Social Medias' Influences on Food Popularity amongst Malaysian University Students

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Abstract

This study explores the influence of social media on the popularity of food by focusing on the type of social media used by university students. This study utilised the quantitative research method to investigate the influence of social media on the popularity of food amongst university students in Malaysia. A total of 194 responses were gathered through the field survey. Descriptive analysis and frequency analysis were generated, and the results from this study showed that majority of the students agreed that YouTube had the greatest influence in terms of the type of social media used to increase the popularity of food. Besides, the visualisation of the food product influenced their demand and product consumption.
Keywords: Social Media, Food Popularity, Malaysian, University Students.

Introduction

Social media is one of the more popular communication tools today because most people use technology in their daily lives. The increasing number of social media users shows just how important it is towards people. There are two categories of media which are traditional media such as television, radio and newspaper; and on the other hand, the social media. Social media is a form of new media which consists of websites and applications that enable users to create and share information or to participate in social networking activities. It is an online environment built on participants' contributions and interactions. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social media is a social process that includes self-presentation and self-disclosure of social media. There are six categories of social media features which are blogs, social networking sites, virtual social worlds, collaborative projects, content communities, and virtual game worlds. Social media influence is essential in the food industry as it gives more information to consumers about food. The posts on social media such as photos, videos, links and texts can also be categorised as the natural phenomena to spread information to other individuals. This really plays an important role in influencing the popularity of food. According to Bulbul and Dahyot (2017), social networks have become a

prominent means for people to share their experiences. The consumers provide reviews about food, services and decorations which can elevate the popularity of the food.

YouTube and Instagram have helped companies to create their own customised profiles and extend essential information in the creation of their own brand community. As a result, in order to determine the popularity of the food, observation in the number of likes, comments, and the number of shares and engagement (Aspasiaa & Ouraniab, 2014) is important. Firstly, the number of likes can be determined from the ratio and then the posting likes are calculated as a percentage from the total reach. Secondly, the total number of comments is determined by viewing the number of comments each post has received. The number of shares is also one of the ways to determine the popularity of the food. Lastly, the popularity can be determined from the engagement. Engagement refers to 'Engaged Users' as the number of people who have visited the page and have clicked on the post that was shared. This consists of liking, commenting and sharing of the post which people have viewed, such as the videos, links and photos (Aspasiaa & Ourania, 2014). Moreover, the new generation is more likely to adapt their behaviour according to their reference group (Stok et al., 2016).

Literature Review
The Popularity of Food
Food refers to a product that gives flavour, scent and nutritional value to the person that is eating them (Hasler, 2002). Food is a significant value that needs to be consumed by people in this world in order to survive. Every day, each person needs to consume food in order for their body to acquire energy to perform work every day. Food will be able to provide an energy source for the person to undergo the day without feeling hungry or tired. In Malaysia, there are many cultures from different races. Each ethnic group has its own unique culture, with its own distinctive cuisine. The cuisine will vary with the culture, even when Malaysians are from the same state, their culture and their cuisine will not be the same. The popularity of each kind of food is influenced by the knowledge and information that is able to be shared with other people. People nowadays have been using the internet to get information about each type of food, and this information can help them in making decisions before they purchase food items (Fathelrahman & Basarir, 2018). Before each person is confident enough to purchase any food, they will do research about the price, nutrition content of the cuisine and the ingredient makeup of the food. This is because not all the ingredients are able to be consumed by individuals with dietary needs and preference.

The food will be popular as people today use the internet to broaden news about the food. Most people are not aware that they have helped a lot in contributing to the popularity of the food as well. Today, people will post any image or location where they have bought the food from the internet. Thus, this really helps in the popularity of the food. Food that people do not know will become well-known with the help of the internet, as people from any part of this world are able to view the social posts and be informed about that specific food. The food popularity will rise as most of the people use the internet in their daily lives.

Social Media
Social media or social networking sites is one of the most used applications nowadays. Almost the entire population in this world use social media without irrespective of their age and gender. Social media has been one of the most used applications that exist in people's

smartphones and also on their portable devices. Each person in this world will have at least one type of social media app or social networking site. They will use social media to search for their relatives, friends and most importantly, search about foods of interests. Usually, they will search for food recipes and also the restaurant that sells certain types of foods. With many social postings that are available and have been posted by users, people will easily find the things that they are looking for and need.

According to Carnejo (2017), two basic senses that are used in social media are auditory and visual senses. Through social media, people can post their pictures and videos as well. These are the reasons why the most integral sensory perceptions when using social media are through hearing and seeing. Individuals will see the picture that is being posted by other people on social media. Not only can they play videos that are being posted, but they will also be able to listen to the sound played by the video. Hence, this is one of the ways to attract people to try and eat the food. People will be tempted as they hear the sound of the food inside the video. People will easily feel hungry, especially when they hear the sound of other people eating in the video.

Nowadays, most people use Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response (ASMR) in their social media accounts such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and many others. By doing these types of videos, they make other people watching these videos hungrier and more tempted to try the food that is displayed in the video. Thus, social media is one of the most useful mediums to make the popularity of food anywhere in the world become very popular and well-known by many people.

Social Media Influence

Social media is very accessible today as it contains much information that is needed by people needed (Fathelrahman & Basarir, 2018). According to Chau, Burgermaster and Mamykina (2018), social media has three functions which are the communication tools, place to share information and also as self-tracking to keep one's own information. Social media is important in the popularity of the food, as the organisation will use social media to inform the consumers about the products that the organisations sell. People nowadays do not have much trust in the advertisement as compared to the social postings that are being shared by other consumers about the food product (Cornejo, 2017). There is research that studies the relationship between the popularity of the peers and the eating pattern of university students (König, Giese, Stok, & Renner, 2017). As the popular peers post certain types of food images on their social media accounts, this attracted many people to try the food these popular individuals have tried before.

As the usage of social media is increasing, the migration of people is no longer become an issue, as the migration has their own food habits and eating patterns (Choudhary, Nayak, Kumari, & Choushury, 2017; Ferguson & Bornstei, 2012). As we know, eating patterns of each person is different, but as more people use social media, the migration eating patterns do not become an issue anymore. This is because people get information about the eating habits of that person. Not only that, by the usage of social media, it will able to make the food of their culture become more famous and acceptable by many people.

Many organisations depend on social media to search for customers (Perumal, Krisnan, & Halim, 2017). Through social media, the organisation will promote and attract consumers to come and eat at their restaurant. Besides that, they will be able to attract their target market to go and eat the food product they sell. Social media also can enhance the relationship of the organisation with their customers, as the customers can give feedback about the food product (Lee, 2017). According to Patino, Pitta, and Quinones, 2012 (as cited in Perumal, Krisnan, & Halim, 2017) social media has become one of the vital marketing tools as it enables consumers to evaluate, choose and also share some information with the organisation and other people. Thus, social media influence in marketing and the popularity of food is important to ensure the food becomes more well-known and accepted by the public.

Types of Social Media
According to Galati, Crescimanno, Tinervia and Fagnani (2017), social networking sites are the place that enables users to create their own social media profiles for them to interact with other users from any part of the world. Moreover, it allows the person to share knowledge, information and also make friends. There are several types of social media that are widely used among all generations today. This would be Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr and many more. According to Nguyen et al. (2017), Twitter is one of the online communication tools where people can produce content and share information with other people. It also can be used as the place to share information and photos on food.

The acceptance rate of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and Flickr has increased in less than a decade (Timilsina, 2017). Each type of social media plays the same role to promote and is a platform to communicate with other people to obtain feedback. It is also a place to have a discussion with people that distant. Social media is important as each type of social media can help promote and increase the popularity of the food in different ways (Muninger, Hammedi, & Mahr, 2018).

Instagram
Instagram is a place where people can share their pictures and videos of the food. People can also interact, share their experiences and share the information about the food with other people. Thus, this can help people make the decision on what they want to buy and what type of food they prefer (Cornejo, 2017; Gallegos, 2016; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The Instagram user can also write any caption to the image or video that they have posted (Holmberg, Chaplin, Hillman, & Berg, 2016). Not only that, but they can also include hashtags to accompany social media postings. This can help people to easily find any material that is similar to what they click on the hashtags.

Facebook
According to Aslan (2018) and Pham, Shancer and Nelson (2018), there are at most fifty-five million status made and 350 million photos that have been uploaded on Facebook every single day. Facebook enables its user to share any information, communicate, and find the company or food product pages easily. Besides that, Facebook allows its user to share the post that has been uploaded by other people on their page. Through this method of sharing, the post will be seen by any person as they view their timeline to see what people have added.

By uploading or sharing any video or picture on Facebook, this will help promote knowledge to others (Tan & Loo, 2014).

YouTube

YouTube is the most famous video-based online networking site (Akram & Kumar, 2018). Through YouTube, people can share any video they want. Not only that, they can write any caption to the video they have posted. In addition, YouTube allows its users to communicate with the person who has viewed the video without needing to subscribe to the channel. According to Holmberg (2017), YouTube has provided various video and information about food, the cuisine of other cultures, how the food is being made and etc.

Twitter

Twitter is a form of 'microblogging' system that allows users to send and receive short posts called tweets. Tweets can be up to 140 characters long and can include links to relevant websites and resources. Twitter allows users to follow other users, as well. The platform grows in popularity by the day and is still one of the most significant traffic sources for sites all over the world, and in every niche, you can imagine. Thus, it is obvious that going viral on Twitter, significantly websites and blogs in getting some much-needed traffic, and you might be surprised to find that it is easier than you think. (Widrich, Leo 2011).

Tumblr

Tumblr is a blogging and social media tool that allows users to publish a "tumblelog", or short blog posts. More than 13 million people visit Tumblr a month, most of them with their own active blogs. Each day, 25,000 new users sign up for the site, and altogether, 71.6 million new Tumblr blog entries, photos, videos and audio files are posted each day. Although you do not have to be a registered user of Tumblr to read other people's Tumblr blogs, you do have to be registered if you want to leave notes. (Boone & Brian, 2017).

Pinterest

Pinterest is a visual discovery engine for finding ideas like recipes, home and style inspiration, and more. With billions of Pins on Pinterest, many ideas can be found to spark inspiration. People are naturally intrigued by graphic images. The more appealing an image is, the more attention it is going to generate – which is what Pinterest relies on. Whether it is an outfit, a craft or a décor idea, people are using Pinterest to share and get new ideas. As such, this site has really become a fantastic marketing tool for businesses in a graphic-friendly niche.

Type of Post

People usually post about food on social media. Most of them will either post the picture or the video of the food. This will usually attract people to find and gain knowledge about the food as they have been tempted to try that food. According to various researchers, food image can make people feel hungry, and their desire to eat will increase (Jansen, Mulkens, & Jansen, 2010; Peng & Jemmott, 2018; Simmons, Martin, & Barsalou, 2005). The visual content from the image-based social media has widely spread its popularity as people will like to see pictures (Lenhart, 2015: Peng & Jemmott, 2018). Instagram is deemed as the perfect tool to share the information as it acts as an electronic word-of-mouth method where people can share their pictures easily without the need to follow the guidelines provides the

social media (Fernandes, 2018). This allows people to share photos of the food widely to any individual effortlessly.

Methodology

Research Design

The research design applied in this study is a quantitative approach which helps determine the relationship between social media and the popularity of food. According to Jakel, Singh, Wichman and Herzoy (2016), ideal observer models are often useful for quantifying how much of the information will be available in a task, which is used by the subjects. The quantitative approach study also refers to descriptive research which examines the relationship between social media and the popularity of food. The descriptive research method in this study describes the characteristics of the population or phenomenon for this research. Descriptive research is a quantitative research method that attempts to collect quantifiable information to be used for statistical analysis of the population sample but does not determine the cause and effect relationship between different variables. It gives a clear view of the population at a single point in time. Therefore, the result obtained from this study can predict the social media influence on the popularity of the food.

Data Collection Process

The data collection method in this study is through a questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed for the respondents to answer and was distributed to the students in Universiti Teknologi MARA Malaysia (Selangor Branch). Students from six faculties were involved: the Faculty of Accountancy, Faculty of Business Management, Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, Faculty of Pharmacy, Faculty of Health Science and Faculty of Education. All of the questionnaires were distributed, and the data collection was completed within two weeks. The questionnaire was distributed within two weeks, from 4th June 2019 until 18th June 2019. The questionnaire was distributed by using Google forms, and the form link was shared through the WhatsApp application.

Population and Sample Size

The population for this study was at the active student at the Universiti Teknologi MARA Malaysia (Selangor Branch). The sampling method used in this study is the non-probability sampling method as per proposed by Kumar, Talib, and Ramayah (2013). Students use social media to share their daily activities and access information about food (Steinberg & Monahan, 2007; Stok, de Ridder, Adriaanse, & de Wit, 2010. The respondents' age was between 19 to 30 years old. From the data interpreted this study, the population of the study is 18,144 students, and the sample size was 194 (n=194).

Research Instrument

The research instrument for this study was constructed based on the variable that has been stated in the study framework of this research project. The questionnaire was constructed by using the Likert scale point. The five-point scale was chosen with the range from 1 to 5 in which 1 and 5 are categorised as 'strongly agree' and 'strongly disagree' respectively. The questionnaire consists of four sections, Section A: Demographic Profile, Section B: Type of Social Media That Influences the Popularity of the Food, Section C: Type of the Post That Influences the Popularity of the Food and Section D: The Influence of Social Media towards the Popularity of the Food.

Data Analysis

The data was analysed by using Statistical Package Social Science (SPSS) version 23.0 focusing on the descriptive statistical analysis, and the frequency analysis.

Findings

Analysis of findings

Data analysis was divided into four parts namely Section A: Demographic Profile, Section B: Type of Social Media That Influences the Popularity of the Food, Section C: Type of the Posts That Influence the Popularity of the Food and to Section D: The Influence of Social Media towards the Popularity of the Food.

Types of Social Media

Table 1:

The Mean Score on the Types of Social Media that Influence the Popularity of the Food

Item	Mean	Std Deviation
I have more than 1 social account	4.57	0.886
Most time I spend using the smartphone is on the social media	4.41	0.812
Instagram is useful in obtaining and sharing information about food.	4.55	0.749
Facebook is useful in obtaining and sharing information about food	4.49	0.864
Pinterest is useful in obtaining and sharing about food	4.10	1.089
Twitter is useful in obtaining and sharing about food	4.35	0.900
Tumblr is useful in obtaining and h sharing about food	3.81	1.264
Youtube is useful in obtaining and sharing about food	4.62	0.699

The findings of the first objective of this research were to find out the type of social media that has influenced the popularity of food amongst students. The mean score of the first question, which was to determine whether the students have more than one type of social media was 4.57. The mean score for the first question has shown that most of the respondents that were students agreed with the question. This has shown that most of the students at UCS have been a user of at least one type of social media. The mean score for the second question was 4.41, where they agreed that most of their time was spent on social media platforms. This has shown that social media has a high influence on the students as they usually use their smartphones to browse through their social media. Question three to eight focused on the types of the social media that was mostly used in obtaining and sharing information about food.

The respondents agreed that YouTube was determined to be most useful in obtaining and sharing the information about food, while Tumblr was chosen as the least useful platform for students. YouTube is one of the most popular video-based online networking site (Akram & Kumar, 2018). As YouTube is one of the most famous video-based online networking sites, people can share as many as videos on food and also provides a huge amount of food information (Holmberg, 2017). Through this online social media platform, the owner of the video can share any information about food; recipes, and the methods of cooking about the food. They can compile all of that inside one video, as the video sharing on YouTube does not

have time limit restrictions. As for Tumblr, most of the respondents which were students at UCS did not really use YouTube. Not only that, some of the respondents did not know what Tumblr was. Tumblr allows their users to post pictures, videos or textual posts, but it was hard to communicate through that platform (Akram & Kumar, 2018). Tumblr also allows their users to repost what others have posted, but not many students at UCS found it useful in obtaining and sharing information.

Types of Post
Table 2:
The Mean Score of the Type of Post which Influenced the Popularity of Food.

Item	Mean	Std Deviation
Visualization servers as alternatives to attract people.	4.70	0.537
Visualization is more useful in communicate with other rather than textual message and the use of symbols or emoji to express reaction	4.45	0.738
The number of the like on certain post influences the popularity of the food	4.53	0.658
The review videos on the social media easily influence me to try that food	4.53	0.671
Level of satisfaction will increase when purchase food in the physical store after obtaining knowliegde and visual of the food from the social media	4.55	0.643
The video of the food share in social media will interest me more than the picture share in social media	4.48	0.721
The food posts in social media easily influence me to try and purchase the food	4.45	0.738
I will scroll the social media post to find what the popular food to eat is.	4.55	2.755

The second objective for this research was to find out the type of post that has influenced the popularity of the food amongst UCS students. This objective was to see whether the students thought that visualisation or textual posts usually influenced the popularity of the food. The first question for this section focused on the visualisation serving as alternatives to attract people's attention towards the food posts. The mean score for this was 4.70, which indicated that the students highly or strongly agreed that the visuals helped increase the popularity of the food. They also agreed that visualisation is more useful in communicating with others rather than by text such as the use of symbols, emojis and writing posts. The results from the previous research also stated that visualisation was more helpful in delivering message to people (Holmberg, Chaplin, Hillman, & Berg, 2016). As for the mean score for the review, videos easily influenced students to try the food.

In addition, the number of likes that influenced the popularity of the food was 4.53. This has shown that the students that were easily influenced by the review videos on social media tend to try certain foods. Not only that, the number of likes on certain posts made students perceived that the food was popular. The mean score for the level of satisfaction, which increased when they purchase food at the physical store after obtaining knowledge and visual

representation of the food from the social media was 4.55. From this, it is shown that the pictures or videos of the food have been helpful when they want to purchase the food. When people see the pictures or videos and gain knowledge about certain food products, their level of satisfaction usually will increase (Fathelrahman & Basarir, 2018). As for the last question from this section, the mean score was 4.55. This was with regards to whether the respondents would scroll to social media to find what popular foods to eat. This has increased the popularity of the food, as respondents highly agreed that scrolling through social media to find what was the popular food to eat was essential. This has surely made certain foods become more popular as people who have tried popular foods will post and give their reviews on social media. Thus, this method has been able to increase the popularity of the food with the help of social media.

The influence of social media towards the popularity of food
Table 3:
The Mean Score of the Influence of Social Media towards the Popularity of the Food.

Item	Mean	Std Deviation
I can easily obtain information about food in social media	4.69	0.581
I can find information about food product anytime in social media	4.58	0.605
Social media give advantages and benefit in spreading information about the food product	4.63	0.575
Social media have both positive and negative influence towards the popularity of food product	4.66	0.575
I willing to travel in order to try the food product that is popular is social media	4.32	0.964

The result for the dependent variable of this research was the influence of social media towards the popularity of the food. The mean score was 4.69 for the question that the respondents could easily obtain information about food on social media. The respondents highly agreed that they could use social media in obtaining information especially about food. There were many social media sites that provide different information about the food. Respondents also agreed that they are able to obtain the information anytime on social media. Social media did not have time limit restrictions for their users, hence the it was made available 24 hours per day. The respondents highly agreed that social media did have its pros and cons in the popularity of the food. Social media did help in spreading the information about the food. Nowadays, social media has become the medium for food producers and customers to interact (Fathelrahman & Basarir, 2018). The positive impact from the influence of social media was that through good reviews about the food, there was an increase in sales and it also helped build the company reputation (Fathelrahman & Basarir, 2018).

Students usually scroll through social media not only to find information about the food but also to purchase the food products online. Students tend to rely mostly on the social media to find any information about food (Abdulahi, Samadi & Gharleghi, 2014). The consequence of using the social media amongst students was that they spend too much time looking up for information about food, where they can actually also use books to find information. There are many more pros and cons in the usage of social media to increase the popularity of the food. The other advantage was that social media can help to promote the food company, as the food

company can easily communicate with their consumers as targeted to any group (Akram & Kumar, 2018); this can easily spread the name of the food company on social media to any students at UCS. As for the bad review that has been spread on social media amongst UCS students, this will decrease the food popularity.

Conclusion

The results for this study have shown that social media does have an influence in increasing the popularity of the food. The type of social media and type of post chosen has also become an important factor in increasing the popularity of the food as well. In addition, there are many advantages and disadvantages of using social media in promoting the food. Social media has become one of the most important things to people especially to students as they can find any information they need through social media. According to Nunan, Sibai, Schivinski, and Christodoulides, (2018) social media is one of the communication phenomena today. Thus, using social media to increase the popularity of the food did help sellers increase the sale and popularity of their food products. There are also few common disadvantages of using social media such as the lack of security, internet addiction, information overload and also loss of social contact (Drahošováa & Balco, 2017). The food producers that use social media in increasing the popularity of the food must pay extra careful as it has both good and bad impacts for them.

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