



# Millennials motivation for sharing restaurant dining experiences on social media

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## Abstract

This study explored the motivation for sharing restaurant dining experiences on social media and the most influential variable that shape purchase intentions and behavior of millennial consumers within the restaurant setting. Its findings affirmed the impact of Electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) communication on purchasing intention and behavior of millennial consumers in Johannesburg. Food and service quality were identified as the foremost motivation variables in the choice of restaurants. Amongst a number of motivational factors identified, Altruism emerged as the leading motivation for sharing positive or negative word of mouth on social media. Recommendations for restaurants include the incorporation of Social media into the marketing communication strategy of restaurants, emphasizing and incentivizing user-generated content as well as enhancing food and service quality to encourage positive e-WOM. The collective impact of factors, including access to information, Internet enabled mobile devices, social media platforms, and the proclivity of Millennial consumers for online engagement contributes in no small way to transforming the hospitality industry. This study contributes towards a better understanding of South Africa's vibrant Millennial consumer markets with specific focus on e-WOM in the local restaurant industry. It provides context to the phenomenon of e-WOM and is expected to shape the social media strategies of restaurants in the city of Johannesburg.

**Keywords:** Restaurants, social media, millennial, electronic-word-of-mouth, Johannesburg

## Introduction

The age of the 4IR, including digital innovation, access to information and Internet-enabled mobile communication devices has placed significant power in the hands of consumers (Edelman & Singer, 2015). Social media, defined as a collection of online channels designed for community-based interaction, content sharing and collaboration (Wise & Shorter, 2014), is perhaps the most potent medium of communication in the 21st Century (Heidemann, Klier & Probst, 2012). Managers in the hospitality industry acknowledge Social Media as a high-value marketing tool leading to its adoption in various sectors of the industry (Perdue, 2010). This study contributes to the literature on the phenomenon of electronic-word-of-mouth (e-WoM) on social media and its impact on consumer behaviour in the hospitality industry, more specific factors that motivate consumers to share user-generated social media content.

User-generated social media content; also referred to as electronic word of mouth (e-WoM) has become an important source of information facilitating consumer awareness, patronage and



evaluation of products and services (Kietzmann & Canhoto, 2013). Electronic word of mouth is especially relevant when prior evaluation before the patronage of services such as that of a restaurant is impossible (Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan, 2006). As an organic form of advertisement, its impact on consumer behaviour and purchase intention have been proven higher than traditional modes of advertisement (Sago, 2010), necessitating the need for restaurants to assess and strategically influence factors that contribute to positive e-WoM (Ratchford, 2015). The widest adoption of web 2.0 applications including social media platforms is found amongst Millennials (Bucuta, 2015). This segment of the market aptly referred to as the 'digital natives' have the greatest affinity to technology and constitute a greater percentage of people engaged in the practice of e-WoM (Powers & Valentine, 2013:598). This study explores the practice of e-WoM by Millennials and identifies motivational factors that drive positive e-WoM on Social Media. It will also promote a better understanding of the mutually beneficial relationship between practitioners of e-WoM and respective restaurants in Johannesburg and the broader South African economy.

## **Objectives**

1. To examine the influence of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WoM) on restaurant menu purchasing intentions of millennial consumers.
2. To understand which mediating variables (service quality, food quality, location, pricing and atmosphere) influence millennials choice of restaurant.
3. To understand the motivations for sharing positive and negative dining experiences on social media.

## **Literature Review**

### **The tourism & hospitality industry in South Africa**

The Hospitality and Tourism industry as a service sector is one of the leading industries. In South Africa, the industry contributed approximately R402 billion to the South African economy in 2016, accounting for 9% of GDP (PwC, 2018), it is forecasted to grow on average 2.2% per annum and projected to account for 11.5% of GDP by the year 2022 (PwC, 2018). The hospitality industry is a critical component of every economy in the world as it draws on tourism and recreational activities. It is multifaceted and dynamic, encompassing free standing hospitality businesses and venues whose primary function is not hospitality (Kunwar, 2017). The industry covers a broad definition of integrated service that includes accommodation/lodging, travel and tourism, entertainment industry, time share and food and beverage of which the restaurant sub-sector is essential. The hospitality and tourism industry with its multifaceted supply chain impacts almost every sector of the economy and was singled out by President Ramaphosa in his maiden state of the Nation address as an area that provides South Africa with "incredible opportunities to, quite literally, shine" (Steyn & Wood, 2018). The industry's contribution to job creation, revenue generation and the overall image of South Africa as a national brand in the global economy cannot be overemphasised.

### **The age of millennials**

Millennials , also known as generation Y are born between 1980 and 2000 (18-38 years) (Bucuta, 2015). A generation is defined by an approximate age/year range or by major historical events in a certain time frame (Bucuta, 2015). Eastman and Liu (2012) identify generational cohorts as a group of individuals who share the same experiences that have given them a set of common characteristics. Due to globalisation and the pervasiveness of communication technology, Millennials are perceived as having the greatest level of similarity in comparison to preceding generations (Bucuta, 2015). Amongst a host of other characteristics that define this generation,



Millennials, "grew up with technology" and are perceived to have the highest affinity for technology and new media (Bucuta 2015). To Millennials, technology is as essential to life as is the food they eat and the cloth they wear (Rosenbloom, 2017). Indeed, there exist a plethora of technologically enhanced lifestyle activities that encompasses modes of transportation (Uber, Taxify), social communication (Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp and Snap chat), travel accommodation (Airbnb) and choice of food to eat (Uber Eats).

Additionally, Millennials are prone to establishing strong connections to family, friends and reference groups in both online and offline settings (Huntley, 2006; Bucuta, 2015). This group of highly educated, sophisticated and technologically savvy individuals are also deemed highly opinionated (Koeppel, 2017; Valentine & Powers, 2013). This trait, coupled with the collective consciousness to share experiences with peers makes them the most socially engaging of all generations (Hubbard & Kellman, 2016). As a result, they are more likely to employ social communication tools as mediums for reviewing experiences and sharing independent opinions of products and services. The value of electronic word of mouth is highly regarded amongst members of the millennial generation as information posted by other consumers on social media platforms is trusted and perceived to be of higher credibility in comparison to the carefully curated adverts by restaurants (Gunden, 2017). According to South Africa's statistical services report (2018), there were approximately 14.5 million Millennials, constituting 26.5% of the country's population in 2018. This population is predominantly single, well educated, career driven and possess (Scarth, 2017). substantial spending power that makes them an important segment of the market to restaurants. While seen as the most interesting generation yet, Millennials are perceived in marketing circles as the most difficult to attract and retain owing to their fickle brand loyalty (Bucuta, 2015). Thankfully, other traits such as candidness and willingness to engage, present opportunities to marketers. In this regard, restaurant managers have the responsibility to identify motivational factors that drive positive word of mouth. This study pursues this objective, as identifying these factors will enable restaurant managers to tailor their service and product offering in a manner that encourages positive e-WoM on social media.

### **Social media and the restaurant industry**

Social media has impacted on the operations of the restaurant industry especially in their mode of advertisement and interaction with consumers. It appears in a variety of forms, thereby, providing a viable and cost-effective alternative to traditional media (Gunden, 2017). Furthermore, Social media, created on the principle of social content sharing is relatively free and offers brands the opportunity to advertise their products and services as well as an avenue for consumers to review their experiences (Redondo, 2015). According to a study by the National Restaurant Association (NRA), 80% of restaurant operations globally use social media as a marketing tool, which underscores the importance of social media to restaurants in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. However, only a fraction of the restaurants using social media in their marketing mix, admit to utilizing its full capabilities (Needles & Thompson, 2013). Consequently, social media applications and sites such as Facebook, Instagram and YouTube have become invaluable tools to restaurants, as much as it has become useful to informing consumers' choice of restaurants.

Extant literature underscores the importance of e-WoM in restaurant decision-making and its significant impact on the restaurant industry (Fox, 2017; Jeong & Jang 2011; Parikh 2013; Tran, 2016). It is understood that consumers are likely to share their restaurant dining experiences on social media based on their level of satisfaction and the exceeding of their needs and wants. Online reviews provide first time patron of restaurants the necessary information to guide their choice and also serves as a form of advertisement generated by consumers for restaurants



(Jalilvand, Salimipour, Elyasi & Mohammad, 2017). This is especially important to Millennial consumers who perceive the shared experiences of their peers as more credible reference points than restaurant curated advertisements (Gunden, 2017; Redondo, 2015). According to Kim et al (2009), dinners voluntarily share experiences on social media motivated by e-WoM mediating variables which include; food quality, service quality atmosphere, location and pricing (Jeong & Jang 2011). E-WoM, both positive and negative, have implication for consumer behaviour (Ryu & Han, 2010). Restaurant managers must understand and appreciate the role of social media in promoting their respective establishments, since the feedback from these engagements with customers goes a long way to enhance customer efficiency and restaurant deliveries (Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan, 2018).

### **Electronic word of mouth (e-WoM) and social media**

The phenomenon of sharing experiences and user-generated content on social networks is a contemporary form of word-of-mouth advertisement (WoM), aptly termed electronic-word-of-mouth (e-WoM) (Tersen & Wecken, 2017). E-WoM communication is the positive or negative communication between potential, real, or previous clients experience of an item, service or organisation, conducted with Internet-enabled mobile devices. According to Long, Wang, Hui & Vasilakos (2013) the potential of WoM is magnified a thousand fold due to the speed, coverage and agility of social media (Erkan & Evans, 2016). Social media has made e-WoM more alluring and engaging (Chu & Kim, 2011). Similar to traditional WOM, e-WoM elicits a greater level of trust and influence amongst peer networks (Gunden, 2017). The difference is in the role social media plays in the effective dissemination of information. Electronic word-of-mouth is perceived to be credible and reliable. Other studies revealed that the credibility and trustworthiness of e-WoM are because, information posted is not from the companies but from actual users (Zamsuri et al., 2012).

E-WoM reviews are fast, impartial, and have a wider reach (Kietzmann & Canhoto, 2007) making it a highly potent medium of marketing and communication (Chu & Kim, 2011). Posting of pictures, videos and messages about past dining experiences on social media influence the decision and intention of other consumers to purchase a particular product or service. However, companies or business have no control over content shared on social media (Leung, Law, Hoof & Buhalis, 2013). Hussain, Ahmed, Jafar and Ranawaz (2017) argued in their studies that e-WoM reduces risk in decision-making based on consumer's prior exposure to products or services. However, in the restaurant setting, e-WoM on social media addresses specific touch points of guest experiences, each of which shapes consumer perspectives differently and influences purchase intentions to varying degrees (Chen, Nguyen, Klaus & Wu, 2015). Restaurant managers must determine which touch-points influence positive experiential reviews on social media in order to address them. These touch points are discussed in the next section.

### **E-WoM mediating variables**

Dining out has become a favourite pastime of many people (Barton, Koslow, Fromm & Egan, 2012). This phenomenon is driven by augmented experiences peculiar to restaurant settings. In previous studies, it was identified that e-WoM mediating variables play an important role in consumers overall satisfaction but food quality was perceived to be the most important of all (Medeiros, Opolski, Caroline & Salay, 2013). Although consumer perceptions vary, the identified factors converge to make dining at a restaurant a memorable event, that is food quality, service quality, atmosphere, location and price of products on the menu (Gunden 2017; Kim & Jogaratnam, 2010). When the expectations of consumers are met, it has a greater possibility of revisiting, positive word-of-mouth and making recommendations to others. E-WoM by guests of restaurants is motivated by the collective impact of these factors, in most circumstances, guests offer an overall rating of the dining experience, while at the same time identifying specific factors



that made the greatest impression on them. Restaurant managers must, therefore, pay critical attention to these factors and advance strategies and practices that influence positive e-WoM to attract potential guests.

### **Motivation for participation in e-WOM**

The pervasiveness of e-WoM in contemporary marketing is established in the literature, however just as it is important to understand the mediating factors of satisfactory service in the restaurant setting, managers must also accord importance to the motivational factors that drive the phenomenon (Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan, 2008). There are three motivational factors that influence millennial consumers to share content on social media, they are Egoism, Collectivism and Altruism (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004; Trusov, Bucklin & Pauwels, 2009).

Accordingly, people engaged in e-WoM do so for some form of social capital, while others engage in it for Altruistic reasons. Egoism, the innate desire to project a favourable image of one's self has also been identified as a motivation for sharing e-WoM. Egoistic motive focuses on the psychological advantages resulting from increased appreciation, self-enhancement and reputation gained for spreading positive or negative content on social media (Jeong & Jang, 2011). Egotistic motivation drives consumers to share e-WoM for social appreciation and recognition. Secondly, Collectivistic motives are an outcome of passionate involvement towards the online community and the delight in making a difference. Positive contributions made to the group by giving information that will benefit all and promote a great sense of belonging (Cheung & Lee, 2012). Lastly, altruistic motives involve the practice of concern for the welfare of others thus putting the needs of others first without considering themselves. This selfless act to share positive or negative content on social media to fulfil the needs of others shows their social concern. The delight in helping others, is distinguished as the main motive in spreading electronic word-of-mouth (Cheung & Lee, 2012; Jeong & Jang 2011; Hennig-Thurau, et al., 2004), this motivation is not only beneficial to other consumers, but to the organisation or restaurants involved, as such positive or negative aspects shapes their output in terms of product or service quality delivery.

### **Methodology**

This study takes a quantitative approach in addressing the proposed research question as quantitative methods entail the collection and analysis of numerical data that yields descriptive results to explain relationships between variables of study, theories and social reality (Muijs, 2011). Essentially, quantitative methods employ mathematical and statistical approaches to make sense of a phenomenon under study.

According to (Muijs, 2011) research designs should be realistic and feasible, taking into consideration, limitations on time, logistical and financial resources. In this regard, quantitative methods proved most ideal for this study (Muijs, 2011). It focused on the motives for sharing restaurant dining experiences on social media by millennials in three selected locations in Johannesburg. It investigates which attributes are the most important in restaurant selection. The main purpose of the study was to examine the most important attributes in restaurant selection. Five e-WoM mediating variables (e.g. food quality, service quality, atmosphere, pricing and location in influencing number of online reviews, overall restaurant rating were selected after a thorough review of the literature. The three motivational factor altruism, collectivism and egoism emerged as the motives for sharing restaurant dining experiences amongst millennials. The study adopted a quantitative survey approach method. The measurement scale comprised a set of open and close-ended questions, a greater percentage of items on the scale had questions with multiple choice answers using a Likert scale measure (Bacon-Shone, 2013).

This approach aptly described as quantitative survey is justified by the need to understudy a broad sample set for which the alternative of a quantitative treatment will be appropriate. Since the study



seeks to obtain insight into behavioral changes of a broad sample population, as well as make inferences on the wider population of Johannesburg, a quantitative method was found most appropriate for the study.

### Data set

The sample size for this study comprised 120 Millennial consumers selected through convenience sampling. The study addressed issues of ethics by providing an assurance of confidentiality and anonymity, and protection from harm. It also sought the consent of participants. The ethical provisions in the survey tools were scrutinized and approved by the Ethical Clearance Committee of the University of Johannesburg. Responses were collated from respondents in three different locations of Auckland Park, Greenside and Parktown. These areas are known for its numerous restaurants and in close proximity to the researcher. The data set comprised responses from patrons of restaurants in Auckland Park, Greenside and Parktown.

### Data Analysis

The data was analysed using the latest version 25 IBM SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) statistic program for the analysis of the results. Results of the analysis were presented in appropriate info-graphics, using frequency and percentage to explain the demographics of the participants. Mean and Standard deviation will be used to analyse the research questions, as well as Pearson Correlation, will be used to analyse the hypotheses. Other results will be summarised using descriptive statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise data using either graphical and mathematical procedures.

### Findings and Discussions

The findings of the research affirm the prevalence of electronic-word-of-mouth on social media amongst Millennials in Johannesburg. The research further established motivation factors driving this phenomenon. Altruism was identified as the key motivation for Millennial consumers sharing restaurant-dining experiences on social media. Food and service quality was also identified as the leading mediating variables in the choice of restaurants. The findings contextualised a global phenomenon which has clear implications for management strategy for local restaurants. The implications to management are supported with insight from literature. Other findings of the study with reviewed literature attempted to adequately answer the research question and fulfil the stated objectives. Findings were presented in simple tables, bar charts and frequency tables. The analysis attempted to address the research question and objectives. The researcher also provided a description and discussion of each table and graphs into various sections, ensuring that the objective of the study had been achieved.

**Table 1.** Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demographic Profile	Frequency (=N)	Valid Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	41	34.2%
Female	79	65.8%
<b>Total:</b>	120	100%
<b>Age</b>		
18-23 years	61	51.3%
24-28 years	40	36.6%



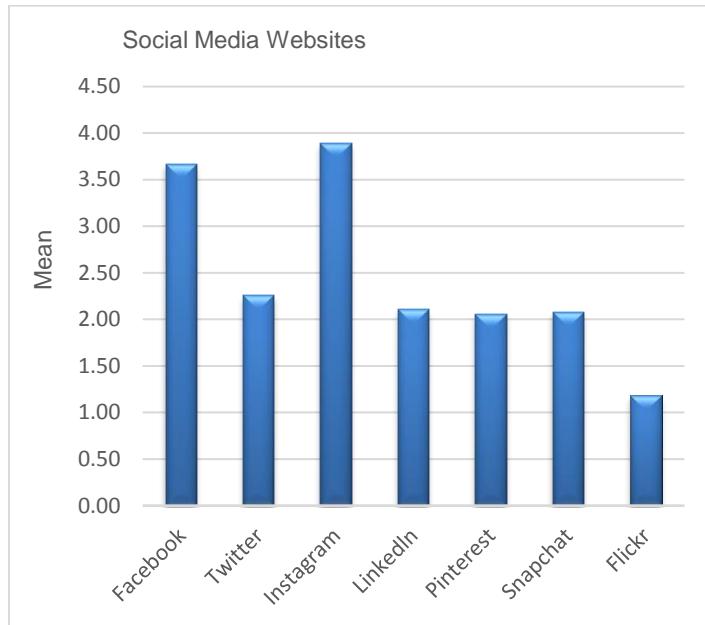
29-33 years	18	15.1%
<b>Total:</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
Black	68	56.7%
White	31	25.8%
Coloured	10	8.3%
Indian	8	6.7%
Asian	3	2.5%
<b>Total:</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
<b>Income Level</b>		
Below R5000 per month	39	33.1%
R5001-R15000 per month	45	38.1%
R15001-R25000 per month	15	12.7%
R25001-R35000 per month	8	6.8%
Above R35000 per month	11	9.3%
<b>Total:</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
<b>Highest Educational Qualification</b>		
Grade 11 or lower (std 9 or lower)	1	.8%
Grade 12 (Matric, std 10)	33	27.7%
Post Matric diploma or certificate	20	16.8%
Baccalaureate Degree(s)	34	28.6%
Post-Graduate Degree(s)	31	26.1%
<b>Total:</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: Author compilation

The above table 1 illustrates the results of the demographic profile of respondents (Millennials) in percentages. The study population was predominantly female representing 65.8% in comparison to 34.2% of male respondents. The age distribution of respondents also favours young adults aged between 18-28 comprising 87.9% of the study population, the age distribution was ideal as it fell in a considerable range of the age group for Millennials. In terms of racial or ethnic distribution, there were more black respondents representing 56.7% of the population. The study population was dominated by respondents earning between R5000- R15000 per month. In terms of education, the qualification with the highest responses was the baccalaureate degree(s) representing 28.6% of the population. These statistics have implications on the patronage of restaurants as well as the growing phenomenon of e-WOM which will be discussed in greater detail.

### Social media behavioural pattern of respondent

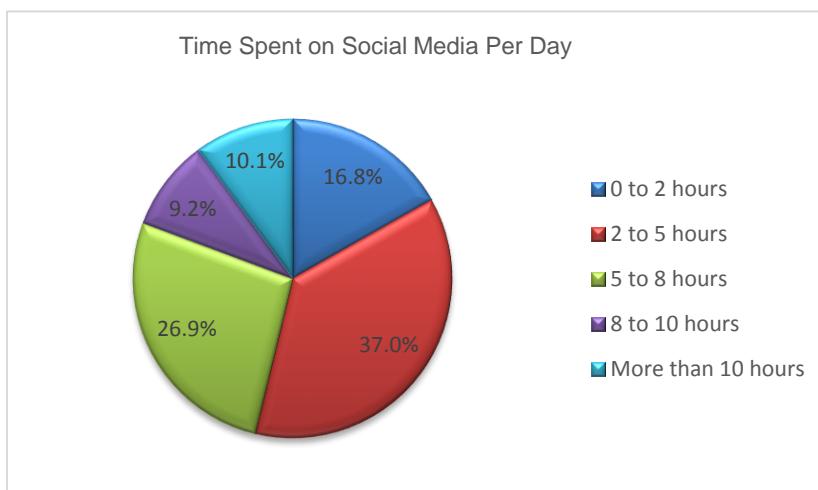
This section shows the various social websites used by respondents, the approximate time spent on social media and the influence of online information on respondents' decision making.



**Figure 1.** Social media behavioral patterns

Source: Author compilation

As evident in the bar graph (fig 1) Instagram is the leading app used by Millennials in sharing e-WoM, as it recorded the highest mean of 3. 89 (SD= 1. 225), the preeminence of Instagram in the sharing of e-WoM is due perhaps to its visual nature. Facebook was rated the second highest with the mean of 3. 67 (SD =1.368) the analysis also revealed infrequent use of Twitter with the mean of 2.25 (SD=1.486) followed by Snapchat and Pinterest. Flickr was used the least with the mean of 1.18. Respondents were granted the opportunity to specify other social media sites they use and YouTube was rated the highest with 3.3%.



**Figure 2.** Time spent on social media by respondents

Source: Author compilation



Figure 2 illustrates the time spent on social media per day of respondents. 16.8% spent 0-2 hours on social media per day. 37.0% is the highest percentage spent 2-5 hours on social media per day. 26.9% spent 5-8 hours on social media per day 9.2% spent 8-10 hours on social media per day and lastly 10.1% spent more than 10 hours on social media per day. The length of time spent on social media indicates the extent of exposure to marketing and advertising campaigns by restaurants; it also indicates the potential influence of social media on lifestyle and dining choices.

**Table 2.** Social media influence on purchase intentions

	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
B8.1 Does information on social media influence your restaurant menu intentions?	3.03	0.991
B8.2 Do you seek your friends' opinion on social media before making a purchase decision?	2.55	1.188
B8.3 Do positive reviews /comments from people you don't know, about product/services/brands on social media, influence your purchase decision?	3.26	1.049
B8.4 Do you purchase products/services after reading positive reviews on social media?	3.12	1.039
B8.5 Do you purchase products/services after reading negative reviews on social media?	1.82	0.820

Source: Author compilation

Table 2 describes how often social media reviews on social media influences respondents purchase intentions. Respondents were asked to rate on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1=never to 5= always indicating their level of influence. The mean values are displayed in table 4.2, B8.1 ( $M=3.03$ ,  $SD=0.991$ ) indicates that their restaurant menu intentions are sometimes influenced by information on social media. B8.2 ( $M=2.55$ ,  $SD=1.188$ ) shows that respondents rarely to sometimes seek friends opinion on social media before making a purchase intention. B8.3 ( $M=3.12$ ,  $SD=1.049$ ) indicates that respondents are sometimes influenced by positive reviews by random people on social media. On the central objective of this study, the impact of a positive and negative review on purchase intentions indicated a direct correlation between the two variables. A negative review of a restaurant's product or services resulted in low levels of patronage, with the mean response on the Likert scale yielding 1.82 and a standard deviation of 0.82. On the contrary, a positive review was sure to attract patronage from prospective consumer indicated by a mean response of 3.12 and a slightly higher Standard deviation of 1.04.

### Social media and dining experiences

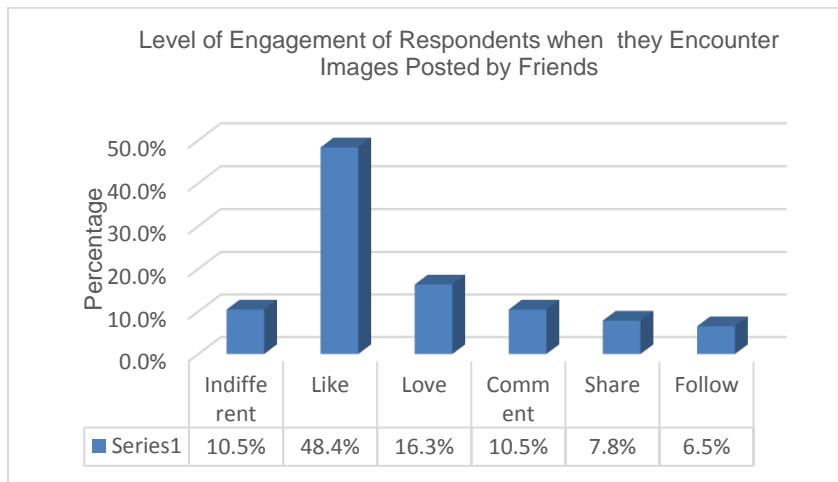
**Table 3.** The influence of social media dining experience on decision making

	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
C9.1 You encounter images of food/ restaurants/ dining experiences posted by peers/mutual friends?	3.63	0.970
C9.2 You encounter advertisement images of food/ restaurants/ dining experiences from restaurants?	3.35	1.054
C9.3 Images posted by friends contribute to your decision making on where to dine?	3.00	1.053
C9.4 Advertisement images contribute to your decision making on where to dine?	3.03	1.069

Source: Author compilation

Table 3 describes how often respondent encounter images on social media. Again, 5-point Likert scale measured responses between 1=never to 5=Always indicative level of exposure to images on social media. The mean values are displayed in the above table, question C9.1 ( $M=3.63$ ,

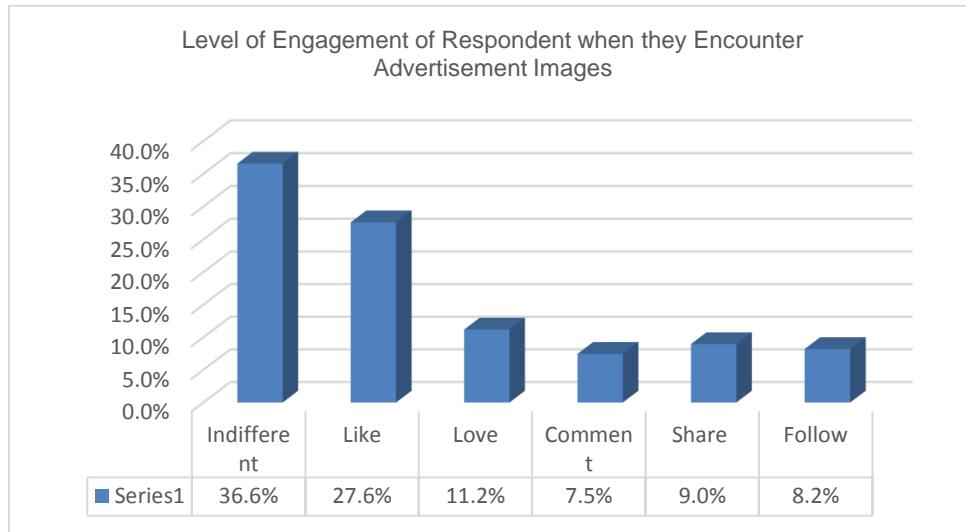
SD=0.970) shows that respondents often encounter images of food and dining experiences posted by friends on social media. C9.2 ( $M=3.35$ , SD=1.054) also indicated that respondents sometimes encounter advertisement images of food from the restaurants. C9.3 ( $M=3.00$ , SD=1.053) shows that images posted by friends sometimes contribute to respondents' decision making on where to dine. C9.4 ( $M=3.03$ , SD=1.069) indicates that advertorial images sometimes contribute to the decision making of respondents on where to dine.



**Figure 3.** Level of engagement to posts by friends

Source: Author compilation

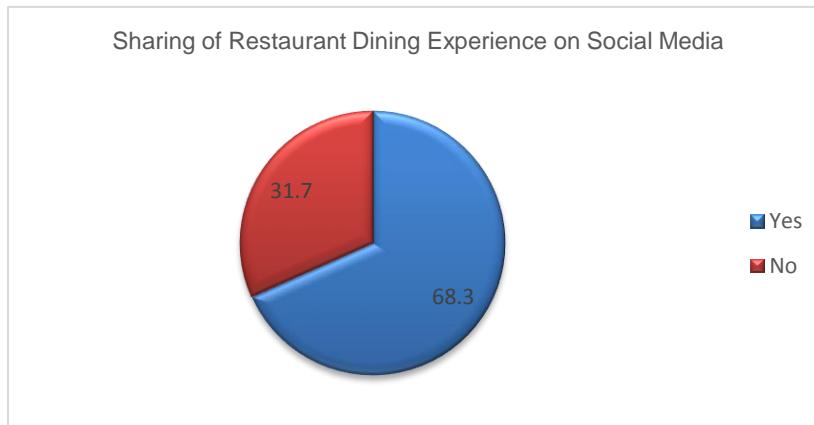
Figure 3 displays the level of engagement of respondents when they encounter images of food posted by friends on social media. Out of 120 respondents, 19 representing 10.5% of respondents were indifferent and not likely to engage contents shared on social media. 48.4% showed a satisfactory level of approval for content by liking what is shared. Yet again, 16.3% of respondents expressed a greater level of affection to content by loving shared content while 10.5% of respondents would go the extra mile to comment on posts. However, a smaller percentage of participants conceded to sharing or opting to follow with a score, 7.8% and 6.5% respectively. The results show that the highest percentage of respondents like to indicate their level of engagement when they encounter images posted by friends.



**Figure 4.** Level of engagement of respondents to advertised content on social media

Source: Author compilation

Figure 4 indicates the level of engagement of respondents when they encounter advertisement images of food on social media. The highest percentage of 36% chose indifferently. 27.6% chose like. 11.2% chose love. 7.5% chose comments. 9.0% chose to share and 8.2% chose to follow to indicate their level of engagement on advertisement images.



**Figure 5.** Sharing of restaurant dining experience on social media

Source: Author compilation

Figure 5 demonstrates that 68.3% of the respondents share their restaurants dining experiences on social media and 31.7% do not share their experiences on social media. This depicts that majority of respondents share their restaurant dining experience on social media

Respondent was asked to give reasons why they chose yes as an answer. Several responses were given and below are the five most frequently response;

- To help others
- To keep friends updated on my dining experiences



- To promote the restaurant
- To increase my followers
- To make recommendations to friends
- To share my level of satisfaction

**Table 4.** Motivations for sharing e-WoM

Item- Total Statistics						
	N		Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation
	Valid	Missing				
Egoism	119	1	2.68	2.67	3	1,012
Altruism	119	1	3.42	3.50	4	1,133
Collectivism	118	2	3.02	3.00	3 <sup>a</sup>	1,073

Source: Author compilation

The reasons for sharing restaurant dining experiences were categorised under three motives according to Heinng-Thurau, (2004); Cheung Lee, (2011). Egoism (Seek attention from peers, sense of belonging and self-indulgence) See Table 4.4 above. With the mean of 2.68 (SD=1.012) indicates that respondents disagree for sharing based on egoistic motive. Altruism (helping others and concern for others) with the highest mean 3.42 (1.133) indicates that respondents share their dining experience based on altruistic motive. Respondents were indifferent when it came to collectivism (reference group and promoting the company) as a motivation for sharing e-WoM with the mean of 3.02 (SD=1.073).

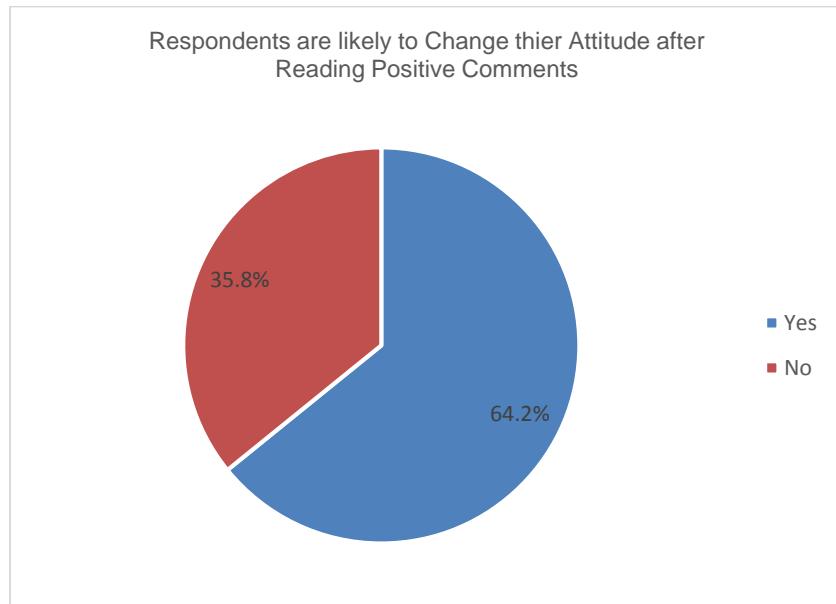
### **Reliability and Inter-correlation Analysis**

The Cronbach's alpha was used to estimate the reliability of responses. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient should be above 0.7 to indicate an acceptable level of reliability. When the Cronbach's alpha coefficient is less than 0.7, another measurement scale, which is the Inter-item Correlation means, can be used to check reliability. In Inter-item Correlation mean value should be between 0.2 and 0.4 for it to be valid but if it is more than 0.4 it's still valid. Inter-item correlation is prescribed only when the Cronbach's alpha is unreliable.

In the case of egoism, the alpha coefficient is less than 0.7 (0.659) proving it's not reliable rather the inter-item correlation mean is applicable since the value is between 0.2 and 0.4 (0.390). In collectivism, the alpha coefficient is less than 0.7 (0.658) but rather the inter-item correlation mean (0.492) was applicable. Lastly, the alpha coefficient for altruism is more than 0.7 (0.858) indicating an acceptable level of reliability (See table below).

**Table 5.** Motivation for sharing dining experience

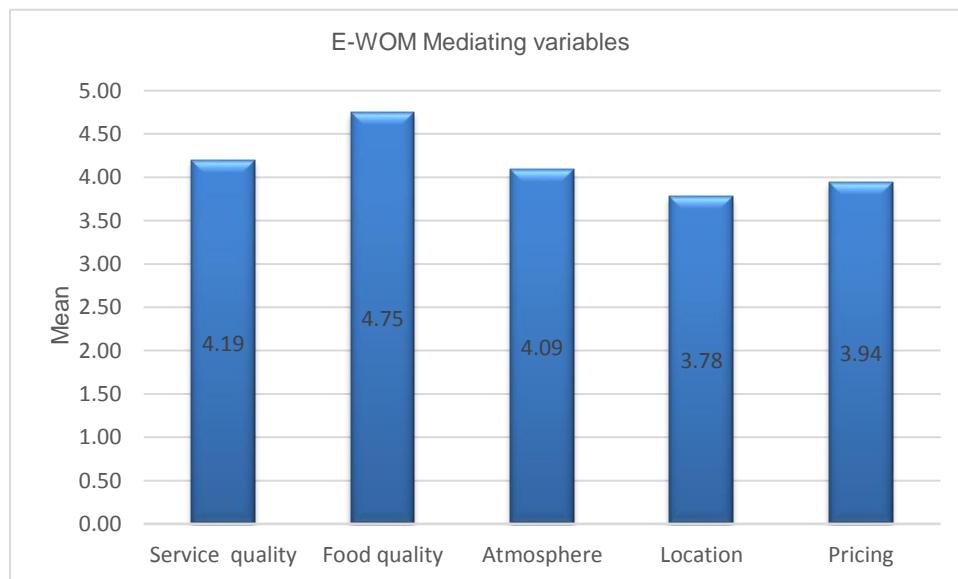
Motivations	Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient	Inter- Item Correlation mean
Egoism	0.659	0.390
Collectivism	0.658	0.492
Altruism	0.858	



**Figure 6.** Impact of e-WoM on consumer behaviour

Source: Author compilation

Figure 4.7 Demonstrate that majority (64.2%) of the respondents are likely to change their attitude towards a certain brand, product/service after reading positive comments/reviews. The minimum percentage of 35.8% respondents are not likely to change their attitudes towards a certain brand, product/service after reading positive comments and reviews on social media. This indicates that positive comments and reviews on social media have a greater influence on consumer decision making due to its credibility and trustworthiness based on the source.



**Figure 7.** E-WoM mediating variables

Source: Author compilation



Figure 7 presents the descriptive statistics of service quality, food quality, atmosphere, location and pricing. Respondents were asked to rank each variable based on the influence in selecting a restaurant from 1= not at all influential to 5=extremely influential. The mean values of these five restaurant variables are presented in the above table. Service quality ( $M=4, 19, SD=0,813$ ) was ranked as very influential. The table indicates that Food quality ( $M=4, 19, SD=0,651$ ) has the highest mean and therefore ranked as an extremely influential variable in making a restaurant choice. Atmosphere ( $M=4, 09, SD=0,898$ ) according to the bar chart was ranked as very influential. Location ( $M=3, 78, SD=1,047$ ) was ranked as somewhat influential and pricing ( $M=3, 94, SD=1,056$ ) was also ranked as very influential.

### Fischer's exact test

#### Comparison between gender group and the sharing of dining experience

**Table 6.** Comparing gender group and the sharing of dining experience

Cross Tabulation						
			C12		Total	
A1 Gender	Male	Count	Yes	No		
		% within A1	61.0%	39.0%	100.0%	
	Female	Count	57	22	79	
		% within A1	72.2%	27.8%	100.0%	
Total		Count	82	38	120	
		% within A1	68.3%	31.7%	100.0%	
			Exact Significance/P-value (Both Sided)			
Fisher's Exact Test			0.222			

Source: Author compilation

A comparison between gender and sharing of comments /reviews/post to friends via social media after dining at a restaurant. 61% of male said yes and 72.2% females said yes (See table 4.7). The Fishers Exact Test will be used in testing the significant level between the gender groups. The p-value should be  $<0.05$  to show there is a difference between groups, in this case, the p-value is 0.222 which is greater than 0.05 indicating that there is no difference between gender groups in sharing restaurant dining experiences on social media. The comparison shows a slightly different but it's not significant based on the statistics.



## Comparison of Gender Group and Attitude of Positive Reviews

Table 7. Comparing Gender Group and Attitude of Positive Reviews

Cross Tabulation						
			C15		Total	
A1 Gender	Male	Count	Yes	No		
		% within A1	61,0%	39,0%	100,0%	
	Female	Count	52	27	79	
		% within A1	65,8%	34,2%	100,0%	
Total		Count	77	43	120	
		% within A1	64,2%	35,8%	100,0%	

	Exact Significance/P-value (Both Sided)
Fisher's Exact Test	0.689

Source: Author compilation

A comparison between gender groups and the likelihood to change attitude towards a certain brand or product after reading positive comments/reviews/online articles about it. 61% males said yes and 65.8% said yes (See table 7). The Fisher's Exact Test will be used in testing the significant level between the gender groups. The p-value should be  $<0.05$  to show there is a difference between groups, in this case, the p-value is 0.689 which is greater than 0.05 indicating that there is no difference between gender groups in changing their attitude towards a certain brand or product after reading positive comments/reviews/online articles (See table 7).

## Normality Tests

A test of normality ascertains assumptions that data is normally distributed. The validity of conclusions from test variables such as the acceptance or rejection of a null hypothesis is also verifiable with normality tests. A normality test was conducted for all the variables under assessment, an abridged test result is presented in this paragraph with the comprehensive results of all other tests attached to the Appendix. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and the Shapiro-Wilk test are used to test normality, in circumstances where the sample size  $n < 50$ , the Shapiro-Wilk test is used while the Kolmogorov-Smirnov is used in instances where  $n > 50$ . The P value is used for both measures, a p-value  $\geq 0.05$  is normally distributed and a p-value  $< 0.05$  is not normally distributed.



## Test of normality on the willingness to share dining experiences based on gender

**Table 8.** Test of normality on the willingness to share dining experiences based on gender

Tests of Normality							
A1: Gender		Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup>			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	Df (N)	Sig (p-value)	Statistic	Df (N)	Sig (p-value)
B6.1 Facebook	Male				0.825	41	0.000
	Female	0.235	79	0,000			
B6.3 Instagram	Male				0.818	40	0.000
	Female	0.276	78	0,000			

Source: Author compilation

Table 8 is a comparison of responses from males and females regarding their willingness to share dining experiences on social media. The null hypothesis is 'there is no difference in willingness to share dining experience between genders. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test is applicable when the group size is larger than 50 while the Shapiro-Wilk test is applicable when the group size is less than 50. In this case, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test is used for the female group because the size is 79 and the Shapiro-Wilk test is for the male group because the size is 41 (See table 8). A p-value  $\geq 0.05$  is normally distributed and a p-value  $< 0.05$  is not normally distributed. As indicated in the results (table 4.9) the p=0.000 i.e. p<0.05 implying non-normality of distribution, this means the null hypothesis cannot be rejected, and as such, there is no difference in the willingness to share dining experiences on social media based on gender.

## Discussion

The demographic information of this study in Table 1 indicates that the majority of respondents are female with the highest percentile of 65.8 % and males with 34.2%. The highest age group who took part in the survey was between the ages of 18-23 years at 51.3%, and the age group to follow was 24-28 years old at 33.3%. The results also indicated Millennials as the dominant group millennials accounted for a greater percentage in this survey (See table 1). The younger generation of millennials is active participants on social media and likely to share their dining experiences on other social network sites. Majority of millennials earns R5000-R15000 per month, which accounted for 38.1 % (See table 1) the lower end of the income range indicates the likelihood of dependence on a monthly stipend from parents or guardians whilst the upper end indicates earnings from entry-level jobs or part-time work.

Nonetheless, the levels of income indicate purchasing power and the ability to dine at a restaurant. According to Bucuta (2015), Millennials have considerable disposable income and enjoys dining out. The highest educational qualification of respondents was baccalaureate Degree, which accounted for 28.6% (See table1). The results depict that younger Millennials between the ages of 18-23 years dominate in the sharing of dining experiences on social media than older millennials.



## Social Media Apps and Time Spent

The study also indicates that Instagram is the leading social media application for sharing e-WoM, registering the highest mean of 3.89 its adoption is perhaps due to the visual nature of the application. Facebook rated as the second highest social media website with a mean of 3.67. The survey also revealed that Millennials adopted other social websites like YouTube, Snapchat, Twitter and LinkedIn. Furthermore, results in figure 4 underscored the importance of social media amongst Millennials, who spent a considerable period online. 37% spent between 2-5 hours and 26.9% spent 5-8 hours online. This has implications for targeted marketing as such long exposure hours are advantageous for content promotion.

## Social Media Behavioral Patterns

Furthermore, the findings demonstrated in table 2 depicts that information on social media sometimes influences restaurant menu intentions ( $M=3.03$ ). Millennials sometimes seek the opinion of friends on social media before making a purchase decision. As stated in literature, information available on social media plays a role in consumers' decision-making process. According to Chu and Kim (2011) and the results, positive comments and reviews from people about products or services often influence purchase decision and sometimes purchase products after reading positive reviews. Findings revealed that respondents rarely make a purchase after reading negative comments and reviews on social media. The findings consistent with the literature, establishing the adverse impact of negative or positive e-WoM on the success of restaurants (Kietzmann & Canhoto, 2007)

It was also found that respondents often encounter images of food/restaurants/dining experiences posted by peers or friends sometimes ( $M=3.63$ ) encounter advertisement images of food/restaurants/dining experiences from the restaurant ( $M=3.35$ ) (See table 4.2). The results show that both images posted by friends ( $M=3.00$ ) and images of food posted by the restaurant's operators ( $M=3.03$ ) contributes to the decision making on where to dine (See table 4.2). Respondents also indicated that they like images posted by friends and are indifferent when they encounter advertisement images (See table 4.2). This affirms the importance of social media to restaurants (Perdue, 2010).

## The Motive of Sharing and Social Media

One of the major findings indicated in the question that inquired whether respondents are likely to share comments or posts to friends via social media after dining at a restaurant. Consumers engage in e-WOM based on their positive and negative experiences in terms of quality assurance. However, motives to participate in online reviews by other consumers is to learn new ideas and interact with other users(Kwok & Yu, 2013). Respondents that answered yes accounted for 68.3% (refer to figure 5). This confirms that Millennials in South Africa share comments and posts to friends after dining at a restaurant. According to Hennig-Thurau *et al.* (2004) and Cheung Lee. (2012) consumers share their experiences on social media based on three motives that are egoism, altruism and collectivism. In the current study, it was concluded that altruism is the main motivational factor for sharing restaurant-dining experiences on social media (refer to table 4). Additionally, results showed that a mean of 3.78 indicating respondents' agreements on electronic word-of-mouth being a highly influential and well-connected marketing tool. User reviews on social media influence consumers to try new products/services with a mean of 3.79. Consumers also agreed that social media has provided effective platforms to new products to draw consumers attention ( $M=4.15$ ), social media has provided an effective powerful platform for consumers to communicate with each other ( $M=4.33$ ) and information on social media is credible and likely to elicit reactions from consumers (See table 4.6). As stated in the literature, these results are comparable to the research done by (Cheung & Lee, 2012; Fox, 2013; Parikh, 2013; Parikh, 2014;



Yang, 2017) where electronic word-of-mouth on social media plays a vital role in consumer decision-making process.

As a result, 66.2% of the respondents admitted to changing their attitude towards a certain brand after reading positive comments/reviews/online articles about it (refer to figure 7). Respondents further gave reasons for admitting to changing their attitude based on credibility, trustworthiness and respect for other people's opinions. Consumers trust reviews and comments from other people to be credible and true than what is posted by the restaurant operators.

### **E-WOM mediating variables**

Findings from the study addressed the following objective 'what variables are the most influential in making a restaurant choice'. Food quality emerged as the leading mediating variable in a consumer's choice of restaurant (Gunden, 2017; Pantelidis, 2010). Service quality was identified as the second most important mediating variable in consumer choice of restaurant according to the study. The quality of service is an important factor in e-WOM engagement, thereby, restaurant employees must be trained and motivated in delivering quality service to gain positive e-WOM from restaurant patrons (Nicolaides, 2008). Although all variables are important in selecting a restaurant, the atmosphere was found to be the least influential mediating variable in consumer restaurant choice as it was indicated in the works of (Sulek & Hensley, 2004; Namkung & Jang, 2008). Price ranked third on the scale of importance with location as the fourth. The table further depicts that the younger age group perceive information on social media to be credible and seeks friends' opinion on social media before making a purchase intention but the older age group thinks otherwise.

### **Recommendations**

The findings of the research provide useful insight into the phenomenon of e-WoM amongst South African Millennials. Information encompassing demography, social media behavioural patterns, motivation and mediating variables for e-WoM have implications for the marketing and communication strategy of restaurants. Findings can be applied in shaping e-WoM by consumers and to build a strong brand image for restaurants.

### **Marketing and Communication Strategy**

The study avails to managers of local restaurants essential information that is useful in developing an effective marketing and communication strategy. In addition to affirming the relevance of electronic word of mouth in shaping consumer behaviour, this study contextualises the phenomenon to aid the operation of restaurants in Johannesburg. It is recommended that restaurants incorporate a cohesive social media strategy into the broader marketing and communication framework. Restaurants are encouraged to initiate this journey by engaging qualified social media strategists to conduct a Social Media SWOT analysis and advise the best direction for social engagement. Amongst the growing list of social media platforms, Instagram was identified as the most used application for sharing dining experiences. For this reason, restaurant operators ought to adopt the use of Instagram in their marketing strategies in order to appeal to a broader spectrum of millennials, also monitor content shared and interacts with consumers. Again, given the significant period of exposure ranging between 2 to 5 hours daily of consumers to social media, it is recommended that more advertising dollars and special attention accorded to developing content and promotional activities suited to Instagram and associated media such as Facebook and twitter.

A critical factor to understand in the use of social media is that each application has strengths and weaknesses, and as such may serve restaurants better in one specific aspect of their communication than another. For example, YouTube is suited to video content while Instagram



is appropriate for pictures, Facebook effectively combines the power of multiple contents across text, audio and visual content. Besides these popular applications, other applications exist that are designed and well suited to the restaurant industry, a good example is Foursquare, which is able to capture a database of clients who check in into a restaurant and adopts an algorithm which markets restaurants to the client's circle of friends (Needles & Thompson, 2013).

### **Curated Versus User Generated Content**

The rise of e-WOM in contemporary marketing literature reflects a fundamental shift in the power structures of communication between business organisations and the consuming public. Marketing communication has changed from the traditional one-way to a conversation that is co-created between organisations and consumers. Social Media is the mediating tool for consumers to influence conversations that directly impacts their wellbeing and the use of goods (Scarth, 2017).

The study affirmed the weakening power of company-curated advertisements in comparison to the impact of user-generated content on consumer behaviour. This confirms findings in literature, which posits the general understanding that e-WoM greatly shapes consumer behaviour especially when the source is perceived as independent, and non-commercially motivated (Steffes & Burgee 2009; Litvin et al. 2008; Kietzmann & Canhoto 2013). E-WOM from relatives, close associates and even celebrities with whom Millennials identify were deemed more credible. It is recommended that restaurants develop innovative marketing and promotional campaigns that encourage the sharing of user experience, effectively locating sufficient power in the hands of consumers, such strategies can be incentivised with rewards to encourage participation and broaden its impact. This strategy, however, requires tact and consistent monitoring by restaurant operators since content generated from consumers may be at variance with the corporate objective and identity of the restaurant.

### **Viral Content**

The creation of viral content is essential to the social media communication strategy of restaurants. The term viral is a colloquial reference to the contagion of social media content (Kietzmann & Canhoto, 2007). Viral content comprises elements of shock, surprise and humor and has a greater potential to positively impact the patronage of restaurants (Kietzmann & Canhoto, 2007). The source of viral content is often irrelevant, thereby providing restaurants with an opportunity to create highly engaging content on social media. The findings of the research revealed that 36% of respondent were indifferent to advertisements of food on social media, this translates little to no engagement with consumers. Restaurants are encouraged to develop highly contagious or viral content, which has the potential to stimulate active engagement with Millennial consumers.

### **Market Segmentation Strategy**

This study also provides significant information to facilitate effective market segmentation and targeted communication strategies. It was established that 88% of respondents aged 18-28 are exposed to digital marketing and actively engage in one form of e-WoM or another. Respondents beyond this age bracket even though not the focus of the study exhibited little interest in sharing their dining experiences. This presupposes, that restaurants will commit a blunder should they apply generic strategies to reaching the different segments of the market. Beyond social engagements, social media is a powerful marketing tool that provides marketers with the ability to target advertorials at specific segments of the market. For this reason, social marketing will yield the strongest result if targeted at the market segment aged between 18-28years.



## **Operational Strategies**

Amongst the four leading mediating variables of e-WoM identified, food and service quality emerged as the most important factors that encourage the sharing of e-WoM on social media. This finding affirms the importance of product and service quality to consumer-based brand equity, without which all marketing and communication strategies may prove futile. The highest standards of food quality must be maintained at all time, accompanied by impeccable service to enhance consumer satisfaction and encourage positive word of mouth. Food and service quality does not only include the nutritional value of food but also the presentation of food in the restaurant setting, a well-presented food stimulates visual pleasure and instinctively leads consumers to share their dining experience. Closely connected to product and service quality is brand image management.

## **Brand Image Management**

The democratic nature of e-WoM on social media contributes to its high degree of unpredictability; e-WoM on social media can have a positive or negative impact on firms. While positive conversations facilitate brand recognition and increased patronage, a negative conversation can lead to costly or even irreparable damage to brands (Kietzmann & Canhoto, 2007). Real-time customer review minimises the probability of negative e-WoM to a minimum. Restaurants can monitor and manage the social media landscape to effectively project a positive brand image and mitigate the impact of negative e-WoM. It was also established that altruism; -the desire to help others - ranked highest as the motivation for sharing eWoM. In a world where consumers have grown weary of company generated advertorials, the desire of consumers to share dining experiences for Altruistic motives is greatly welcome and needs to be harnessed to ensure growth in patronage. Restaurants can

## **Future Research**

The place of social media in consumer behaviour amongst today's digitally savvy Millennials cannot be over-emphasised. So far, decisions to invest in social media are more frequently made on the generally accepted belief that social media is an important tool (which continues to grow in importance), instead of its calculated ROI, this may be partly due to the dearth of academic research in this area. It is fascinating nonetheless how restaurants and eateries adopt various digital technologies to interface with consumers in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Ample opportunities exist for research in this sphere of marketing covering various aspects of social media. It is important, however, that research on social media and e-WoM in the hospitality industry is contextualized to fit the needs of industry players in South Africa and the continent of Africa as a whole. Opportunities avail in the use of Big Data in the Hospitality Industry, other researchable topics include 'The role of mobile apps and self-service devices in hotels', 'Management approaches to social media marketing in the hospitality industry', 'Search Engine Optimisation and Digital tools in hospitality management' and 'analysis of the use of fast food apps by millennial consumers'. An opportunity for future research is also presented by one of the study's limitations, this is with regards to the categorization of restaurants to enable an effective analysis of the impact of social media on varied types of restaurants. More importantly, it is recommended that the impact of social media marketing from the perspective of restaurant managers is explored to balance findings from this research.

## **Limitations**

A number of factors limit the applicability of the findings of this research on the broader Millennial population and restaurants beyond the city of Johannesburg. The three most important limitations



include restaurant categorization, the occurrence of non-response bias and limitations of sample population and location.

### **Restaurant Category**

Restaurants vary in nature and purpose, examples of restaurant categories include Artisanal restaurants, Fast Food Restaurants, Patisseries and Full-Service Restaurants. An ideal approach would have been to categorise the restaurants under study to adequately cater for disparities in consumer interactions and engagements with them. The absence of such categorization presents challenges to the broad application of the research findings to all types of restaurants, this was however impossible given the constraint on time and resources of the researcher and is recommended for future research.

### **Non -Response bias**

The researcher in an attempt to mitigate the possibility of non-response bias personally administered the questionnaire, however, this failed to eliminate non-response in the data collected. This may have been due to limitations on time for data collection and the lack of familiarity with respondents.

### **Sample Population and Location**

The data set of 120 respondents though adequate is insufficient to provide valid findings applicable to the city of Johannesburg with a population of 4.4 million people according to the 2016 population census. Furthermore, the research focused on three areas in Johannesburg namely Auckland Park, Greenside and Parktown due to its proximity to the researcher. It was nonetheless impossible to capture data beyond this proximity due to constraints on time and funding.

### **Conclusion**

Technology plays a vital role in people's daily lives in the twenty-first century. The phenomenon of electronic-word-of-mouth (e-WoM) is even more prevalent amongst Millennial consumers, who readily adopt its use either to gain social capital or for personal reasons. The impact of e-WoM on consumer behaviour of Millennials in Johannesburg is evident with implications for marketing and communication strategies of restaurants. In line with this, restaurant operators are encouraged to embrace and adopt strategies to manage the impact of e-WoM on their operations. Amongst the three most important motivations for sharing e-WoM, altruism was identified as the leading motivation, which emphasises the desire of South African millennial consumers to help their peers in their choice of restaurants. Additionally, food and service quality were identified as leading factors in the choice of restaurants for Millennials in Johannesburg, which also underscores the need to provide quality food and services to consumers. As an emerging discipline of marketing, social media presents phenomenal opportunities that should be harnessed by establishments in the restaurant industry because it will enhance their sustainability.

Recommendations for restaurants include the incorporation of Social media into the marketing communication strategy, emphasising and incentivising user-generated content as well as enhancing food and service quality to encourage positive e-WoM. This study contributes towards a better understanding of South Africa's vibrant Millennial consumer markets with a specific focus on e-WoM in the local restaurant industry. It provides context to the phenomenon of e-WoM and is expected to shape the social media strategies of restaurants in the city of Johannesburg and beyond.



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