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It Wetted my Appetite! Demographic Differences in Perceiving Gastronomy Content on Social Media: A Study of Fast Foods Restaurants in Port Harcourt

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Abstract

Fast food chains have emerged to be a dominant sector in the Nigerian retail industry, contributing to employment generation and the nation's GDP. In the face of dynamic competitive business landscape, this sector has continuously relied on the traditional method of communicating, engaging and retaining customers. This anachronistic approach has cut them from a profitable customer segment which relies heavily on ICT tools such as social media. Thus, the aim of this study is to examine the differences in the rate fast food chains utilize social media through professionally handling posting of gastronomy content on their social media pages. Utilising gastronomy as an emerging concept and/or theory in the tourism discipline, we used the SPSS 24 as the analytical software with analytical tools such as ANOVA and T-Tests, we found that gastronomy content on social media does not influence consumers' perception of a fast food as favourite. However, we found that women and the adult population showed responsiveness to gastronomy content on social media than the men and the younger population. Theoretical and managerial implications are offered in addition to future research directions.

Keywords: Social media, gastronomy, fast food, demographics

Introduction

The emergence of social media has provided firms with different platforms to communicate, engage and get instant feedbacks from their customers (Ukpabi & Karjaluoto, 2016). As a matter of fact, evidence abounds to support the assertion that many firms rely on social media more than the traditional communication channels for the communication of the firm's brand image (Zhao et al., 2011; Bruhn, Schoenmueller & Schäfer, 2012). The reason is not far-fetched: social media is a cheaper form of communication and has a wider reach (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). On the other hand, the ubiquitous adoption of social media by consumers is attributed to the argument that it has provided an emancipatory platform whereby consumers are no longer passive recipients of firms' messages but are also considered as strategic partners whose voices on social media are fundamental for product and service innovation.

In Nigeria, the liberalization of the telecommunications industry in 2002 created a revolution in information dissemination. As a country that was not part of the traditional sophisticated telephone era, the introduction of global system for mobile communication (GSM) leapfrogged the market to one of the dominant telecommunications market not only in Africa but across the globe. Thus, with data services that enable internet connection, many Nigerians are adopting the Western culture of communicating more online than physical. The January 2017 industry report of internet subscription by the service providers is as follows: Airtel – 19,618,485; Etisalat – 13,564,284; Globacom – 27,076,272 and MTN – 31,015,405 (NCC, 2017). With a total internet subscriber base of 91,274,446, that is 51% of the total population, Nigeria is currently experiencing information revolution. Additionally, the Internetworld Stat. (2017) reports that Nigeria Facebook subscription stands at 16 million, second to Egypt with 32 million, thus, making Nigeria the second largest Facebook subscription in Africa. The above statistics is a pointer to the fact that firms that drive customer engagement through the internet and particularly social media will undoubtedly harvest large customer base. In the developed markets, particularly, the hospitality & accommodation sector which also comprises restaurant/fast food business is at the forefront of digitalization especially the use of social media for communication with customers (Kwok & Yu, 2013). Posting of gastronomy (food) content on social media pages has been a great way of attracting customers to restaurants. Many customers who patronize restaurants/fast food would want to find the different menu available on social media pages of these restaurants/fast food centres.

Different studies have examined how the different social media platforms influence customers patronage of restaurants. Thus, Kang, Tang & Fiore (2014) found that customers are attracted to Facebook restaurant pages when they obtain socio-psychological and hedonic benefits. Additionally, in a study of Generation Y information sharing on dining content on social media pages, Bilgihan, Peng & Kandampully (2014) found that Generation Y (mainly young college students) relies on gastronomy content on social media pages and shares such information among themselves which they evaluate before patronizing any restaurant. However, the study did not find any difference on how gastronomy content appeal to the gender. As a culturally diverse society, Nigerians love for specially prepared cuisines is archetypical of a particular tribe or culture. Thus, restaurants/fast food outlets that not only offer these cuisines but also parade them on their social media platforms will attract higher patronage. To the best of our knowledge, no study has investigated this important sector in Nigeria. Thus, the objectives of this study includes: to examine how gastronomy content on fast food social media pages influence patronage; to investigate the gender differences in responding to gastronomy content on fast food social media pages; to investigate how age influence the response to gastronomy content of fast food social media pages. Our study will make theoretical and managerial contributions to the body of research on this research stream. First, theoretically, our study will extend literature on the influence of gastronomy content on social media pages. Second, our study will also contribute to the debate on how gender differences influence response to gastronomy content. Finally, our study will contribute to the literature on social media adoption in the emerging markets. Managerially, our study will provide managers in the fast food business on how to attract customers by professionally handling the posting of gastronomy content on their different social media pages. It will also educate managers on how to appeal to the different demographic constituents in a given market. Our study is divided as follows: the next section will treat the

literature review; section three treats the methodology while section four handles the data analysis and result. We shall conclude in section five with the discussion, theoretical and managerial implications of our study.

Literature Review

Background and meaning of Gastronomy

Food is a basic necessity of life. Of course, good food taken in adequate quantities and proportion the body requires is unarguably a cornerstone for longevity. Thus, the term 'gastronomy' has attracted both scholarly and managerial attention in recent times. The first study of gastronomy was undertaken by Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin (1755-1826) and published in *La Physiologie du gout* in 1825 (Kivela & Crotts, 2006). The term was derived from two Greek words *Gastro* and *nomos*. *Gastro* relates to the stomach and all associated parts of the body involved in food digestion starting from the mouth, while *nomos* implies rule or regulation (Santich, 2004). Therefore, joining the two words we can deduce that gastronomy relates to advice, rule and regulations regarding what to eat and drink. Though many meanings have been ascribed to the term, but basically, the fundamental idea about gastronomy is that it relates to food prepared and cooked in relation to a particular culture. Consequently, we define gastronomy as the varieties of food pertaining to a particular culture through which the people in that culture are represented and identified.

In disciplinary terms, gastronomy has been studied extensively (see Barham et al., 2010; This, 2002; This, 2011). As a discipline, it is concerned with the changes that take place when food is prepared from the point of initial preparation to the point when it is ready for serving. Thus, molecular gastronomy has been used as the chemical processes that underly food preparation. The discipline evolved from the logic that food preparation that is fit for human consumption should go through some defined process. This process, just like a scientific procedure should be easy to be replicated irrespective of the geographical location so long as the procedures and items used for its preparation have been markedly identified and documented. In furtherance to this, chefs and molecular gastronomists have argued that patenting their cooking rights is a way of protection to avoid duplication without recourse to the rights of the patent holders (Arons, 2015). We thus argue that the cultural variations in the science and art of cooking makes patenting cooking rights a difficult exercise and would by no means be largely successful as each culture has a unique way their food is prepared.

In tourism, gastronomy has been used to define a destination (Hjalager & Richards, 2003). As a matter of fact, the perception of a destination as famous for good food has motivated visits to such a destination (López-Guzmán & Sánchez-Cañizares, 2012). Accordingly, Singapore (Henderson, 2004), Spain (López-Guzmán & Sánchez-Cañizares, 2012), Malaysia (Zainal, Zali & Kassim, 2010) are noted as epic gastronomy tourism destinations. However, some studies have argued that while traditional cuisines are responsible for attracting tourists, globalization has negatively affected traditional cuisines as immigrants and travelers usually incorporate their national cuisines to the traditional recipes such destination is famous for (Henderson, 2004). As a result, some destinations notably famous for particular cuisines have lost their identity as the penchant for processed food mostly from the Western regions have dominated food consumption (Sutton, 2001). The exponential growth and expansion of multinational fast food chains like McDonald's, KFC, Burger King, Nandos, Pizza Hut, etc. lend credence to the argument that

traditional cuisines are fast losing their cultural identity. Importantly, the young and middle-aged generally referred to as ‘Generation Y’ have been linked to show great interest and patronage of food from the Western fast food chains (Boone-Heinonen et al., 2011).

In spite of the many calls for heavy sanctions on the operations of the fast foods due to exposure of the consumers to health complications as a result of the fatty contents of the menus (Henderson et al., 2009), consumers have continued to show unrestrained appetite for their consumption. From our critical analysis of both peer-reviewed and business publications on this issue, we conclude that three factors are responsible for their exponential growth and expansion. First, fast food outlets are noted for efficient services (Lee & Ulgado, 1997). Beside the fact that they deliver fast services, they also customize their services to suit their various customer needs and preferences. A busy executive can place order and have the food delivered to his office. This sets them apart from the traditional restaurants that offer one size-fits-all services. Second, since most of them are multinationals, they adopt the ‘glocalisation’ strategy (Prakash & Singh, 2011). Glocalisation implies adopting a global business strategy in terms of efficient customer service while tailoring the menus to local needs and demands. To this end, a glocalisation of menus, for instance, McDonald’s implies that it has to offer local cuisines obtainable in the local community where it operates. This strategy makes the local consumers have a sense of identity with the firm. Three, and finally, their promotional strategy makes them have global appeal that cuts across age, gender and culture (Vignali, 2001). They utilize many promotional tools to reach their target audience including traditional media like television, newspaper and magazine. They are also very popular in showcasing these menus on their social media pages which are mostly targeted at the young and middle-aged (Gaber & Wright, 2014).

Motivations for Using Social Media

Social media is growing in popularity and many marketers are adopting the different social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Flickr, etc. more than the traditional media to connect with different customer segments (Constantinides, Romero & Boria, 2008). Comparatively, it is considered cheaper with wider coverage than the more traditional media. Scholarly evidence suggests that the increasing adoption of social media is attributed to functional, social and psychological motives (Kang, Tang & Fiore, 2014). Functionally, consumers resort to social media to search for products and services. They also use social media to compare prices from different retailers. In the accommodation and hospitality sector, consumers’ functional use of social media is to search for best accommodation, security and safety concerns and the destination that delivers the best exhilarating travel experience (Munoz-Leiva, Hernández-Méndez & Sánchez-Fernández, 2012). Scholarly evidence also abound that social media has opened a new chapter in relationship formation and sustenance as romantic (e.g. Tinder), professional (e.g. LinkedIn), social status enhancement (e.g. Facebook) etc. have enhanced social connection and cohesion (Seidman, 2013). Psychologically, some studies have reported that social media use provides a route to escapism and loneliness (Lee & Hyun, 2015). Furthermore, among the gender, women are found to be higher in the use of social media than the men just as young people use it more than adults (Lenhart et al., 2010).

Gastronomy Content on Social Media

Facebook has been used extensively by restaurants to post gastronomy contents such as photos and videos of their menus. Many customers go through the posts to check for the availability of

their preferred menus before visiting the restaurants. However, not only photos and videos of menus are posted by restaurants, marketing messages are also part of the posts to attract customers. Kwok & Yu (2013) in a study analyzing business to consumer communications on Facebook by restaurants comprising nine hundred and eighty-two Facebook messages from ten restaurant chains and two independent operators, found that gastronomy posts such as photos and videos of menus received more “Likes” than marketing messages. However, there is a conflict in findings pertaining the most preferred social media channel used by restaurants for their gastronomy posts. While some studies have suggested there is no consistent use of any social media channel of the restaurants and tourism firms (DiPietro et al., 2012; Leung, Bai & Stahura, 2015), Kang, Tang & Fiore (2014) argues that Facebook is the most popular in use. From the above arguments, we therefore propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis:

- H₁. Consumers are more likely to patronize fast food restaurants with attractive gastronomy contents on social media than those without

- H₂. Women are more influenced by gastronomy contents on social media than the men

- H₃. Younger consumers respond to gastronomy content on social media than older consumers

Methodology

Population, Sample and sampling technique

Population for the study comprised all Nigerians who patronize fast food restaurants. In recent years, fast food restaurants have grown so much that they do not only operate in large Nigerian cities like Abuja, Lagos, Port Harcourt, etc. but have also seen the need to open centres in suburban areas. Since we cannot gain access to the general population, we selected the sample, that is, a group of people who represent the population. Thus, our sample for the study comprises the entire community of Ken Saro Wiwa Polytechnic, Bori. The polytechnic is in Rivers State, which is the centre of oil and gas in the Niger Delta. The institution is representative of the population as students, staff and visitors are drawn from the diverse social, political, economic, tribal and religious group that makeup the country. Additionally, our study takes a cue from a similar study which was conducted in a college in the United States (Bilgihan, Peng & Kandampully, 2014). The sampling technique adopted was convenience sampling. In this method, access is determined based on the ease with which the respondents could be reached. Thus, both students and staff were approached given the survey. Of the 150 questionnaires distributed, 27 were either not returned or badly filled, thus, leaving 123 which were finally used for the analyses. The survey instrument was divided into two sections: demographic section and Likert-scale questions. The demographic section obtained the demographics of the participants while the Likert-scale section comprised measurement of the response to gastronomy contents drawn from an existing study. A seven-point Likert Scale was adopted ranging from Strongly Agree = 7 to Strongly Disagree = 1. Data was analysed using SPSS 24 with tools such as descriptive statistics and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) used to test the research hypotheses.

Analysis and Results

As stated earlier, our analyses comprise descriptive statistics, T-Test and ANOVA. The first is descriptive statistics as shown below:

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for demographics

Demographics		Frequency	Valid Frequency Percent (%)
Gender	Male	50	40.7%
	Female	73	59.3%
Age	18-24	51	41.5%
	25-31	70	56.9%
	32-38	2	1.6%
Employment	Employed	2	1.6%
	Unemployed	3	2.4%
	Student	118	95.9%
Fastfood/Restaurant	The Promise	37	30.1%
	Kilimanjaro	29	23.6%
	The Genesis	35	28.5%
	Tantalizers	5	4.1%
	Mr. Biggs	9	7.3%
	Others	8	6.5%

From the Table 1 above, among the respondents, females were more (59.3%) than the males (40.7%). Similarly, those between 25-31 years were the highest (56.9%), followed by 18-24 (41.5%) while those from 32 years and above were just 1.6%. The reason is not far-fetched. The study was conducted in the campus environment. When asked about their favourite fast food chain, 30.1% (the highest number) indicated The Promise, followed by The Genesis (28.5%). Meanwhile, Kilimanjaro, Tantalizers and Mr. Biggs recorded 23.6%, 4.1% and 7.3% respectively.

An ANOVA test was conducted to determine the fast food chain with the most visible gastronomy content on social media. The result is shown in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Consumers perception of gastronomy content on social media

Variables	The Promise		Kilimanjaro		The Genesis		Tantalizers		Mr. Biggs		<i>p-value</i>
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
Attractiveness of Gastronomy content	3.53	1.62	4.28	1.24	5.00	1.52	3.90	1.21	3.28	1.49	.05

From Table 2, the ANOVA analysis shows The Promise ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 1.62$), Kilimanjaro ($M = 4.28$, $SD = 1.24$), The Genesis ($M = 5.00$, $SD = 1.52$), Tantalizers ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 1.21$) and Mr. Biggs ($M = 3.28$, $SD = 1.49$). Comparing the mean of the above results, The Genesis with the highest mean is thus perceived as the fast food chain with most attractive gastronomy content on social media while The Promise is the most favourite fast food chain, thus, hypothesis 1 is rejected.

Table 3 is the result of the Independent Samples T-Test to determine which gender is most attracted to gastronomy content on social media. Women ($M = 4.07$, $SE = 1.39$) were more

attracted to gastronomy content on social media than Men ($M = 4.00$, $SE = 1.64$), though this difference was not significant $t(121) = -.47$, $p > .05$, thus hypothesis 2 is accepted.

Table 3: Gender attraction to Gastronomy content on social media

Variables	Women		Men		Mean Difference	<i>t</i>	<i>p-value</i>
	M	SD	M	SD			
Attractiveness of Gastronomy content	4.07	1.39	4.00	1.64	-.13	-.47	.21

Finally, ANOVA test was conducted to determine the influence of age and income levels on influencing attractiveness to gastronomy content on social media. The result as shown in Tables 4 indicate that those with age bracket 32 years and above responded to gastronomy content than the younger consumers, thus, hypothesis 3 was rejected.

Table 4: Influence of age on response to gastronomy content on social media

Variables	18-24 YRS		25-31 YRS		32-Above YRS		<i>p-value</i>
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
Attractiveness of Gastronomy content	4.17	1.43	4.00	1.52	4.25	2.48	.05

Conclusions

The aim of our study was to examine how the different demographics in the Nigerian fast food restaurant market respond to the gastronomy content on social media (Facebook) pages. As an emerging sector in the Nigerian retail industry, fast food restaurants have provided employment opportunities to thousands of people, thus, improve their standard of living in addition to the contribution to the nation's GDP. Additionally, a firm's ability to not only maximise the potentials of social media but also pedestal it as a strategic focus will unlock market dynamics that will enhance its competitiveness. In the era of information and communications technology (ICT), successful firms realise that harnessing the different social media platforms enhances efficient customer engagement and return on investment. However, in the emerging market such as Nigeria, the optimum utilisation of ICT tools, especially social media is still nascent (Ukpabi & Karjaluto, 2016). In the fast food industry, successful chains like McDonald's, KFC, Burger King, Nandos, Pizza Hut, etc. seize different communication channels. The ubiquity of social media platforms in the developed markets have opened a vista for these firms, thus, they use different social media platforms for different customer segments. Since majority of their customers will check on their social media pages for available menus before visiting their outlets, the handling of gastronomy content can either attract or repel an intending customer. Consequently, these fast food chains employ professional means of posting gastronomy content aimed at wetting the customer's appetite and possibly attract them to the store. Our study therefore extends this body of literature and applies it to an emerging market context in Nigeria.

Three hypotheses were proposed. The first hypothesis was that consumers are more likely to patronize fast food restaurants with attractive gastronomy contents on social media than those without. From the descriptive statistics, the respondents' most favourite fast food restaurant was

The Promise while The Genesis was rated as having the most attractive gastronomy content on social media. Thus hypothesis one was rejected. This implies that attractiveness of gastronomy content on social media is not a factor to consider in rating a fast food as a favourite. This result has two implications. One, Nigerian fast food consumers have not developed their use of social media, as such it is not used to evaluate fast food restaurant offerings. Thus, those who patronize these outlets do so out of word of mouth or other peculiar attractions or promotional strategies. Two, the results imply that number of fast food outlets and efficient customer services are still important attractions to pull customers to these outlets. Hypothesis two which states that women are more influenced by gastronomy content on social media than the men was accepted. Naturally, women are easily attracted by captivating pictures, in addition to the fact that they spend more time on social media than the men. Finally, the third hypothesis which postulates that younger consumers respond to gastronomy content on social media than older consumers was rejected. Our result indicate that older consumers were more attracted by gastronomy content on social media than the younger consumers. The reason is that since our study was conducted in the campus environment, majority of the students may not have the means to afford meals from fast food restaurants. As such, many of them depend on the food sold at the campus cafeterias which are considered cheaper.

Theoretical Implications

Our study theoretically extends prior research in the following ways. One, the slow pace of ICT adoption by consumers in the emerging markets in Africa is the reason businesses are also slow to adopt same. In the developed markets, professional handling of gastronomy contents on social media even helps consumers to share such contents among themselves in order to decide which restaurants to visit (Bilgihan, Peng & Kandampully, 2014). According to our result, attractiveness of gastronomy content on social media is not a factor in driving customer patronage confirms existing studies to the effect emerging markets in Africa are archetypical of low ICT adoption (Ukpabi & Karjaluoto, 2016). As a way of ensuring patronage, businesses still thrive on the traditional promotional channels. Second, many studies have confirmed that women are more emotional than the men, thus, more sensitive to quicker emotional arousal when presented with food pictures. In our study, the women showed higher level of arousal and response to gastronomy content than the men, thus, a confirmation of a theory in the medico-psychological proposition that women possess higher level of response to food pictures than their men folk (Frank et al., 2010). Finally, while existing studies found that younger people show a predominant use of ICT tools including social media (Correa, Hinsley & De Zuniga, 2010), our study showed a conflicting finding. Understandably, access to income predisposes a consumer to own ICT devices that enable social media use. Thus, poverty is a major factor in the emerging markets that makes ICT devices difficult.

Managerial Implications

The dynamism in the business ecosystem which ICT tools have ushered are certainly going to render some businesses redundant in the long run if they continue to shun the adoption of ICT tools. Managers in the fast food industry should realize that the use of ICT tools is no longer an option but a necessity. Manager can enhance their online presence through the following ways: one, though our study finds no relationship between gastronomy content on social media and being rated as a favourite fast food outlet, yet the education of the customers on the need to continuously check out social media is absolutely necessary. This can be achieved through such

channels as Facebook, Instagram where they “Like” their pages. Managers should adopt the traditional means of promotion like television, radio and magazine where they can through these channels demonstrate the varieties of their gastronomy content on social media. They can also demonstrate how consumers can easily access their social media pages and have access to variety of menu options. Second, managers should seek to open a robust social media customer engagement platform such as Facebook fan page. Those who join these fan pages can have incentives such as discounts and other promotional offerings in order to encourage large followership. Third, since our study found women more responsive to gastronomy content, managers should continuously target women with content that appeal to their gender. It is evident that in most cases when a woman is won, she has higher chances of influencing her partner and even the entire family to the fast food outlet of her preference. Finally, it is recommended that managers should adopt omni-channel social media strategy. Nigeria is a religiously and culturally diverse market, thus, many people detest Facebook for the aberrant predominance of socially sanctionable content on its pages. As such managers should consider other channels like Instagram, Twitter, Flickr and Youtube that consumers can check-in to increase of their dislike to any channel.

Limitation of our study and suggestion for future study

Our study is not without limitations. Our study was conducted within a campus environment and students which comprises the younger population were predominantly the respondents. As such, we suggest that our study may not be generalizable to the wider Nigerian population. Secondly, there are many fast food chains operating the Nigerian market than the ones used in this study. It is possible that respondents who could not find their favourite fast food on the survey had no option than to choose another option, thus likely to influence the result of the study. Finally, usable response rate is considered inadequate for a market that currently comprises more than 180 million consumers. In the light of the above, we therefore that future studies can sample respondents from major cities like Port Harcourt, Lagos, Abuja, Ibadan, Warri and Kaduna to arrive at a more representative sample in addition to incorporate more number of fast food chains.

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