (2020). Engaging Restaurant Customers on Facebook. *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly*.
- Note: The literature-review details supplied in the Excel workbook were used for the research-gap discussion. Full bibliographic verification against the original publications is recommended before formal journal or conference submission.