

EXPLORING CUSTOMERS' ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOURS TOWARDS USING MOBILE MARKETING BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER VISITING RESTAURANTS IN SAUDI ARABIA

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Abstract: Contemporary tourism has seen the adoption of mobile applications to discover and market attractions such as restaurants and hotels, yet few academic studies focus on customer attitudes and behaviours towards using mobile marketing for restaurants in non-western cultures, including Saudi Arabia. The Saudi Arabian Government's announcement that the country's borders are opening to international tourists is a significant opportunity for hospitality businesses. This study provides insight into customers' attitudes and behaviours towards using mobile marketing channels for deciding on restaurants. Qualitative research using semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten Saudi customers who frequently utilise their smartphones to decide on restaurants. Thematic analysis identified positive attitudes towards the use of mobile marketing by restaurants, which included usefulness, ease of use, and time and money savings, while misleading information and massive advertising resulted in negative attitudes. Furthermore, the research highlights customers' main mobile marketing activities before, during, and after their visits to restaurants. This research provides initial findings identifying opportunities for businesses resulting from the adoption of these technologies.

Keywords: Restaurants selection, Instagram, Google Maps, TAM, social media.

Introduction

Customers, more than ever, are relying on their mobile phones rather than desktop and laptop computers to connect to the Internet. Research by Deloitte in 2015 found that smartphones influenced about US\$600 billion of in-store purchases, up from US\$159 billion in 2012 (Haims, 2015). According to the 2016 Communications and Information Technology Commission (CITC) of Individuals and Families Report prepared by the Saudi Arabian CITC and King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals, 71% of those surveyed said they no longer needed desktop or laptop computers (CITC, 2016). Most mobile phone owners have access to these devices all the time, enabling companies to communicate with their customers and potential customers anytime and anywhere. As a result, advertising on mobile devices has become even more popular than television (TV).

In 2018 in the US, \$76.17 billion was spent on mobile advertising compared with \$69.87 billion spent on TV advertising (eMarketer, 2018). Additionally, mobile advertising spending in the US is likely to exceed spending on all traditional media combined (eMarketer, 2018).

According to Kaplan (2011, p. 130), the definition of mobile marketing is "any marketing activity conducted through a ubiquitous network to which consumers are constantly connected using a personal mobile device". Mobile marketing allows companies to send offers to customers based on their location, together with relevant personalized suggestions and deals that might meet customers' individual requirements (Berman, 2016). All these features have a large influence on today's business environment, leading to marketing professionals focusing marketing spend on mobile efforts across all industries, including the hospitality industry.

The Saudi Arabian economy is moving away from its dependence on oil and supporting other industries, such as hospitality, which leads to a remarkable increase in the restaurant market. At the same time, the number of mobile phone users is significantly growing in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, this research seeks to explore customers' attitudes and behaviours towards the use of mobile marketing before, during and after visiting restaurants in Saudi Arabia.

Background of the Study and Research Questions

Fundamentally, mobile marketing is the marketing process that is performed through mobile phones, including mobile web, SMS messages, social media, and various mobile applications. This research project seeks to investigate the attitudes and behaviours of Saudi Arabian customers towards mobile marketing for restaurants. It is anticipated that the research outcomes will contribute to the knowledge about current mobile marketing in Saudi Arabia and will assist marketers in the tourism and hospitality industry in Saudi Arabia to improve their marketing performance. The following research questions will drive this study:

1. What are customers' attitudes towards the use of mobile marketing for restaurants in Saudi Arabia?
2. What is the usefulness of mobile marketing for customers' restaurant selection?
3. What kinds of mobile marketing interactions do customers engage in before, during, and after their visits to restaurants in Saudi Arabia?

Significance and Contribution

In spite of the fast growth of mobile marketing, studies on customer attitude and behaviour related to mobile marketing are limited, specifically, on customers' attitudes towards mobile marketing (Kushwaha & Agrawal, 2016). Several studies call for further research regarding the use of different mobile marketing

channels by customers in the hospitality industry (Patsiotis *et al.*, 2020). The potential of marketing opportunities using mobile channels has not been fully explored in the restaurant industry specifically (Mattila, 2004; Starkov, 2010; Kwon, 2013). There are limited studies which examine the influence of mobile marketing on restaurants' customers, and a lack of previous research on the influence of mobile marketing on restaurants' customers in Saudi Arabia. Accordingly, this research seeks to address that gap. Also, most of the previous research about customers' attitudes towards mobile marketing adopted a quantitative methodology (Karjaluoto & Terhi, 2007; Barutçu, 2007; Sultan *et al.*, 2009; Balasubramanian *et al.*, 2011; Alalwan *et al.*, 2018), which might produce a limited understanding of the issue. To understand consumer behaviour, this study adopts a qualitative methodology to seek the subjective opinions of individuals. As a result, it is expected that this study will offer theoretical and practical contributions.

In terms of its theoretical contribution, this study will reveal the Saudi Arabian customers' attitudes towards mobile marketing for restaurants. In addition, this research project will evaluate the usefulness of mobile marketing channels for customers when selecting restaurants in Saudi Arabia. Additionally, this study intends to show customers' interactions during the various decision-making stages; before, during, and after visiting restaurants in Saudi Arabia. The findings of this research will contribute to the current literature and knowledge on customers' attitudes and behaviours towards the use of mobile marketing, particularly in global markets. The practical contribution of this research will help marketers to design appropriate mobile marketing campaigns that will target mobile users. This is relevant as the number of mobile users now total 6.8 billion worldwide in 2019 and is expected to reach 7.33 billion in 2023 (Statista, 2020). Furthermore, there is a 2.7% increase in the number of Saudi Arabian mobile users, from 40.21 million users in 2017 to 41.31 million in 2018 (CITC, 2018). Concurrently, the Saudi Arabian Government

has announced that its borders are open to tourists beyond religious tourism. One of the features of modern life is that people, especially, tourists adopt new applications and technologies to look for information about attractions, such as restaurants, which can increase tourism growth (Zacarias *et al.*, 2015). There is extraordinary growth in the Saudi Arabian restaurant industry (MIC, 2019), and the hospitality industry provides the third largest contribution to the Saudi Arabian GDP (GASTAT, 2019). This research will help marketers exploit the opportunities in the hospitality sector, which have a high growth potential resulting from these new technologies adopted by tourism operators. The understanding of customers' attitudes and behaviours towards the use of mobile marketing will help marketers in the tourism and hospitality industry in Saudi Arabia improve their performance.

Literature Review

Mobile Marketing in Hospitality

The number of people using mobile phones is growing enormously. Mobile phones and their applications provide greater opportunities for businesses, more so than other channels, to reach customers who are searching for information about shopping, services or goods, or all of these activities combined (Strom *et al.*, 2014). Mobile marketing has many channels to combine old and new media (Ghaleno *et al.*, 2016). That gives mobile marketing an advantage over traditional advertising media, such as television (eMarketer, 2018).

The use of new technologies in the hospitality industry promises to improve its marketing performance (Balasubramanian *et al.*, 2011). Furthermore, the latest technology is convenient and allows customers to control the service experience (DiPietro *et al.*, 2012). Among the benefits of using different kinds of technologies in the hospitality sector, specifically restaurants, is increased customer satisfaction, which leads to an increase in revenue (Kimes, 2008). The mobile sector is

one of the newest and most important fields in marketing, and it has great influence on today's businesses. Restaurants that invest money and effort in more than one mobile marketing channel stand to improve their performance and profitability. According to international research company Deloitte Hospitality, in order to gain a competitive edge in future, hospitality corporations need to invest in technology, specifically websites and mobile technologies (DiPietro *et al.*, 2012).

Smartphones have changed several aspects of the hospitality industry. For example, American and other international travellers have used the mobile web to plan and make purchases for their travels (Starkov, 2010). As a result, hospitality companies have accelerated offerings of mobile applications to customers, allowing them to search and purchase products and services using their smartphones (Kwon, 2013). With the explosion of mobile marketing, companies are shifting to communicate directly with their existing and potential customers via mobile smart devices at a lower cost than traditional media channels (Danaher *et al.*, 2015).

Data indicate that mobile marketing is the highest priority for technical users as it has shown a high return on investment; 71% of salespeople think that mobile marketing is critical to their company; 58% of businesses surveyed have a dedicated mobile marketing team, and they believe that having a team of specialists in mobile marketing enables them to maximise the advantages of the platform (Gao *et al.*, 2020).

Attitudes Towards Mobile Marketing

An 'attitude' is defined by Ajzen (2005, p. 3) as "a disposition to respond favourably or unfavourably to an object, person, institution, or event". After the great improvements in mobile technologies, numerous firms recognized the potential of mobile marketing channels to contact their customers anywhere at any time (Laszlo, 2009). These improvements have

influenced and changed customers' attitudes and behaviours (Shankar & Balasubramanian, 2009). The attitude towards mobile marketing has shaped the favorable or unfavorable customers' evaluation of a mobile marketing campaign (Varnali, 2012). In order to understand customers' behaviours with regard to mobile marketing, it is important first to understand customers' positive and negative attitudes towards mobile marketing (Kushwaha & Agrawal, 2016).

Balasubramanian *et al.* (2011) found that in the context of Malaysia, there is an increase in customer acceptance of smartphone applications if information about a restaurant's products and promotions is provided. Barutçu (2007) studied the attitudes of Turkish consumers towards mobile marketing channels. He found that customers who are price-conscious are more likely to have positive attitudes towards mobile marketing channels. Sinkovics *et al.* (2012) researched consumer perceptions of mobile advertising based on samples from Austria and Japan. They found that some variables, such as a "good source of information" have a positive influence on customers' attitudes towards mobile advertising. Previous studies have found that customers have a positive attitude towards mobile marketing channels if they can perceive their usefulness (Barutçu, 2007; Balasubramanian *et al.*, 2011; Sinkovics *et al.*, 2012). One significant factor related to user-generated media is the usability or ease of use (Shao, 2009). Perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness are significant factors, which influence attitudes towards mobile marketing in the fast-food restaurant industry (Nazariet *et al.*, 2018).

Despite the majority of prior studies showed favourable customer attitude towards mobile marketing channels, other researchers discovered otherwise. Kushwaha and Agrawal (2016) investigated the impact of mobile marketing initiatives on customers' attitudes and behavioural outcomes. They noticed that mobile marketing initiatives had a significant negative influence on their sample. Furthermore, mobile

marketing has a more powerful impact on the group of customers with negative attitudes than on those with positive attitudes. The findings indicate that customers in this sample are very sensitive towards mobile marketing channels, indicated by the stronger negative attitudinal responses. Le and Nguyen (2014) explored the attitudes towards mobile advertising, specifically, mobile web display and mobile APP display advertising. They found that many customers do not have positive feelings towards advertising even though they cannot ignore the usefulness of mobile advertising. Saeed *et al.* (2013) studied consumer attitudes towards advertisements disseminated via mobile phones. They found that, generally, customers have a negative attitude towards advertisements appearing on mobiles, unless they have given advertisers their consent in advance. Previous studies have found that customers mostly seem to have a negative attitude towards mobile marketing channels even though they understand the usefulness of mobile marketing (Saeed *et al.*, 2013; Le & Nguyen, 2014; Kushwaha & Agrawal, 2016).

Perceived Usefulness of Mobile Marketing

Perceived usefulness is defined by Davis (1989, p. 320), as "the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would enhance his or her job performance". Mobile Internet services are available anywhere at any time without any boundaries, and this encourages customers to use mobile Internet services in their daily lives (Pousttchi & Goeke, 2011; Wong *et al.*, 2013). Several mobile technology researchers have claimed that if customers are convinced that mobile technologies are useful tools that can help them to be more productive, they will be much more accepting of these tools (Cheng & Huang, 2013; Park *et al.*, 2014; Alalwan *et al.*, 2018). Moreover, Alalwan *et al.* (2018) found that in regard to mobile Internet adoption in Saudi Arabia, perceived usefulness has a significant influence on the Saudi customers' intention to adopt mobile Internet services.

Perceived Ease of Use of Mobile Marketing

Perceived ease of use explains the extent to which a user believes that a system is free of effort (Davis *et al.*, 1989). Several travel and tourism studies have supported the influence of ease of use in the context of technology acceptance model (TAM) on attitudes (Mariani *et al.*, 2019). In other research contexts, Karjaluoto *et al.* (2010) found that ease of use influenced attitudes towards using mobile banking in Brazil. Li *et al.* (2017) studied the factors affecting current users' attitude towards e-auctions in China and found that perceived ease of use of e-auctions have a positive effect on Chinese users' attitudes towards e-auctions.

Consumers' Behaviour and Decision-making in Hospitality Industry

Peter *et al.* (1999) define consumer behaviour as a system behind consumers' activities and reasons for choosing, or not choosing, to purchase goods and services. The American Marketing Association defines consumer behaviour as "the dynamic interaction of affect, cognition, behaviour and the environment by which human beings conduct the exchange aspect of their lives" (as cited in Mattila, 2004, p. 449). There are core differences between goods and services. For example, services are characterised by intangibility, inseparability, heterogeneity, perishability, and lack of ownership (Williams, 2002). Taking these characteristics into account, consumers' decision-making processes in regard to services are more difficult compared to consumers' decision-making processes for goods. A consumer's decision-making journey involves multiple stages, which starts from the need-recognition stage passing through to the pre-purchase activities stages to the purchase decisions stage until the post-purchase activities stage (Yadav *et al.*, 2013). The hospitality industry has a lot of different service categories which have various consumption times, which start from several different situations, like drinking a coffee or eating a fast-food meal, to days or months staying at hotels (Williams, 2002). However, in the pre-purchase stage, the

customer may be searching for information about services or goods using the mobile web or a review app such as Yelp (Grewal *et al.*, 2016). There are a lot of customers uploading reviews with photos and videos on social media (Shah *et al.*, 2015). Also, mobile marketing can encourage customers' recognition of a need that leads them to purchase from stores near to them. Moreover, an advertisement from stores targeted to nearby customers might lead to unplanned purchasing (Grewal *et al.*, 2016). For example, same-day mobile push coupons are effective with consumers who are nearby while next-day coupons have more influence on consumers who are not nearby (Luo *et al.*, 2013). In the post-purchase stage, consumers are likely to use social media to express their view of purchases, which is an opportunity for marketers to target mobile advertisements to the consumer's friends and get their views (Grewal *et al.*, 2016). In general, consumers in the purchase stage are likely to weigh up the positives and negatives of purchasing a product, which is different from a consumer in the need-recognition stage (Troepe & Liberman, 2003).

Restaurants don't just offer products to satisfy customers' hunger. Some researchers believe that customers' need recognition in restaurants appears to be for celebrating occasions (Kivela, 1997; Mehta & Maniam, 2002). Customers would seek information about a restaurant if they think that there is the possibility that a restaurant would not meet their needs (Lutz & Reilly, 1974). Additionally, customers would search for information about a restaurant using their mobile phones before visiting the restaurant considering factors such as: Location, time, and social context (Teevan *et al.*, 2011). The most likely sources of information for customers are online sources and friends' and family's restaurant visiting experiences (Bei *et al.*, 2004). Positive Word-of-Mouth (PWOM) is very important and has great influence on customers' decisions in regard to restaurants (Longart, 2010). Additionally, positive electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM) affects restaurant visit intention (Popy & Bappy, 2020).

Theoretical Framework

Researchers have created and developed tools to measure and analyse the satisfaction of computer users (Legris *et al.*, 2003). Hence, it makes sense to turn to the efforts of psychologists who study satisfaction as feelings or attitudes towards factors concerning experiences (Bailey & Pearson, 1983). One of the most influential theories in this field is the TAM displayed in Figure 1, which was developed by Davis to explain why users accept or reject the use of technologies (Davis, 1989). TAM was built upon the theory of reasoned action (TRA), which was proposed by Fishbein and Ajzen in 1975 to predict the behavioural intentions of people in various situations (Legris *et al.*,

2003). TAM is a theoretical model that shows technology usage and adoption and considers the perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness as the most important factors to explain the use of a system (Legris *et al.*, 2003). Also, TAM offers a foundation for investigating the influence of external variables on feelings, attitudes, and intentions (Legris *et al.*, 2003). Several successful mobile marketing studies have used the TAM model in their research (Balasubramanian *et al.*, 2011; Nazari *et al.*, 2018; Chee *et al.*, 2018). TAM guides this study inquiry and clarifies the relationship among the variables. Ease of use and usefulness arising from the use of mobile marketing channels were considered the main factors which guide

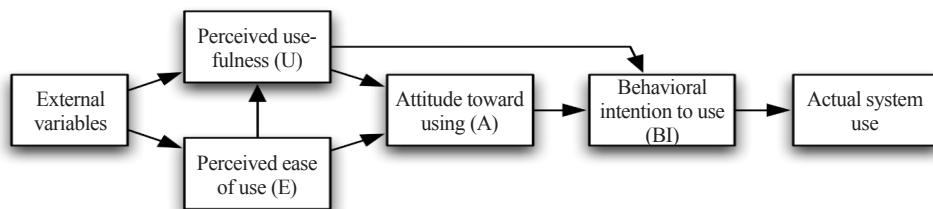


Figure 1: TAM Model
Source: (Davis *et al.*, 1989)

customers' attitudes. Then, attitudes impact the behavioural intention to use mobile marketing before, during, and after restaurants visits.

fully recognize the subjectivity of an individual about a situation he or she had experienced recently.

Methodology

Research Design

This study investigates a phenomenon that is based on people's feelings about an experience. A qualitative methodology using the phenomenology approach is adopted (Creswell, 2014). This study is conducted from an interpretivist perspective to explain consumers' experiences in relation to the use of mobile marketing channels in the restaurant sector. This perspective offers a comprehensive context and flexible framework for research (Saunders *et al.*, 2009), which helps to achieve a full understanding of the nature of the mobile marketing consumers' experiences. Moreover, using a qualitative methodology will help to

Sampling Technique and Study Population

Participants for this research are selected through purposive sampling. Purposive sampling allows researchers to collect very rich data from few targeted participants who are known to have experienced the studied phenomenon (Patton, 2014). In phenomenon research, 2 to 10 participants are considered to be a sample that can provide appropriate data for research (Boyd, 2001). The study sample comprises 10 Saudi Arabian consumers who own a smartphone and use it to make decisions about restaurants in Saudi Arabia. The participants were 4 females and 6 males. The sample ages range from 18 to 35 years old. The participants' narrow age group is because they are the main group with

technology accessibility in Saudi Arabia. They are from Saudi Arabia's main regions: The Eastern Region, Riyadh Region, and Mecca Region. Most of Saudi Arabia's population and major cities are located in these areas.

Data Collection and Analysis

To collect primary data, the researcher conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews via Skype with 10 Saudi Arabian consumers. Semi-structured interviews can use a group of themes and questions (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). This study uses open-ended questions, which allow participants to reflect on their recent restaurant experiences. Some of the interview questions were adopted from previous studies (Sultan *et al.*, 2009; da Silva *et al.*, 2018; Hwang, 2018). The participants' experiences and emotions were then analyzed thematically to establish and validate the study results. Thematic analysis is a method that helps to analyse, identify, and recognize themes in a set of research data, and this helps to organize and clarify them (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this study, the researcher used NVivo version 12 to manage the texts transcribed from the interviews and to code the data.

Results and Discussions

Customers' Attitudes Towards the Use of Mobile Marketing Channels for Restaurants

The findings revealed positive and negative attitudes towards mobile marketing channels.

Perceived Usefulness

Numerous participants considered mobile marketing very useful as it offered a lot of valuable information including customers' reviews and food images, which helped customers acquire a comprehensive brand image about a restaurant and to decide which restaurants to visit. Participant 2 mentioned five benefits of using mobile marketing regarding restaurants. "*Mobile marketing channels remind me of some restaurants that I know, provide*

customers' reviews, show online menus, offer food prices, and present restaurants and food pictures". (Participant 2, Male, aged 31-35).

Perceived Ease of Use

Several participants believed that mobile marketing facilitates the search for information when choosing a restaurant. Participant 9 mentioned that with mobile marketing, it is quick and easy to obtain specific information about a restaurant and its food. "*Mobile marketing channels are easy to use, and they offer a great and organized way of searching that always leads me to what I want.*" (Participant 9, Female, aged 18-25).

In this same regard, this is a positive means of increasing customer acceptance via smartphone applications that provide information about restaurants' products and promotions (Balasubramanian *et al.*, 2011). Moreover, customers will have a positive influence on some variables since a good source of information can shape customers' attitudes towards mobile marketing (Sinkovics *et al.*, 2012). Also, ease of use is considered an important attribute of attitudes in user-generated media (Shao, 2009) and consumers' attitudes towards mobile marketing in the context of restaurants (Nazari *et al.*, 2018).

Misleading Information

Some participants have negative attitudes regarding the use of mobile marketing channels for restaurants. Their main concern was misleading information. According to Participant 6, some reviews are fake or the restaurant is overrated, leading customers to have high expectations which a restaurant cannot meet. "*Sometimes, the information on mobile marketing channels may mislead me. Unfortunately, some restaurant managers and a few customers take and edit pictures of a restaurant's meals and its atmosphere then uploaded them. That makes the pictures way better than reality resulting in high customers' expectations. When these high expectations are*

not met, customers would be disappointed and unsatisfied." (Participant 6, Female, aged 26-30).

Numerous Ads

Another factor that leads participants to have negative attitudes is the numerous ads which made some participants unwilling to receive restaurant information and deals through their mobiles. For example, Participant 4 said he was not willing to receive information and deals from restaurants through SMS, emails, and etc. He thinks that a high volume of advertisements is indicative of a failing restaurant. *"I think that restaurants that do a lot of ads all the time are covering their failures in providing good quality food and services by finding another way to attract customers. As a result, as soon as these kinds of restaurants stop advertising themselves; customers stop going to them. I believe that restaurants that offer excellent food do not need to do a lot of ads unless it is a new restaurant. For example, Albiak does few ads and continues to maintain its food quality and services resulting in a lot of customers visiting the restaurant branches every day."* (Participant 4, Male, aged 26-30).

In regard to the same issues, Kushwaha and Agrawal (2016) investigated the impact of mobile marketing initiatives on customers' attitudes and behavioural outcomes. They found that mobile marketing channels have a significant negative influence on their sample. Customers have a negative attitude towards advertisements appearing on mobiles (Saeed *et al.*, 2013). Moreover, customers seem to have a negative attitude of mobile marketing channels even though they understand mobile marketing usefulness and ease of use (Saeed *et al.*, 2013; Le & Nguyen, 2014; Kushwaha & Agrawal, 2016).

The Usefulness of Mobile Marketing for Restaurant Selection

Saving Money

Numerous participants found mobile marketing useful for saving money when they are choosing a restaurant. According to the participants,

saving money was not limited to using discount coupons; and included thrift measures such as limiting spending on an unpleasant experience and by planning a budget. These two practises depend on information from reviews, online menu, apps, and etc. For example, Participant 8 said that mobile marketing channels could save him money because he could find out meal prices online. Knowing the prices before going to a restaurant helps customers to plan a budget. *"Online menus help me to decide what I am going to order in advance, and how much I am going to spend. This information would help me save money."* (Participant 8, Male, aged 26-30). Participant 3 said that Google Maps' price group ranking is very useful for saving money when selecting a restaurant. *"Google Maps as high \$\$\$, middle \$\$, average \$. I will not go to the high-price restaurants and chose to go to middle and average price restaurants, which saves me money."* (Participant 3, Male, aged 31-35).

Participant 7 believed that the information a customer obtained from reviews saves money by helping her to avoid spending on an unsatisfactory restaurant experience. *"The reviews help a customer to minimize (the chances of) going to a restaurant that provides poor quality food. This saves the customer from losing money on an unpleasant experience."* (Participant 7, Female, aged 26-30).

Participants stated that they searched for specific information for the purpose of deciding on a restaurant. This is consistent with recent research that found that customers searched for information about services or goods using the mobile web or a review app such as Yelp (Grewal *et al.*, 2016). Moreover, price-conscious customers are more likely to have favourable attitudes towards mobile marketing channels because of their utility in saving money (Barutçu, 2007).

Saving Time

Many participants expressed that mobile marketing is time-saving because it offers a very organized way of searching for restaurants in Saudi Arabia by offering location and GPS

information. Participant 10 explained that: *"I do not need to spend a lot of time asking people about a restaurant suggestion. I just have to open a food application to search in an organized way by categories, such as food type (seafood) and specific location (in nearby locations), and that would help me find what I look for in a very short time."* (Participant 10, Male, aged 21-25).

Mobile marketing channels offering information about locations and GPS was found by participants to be one of the most important means of saving time. Several interviewees stated that the GPS was valuable in helping them decide on a restaurant. Participant 8 explained that he used the GPS service provided by Google Maps to find restaurants nearby. *"Instead of going out searching for a good nearby restaurant, I can search for a good restaurant before going out using Google Maps."* (Participant 8, Male, aged 26-30).

Some interviewees mentioned that they use mobile marketing channels to help them find not only a restaurant's location, but also how long it would take them to get there. In this regard, Participants 3 and 6 reported that: *"Google Maps helps me go to a restaurant by guiding me to the shortest and least crowded roads, which saves my time."* (Participant 3, Male, aged 31-35). *"Google Maps can prevent me from getting lost while going to a restaurant that saves my time and my car's gas."* (Participant 6, Female, aged 26-30).

In the same regard, customers are more likely to immediately use the information they find during mobile local searches (Teevan *et al.*, 2011). Via the utilization of mobile marketing for restaurant selection, consumers can speedily choose restaurants via an efficient search, thereby saving time. Mobile marketing can encourage customers to purchase from nearby stores (Grewal *et al.*, 2016). Hence, readily available information regarding restaurant location and GPS is considered by participants to be very useful when they are deciding on a restaurant.

Consumers' Behaviours Before their Visiting Experience to Restaurants

It has been identified by many studies that customers search for information about a potential restaurant before going there for the purpose of making sure that the restaurant will meet their expectations and needs (Lutz & Reilly, 1974). Furthermore, customers search for information about a restaurant using their mobile phones before visiting the restaurant (Teevan *et al.*, 2011). Participants in this study stated that their main goal when doing an online search for a restaurant is to look for information on location, working hours, photos of meals, and the décor. Some make lists of restaurants, read customers' reviews, and look for restaurants on the sites of social media influencers. The restaurant location is the most important piece of information that most of the participants look for. Some interviewees indicated that most of the time they search for nearby restaurants. Participant 3 mentioned that location is the decisive factor when he is deciding on a restaurant. *"Before visiting a restaurant, I would check how long it is going to take me to arrive at a restaurant using Google Maps. If it takes more than 45 minutes, I will probably search for another restaurant."* (Participant 3, Male, aged 31-35).

Some participants use mobile web and social media before visiting a restaurant to search for restaurants' working hours. Participant 8 considered restaurants' working hours as the first item of information he would look for. *"The first thing I would do before visiting a restaurant is that I would search in Google Maps for working hours."* (Participant 8, Male, aged 26-30).

Several participants highlighted the importance of seeing images of food and restaurant décor. Furthermore, they mentioned that photos helped them form expectations about the food, level of service, and the restaurant in general. Some participants indicated that they would search for images on the web, specifically Google, and on social media, specifically, Instagram. Participant 5 mentioned that food photos were key to knowing the signature dishes

at restaurants. *“Before visiting a restaurant, I would look for food pictures to find out the most popular dish at that restaurant.”* (Participant 5, Female, aged 26-30).

From the interviews, it emerged that some of the participants used mobile marketing channels to search for a list or to compile a list of restaurants to visit. Participant 1 stated that he obtained a list of the 10 best restaurants in a specific location from Google Maps or TripAdvisor, and then chose one from that list. Participant 10 explained that before visiting a restaurant, he searched for restaurants on social media and compiled his own list. *“Before visiting a restaurant, I would search in social media, especially, at food influencer accounts on Instagram, such as The Eastern Province Restaurant, in order to create a list of three restaurants to choose from.”* (Participant 10, Male, aged 21-25).

Several participants indicated that they make decisions about restaurants based on the recommendations and reviews offered by previous customers. One of the ways by which they search for customers' reviews is to search for the restaurant's name in Instagram hashtags. Participant 1 usually reads restaurant reviews posted by previous customers' as this helps him to know what to expect from a restaurant. *“Before visiting a restaurant, I would read people's reviews on that restaurant. These social media reviews would set my expectations of a restaurant, which assist me to make a decision.”* (Participant 1, Male, aged 31-35).

Some participants mentioned that before visiting a restaurant, they always searched on social media, specifically, influencers' accounts on Instagram to decide on a restaurant. Participant 9 stated that her choice of restaurant is based on the information that is on the food influencers' Instagram accounts. *“Before visiting a restaurant, I would open a Saudi Arabian food influencer's Instagram account looking for a restaurant.”* (Participant 9, Female, aged 18-20).

Prior to visiting restaurants, participants utilised Google Maps, TripAdvisor, Instagram, or Snapchat. A restaurant list is one of the

Google Maps and TripAdvisor features. Additionally, Google Maps' GPS technology is the preferred platform of some participants over other channels. The information about restaurants shared on Instagram and Snapchat by social media influencers has a major impact on some participants' decision to use Instagram or Snapchat before visiting restaurants. In discussing the above outcome, it was found that customers' use of mobile marketing channels to search for information before visiting a restaurant has a strong influence on their choice. In terms of information, online sources, including mobile marketing channels, and friends' and family's restaurant experiences are important sources of information (Bei et al., 2004).

Consumers' Behaviours During their Visiting Experience to Restaurants

Searching for Information Before Ordering

The process of searching for information about restaurants using mobile marketing channels does not stop with a decision on choice of restaurant. Some patrons conduct a further search for the best food before ordering. Several participants, while in their chosen restaurant, use their phones to search for information for the purpose of deciding on a dish. These interviewees stated that they search for food photos on the restaurants' online menu, social media, and apps trying to find the most popular dish. For example, Participant 1 searches first for the online menu. Then, he searches on social media in order to make his decision. *“First, I check the online menu. After that, I would try to find the most popular dish and the restaurant signature order using social media.”* (Participant 1, Male, aged 31-35).

Based on the above, it can be understood that customers use mobile marketing channels to search for information and photos prior to ordering meals while they are at restaurants. Moreover, the WOM opinions conveyed with mobile marketing channels are very useful for customers when making decisions concerning restaurants (Longart, 2010).

Uploading Photos on Social Media

Several participants stated that they have taken photos and uploaded them to their social media accounts while at a restaurant. Participant 6 reported that she used social media to fill the waiting time between ordering and eating. *"If I like a restaurant's atmosphere, I would take a picture and upload it to my social media accounts while waiting for my order."* (Participant 6, Female, aged 26-30).

Many customers do not stop using their smartphones when they are in a restaurant, and carry on taking and uploading photos on social media. Shah *et al.* (2015) found that the number of people who take photos and videos and upload them on social media has increased significantly.

While visiting restaurants, participants used the following marketing channels: Google Maps, Twitter, Instagram, Swarm, and Snapchat. Social media, particularly Instagram is the most used channel for most of the participants at this point of their visits. This is because it enables consumers to quickly access online menus, food pictures, and reviews, which assists them in finding the most popular orders and signature meals. Additionally, several participants stated that they take photos of the food, atmosphere, and themselves and upload them to their social media profiles.

Did Not Utilise Any Mobile Marketing Channels

A few participants said they did not use any of the mobile marketing channels while visiting a restaurant. Participant 8 explained that he did all the required searching beforehand, so, there would be no need to search again. He would rather enjoy the experience. *"I did search for a good restaurant before visiting the restaurant. In the meantime, I would rather enjoy the experience and communicate with my family or my friends rather than holding my phone all the time."* (Participant 8, Male, aged 26-30).

Consumers' Behaviour After their Visiting Experience to Restaurants

Sharing Information

Some participants in this study reported that their main reason for using mobile marketing after visiting restaurants is to share information. The three most common ways by which participants shared information were posting reviews publicly, sending opinions, and recommendations to close people only, and contacting restaurants management directly.

Several participants stated that they post reviews using one of mobile marketing channels. Participant 8 stated that he posts a review and a photo that explains his experience and ranks the restaurant accordingly using Google Maps. Moreover, he said he would post a review whether or not he had a pleasant experience at a restaurant. *"I would share a picture with a review on Google Maps no matter whether I was satisfied with my experience."* (Participant 8, Male, aged 26-30).

As is shown in this section and in the perceived usefulness section, participants' main reason for posting reviews was to create a database to help them decide on restaurants. Recent researchers have found that reviews can influence customers' purchase decisions (Grewal *et al.*, 2016).

Several participants stated that they were not willing to post reviews on a public forum. However, they were willing to share with family and friends their opinions about their restaurant experiences. For example, Participant 4 explained that he does not like to share his restaurant reviews publicly, although he would share them with people close to him. *"It is not my personality to share reviews on Google Maps or social media. However, if like the food, I would tell my close friends about it using Snapchat or WhatsApp."* (Participant 4, Male, aged 26-30).

In this same regard, it has been identified that WOM including e-WOM through customers' reviews, is another information source that has great influence on customer

decisions about restaurants (Longart, 2010; Popy & Bappy, 2020). Furthermore, Bei *et al.* (2004) found that one of the most significant sources of information about restaurants is the reported experiences of friends and family.

Some participants said that if they had very pleasant and satisfying experiences that exceeded their expectations, they would use mobile marketing channels, specifically social media, to contact restaurants. For example, Participant 5 stated that if she was very happy with a restaurant, the food in particular, she would use social media to contact and thank the restaurant for providing a very satisfactory experience. *“If I was amazed by the food, I might visit the restaurant page on Instagram and thank them.”* (Participant 5, Female, aged 26-30).

On the other hand, some participants stated that if they had an unpleasant experience that did not meet their minimal expectations, they would contact the restaurants’ management via mobile marketing channels. Participant 6 stated that she would report her experience to the restaurant’s management using social media if her experience was extremely disappointing: *“If I was very disappointed about my experience, I would contact the restaurant management using Instagram direct messages.”* (Participant 6, Female, aged 26-30).

The marketing channels used by the participants after visiting restaurants are Google Maps, Instagram, Snapchat, and WhatsApp. Following restaurants visits, the majority of participants would utilise these channels to share their experiences by posting reviews publicly with other customers or sending them to family and friends. Finally, Google Maps and Instagram are found to be the most commonly utilised channels for the purpose of selecting restaurants by customers in Saudi Arabia.

Not Sharing Information at All

Several interviewees reported that they did not utilise mobile marketing channels after their visits to restaurants. They believe that it is not important for them to engage in any mobile

marketing activities after their restaurant experience. For example, Participant 7 said sharing reviews via mobile marketing channels was not an important activity for her. Since no one has asked her to undertake any mobile marketing activity, she does not do so: *“No one asks me to post a review, and I do not think it is an important thing to do.”* (Participant 7, Female, aged 26-30).

Limitations of Study

While this study has contributed to identifying the attitudes and behaviours of Saudi Arabian customers in terms of mobile marketing for restaurants, there were some limitations. This research adopted qualitative approach based on in-depth interviews with a small sample size compared to quantitative research that tends to have larger samples and may be more generalisable to the population. Also, this study focused on the customers’ attitudes and behaviours towards the use of mobile marketing for restaurants, and is limited to only one country, Saudi Arabia. Finally, this research was conducted from the perspective of customers; the restaurant management’s view was not considered.

Conclusion

The main objective of this study is to investigate customers’ attitudes towards restaurants’ mobile marketing channels that customers engage in before, during and after their visits to restaurants in Saudi Arabia. The findings show that Saudi customers have both positive and negative attitudes towards mobile marketing for restaurants in Saudi Arabia. Saving time and saving money emerged as the two main factors that Saudi customers considered when selecting restaurants using mobile marketing channels. Furthermore, customers’ main mobile marketing activities before visiting restaurants may involve searching for information about restaurants’ locations and opening hours, seeking images of meals and restaurants’ décor, making lists of restaurants, reading customers’

reviews, and looking for restaurants on social media influencers' accounts. The outcomes of this study show that customers' core mobile marketing activities when visiting restaurants involve searching for information before ordering and uploading photos on social media. Finally, the results show that customers' mobile marketing activities after visiting restaurants are posting reviews on a public platform, sharing experiences with close people, and contacting restaurants' management. This study has contributed to the understanding of customers' attitudes and behaviours towards restaurants' mobile marketing channels, which will help restaurant managers in Saudi Arabia improve their marketing performance, thereby, increasing the number of customers choosing their restaurants for a dining experience.

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