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Assessing the Impact of Social Media Marketing Factors on Restaurant Customers' Purchase Intentions in Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia

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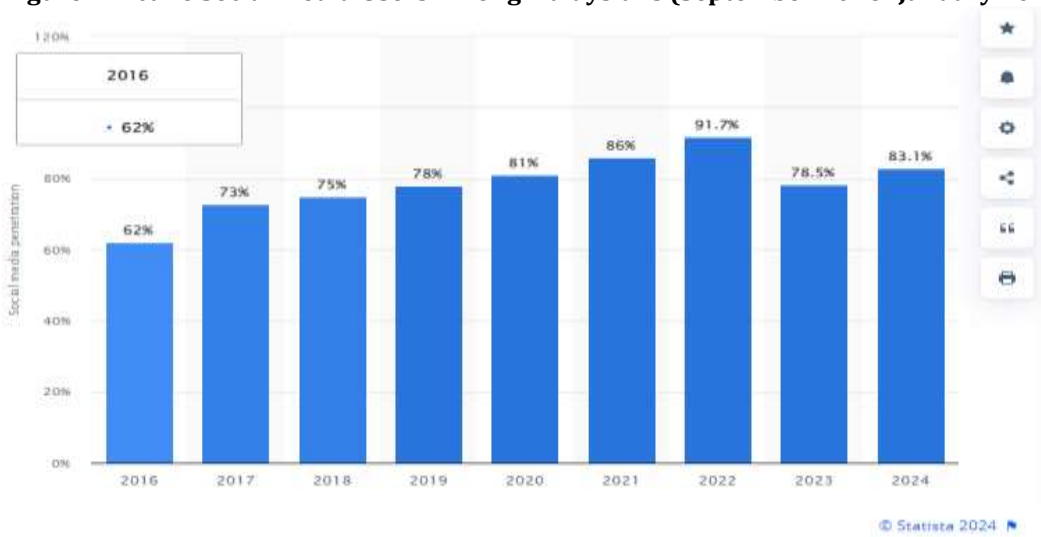
Abstract: In recent years, digital platforms, particularly social media, have transformed how customers discover and choose dining options. These platforms significantly influence purchase decisions, marking a shift in how businesses in the food and beverage sector engage with their audiences. Hence, this study aims to assess the impact of social media marketing on the purchase intentions of restaurant customers in Negeri Sembilan. It focuses on three key factors, which are menu visuals, advertising, and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM). A cross-sectional study has been conducted using purposive sampling, targeting customers with dining experiences at restaurants in Negeri Sembilan who are familiar with social media. A total of 342 usable responses have been collected through an online survey, ready for analysis conducted using SPSS Version 26 to provide meaningful results addressing the research questions of this study. The findings from the hypotheses show that key factors like advertising, menu visuals, and e-WOM have a significant, positive effect on customer purchase intentions. e-WOM and advertising are significant, with e-WOM being the most impactful factor. However, menu visuals have a weaker impact. Descriptively, the respondents have also ranked e-WOM and advertising as their top-priority factors towards their purchase intentions. This study advocates the significance of efficient social media strategies in boosting consumer interactions and influencing buying intentions, offering restaurateurs and marketers insightful information. Hence, expanding the research to include longitudinal studies would provide deeper insights into changing consumer behaviours over time.

Keywords: *Social-Media Marketing, Advertising, e-WOM, Menu Visual, Purchase Intentions*

1 Introduction

In today's digital world, marketers, influencers, and businesses need to understand how their audiences interact with online platforms. In the food and beverage industry, social media and online ordering are powerful tools to reach and influence customers. Restaurant managers can leverage this knowledge to develop effective strategies, utilising the digital landscape to enhance customer engagement and boost purchase intentions (Kumar et al., 2020). As displayed in Figure 1 below, as of January 2024, 83.1% of Malaysians were active social media users, increasing from 78.5% in 2023, with Facebook leading the social media platforms (Statista, 2024). Furthermore, social media nowadays affects individuals' emotions and behaviours, often causing mood swings based on their online experiences. Many Malaysians feel that social media influences their happiness, and they find it hard to stop using it (Siddharta, 2024). This, consequently, echoes from consumer-behaviour shifts according to changing trends and preferences, which vary across generations. As social media platforms evolve, so do the patterns of consumption, highlighting the impact of digital trends on purchase decisions.

Figure 1: Active Social Media Users Among Malaysians (September 2016- January 2024), Statista 2024



The food and beverage (F&B) industry in Malaysia plays a significant role in the nation's socio-economic development and cultural identity. As a hub of multicultural influences, Malaysia's F&B sector offers a wide array of cuisines, ranging from traditional Malay dishes to Chinese, Indian, and other fusion flavours. This diversity not only attracts domestic and international tourists but also positions the industry as a critical economic driver. In 2023, Malaysia's F&B industry was valued at over RM220 billion, with projections indicating continued growth due to rising consumer demands (Statista, 2023). Within this national landscape, Negeri Sembilan stands out for its unique culinary heritage rooted in Minangkabau traditions. This uniqueness attracts both local and international tourists, making the F&B industry a vital contributor to Negeri Sembilan's tourism economy (Wong et al., 2024). While preserving this heritage, Negeri Sembilan's F&B sector is embracing modernity through the adoption of digital marketing strategies. As a result, restaurants are increasingly leveraging social media to enhance visibility, attract customers, and compete in an evolving marketplace (Mohammed et al., 2024).

On the other hand, while social media offers an abundance of advantages, it can also expose restaurants to the harsh glare of negative publicity. Unfortunately, uncontrolled online platforms have allowed individuals to freely post damaging reviews, potentially inflicting significant reputational damage and impacting business stability. Conversely, users themselves may be susceptible to manipulation by deceitful comments planted by competitors. This highlights the complex dynamic of online reputation, of which the positive effects of relative popularity can be dampened by the presence of unfavourable fake reviews, particularly for independent eateries compared to chain restaurants (Li et al., 2023).

However, social media holds vast potential for restaurants, harnessing the persuasive power of online buzz and evaluations. In today's digital landscape, restaurants can leverage social media to cultivate devoted followings and reap numerous benefits. Even though its influence can be a double-edged sword, social media's positive impact is undeniable, particularly within the experience-driven restaurant industry. Kumar et al. (2020) have pointed out that online reviews will increasingly influence restaurant revenues and consumer choices. The same applies, but women are more likely to engage the power of word-of-mouth, and the host of platforms only amplifies its experiential qualities. Social media can be viewed as the echo chamber of WOM, amplifying diners' positive notes and attracting new loyal patrons. Moreover, as suggested by Kumar et al. (2020), the Internet is the primary source of information that potential customers refer to. On top of that, aligned with the assumption introduced by Li et al. (2023), clients follow their peers' behaviours. Therefore, stirring the positive buzz on social media can serve as a dynamic retention tool. Thus, restaurants can use the platforms to regain control, incentivise repeated visits, and encourage constructive dialogues.

This study seeks to assess how social media marketing affects the purchase intentions of customers who have dined at restaurants in Negeri Sembilan, considering the region's distinctive culinary and cultural heritage. Moreover, it aims to identify how key factors, such as menu visuals, advertising, and electronic word-of-mouth

(e-WOM) influence these intentions. This study focuses on advertising, menu visuals, and e-WOM as the key social-media marketing factors due to their established influence on customer behaviours, identified gaps in their combined exploration within the restaurant industry, and their practical relevance for restaurants in Negeri Sembilan. These factors have been chosen based on previous studies and their alignment with the study's goals to offer useful insights for local restaurant managers. Hence, the study objectives are stated as follows:

RO1: To examine the relationship between social media marketing and restaurant customers' purchase intentions in Negeri Sembilan.

RO2: To investigate the impact of menu visuals, advertising, and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) on restaurant customers' purchase intentions in the food and beverage industry in Negeri Sembilan.

2. Literature Review

In understanding consumer purchase intentions, this study has highlighted the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) introduced by Ajzen (1991), which provides a useful framework as a preliminary concept. This theory has explained that a behaviour is influenced by intention shaped by three main factors, which are attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. To make it clear, attitude refers to an individual's positive or negative evaluation of a behaviour, such as customer intention to purchase. Subjective norms, on the other hand, reflect the influence of social pressures or expectations, for instance, the impact of e-WOM from peers or online reviews. Meanwhile, perceived behavioural control relates to the ease or difficulty of performing a behaviour, such as how easily one can access information through social media. As far as this study is concerned, this theory has helped to explain how social media marketing elements like advertising and e-WOM influence consumers' attitudes and their purchase intentions in food and beverage establishments. Moreover, it also fits well with how digital platforms are changing consumer behaviour, particularly in the food and beverage sector, where decisions are increasingly influenced by online interactions and marketing efforts.

Consumer Purchase Intentions: Purchase intentions from consumers indicate their propensity to make a purchase and are a good indicator of their actual purchasing behaviour. Businesses must comprehend this idea since it is influenced by marketing tactics, brand perceptions, and personal traits. Qadri (2023) has highlighted the importance of using purchase-intention data to target marketing campaigns. Furthermore, Nguyen et al. (2022) have also emphasised how advertising can increase buying intention by giving consumers the knowledge they need to make wise selections. Therefore, it is evident that understanding customer purchase intentions is essential for creating marketing tactics that work with target demographics and increase sales in the restaurant industry.

Social-Media Marketing: Engaging customers via social-media marketing products includes content creation, community engagement, and specific social-media advertising, such as Facebook and Instagram. According to Buffer (2019), having a business agency present on social media marketing helps clients interact more openly and see the business. Social media marketing tactics are especially successful in the hotel sector because they increase customer loyalty and engagement, two factors that have long been highlighted in marketing literature (Kumar et al., 2020). Social media's dynamic nature helps businesses to adapt quickly according to customer behaviour, making it an integral element of modern-day advertising strategies for restaurants that may be seeking to appeal to more customers and retain patronage.

Social-Media Advertising: Advertising is a powerful tool that allows brands to reach targeted audiences through various platforms. According to Lopes et al. (2023), promoting and advertising a brand on social media can enhance the trustworthiness of its marketing messages, making them sound and look more convincing and credible. Furthermore, research has indicated that the effectiveness of social media advertisement hinges on several factors, including creativity, emotional appeal, and the use of endorsements. A study has found that these elements significantly influence consumer perceptions and purchase intentions (Sriram et al., 2021). These critical marketing elements impact how customers perceive products and decide on the restaurant industry's dos and don'ts of what to buy. Good advertising stimulates consumers, which is why The Economic Times (2019) has noted that it boosts awareness and informed purchases. While each can deliver personalised content or messaging, targeted advertising has the potential to alter behaviour dramatically. In addition, social media also provides businesses with platforms to engage directly with their customers, boost brand visibility,

shape consumer attitudes, collect valuable feedback, enhance products and services, and drive sales growth. In other words, it serves as a dynamic tool for fostering stronger customer relationships and ensuring that marketing efforts are both impactful and responsive to consumer needs (Lal et al., 2020). The way restaurants contact potential consumers has changed a lot due to digital advertising methods. These include paid media strategies like social ads that allow for optimised spending to get the most return both in reach and engagement, purchase intentions. Therefore, the hypothesis is formulated as follows:
H1: *Social media advertising has a significant, positive effect on restaurant customers' purchase intentions.*

Electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM): Electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) plays a significant role in consumer decision-making, especially with restaurant establishments. This comprises user-generated content, social media recommendations, and online reviews – all necessary sources of information for potential customers. Previously, Kumar et al. (2020) have stated that e-WOM plays a significant role in consumer purchase decisions, as it is claimed, because peer word-of-mouth is often considered more trustworthy than traditional advertising. Putri et. al (2022) have also suggested that social-media marketing and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) significantly influence consumers' purchase intentions in the food and beverage sector, highlighting the importance of interactive content and shared experiences in driving purchase decisions. As e-WOM affects consumer perceptions and creates involvement, this validity is crucial. Park et al. (2021) have been very explicit about the importance of vision inputs in electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), suggesting that visual reviews may trigger enhanced emotional responses and willingness to buy. This is because customers are typically drawn in by the captivating story that is created by the fusion of textual and visual elements. All things considered, e-WOM is an effective marketing technique that eateries may use to strengthen their brand visibility and influence consumer choices in a competitive market. Therefore, the hypothesis is formulated as follows:
H2: *Electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) on social media has a significant, positive effect on restaurant customers' purchase intentions.*

Menu Visual: The menu visual functionality of anything like the menu itself plays a significant part in consumer behaviour, especially in the restaurant industry. A good design with clear, high-quality images of high quality at the highest resolution is helpful. According to Park et al. (2021), all kinds of food images set forth information because the picture superiority effect claims this fact. Their study has found that videos can vastly outperform texts, capturing consumer attention and generating emotional responses. Apart from that, Brewer and Sebby (2021) have also noted that well-designed menus not only provide efficient access to information that alerts customers but also encourage purchases and enhance profitability for the establishment. No wonder the emotional snapshot of food images as potent reminders for appetite arousal is a powerful marketing tool. In addition, McCook (2023) has also asserted that effective utilisation of visuals on social media can significantly enhance how restaurant brands leverage these platforms to boost sales and improve customer service, ultimately influencing purchase intentions. The strategic placement of menu photos is a necessity for restaurants looking to obtain new and repeat business in a competitive market. Therefore, the hypothesis is formulated as follows:
H3: *Menu visuals on social media have a significant, positive effect on restaurant customers' purchase intentions.*

3. Methodology

This study has used a quantitative, cross-sectional approach to assess how social media marketing has an impact towards restaurant customers' purchase intentions in Negeri Sembilan. To recap, this study has focused on three main factors, which are menu visuals, advertising, and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM). This study has used purposive sampling, suggested by Etikan et al. (2016), to select customers who are familiar with social media and with restaurant dining experience in Negeri Sembilan. Instead of relying on the comprehensive sampling frame, the respondents have been chosen based on specific eligibility criteria to align with the study's objectives. Thus, a total of 342 valid responses have been obtained through an online survey, guided by recommendations for quantitative studies, by which 300 to 400 respondents have been typically suitable for non-probability sampling to ensure reliable results (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). To accommodate a diverse audience, the survey has been available in both *Bahasa Melayu* and English. The questionnaire has been structured into six sections, which are the screening section to validate the respondents' eligibility, demographics, menu visuals, advertising, e-WOM, and purchase intentions, with responses measured on a 5-

point Likert scale. Several data analyses involved have been the descriptive statistics and correlation analysis with the use of SPSS Version 26 to examine the relationships between the variables. The findings are presented in tables and graphs, aiming to indicate clear results that answer the objectives of the study.

4. Findings

Table 1: Demographic Profiles

	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	156	45.6
Female	186	54.4
Age		
18-22 years old	26	7.6
23-27 years old	92	26.9
28-32 years old	33	9.7
33-37 years old	130	38.1
38 years old and above	61	17.9
Monthly Income (RM)		
0-1,499	30	8.8
1,500-2,499	39	11.5
3,000-4,499	270	79
4,500 and above	3	0.9
tion		
Diploma	96	28.1
Undergraduate (Bachelor's Degree)	149	43.6
Postgraduate (Master's Degree/PhD)	65	19.0
Others	32	9.4
me Spent on Social Media Sites per Week		
3 hours	197	57.6
4-6 hours	96	28.1
7-9 hours	20	5.9
10 hours and above	29	8.8

The demographic profiles displayed in Table 1 above are presented according to their genders, ages, monthly incomes (RM), education levels, and total hours spent on social media sites per week. Based on the frequency analysis, the total number of females is higher than males by 54.4% (186 females) and 45.6% (156 males) out of 342 respondents. The highest percentage of the respondents for age is recorded by the age range between 33 and 37 years old, representing 38.1% (130 respondents), followed by the age range between 23 to 27 years old and 38 years old and above with 26.9%, represented by 92 respondents, and 17.9%, represented by 130 respondents, respectively. Meanwhile, the respondents aged between 18 to 22 years old and 28 to 32 years old remain the lowest with only 7.6% (26 respondents) and 9.7% (33 respondents), respectively. The highest monthly income (RM) is recorded by several respondents who earn an income between RM3,000 and RM4,499, represented by 79% (270 respondents), followed by an income between RM1,500 and RM2,499, with 11.5% (39 respondents). The lowest ranges of monthly income are recorded by RM0, RM1,000 and RM4,500 and above, which are 8.8% (30 respondents) and 0.9% (3 respondents), respectively. In the meantime, the highest education level is recorded by Undergraduate (Bachelor's Degree) with 43.6% (149 respondents), followed by Diploma with 28.1% (96 respondents), postgraduate (Master's Degree/PhD) with 19.0% (65 respondents), and the lowest education level is from others, which is only 9.4% (32 respondents). Finally, there are 57.6% (197 respondents) who spend only 1 to 3 hours on social-media sites per week, followed by 28.1% (96 respondents) who spend 4 to 6 hours on social-media sites per week, and 8.8% (29 respondents) who allocate 10 hours and above for browsing social-media sites per week. The lowest time spent recorded is between 7 to 9 hours with 5.9% (20 respondents).

In the meantime, Tables 2, 3, and 4 below present the summary of the descriptive analysis, which includes the mean scores, standard deviations, and ranks of each item in a single variable.

Table 2: Summary of Descriptive Analysis for Social-Media Advertising (A)

Code	Item	N	Mean	Standard Dev	Rank
A1	Typically, I check social media for information before making a purchase, especially when it comes to restaurant options in Negeri Sembilan.	342	3.94	0.728	4
A2	It's much easier to browse through menu varieties, including their halal and health selections, especially when considering options available in Negeri Sembilan.	342	4.04	0.688	3
A3	Social media users' reviews from Negeri Sembilan have encouraged me to try new products, services, and brands.	342	4.11	0.744	2
A4	Menus presented on social media have influenced me to try restaurants in Negeri Sembilan.	342	4.23	0.644	1

According to Table 2 above, in terms of social media influence, A4, which refers to social media menus, has the highest mean score of 4.23, indicating a strong impact on purchase decisions. This is followed by social media reviews (A3) and menu browsing with specific selections (A2). Overall, social media interactions play a crucial role in shaping consumer choices, highlighting the connection between social media engagement and purchase intentions.

Table 3: Summary of Descriptive Analysis for Menu Visuals (B)

Code	Item	N	Mean	Standard Dev	Rank
B1	The restaurants' Internet menus are presented in an appealing style.	342	4.04	0.802	1
B2	The visuals on these online menus are very pleasing.	342	3.96	0.810	4
B3	I find these online menus' graphics appealing.	342	4.04	0.757	2
B4	The arrangement of these online menus appeals to me.	342	4.01	0.716	3

In the interim, Table 3 above presents the summary of the descriptive analysis for menu visuals. The result shows that the respondents have generally found the online restaurant menus appealing across all aspects. The menu's style (B1) and graphics (B3) are rated highest, both with a mean of 4.04, indicating strong, positive perceptions. The arrangement of the menu (B4) has a mean of 4.01. The visuals (B2), however, have the lowest mean at 3.96, suggesting that they are slightly less appealing compared to the other elements. Meanwhile, the standard deviations are relatively low, yet, overall, they reflect consistent opinions among the respondents. B2 shows the highest variability (SD = 0.810), indicating more diverse views on the visuals. In contrast, B3 has the lowest variability (SD = 0.757), suggesting that the respondents have principally agreed on the appeal of the graphics. These findings highlight the importance of both aesthetics and organisation in designing effective online menus. In addition, "*The restaurant's Internet menu is presented in an appealing style*", referring to B1 (Mean: 4.04), is tied in scores with B3 but has a slightly higher standard deviation, indicating that it edges out as the most preferred one due to its perceived importance.

Table 4: Summary of Descriptive Analysis for Electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM) (C)

Code	Item	N	Mean	Standard Dev	Rank
C1	Consumer buying decisions are influenced by buzz marketing, which uses news/entertainment to generate word-of-mouth.	342	3.96	0.701	4
C2	Viral marketing that consists of messages intended to be shared electronically or by email influences consumer purchase intention.	342	4.05	0.653	3

C3	Community marketing, which involves user groups, fan clubs, and discussion forums, influences consumer purchase decisions.	342	4.10	0.759	2
C4	Conversation creation by various forms of entertainment, promotions, emails, and other materials influences consumer purchase intentions.	342	4.23	0.658	1

According to Table 4 above, in marketing strategies, conversation creation (C4) has the highest mean score, which is 4.23, showing that it is the most effective element in driving purchases. Community marketing (C3) and viral marketing (C2) are also found to influence consumers but to a lesser extent. This suggests that consumers prefer strategies that encourage interaction and communication, with entertainment and engagement playing a crucial role in their choices.

Table 5: Summary of Descriptive Analysis for Purchase Intention (DV)

Code	Item	N	Mean	Standard Dev	Rank
D1	I'm going to visit restaurants in Negeri Sembilan after looking at menus on social media.	342	3.95	0.700	4
D2	My probability of placing an order at restaurants in Negeri Sembilan has increased after looking at the advertisement.	342	4.05	0.691	3
D3	Referral programmes, which provide happy customers with various means to spread the word, have an impact on consumer purchasing decisions.	342	4.10	0.761	2
D4	Consumer buying decisions are influenced by restaurants' interactive social media promotions.	342	4.23	0.658	1

In Table 5 above, D4, which refers to interactive social-media promotions, has the highest mean score of 4.23, showing the strongest influence on consumer purchasing decisions. D3, which represents referral programmes, follows closely with a mean of 4.10, while D2, referring to advertisement, also has a positive impact with a mean score of 4.05. However, D1, which is related to the menu on social media, has a slightly lower mean of 3.95. This suggests that interactive promotions on social media are the most effective way of driving customer interests and purchase decisions among the respondents.

Pearson's Correlation Analysis: This study has employed Pearson's correlation analysis, which is widely recognised as a relevant method for assessing linear relationships between two variables. In this study, purchase intentions serve as the dependent variable, while advertising, menu visuals, and e-WOM act as the independent variables. As mentioned in the previous section, this inferential analysis has been used to examine the hypotheses development and establish the connections using SPSS Version 26 to analyse and test each of the statistical hypotheses.

Table 6: Correlation Analysis

Variable	Advertisement R	Menu Visual R	e-WOM R	Purchase Intention (R)	p-value
Advertisement	1	0.189	0.916	0.916	0.00
Menu Visual	0.189	1	0.133	0.133	<0.001
E-WOM	0.916	0.133	1	1.00	<0.001
Purchase Intentions	0.916	0.133	1.00	1	<0.001

The results in Table 6 above show that social media marketing dimensions, such as advertisement, menu visuals, and e-WOM, are significantly related to customer purchase intentions. Moreover, the correlation results show a strong relationship between e-WOM (electronic word-of-mouth) and purchase intentions with a perfect correlation coefficient of 1.00, indicating a very significant influence. On top of that, advertisement is also found to have a strong, positive correlation with purchase intentions (0.916). In contrast, menu visuals have a much

weaker correlation (0.133) with purchase intentions. However, all the relationships have statistically significant p-values (<0.001), confirming the reliability of these findings. Overall, e-WOM and advertisement are the most impactful factors influencing consumer purchase intentions, with e-WOM being the highest significance among the variables.

Hypothesis Testing: The results of the hypothesis test, as presented in Table 7 below, illustrate both the hypotheses and their outcomes.

Table 7: Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Item	Hypothesis	Result of Hypothesis
H1	Social media advertising has a significant, positive effect on restaurant customers' purchase intentions.	Supported P = 0.00 < 0.05
H2	Electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) on social media has a significant, positive effect on restaurant customers' purchase intentions.	Supported P = 0.001 < 0.05
H3	Menu visuals on social media have a significant, positive effect on restaurant customers' purchase intentions.	Supported P = 0.001 < 0.05

The results displayed in Table 7 above show that the hypotheses are all supported. Overall, these findings suggest that social media elements like advertising, eWOM, and menu visuals all strongly influence consumer purchasing decisions in the restaurant industry.

Discussion

Social media has become an essential part of our lives, and its impact on consumer behaviour is irrefutable. Prominent literary works have explored the purchasing patterns of consumers in the global restaurant industry. Researchers, including Almohaimmeed (2019), have demonstrated that social media activities significantly drive purchase behaviours in the food and beverage sector. However, there are gaps in our knowledge of how Negeri Sembilan restaurants have shaped consumer purchase intentions. Therefore, this research has attempted to close the gaps through analyses based on the conceptual model that has been constructed. The findings of this study suggest that various social media marketing elements, such as advertising, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), and menu visuals, exert a significant influence on the purchase intentions of consumers in Malaysia, particularly in Negeri Sembilan.

The results of the study display the strong influence of social media marketing on restaurant customers' purchase intentions, with advertisement and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) playing crucial roles. Notably, the data reveal that electronic word-of-mouth and social-media advertising are the most impactful factors, with electronic word-of-mouth having the strongest influence on purchase intentions (Sriram et al., 2021). Additionally, research by Putri et al. (2022) has also suggested that social-media marketing and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) significantly influence consumers' purchase intentions in the ready-to-eat food sector, highlighting the importance of interactive content and shared experiences in driving purchase decisions. This is because electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) spreads customer experiences rapidly, which strongly impacts brand engagement and purchase intentions. Thus, the use of social media technology in spreading positive word-of-mouth will increase consumer purchase intentions.

Meanwhile, the findings indicate that social media advertising significantly influences consumer purchase intentions. This study has revealed that most respondents are Millennials, with the highest proportion of them aged between 33 and 37 years old. According to Kumar et al. (2020), the effects of social media on consumer experiences and purchase intentions vary across age and gender demographics. Social media marketing and consumer purchase behaviour are notably shaped by advertising efforts. Gupta and Kumar (2022) have suggested that marketers should aim to foster positive consumer attitudes towards social media advertisements by emphasising key factors that influence purchase decisions. Similarly, Salhab et al. (2023) have also observed that advertising on social media platforms is an effective way for producers to engage with customers. Advances in technology have amplified the impact of social media, simultaneously transforming how consumers form their purchase intentions. Moreover, promoting and advertising a brand on social media can enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of marketing messages, making them more persuasive (Lopes et al., 2023).

Finally, while menu visuals may have a relatively weaker impact compared to the other factors, their importance should not be underestimated. Park et al. (2021) have highlighted the "*picture superiority effect*", noting that visual elements, such as food images, communicate information more effectively than text alone by capturing consumer attention and evoking emotional responses better. Similarly, Soh and Sharma (2021) have also emphasised that a menu's visual appeal can shape perceptions, elicit emotions, and ultimately influence purchasing decisions. Researchers, including Sriram et al. (2021), have underscored the importance of carefully designing social media advertisements, as their visual features and presentation significantly affect consumer perceptions and intentions. Additionally, Park et al. (2021) have also highlighted the role of visuals in electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), observing that evaluations featuring images tend to evoke stronger emotional reactions and increase the likelihood of purchase.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study underscores the powerful influence of social-media platforms on consumer purchase intentions, particularly in the restaurant industry of Negeri Sembilan. The widespread use of social media has redefined how consumers make decisions. This is because today's consumers are more informed, connected, and empowered, with the ability to access vast amounts of information and share their experiences with others almost instantly. These shifts in behaviour highlight the need for marketers to harness social media effectively by building brand trust, encouraging positive e-WOM, and designing visually engaging content that resonates with their target audiences. In conclusion, the findings confirm that social-media marketing elements, such as e-WOM, advertising, and menu visuals, significantly affect consumer behaviour, with e-WOM emerging as the most impactful factor among the variables. The findings also suggest that the effective use of menu visuals, though less impactful, can still contribute to customer attraction. Therefore, future marketing strategies should emphasise these factors to enhance customer loyalty and drive sales. This demonstrates the importance of leveraging interactive and shareable content to drive purchase decisions. While this research provides valuable insights, it also identifies opportunities for further exploration. For instance, future studies could examine additional factors, such as service quality and pricing within the restaurant context, to develop a more comprehensive understanding of consumer purchase intentions. This is because the results emphasise the value of these factors in shaping consumer behaviour and suggest practical strategies for restaurant owners to enhance their social media presence. In addition, future research could also explore these factors further in different regions and over extended periods to provide deeper insights into evolving consumer preferences.

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