

Influence of Social Media Reviews on Selection of Restaurants by Customers in Pune City

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to highlight the impact of social media reviews on customer restaurant selection in Pune. The popularity of social media is growing by the day, and all types of businesses are embracing it as an important part of their marketing strategies. (Timilsina, 2017). Social media has provided a low-cost and easy-to-use marketing platform for reaching thousands of customers instantly. It has been hailed as playing a growing role in many aspects of the hospitality industry, including guest satisfaction and process improvement. Most businesses today use social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, among others, as a new way to communicate and conduct business (Anderson, 2012). To promote the business and new offers restaurant industry use social media pages like Instagram and Facebook to attract the patrons to outlets. The trend of uploading pictures and posting comments or writing reviews is one way of describing the dining experience and this research aims to find the influence of social media reviews while selecting the restaurant.

Keywords: Social Media, Restaurant, Reviews, Marketing

media reviews and its influence on decision making of customers while selecting the restaurants. The study also helps the reader to understand the importance of social media marketing in restaurant business.

INTRODUCTION

In today's world, human life revolves around technology, also known as digital revolution. Humans rely on gadgets like Smart watch, laptops and most importantly on Smartphones for everyday habits. With increase in buying of smartphones, social media applications are part and parcel. Social media can be defined as – "A group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content". (Selvi & Thomson, 2016). Social media incorporate a range of online information sharing formats including social networking sites like Facebook, Instagram, creativity work sharing sites like YouTube and Flickr and collective websites like Wikipedia and sites like Twitter for microblogging.

WHY SOCIAL MEDIA?

Social media gives equal power to all users to search, explore things in life. With arrival of social media, communication has become more effective in terms of sharing information about products/services, voicing out opinions via feedback, comments etc. All social media sites are like community and hence information can be easily passed from one to another, despite the physical boundaries. Today, easy access to smartphone and internet, customers have more information available to them about products or services anytime, anywhere.

Since social media is free, widely accepted and easily accessible, there are more than million users on various

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- To study the various social media used.
- To study the influence on choices in overall by social media.
- What advantages and disadvantages social media have on restaurant business?

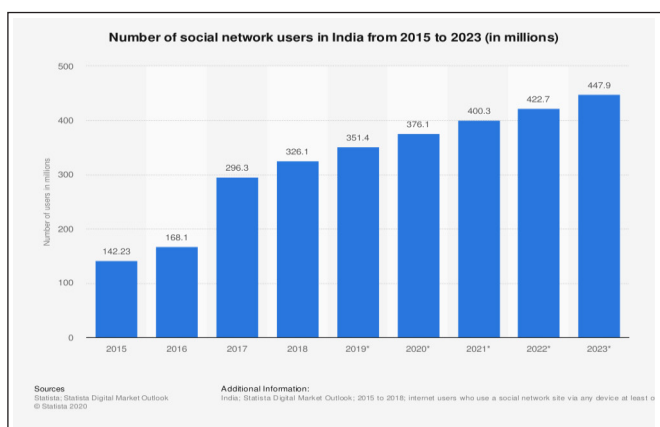
SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

This study explores influence of social media on consumer's decision while selecting the restaurant in Pune city. The study helps in understanding role of social

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social media networking sites. Also, social media has created a 2 – way and many – to – many communication systems allowing customers to connect, create, and share media content on on platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Twitter. Etc. (Purdy, n.d.). Social media has become easily accessible and handy tool for communication with customers as well as marketing.

Previous research studies having emphasized on impact on social media reviews on consumer’s buying decision, influence of social media on financial performance of restaurants and other aspects. This research aims to highlight influence of social media reviews on consumer’s decision on selecting restaurants in Pune. According to Statista, India’s social media users number will be around 448 million users by 2023.



Source: Number of social network users in India from 2015 to 2023 Statista, (Diwanji, 2020).

LITERATURE REVIEW

History of Social Media

Oxford dictionary defines Social media as “Websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking” (McFadden, 2018). Social media channels have been everywhere since the early 2000s and is known by everyone in today’s world. The term social media is not only known by urban folks but also is known by the remote areas of the world. For example - Facebook is considered as king of social media with over 2.4 billion monthly active users worldwide, where India alone contributes to the number of 260 million users (Clement, 2020). According to Krishnan, V’s article, Indians spent average of 144 minutes on social media every day, i.e. 2.4 hours (Krishnan, 2019).

It is impossible to imagine world without social media today, as it not only helps one to connect, communicate but also has become an income source in today’s world. Over the time there has been an exponential growth in number of users of social media due to easy availability of cell phones, tablets, computers and internet connection. Although to use social media seems like a new trend at the present, it has been practised past few decades.

Social Media and Restaurants

With digital revolution and easy availability of smartphones, social media at everyone’s fingertip. Ideal use of social media is to connect or form a social network, with added features of being able to share pictures, videos and posting comments, social media is free marketing tool. With low to almost no cost involved, it has become platforms for most business to promote their products, especially smaller organizations or restaurants who cannot afford advertisements as traditional way of marketing.

With rising use of social media, various restaurants have profiles on Social media domains to promote the sales of restaurants. It not only helps in promotions, but also maintains a pathway to be connected to patrons. According to Pick (2014), 54% of restaurant customers’ buying behaviour is directly influenced by reviews posted online by other patrons, and 60% of customers would change their restaurant choice in response to negative feedback from within their social network, as cited by Tichaawa and Mhlanga (2017). Social media is changing aspects of restaurant operations and has become a marketplace where every post, picture or story is used to sell products. Exponential growth in the use of social media by millennial has created lot of pathways in the form of opportunities as well as challenges for restaurant operators. Opportunity in the way of promoting new menu and providing customers with a meal and an experience, and challenge in the form of maintaining cordial relationship with customers online when they post feedback (Needles & Thompson, 2013).

Social Media Impact on Restaurants

According to Breed (2011), positive comments that are made on social media have positive aspects like increase in purchase intentions regarding the purchase of new menus, as comments or reviews involves less risk in

making the purchase. Based on research, it is observed that restaurant customers are more likely to trust on comments or reviews posted by other consumers on social media platforms rather than restaurant's website. According to Sinclarie and Vogus (2011), positive comments that are made on social media lead to development of brand image of the restaurant, which can eventually lead to reduction in the promotional expenditure.

On the other hand, as each coin has 2 sides, it is no different situation with social media comments, as one has to be prepared for negative comments or criticism on the path. As per research conducted by the University of Kentucky (2011) negative comments on social media lead to deduction in customers' purchase intentions relation to the product and service.

According to Daniel (2011), he states that there are about 44% of first time restaurant customers who rely on positive comments regarding the restaurant and that 10% of the comments usually come from a previous restaurant patron. In the study by Ulusu (2010) showed that a satisfied customer would be likely to tell 3 other customers on social media about their dining experience and vice versa. Buscall (2015) catches that one bad tweet or negative comment on social media can lose your business up to thirty customers. With rising use of Instagram and Facebook it is easy for foodies to share their experience with photos in real time. Trend of posting every single detail on the instagram handle is like a ritual for millennial today. Social media presence is strong enough to attract big organizations, hotels and restaurants to involve in social media and stay connected to the guests (Malbaša, 2018).

Social Media Types and Restaurant Experiences

Restaurant experiences majorly consist of elements like food and service quality, value for money and secondary elements like ambience, accessibility to location, discounts offer. However, today restaurant experiences are not only influenced by food and other elements but by social media. (Pick, 2014). Social media is a part of the appeal of dining out because it enables them to share their experiences with their online communities (Beese, 2011). By encouraging customers to post images and messages about their meals, restaurant can enhance the customer experience to guests (Edwards, 2013). By

posting online, it is responsibility of restaurant to maintain the consistency and quality of food and service as every post counts and can attract good number of customers. Situation for restaurant industry is changing and various small organizations are gaining popularity worldwide through social media. In a study by Brown (2016), it was found that the influence of social media on restaurant experiences also depends on the age of customers.

Advantages of Social Media for Restaurants

Popularity and Valuable Customer's Vision

With more active presence on social media there are more chances of acquiring popularity for restaurants. About 500 million tweets, 95 million videos and photos uploads in Instagram and over 4.5 billion likes on Facebook are there daily. In addition to this, actively promoting the organization with trending ways for example hashtags in Facebook and twitter helps to raise the brand awareness and reliability (Caruso, 2016, cited 09.02.2017).

Prosperous Customer Experience

Good customer experience is a combination of providing good service in present as well as acknowledging and responding to comments posted by customers on social media pages counts for enhancing the experience. It also portrays sincerity of restaurant management towards the customers which also helps in up rise of sales with. (Caruso, 2016, cited 09.02.2017).

Increment in Customer Service

Responding the customer's comments whether it is positive or negative, clearing confusion as well as interpreting the doubts deepens the quality of customer service in online marketing. People who chases a brand in social media are loyal to that brand (Caruso, 2016, cited 09.02.2016).

Increased Web Traffic

It is equally important to increase the web traffic of your business. Responsive and well-designed website featuring outstanding search engines are not enough. Boosting the site, use of social media is significantly important. Activities like engaging customers by sharing

appropriate contents in social media, collecting feedbacks and responding them wisely, adjusting marketing strategy from feedback on target group increases the web traffic which leads to appear on top in search engine optimization (SEO) as social sites starts looking more like SEO (Dane 2016, cited 09.02.2017).

Analysing Competitors

Tracking the activities of competitors and analysing the result to use in business helps to upgrade business followed by upgrading plans, offering discounts and other offers to attract more customers (Caruso 2016, cited 09.02.2017).

Building Relationships

Social media is not just for expansion of business and marketing platform. It is the pitch to develop relationship with loyal customers by answering customer’s questionnaires appropriately and 14 quickly. Management of the relation exist before, during and after; provides an opportunity to enrich the future relationship with potential customers (Coen 2016, cited 09.02.2017).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is based on influence of social media reviews on customers while selecting restaurants in Pune city. The data for the study was collected using structured questionnaire.

Method of Data Collection

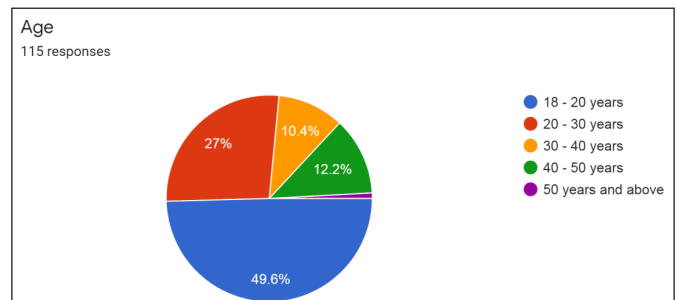
Primary Data: Primary data was collected from the students and it was collected with the help of structured questionnaire with closed ended questions. Questionnaire was formed using Google form, as it is economic and environmental friendly and convenient option.

Secondary Data: Secondary data was gathered using Journal articles, information from websites, magazines etc.

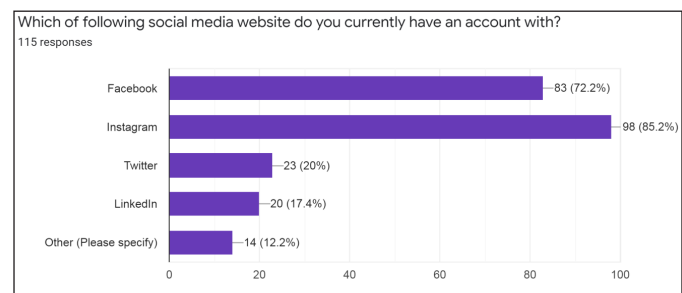
Sample Design: The target for this research was more focused on the younger generation so the questionnaire was designed keeping in mind that each and every respondent must be able to understand what are they answering to and could answer all the questions correctly.

Sampling Frame: The questionnaires were circulated to the targeted respondents and the responses were collected online through Google docs. The data was collected and used as sample for this research paper. A total of 150 questionnaires were sent and 115 respondents have been received.

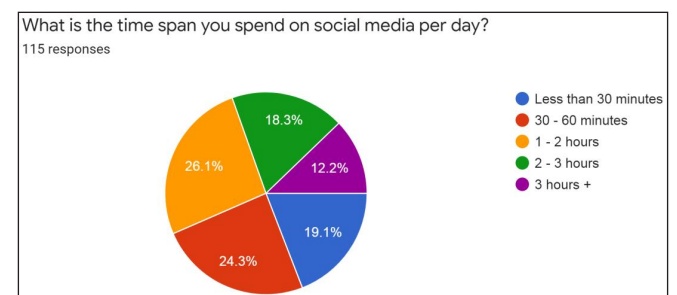
RESEARCH FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION



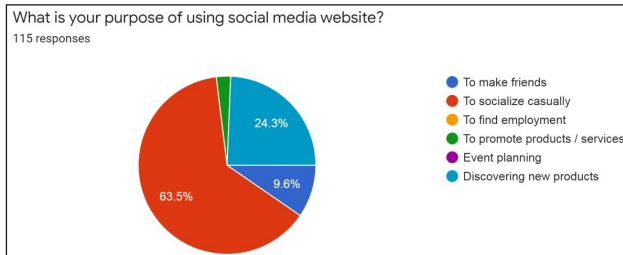
As the pie chart demonstrates out of 115 respondents 49.6% belong to the age group of 18-20 years, whereas 27% respondents fall under the age group of 20-30 years. 12.2% in the category of 40-50 years and 10.4% as 30-40 years. As per generic observation by the researcher, use of social media is highly common among people of 18-30 years.



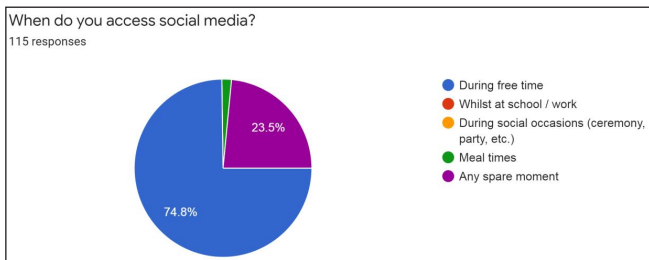
The above chart compares use of different websites by the respondents. With the score of 98% respondents use Instagram and 83% of respondents use Facebook. Whereas 23-20% reflects less use of Twitter and LinkedIn.



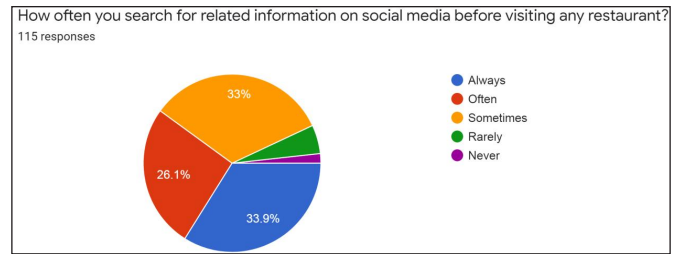
The most interesting aspect of this pie chart is only 12.2% of respondents tend to spend more than 3 hours on social media per day. Surprisingly, maximum respondents spend 1 - 2 hours on social media contributing as 26.1%. With technology and internet reaching every corner of the world, rise in use of social media users can be forecasted with increasing availability of smartphones.



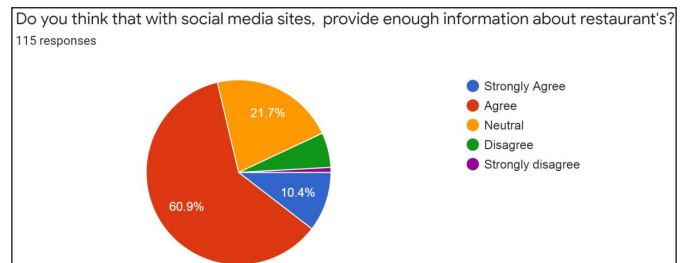
When social media was introduced, the ideal purpose was connecting with friends and creating social network. Over the passing years, technology has upgraded and so are all the applications with new additional features. Today social media platforms serve other purposes like finding employment, promoting services/products, planning of events, marketplace to buy and sell things and so on. The pie chart represents 63.5% respondents use social media to socialize casually and around 24.3% of participants use it discover new products. Internet is truly ‘Internet of Everything’ meaning any question about anything sectors, language, product etc. Google search engine has all answers.



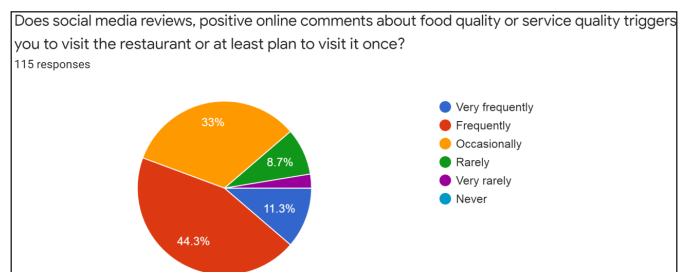
Closer inspection to the chart, it shows around 74.8% of respondents use social media during free time, and 23.5% of them use it any spare moment that is available. Use of social media during free time can allow the user to explore more in detail and gain information in depth, whereas checking social media at any spare moment is more towards the motive of checking updates, stories, or posts. It can be relatable and useful for restaurants to study and analyse the pattern of time generally spent on social media. With observations, restaurants can display new themes, menus, upcoming events and about every other event on social media page might lead to increase in annual sales and financial gain.



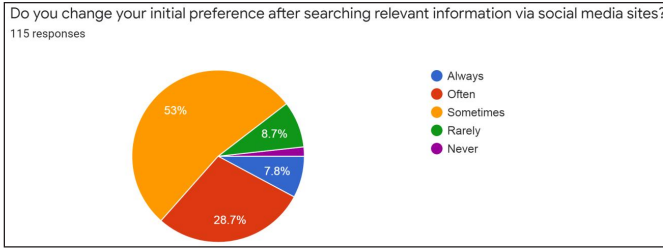
Surprisingly, the data in the pie chart represents difference of 0.9% as 33.9% of respondents always use social media to search information prior to visit to the restaurant and 33% of respondents use it sometimes. One certainly cannot ignore 26.1% of respondents use social media to look for information on restaurants through posts, comments, stories by earlier patrons.



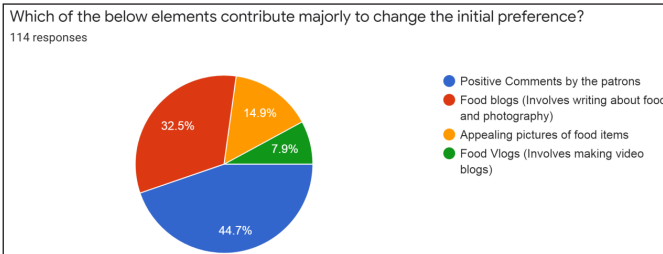
Surprisingly, only a minority of respondents about 10.4% feel that social media sites provides precise information. Whereas, 60.9% of respondents agree to the fact of information begin provided by the social media sites about restaurants. Providing right information at right time to attract customers is a skill that is required for digital marketing.



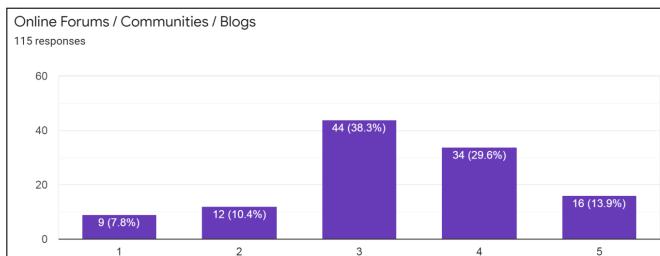
The above pie chart depicts 44.3% of respondents feel positive online comments about any restaurant triggers the craving of visiting it at least one. Whereas, good percentage of 33% of respondents experience the trigger occasionally. With addition of other percentages of parameter, it can be noted that earning positive feedback from patrons develops brand image in the mind of users.



The above pie chart data answers the research question of change in preference of restaurants after searching relevant information apparently leading towards influence of social media while selecting the restaurant. 53% of respondents change their preference sometimes, whereas approximately 29% change it often.

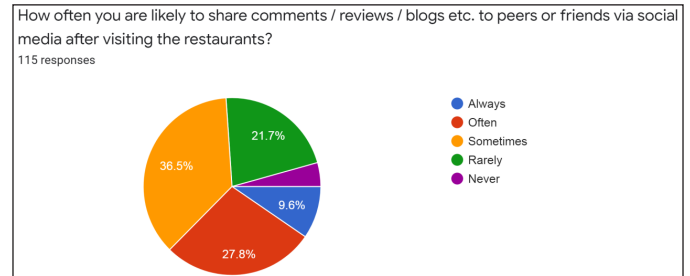


The above pie chart represents the crux of the project, around 45% of respondents look forward to positive comments for restaurants by patrons is the most important element in shifting the decision. On the other hand, approximately 33% of respondents feel food blogs with description of food and photography influence the change in decision.

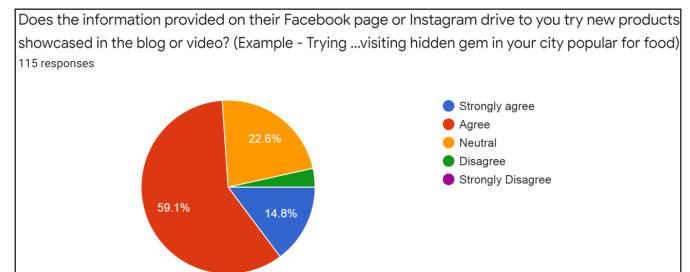


The above charts represent use of different social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Online Forums/Discussion etc. for searching information about any restaurant, or cafe before the visit. Comparing all the above results Instagram wins as the most use application as source of information, followed by YouTube with 20%. Surprisingly, Facebook is the least preferred source of information by the respondents. YouTube has recently gained popularity and has become source of information with real content and especially with Food Vloggers

recording their experiences about food and travel has created monster of information from different parts of the world. International food vloggers like Sonny Side, Mark Wiens and Rocky and Mayur and many others, have created own community and fan base. With technology, time and money invested correctly, Food vlogs is a career option today.



Social media marketing is free digital marketing tool where electronic word of mouth can make or break any business today. Writing blogs, comments, and reviews is sharing their own experience with close ones also ties up with giving infinite number of people to post comments. Around 28% of respondents often share their experience whereas approximately 37% of people share is sometimes. 21.7% of respondents share their thoughts rarely, but event that definitely creates or contributes to building of brand image and hence is utmost important to create a unique experience for every diner.



About 59% of respondents agree that information provided on social media platforms trigger them to try new products or services offered by new place, restaurant or cafes. Whereas around 15% of respondents strongly agree to curiosity generated by watching videos or blog to try new place in the market. With more and more food vlogs coming up, smaller eateries, roadside stalls have gained popularity and increase in their sales. Popular example – Small eatery named as Bade Miyan located in Colaba, Mumbai has gained popularity for their kebabs in the country.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has shown that with rise in digital revolution use of social media is gaining popularity worldwide, even in the remote villages. The following conclusions can be drawn from the study:

Social media platforms acts as interface to stay connected with friends in any part of the world and is becoming major part of our life. Online presence more often is stronger compared to actual/physical presence. It has become a ritual to check post, updates and stories every day by most of the users.

Social media marketing is the new normal and is adapted by various business or organization such as cafes, restaurants, and schools, colleges to promote their products or services and create brand awareness amongst the customers.

The results of this study indicate that comments, posts whether positive or negative have impact on the decision making while selecting the restaurants in Pune city. Any positive comments can only help in boosting the sales of the restaurants while on the other hand even a single negative comment can convert loss of 30 customers.

Maintaining professional relationship and acknowledging their feedback or comments and replying back is one way to enhance the customer experience by demonstrating your understanding of what every single customer means to the restaurant.

The findings of this research provide insights for restaurants owners/management to use social media in the right way to promote products/services to increase the sales and gain repeat customers.

Overall, the study strengthens the idea of social media reviews does play a significant role in decision making of consumers while selecting restaurants in Pune city.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings will be of interest for restaurant owners to think and learn about tactics to use social media as marketing tool.

An expert with the knowledge of creating content, post and business developer can help to create online brand image.

It is important to treat every customer equally and classify every single comment as Strength, Weakness, Threat or Opportunity depending on the type. It can create a map towards the path of long term sustainable successful business.

This research can be conducted by selecting one specific category of any Food & Beverage outlets like Fine dining restaurants or cafes. Further research can also be done by comparing sales before and after use of social media for purpose of business expansion in Pune city.

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