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# Social Media and Its Impact on Users' Decision Making to Visit a Fine Dining Restaurant

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**R·I·T**

**Social Media and Its Impact on Users' Decision**

**Making to Visit a Fine Dining Restaurant**

By

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A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Science in Service Leadership and  
Innovation

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### Abstract

This study focused on exploring what factors and social media tactics are important to consider when creating an effective social media strategy for a fine dining restaurant in Zagreb for Facebook and Instagram. The important factors to consider when creating an effective social media strategy and useful social media tactics to use for a fine dining restaurant in Zagreb were defined. The study used a qualitative research approach and in-depth research questions. Ten participants shared their personal experiences connected to social media and fine dining restaurants. Fifty percent of the participants were experts in marketing and the food industry who provided the study with in-depth results. The main factors discovered tied to social media marketing and social media strategies that could motivate participants to visit a fine dining restaurant in Zagreb were: quality photos and videos, special offers, positive word of mouth, social media tactics, price, emotions and reasons to visit (enjoyment, business, recommendations, and curiosity). A combination of the most effective social media tactics and fine dining restaurant needs and wants of the participants are discussed.

*Keywords: fine dining restaurant, Zagreb, social media, decision making, social media marketing*

**Table of Contents**

Abstract.....	3
Introduction .....	6
Research Problem .....	6
Review of Past Studies and Deficiencies .....	6
Significance of the Study.....	8
Problem Statement .....	8
Research Questions .....	9
Literature Review .....	10
The Importance of Social Media Marketing .....	11
Social Media Tactics .....	14
Creating Positive Word of Mouth .....	19
Positive Effects of Using Social Media for Your Restaurant.....	23
What Attracts Customers to Fine Dining Restaurants.....	24
Conclusion of the Literature Review .....	26
Methodology .....	27
Research Design .....	27
Strategy of Inquiry .....	28
Participants .....	29
Data Collection .....	32
Ethical Considerations .....	34
Reliability and Validity .....	35
Data Analysis .....	35

Role of the Researcher .....	37
Results .....	40
Visual Quality Content .....	40
Special Offers .....	43
Positive Word of Mouth .....	44
Social Media Tactics .....	46
Price .....	48
Emotions and Reasons to Visit .....	49
Discussions/Recommendations .....	51
Limitations and Future Directions .....	59
References.....	62
Appendix A: Interview questions.....	69
Appendix B: Interview questions with data collected and explained .....	75

## **Social Media and Its Impact on Users' Decision Making To Visit a Fine Dining Restaurant**

### **Research Problem**

Have you ever scrolled down your Facebook or Instagram feed, seen an interesting post, liked it and just kept scrolling? If you use social media, you most likely have done this. Are you overwhelmed with everyday ads, marketing, and day to day information in general? Social media can be exhausting to our minds. Typically users reach out to social media for entertainment, but sometimes being constantly barraged with advertisements and hard selling ads tends to push the audience away. According to Fox (2016), customers have become sceptic of marketing and also only share information that is useful to them. Restaurants should create interesting content that is appealing to the audience rather than just advertise to them (Fox, 2016). For example, create a social media post that includes a joke, a quote, a blog post, a contest – some type of content that can trigger users to relate to the restaurant's social media post (Fox, 2016). This means that users have been intrigued and that the restaurant succeeded in catching the users' attention and connecting to their customers, instead of just advertising their products to them (Fox, 2016). If users can benefit from the restaurant's post such as, getting a laugh from it, being able to relate to it or learning something useful, they will most likely reach out to the brand more often because they will feel an emotional connection rather than being over advertised (Fox, 2016).

### **Review of Past Studies and Deficiencies**

According to Barrett (2016), developing a sincere customer relationship by motivating your audience to engage in conversation, using more video content and using user-generated content (content created by users that is connected to your brand or products) are just a few of the best social media tactics for attracting customers' attention on social media platforms.

Maintaining a quality relationship with your customers rather than hard core advertising your product brings businesses many benefits, such as positive word of mouth and higher sales (Fox, 2016). According to Kim, Koh, Cha, and Lee (2015), social media has a positive effect on businesses that know how to use it correctly.

It is important for businesses to have a good relationship with their customers on social media pages because these pages are the “mirror” of their companies. They present their service, care, personality, offers and basically who they are, what they do and how well they do it. Every day is a chance for companies to improve their image and gain more new customers or lose customers based on how much effort they put into social media management (Fox, 2016). Social media is essential for businesses today because customers explore their options on Facebook and Instagram. If a hotel or restaurant is not active on these social media platforms it is equal to the idea that they do not exist in the business world (Aaker & Smith, 2010).

Customers’ visits to restaurants’ social media platforms should motivate them to visit. However, if they receive bad customer service right at the start of their pre-purchase stage, they will most likely eliminate that restaurant as one of their options (Aaker & Smith, 2010). On the other hand, if a restaurant can build a relationship with their followers (customers), keep them entertained and constantly remind them about the restaurant then they will most likely decide to visit the restaurant (Song & Yoo, 2016). Past studies showed that social media marketing is beneficial for companies that use it wisely and effectively (Kim, et al., 2015). They discovered what types of social media tactics are useful for engaging followers (Barrett, 2016).

### **Significance of the Study**

This study explored what factors and social media tactics are important to consider when creating an effective social media strategy for a fine dining restaurant in Zagreb for Facebook and Instagram. The proposed research provided information from past studies that mentioned the advantages of using social media marketing for restaurants and other businesses if used correctly. The study could also help the reader understand the importance of social media marketing, what the most effective social media tactics are, and the positive effects it has had on sales and why people are attracted to visiting fine dining restaurants. Since fine dining restaurants are a specific market, this study aimed to explore what types of social media content, tactics and overall factors were important to consider when creating an effective social media strategy for fine dining restaurants in Zagreb.

This study also focused on exploring the needs and wants of customers of fine dining restaurants in Zagreb and what type of content is essential in creating a quality post that can turn a lead into a real life customer. Social media is a great tool that helps businesses/restaurants approach their customers easier, faster and more effectively than ever (Business Review Australia, 2014). The result of this study could advance the knowledge of fine dining restaurant owners and social media marketers regarding how they can use the benefits of social media marketing to its utmost extent to attract customers specifically to fine dining restaurants in Zagreb, which has not yet been discovered in previous studies.

### **Problem Statement**

Social media is the fastest, most affordable and effective way of marketing to customers today (Business Review Australia, 2014). It has turned into the new digital version of “word of mouth” and has become an essential part of the path to success for businesses worldwide (Business Review Australia, 2014). Due to the high use of social media in business, social media

users have been spammed with ads on Facebook and Instagram daily and it has become challenging for brands to stand out on social media platforms. While social media platforms provided opportunities for new customers and sales, on the other hand, they also required businesses to pay for ads (such as Facebook and Instagram). Businesses needed to pay to receive results and reach as many users as possible. Even with amazing ads, sometimes people are just not interested. Consumers today know when they are being marketed to and they are not attracted to ads, especially if prices are high or if they are not interested in the product. This study aimed to find out how companies can reach their customers attention and motivate their interest to visit a fine dining restaurant in Zagreb despite all of the ads that they receive daily. The participants for this research were foodies, people who enjoy dining at restaurants, drinking wine and are in the age range of 25 – 35. According to Hutchinson (2017), most Instagram users are the age of 35 and under while most Facebook users vary from 18 – 49. This is the reason why the age range was 25 - 35. The participants were mostly from the area of Zagreb and people who love food and wine. All ten participants enjoy eating out at delicious restaurants, one participant is a wine owner, one is a restaurant owner and one is a sommelier as well as a PR/marketing agency owner. One participant has worked as a waiter in restaurants. One of the participants was a well-known food critique. They all have two things in common – they love enjoying quality food and wine and are active on Facebook and Instagram.

### **Research Questions**

The research question being explored is: What factors and social media tactics are important to consider when creating an effective social media strategy for a fine dining restaurant in Zagreb? Sub research questions are: What will make customers actually visit the fine dining restaurant rather than just liking a post?

### **Literature Review**

The following literature shows what best practices other businesses and restaurants have experienced worldwide to attract customers. The purpose of finding these best practices was to learn what worked best for other restaurants and businesses and to see whether participants of this study would have similar answers. The following literature also helped the researcher to create unique and consistent research questions for the participants with the purpose of finding greater, in-depth answers on whether social media can effect decision making of potential customers of fine dining restaurants in Zagreb (Noel, Vinodol, Dubravkin put, Pod Zidom Bistro & Wine Bar, Ristorante Carpaccio) and how.

The literature review focuses on four areas: social media tactics, creating positive word of mouth, the positive outcome of using social media to promote business/a restaurant and what attracts people to fine dining restaurants. The literature explains what social media strategies were effective and what social media tactics attracted customers. These four topics are connected to the study because they give solid background on what has worked best for other restaurants and businesses that have used social media marketing. The literature that focuses on the topic of social media tactics explains what tactics have been found to be effective and which ones have resulted in high social media engagement with customers that lead to more sales. Many of the literature references also explained the importance of positive word of mouth and how social media has become the new form of online word of mouth. The literature explained why and how people have perceived certain companies as ones that they can trust and be loyal to, that they would visit and recommend through social media channels such as Facebook and Instagram.

In today's world, most people know that using social media for your business is good and positive. However, the following literature will explain how companies have measured their

results of social media campaigns and the positive outcomes that come from them to businesses and restaurant owners. Finally, the business of fine dining is explained through the following literature review and it focuses on what attracts customers to visit specifically fine dining restaurants and what factors have helped them decide whether they should visit a fine dining restaurant again. This study explored to whether social media marketing can have an impact on social media users' decision making to visit a fine dining restaurant in Zagreb and what type of content and factors could motivate them to visit.

### **The Importance of Social Media Marketing – Cheap, Fast, Reliable, Powerful**

**Low cost and beneficial.** Remember billboards, TV ads, newspaper ads and similar? Traditional ways of marketing are now slowly disappearing due to the low cost and high effectiveness of social media marketing (Whiting & Deshpande, 2016), (Bennett, 2017). According to Alhabash and Ma (2017), “about three quarters of Internet users report having a Facebook account”. Alhabash and Ma (2017) stated:

Instagram has over 400 million active monthly users who shared over 40 billion pictures, with an average of 3.5 billion daily likes for >80 million photos shared daily on the site. More than half of young adults (18–29 years old) report using Instagram, thus making them the largest group of Instagram users. (para. 7)

What better way to advertise than a place where most people are active? According to Bennett (2017), social media marketing has become the most efficient marketing strategy for companies. It is low-cost and allows businesses to connect to their customers and develop a relationship which is very important. For only a few dollars, businesses can reach over a thousand people, target people by interests, location, and age on Facebook. Instagram is connected to Facebook and allows businesses to have the same ad on their Instagram page as well.

**Large impact on decision making in the customers' pre-purchase stage.** According to Song and Yoo (2016), social media has had a large impact on customers' purchasing decisions in the pre-purchasing phase. Travelers use social media before they visit a destination, during their stay and after (Song & Yoo, 2016). Developing a relationship with your customers is important in the pre-purchasing phase (Song & Yoo, 2016). According to Song and Yoo (2016, p. 93), customers who use social media are influenced by the functionality of using social media which provides them with quick information, fast service and shared experiences where they can see how other people enjoyed a restaurant or travel destination by viewing other people's comments, pictures, videos and reviews. They are also influenced by discounts, special deals, free coupons and amusing posts that provide them with entertainment and fun. Their study showed that users were least motivated by psychological and social influences such as feeling a belonging, trust or sense of identification.

**Connecting to customers.** Bennett's (2017) study is about how small restaurant businesses use social media for marketing strategies. According to Bennett (2017), social media marketing is used to increase sales, brand awareness and positive word of mouth. It is used to attract customers and increase food purchases at restaurants. Restaurant owners used social media channels "to post pictures, videos, promote community events, advertise daily specials, and post the restaurant's menu" (Bennett, 2017, p. 26) which increased their sales by 54% (Bennett, 2017, p. 70). According to Bennett (2017), social media allows restaurants to easily reach their customers and send them marketing messages. Electronic word of mouth and customer reviews increase brand awareness (Bennett, 2017). According to Bennett (2017), social media marketing can help increase sales, allows restaurant owners to easily connect and communicate with customers and raises brand awareness for their restaurants. Bennett's (2017)

study found that social media marketing had a significantly positive impact on restaurant performance. While traditional marketing is a one-way street telling customers what you want them to hear, social media marketing is a multilane highway giving users a chance to say their opinion about products and services (Bruce & Solomon, 2013). This gives businesses a chance to find out what they need to improve and allows customers to be proactive in co-creation rather than just taking what is given. This can lead to innovation and growth, rather than stagnation (Hajli, Shanmugam, Papagiannidis, Zahay & Richard, 2017). Building a level of trust with consumers will help marketers grow their business faster than those who only advertised to consumers (Liang, 2013). Enterprises and consumers develop loyalty and trust through social media marketing (Kim et al, 2015). Social media is almost like a virtual food market; customers come to the market and have tons of choices.

Customers explore and see who they would like to buy from, who they can trust the most, whose food looks the most quality and what type of service they can expect to receive from the restaurant (Liu, Li, Ji, North and Yang, 2017). Social media provides users with options and businesses should take advantage of that position and create the best possible brand image, provide top service and treat their customers with care (Weintraub, 2012). According to Kim, et al. (2015), social media has a positive impact on brands or companies. Kim et al. (2015) stated, “Especially for small business operators in the restaurant industry, social media provides low-cost advertising to increase market share and boost restaurant sales”. However, what is being explored in this study is what social media tactics can attract people to fine dining restaurants in Zagreb. Before revealing what the participants of this study believe, let us take a look at what experts from past studies believe to be true for restaurants and businesses in general.

### **Social Media Tactics**

**User-generated content.** There are many social media tactics out there such as, videos, live-videos, contests and more. Some are consistently effective and a few are just passing trends. According to Cutrone (2015), user-generated content is one of the most effective ways of gaining trust from your followers on social media. User-generated content is tied to trust because it is easier for people to trust another person's experience rather than what the brand is trying to sell to them. In other words, pictures, videos and text that other customers have posted to the brand's social media page (user-generated content) are used as confirmation to other users' that these customers were satisfied with the brand, service, product and/or experience. This assures the customer that is still found in the decision making phase to either become a customer of the brand or business or not (Cutrone, 2015). Customers trust other users' experiences more than the brand's photos, videos or words. Followers are more likely to purchase something from a business if they see that others have been satisfied. For instance, users could view a fine dining restaurant in Zagreb and be debating whether it would be worth visiting or not. If the fine dining restaurant's social media pages have many visitor photos showing that they were satisfied, this would most likely motivate the people watching to visit and also increase online positive word of mouth (the overall picture of the restaurant). Users would be more likely to be attracted to visiting that restaurant. However, if the users only saw pictures that the restaurant created, then there could be a possibility that they could be sceptical and give up on visiting the place due to uncertainty or search for more information and feedback before making their decision.

**Encourage communication and engagement with customers.** A few social media tactics that could help companies enhance their image and engagement on social media channels are: showing behind the scenes moments, answering customer complaints, beginning a conversation and using more video content (Barrett, 2016). According to Barrett (2016), the key

to gaining new customers is engaging in conversation with them, motivating communication and presenting the restaurant in its best light with amazing pictures and content. However, sometimes even amazing content needs to be filled with background meaning or personal fulfilment for users. Companies should mention the benefit that users are receiving from reading their posts. For example, companies can start their posts with a question or include humorous content for the purpose of differentiating themselves from the usual advertisements that users see on social media and in their everyday lives (Aaker & Smith, 2010). According to Aaker and Smith (2010), it would also be a good idea to talk about topics that have nothing to do with sales. For instance, companies can mention a community or worldwide event, just to show customers or users that their focus is not exclusively on the company, its products or profit. Connecting to the audience on an emotional level and creating relationships with users will motivate the audience to reach out to the companies more, pay attention to their social media posts, and remind the users of their brands, and products more often (Aaker & Smith, 2010). It is similar to receiving a birthday discount in the mail, the more the companies think about their customers and pay attention to them, the more their customers will think about and pay attention to them.

**Video content.** Due to the overload of information that people receive in today's world both online and offline, video content is a clear and simple way to communicate a message and grab the users' attention (Gamble, 2016). According to Gamble (2016, p. 47), color visuals increase users' willingness to read by 80%. People do not have time to read articles anymore and are only interested in the main ideas. People can remember 80% of the content that they see and only 20% of what they read (Gamble, 2016, p. 47). Videos motivate users because they usually tell a story, contain beautiful pictures or animations and are short and to the point (Gamble, 2016). Videos can also improve users' transfer of learning by 80% and the brain processes

visuals 60,000 times faster in the brain (Gamble, 2016, p. 47). Watching videos on Facebook and Instagram have become the way that we perceive the world today. It is the fastest and most effective way to learn and discover new things. It replaces old TV ads and can be targeted on Facebook for low cost.

**Connecting to customers.** Nokia for instance, knows that having a good relationship with customers' results in more sales. For example, they delivered personal experiences to their consumers and gained their trust. They focused, on maintaining conversation with them and always looked for future opportunities of communication with existing and new followers (Holloman, 2016). One example would be: a few Nokia employees created Nokia Follow Friday (#FF) on Twitter during a social media team day in Finland. Each Friday, people recommended people to follow along with the #FF tag on their tweets. Originally, they were supposed to spend the day being graffiti artists, but at the end, they posted the graffiti to Twitter and announced the first Nokia Follow Friday which is now a tradition (Holloman, 2016, p. 47). This showed that they constantly sought new opportunities to connect to their followers and gain new ones.

According to Jackson (2016), sharing recipes is one of the top keys to catching the hearts of restaurant customers. This allows customers to enter the restaurant's comfort zone and therefore the restaurant is being transparent with its customers. In return, customers feel close to the brand (Jackson, 2016). One interesting finding from Jackson, Lancaster and Wirth (2016) was that Ben & Jerry's takes pictures of hands and their products, which has showed more effectiveness in social media posts on Instagram because it gave a more real-life feeling to the photo. It made users or customers feel like "I want to be holding that delicious food in my hand, it looks so good". The technique added a personal and human touch.

Marketing on Facebook is more effective when indirect marketing is used, such as sharing menu descriptions rather than the restaurant pointing out that they are selling the food from the menu directly (Kwok & Yu, 2013). According to Rowe (2016), five ways restaurants can be noticed on Instagram are using the best photos that the restaurant has, sharing an insider's look (menu items, events, chef, staff, behind the scenes magic), having a social media content plan, following people and using hashtags. By communicating to customers that the restaurant is not just selling, but wants to provide an experience to its customers, a sense of value is created and users feel like the visit to the restaurant would be worthwhile.

**Customization, choice and convenience.** Another way restaurant owners could adjust their social media tactics and strategies is by following the needs of the new generation Z, which is mostly by being active on Instagram, Twitter and Tumblr. Their needs are the 3 C's: customization, choice, and convenience (Ruggless, 2016). In other words, customer of generation Z are in need of personalized service and products, a variety of choice, and fast and efficient service. If the restaurant has this in their offer, they can easily market this population on social media platforms and gain new customers who would most likely share their experience online through social media platforms (Ruggless, 2016). Each customer would like to be treated with special care and they love to have a variety of choices to choose from when picking the product they want to purchase; for example, if a girl is choosing a pair of sweat pants, she will probably want to choose from at least four or five different colors (Ruggless, 2016).

**Listen and pay attention to your customers.** Weintraub (2012) highlighted the importance of companies listening to customers and managing their brand reputation on social media platforms. According to Weintraub (2012), answering messages on social media and communicating with your customers on a daily basis is very important. Many users reach out to

social media for further information such as, price, reservations, offers and online reviews (Fox, 2016). Users search for fast answers and dedicated brands (Fox, 2016). Listening to customers helps brands find out what they should change or how they can improve their offer (Weintraub, 2012). Facebook and Instagram have become open portals for communicating with customers and providing top service as best and as quickly as possible (Kim, Li, & Brymer, 2016).

**Allow the food pictures and videos to speak.** Ariyasriwatana and Quiroga (2016)'s empirical study focused on restaurant reviews from the website Yelp and how many different ways the deliciousness of food can be communicated by people.

Ariyasriwatana and Quiroga (2016)'s study found that there were eight categories in which the deliciousness of food could be communicated: senses (subcategories: taste, smell, touch, flavor, visual and deliciousness), culinary affair (subcategories: cooking, authenticity, variety of menu offering, and portion), matter of the heart (affection, feeling, emotion, sentiment, mood and the indulge of craving), health (subcategories: healthy deliciousness and unhealthy deliciousness), testimonial and endorsement (general word, ranking and rating, approval from connoisseur, guarantee, recommendation/invitation/challenge/a call to action, gratitude/congratulation/admiration, celebrity, and insider/guru from food industry), personal signature (subcategories: humour, drama, nonverbal communication), consumer (subcategories: mouth-watering, frequency, eating mannerism, amount consumed, celebration, wanting more, food virgin, leftovers and takeout, out of comfort zone), and restaurant (subcategories: worth of price, service, inconvenience, atmosphere, where the locals eat, food supply) (Ariyasriwatana and Quiroga, 2016). According to Ariyasriwatana and Quiroga (2016), the categories and subcategories represent how

people express deliciousness through online restaurant reviews on the Yelp website.

(para. 3)

According to Ariyasriwatana and Quiroga (2016, para. 3), the customers used sentences such as, "...this cake was impossibly light yet bursting with *a deep, hearty chocolate flavor*". Ariyasriwatana and Quiroga (2016, para. 4) stated: "Marketers and planners can benefit from these categories". Food is often linked to pleasure and strong emotions; it is also seen as fun and entertaining (Ariyasriwatana and Quiroga, 2016). These categories and examples of expressed deliciousness could help marketers attract customers in general and on social media (Ariyasriwatana & Quiroga, 2016). If the food speaks to us, we will most likely want to try it out. A good mixture of words and pictures or videos could certainly attract users' attention on social media (Ariyasriwatana and Quiroga, 2016).

### **Creating Positive Word of Mouth**

**Traditional word of mouth and online word of mouth.** Word of mouth has had a great impact on people's behaviors and their decision making (Kim et al., 2016). Traditional word of mouth is when one person shares information with another person about a certain experience or recommends the experience to another person (Eelen, Özturan & Verlegh, 2017). Today, online word of mouth is created using pictures, comments, videos and leaving reviews or comments on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and more online social networks (Lui et al., 2017).

***The importance of online word of mouth.*** According to Liu et al., (2017), maintaining a consistent relationship with consumers leads to more positive word of mouth. Word of mouth can then increase sales and brand awareness (Fox, 2016). Therefore, social media is truly a powerful marketing tool for small business restaurants when used and properly implemented (Bennett, 2017). Dunkin' Donuts created a lot of social media engagement with their fans when

they decided to make a Valentine's Day contest. Contest members had to post a way that the brand is a part of their love life and mention the hashtag Dunkinlove. Under the hashtag Dunkindonuts or Dunkinlove on social media channels, all you can see is positive things about the brand. This made a great deal of positive word of mouth for Dunkin' Donuts. The most effective part of the contest that created positive word of mouth for Dunkin' Donuts was the prize, free coffee and donuts for a year and \$2500 to spend on anything outside of Dunkin' Donuts. This was a great example of how to get customers' attention and loyalty through social media channels (Food and Beverage Closeup, 2017).

**The importance of interacting and developing a quality relationship with your audience.** According to Fox (2016), it is important to have developed relationships with customers rather than just advertising to them. Fox's (2016) study focused on the importance of word of mouth and online word of mouth. It was an empirical study done in Dublin, Ireland using a qualitative approach. Restaurant marketers who used social media marketing and restaurant customers who used social media were both interviewed. The interview topic was online word of mouth and finding out what types of styles and communication could create effective stimulation of positive online word of mouth for restaurants in Dublin (Fox, 2016). A way to create a viral campaign is by inviting the audience to engage in what the restaurant is doing. For example, a restaurant that has launched a new summer cocktail menu requested its Facebook friends to get involved by assigning names to the new cocktails (find the source?). An incentive was offered to the person who chose the winning name. This was one way to face the challenge of creating interaction and engaging communication.

In contrast, it was found that excessively promotional content makes the audience "unfriend" and "unfollow" a restaurant on Facebook and Twitter (Fox, 2016). According to Fox

(2016), it is important to create online communication with a dash of personal touch. Restaurant marketers from Fox's (2016) study felt that it was almost compulsory to personally sign-off on posts (Fox, 2016). It was also found that communications must be distinctive, and restaurants must be able to transmit their own character through their social media content (Fox, 2016).

Fox's (2016) study strongly supports the idea that restaurants in Dublin should be using flexible, laid back communication, different tactics for different social media channels, funny posts, storytelling and adapt everything to mobile (Fox, 2016).

**Offer value – market value.** According to Gromfin (2016), before marketing a restaurant it is important to make sure that the restaurant is being run well. Otherwise, there is no point to market a restaurant that people would not enjoy visiting (Gromfin, 2016). The goal is to create something valuable to share about the business with customers, tell everyone about it, and be there constantly for guests. In other words, customers' experiences are equivalent to positive or negative word of mouth and can either promote the restaurant or destroy it (Gromfin, 2016).

According to Grub Street (2016), one chef adjusted his entire restaurant to adapt it to the technology that was being used by the younger population. He wanted it to be a place where customers would post a picture saying that they are in his restaurant, and he succeeded. This brought the restaurant nothing but positive word of mouth because he recognized his target market needs and delivered it to them both online and offline. This is what he said,

Starbucks did it 15 years ago - created a sense of a third place. This is the new third place. If you look on the walls, I have nothing but USB ports everywhere. I don't have plugs. I have free 5G WI-FI. Everything is Instagrammable. I have hashtags on my mirrors. Pokémon Go is trending, and I have something on my board outside about it. The whole point is that this is built for the millennials - the youth. (Grub Street, 2016, para. 16)

**The importance of being active on social media.** Kwon and Mattila's (2015) study examines the importance of self-brand connection and positive word of mouth. According to Kwon and Mattila (2015), brand love is connected to positive word of mouth, loyalty, willingness to pay premium price and forgiveness of brand failures. The empirical study focused on discovering what factors caused positive word of mouth amongst customers who loved hospitality brands (Kwon & Mattila, 2015). Kwon and Mattila (2015), found that a self-brand connection raises loyalty levels and also positive word of mouth amongst consumers. For instance, the Starbucks app allows customers to pay by phone and also store their own customized favorite drinks in the database (Kwon & Mattila, 2015). Kwon and Mattila (2015) also pointed out that marketers should use messages that promote individuality such as, "enjoy yourself", "create your own favorite drink" or "people like you". A combination of self-brand connection a promotion of individuality is the secret to success for gaining loyal customers and positive word of mouth (Kwon & Mattila, 2015). Kwon and Mattila (2015) suggested that marketers should use social media to create a brand personality among customers which could potentially raise the brands' online positive word of mouth. For example, a restaurant that follows the concept "farm-to-table" could focus on factors such as being local, having fresh foods, being laid-back and creating an emotional connection with their loyal customers through social media (Kwon & Mattila, 2015).

According to Grub Street 2017, Jack's Wife Freda is a small restaurant that recognized the potential of Instagram just when it started to grow. They paid attention to small details and creating a great marketing story that made their restaurant go viral on Instagram. For example, they had cute sayings put on their sugar packets such as, hello sweet, hug more and Jack <3 Freda. They posted many pictures of the food and atmosphere and also had creative menus

designed that were used as placemats. Also, they had a story behind the restaurant name. Jack and Freda were the names of the owner's immigrant grandparents who loved each other very much. All of these techniques combined with connecting to their audience on Instagram allowed Jack's Wife Freda to have 120,000 Instagram followers, while their nearby competition the Dutch's had 11,100 and the Spotted Pig's had 20,500 (Grub Street, 2017). Overall, a creative marketing approach, a strong social media presence and a good connection with the audience can have a great positive effect for the restaurant.

### **The Positive Effects of Using Social Media to Promote Business/Restaurant**

Kim et al.'s (2015) empirical study focused on the impact of social media activity on the restaurants' firm values. Kim et al. (2015) found that if social media is used correctly, there is a positive linear relationship between social media and the firms' value. Kim et al. (2015) found that positive consumer reactions to a firm's social media activity can improve the firm's value in financial markets. Also, restaurants can benefit from social media because it is a low-cost advertising tool and is used to increase market share and boost restaurant sales (Kim et al., 2015). According to Kim et al. (2015), 93 % of marketers use social media for their businesses and the restaurant business uses it greatly. It is important to manage online reviews well. For example, Starbucks accepts first hand suggestions and criticism (Kim et al., 2015). If online reviews are handled poorly, customers will punish the brand rather than promote it with positive word of mouth (Kim et al., 2015). Kim et al. (2015) recommended that restaurants engage in social media activity and managing social media pages with care because the restaurant firms will be able to receive positive feedback from customers and financial markets for their leadership in the industry.

**Positive reviews equal positive revenue.** According to Kim et al. (2016), positive reviews lead to positive word of mouth through social media. The number of reviews a restaurant

has positively effects its financial performance on three levels: net sales, guest counts and average check (Kim et al., 2016). As stated above in the “Creating positive word of mouth” section, users rely on social media and other online sources to determine if they want to trust a restaurant and visit (Liu et al., 2017). The more positive online reviews there are, the more users will be willing to try the restaurant (Liu et al., 2017).

**Measuring successful campaigns and a positive pattern of sales.** Companies can check how much effect social media has had on their sales. According to Ruggless (2016), companies can look at how many online orders were received through social channels and those average checks, and how many website views were produced. By using Google analytics, you can measure the success of your social media campaign (Tonyan, 2016). Clearly, social media does have a positive impact on sales. This research paper explores whether that is true for fine dining restaurants in Zagreb.

### **What Attracts Customers to Fine Dining Restaurants**

It is important to know what customers want from fine dining restaurants because no matter how good a restaurants’ social media marketing can be, if the original product or service does not satisfy the customers’ needs, they will not return to the restaurant. (FIND SOURCE) Dunn, Njite and Hyunjung’s study (2008) focused on discovering what attributes impacted customers’ selections of fine dining restaurants. Dunn et al. (2008) found that customer relations was the most important factor. After that, employee competence, convenience, atmosphere, and price (Dunn et al., 2008). Price was the least important decision making factor (Dunn et al., 2008). Each of the factors were important, but customer relations was most significant factor to be considered when providing successful fine dining services to customers. Dunn et al.’s study found the following (2008):

Further, the research acknowledged that developing and maintaining desirable customer attributes is of utmost importance to brand managers because certain attributes strategically place a product in the consumer's mind. (para. 64)

According to Dunn et al. (2008), strength of association can have an effect on a customers' decision making. Dunn et al. (2008) suggested that managers should focus on hiring well-qualified employees and training. Thus, providing top quality service (Dunn et al., 2008). Customers said that they wanted personalized service, so the service must be very professional and dedicated to the customer (Dunn et al., 2008). Therefore, their attention should be put on the interaction between customers and service providers, investing a large amount of attention in that area (Dunn et al., 2008). According to Dunn et al. (2008), if customers develop a positive attitude toward employees at fine dining restaurants, the brand will likely be successful and if they do not the brand will likely be unsuccessful. Dunn et al.'s study (2008) taught fine dining restaurant managers and marketers how to position their restaurant and send a positive message to their audiences. Also, it taught fine dining managers and marketers what factors should be mentioned in advertisements and which ones should be used rarely. According to Dunn et al. (2008), the following factors should be mentioned in advertisements more frequently: customer relations, employee competence, convenience, and atmosphere. On the other hand, price should be mentioned much rarely (Dunn et al., 2008).

According to Harrington and Ottenbacher's (2011) study, restaurant marketers should focus on communicating the benefits of fine dining restaurants. Also, it is important for marketers to have in mind what target market they are communicating to. Marketers should have the following customer characteristics in mind: age, gender and dining frequency. Harrington and Ottenbacher's (2011) study found that price/value, quality expectation and

variety/innovation were important factors that customers considered when selecting fine dining restaurants.

Females rated price/value, quality expectation and dietary attributes as important (Harrington & Ottenbacher, 2011). Marketers should focus on quality of attributes when marketing to women, while men paid less attention to this factor (Harrington & Ottenbacher, 2011). Frequent male diners rated the atmosphere/setting important more than less frequent diners (Harrington & Ottenbacher, 2011). Females did not rate the setting as important whether they were frequent or non-frequent diners (Harrington & Ottenbacher, 2011). Regarding the age factor, older consumers should be marketed with the following: promotion (reviews, and advertising), quality expectation (atmosphere, design, reputation, and recommendations), setting (private and low noise), and dietary (healthy options and menu flexibility to meet special diet needs) (Harrington & Ottenbacher, 2011). While, younger customers should be marketed with messages that communicate pricing, increasing the value of their experience and products that increase the value for price (Harrington & Ottenbacher, 2011). According to Harrington and Ottenbacher (2011), frequent diners are a target market that have higher expectations, menu variety and innovativeness is of great importance to them, they are a reached market and also one that will maximize revenue. Both frequent and non-frequent diners rated the price for value relationship very important (Harrington & Ottenbacher, 2011).

### **Conclusion of the Literature Review**

In order to gain knowledge about what social media tactics other hospitality businesses around the world used for their social media strategies, the researcher gathered information from various literature sources from the RIT library and relied on this information for further development of the study. According to Kim et al. (2015), social media marketing is used to a large extent by restaurant marketers because it is a low-cost advertising tool and can increase

market share and boost restaurant sales. However, social media marketing only has a positive effect if used correctly (Kim et al., 2015). That is why it is important for restaurant marketers to learn about the most effective social media tactics that they can use for their social media strategy. In general, social media tactics that are effective are using user-generated content, video content, motivating customers to engage in conversations, and entertaining users with fun content. Specifically, for restaurants, all of these can be applied with an addition of sharing recipes, behind the scenes photos and highlighting the content and also visuals of the food. It is also good for restaurants to creatively advertise by including the audience in engagement within the posts, rather than just saying what is on their menu. The importance of creating positive online word of mouth represents the benefits of social media and how it can easily raise or lower sales due to user-generated content and reviews. Finally, the section about fine dining restaurants defines what people look for in fine dining restaurants and what factors are important to them when deciding to visit these particular types of restaurants. The study will explore what factors and social media tactics are important to consider when creating an effective social media strategy for a fine dining restaurant in Zagreb.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

The research approach used to gather information for this study was the qualitative approach. The qualitative approach gathered participants' perspectives on the research problem (Creswell, 2014, p. 186). This research paper used a qualitative research method because the goal was to discover the opinions and experiences of participants related to social media, fine dining restaurants, and the possible effects of social media marketing on user buying decisions.

This study explored what social media tactics are effective and can help fine dining restaurants in Zagreb attract more customers, as well as what factors could motivate potential

customers to actually visit a restaurant rather than just liking a post. Participants who visited fine dining restaurants occasionally or have had a usual habit of visiting fine dining restaurants shared their opinions on what type of content and social media marketing tactics could attract potential customers to visit fine dining restaurants in Zagreb (Noel, Dubravkin put, Vinodol, Pod Zidom Bistro & Wine Bar and Ristorante Carpaccio).

### **Strategy of Inquiry**

The strategy of inquiry for this study is phenomenological research. The phenomenon that was researched was whether social media could impact the decision of fine dining customers to visit fine dining restaurants in Zagreb. This study considers participants' opinions based on their experiences related to using social media in their everyday lives, whether their decision to visit a fine dining restaurant is affected by social media and what their wants and needs are when it comes to visiting a fine dining restaurant in Zagreb (Creswell, 2014). A semi-structured interview with open-ended questions was used to gather information from participants (Descombe, 1998, p. 200). Open-ended questions helped the researcher collect a large and diverse amount of information from participants. The questions were predetermined, but the researcher left room for participants to add any information that they felt was important. The interview was conducted online using e-mail without using Skype. This caused a loss of visual contact and remoteness (Descombe, 1998, p. 200). The researcher chose e-mail interviews and Facebook messages to relieve the participants from having to take extra time from their busy lives to schedule a meeting. E-mail interviews and Facebook messages allowed the participants to take time answering questions. Facebook messages also provided the interviewer with real time additional information. Finally, telephone interviews the researcher with in-depth additional data. The researcher relied on written responses and e-mail interview phone calls, and Facebook messages to collect extra information (Descombe, 1998, p. 200).

## **Participants**

There were ten participants in the age range 25 to 35 years old. They were tech-savvy and social media users, meaning that they logged into Facebook and Instagram at least once a day. They were food and wine lovers who enjoyed treating themselves to luxury pleasures occasionally or had a habit of consistently eating out and enjoying a hedonistic approach to life. The participants were people who owned wine bars, restaurants and have had experience in the food industry, marketing or just enjoyed visiting fine dining restaurants on special occasions. They were not part of a certain financial status. There were nine female participants and one male participant. It is possible that this introduced some bias. The population were customers who visited fine dining restaurants before or have had a usual habit of visiting fine dining restaurants. The samples were selected because they fell under the category “foodie”, they had a habit of visiting fine dining restaurants and they used social media at least once a day. The researcher did not know where to find people who would fit into that group so the researcher asked to be connected to people who were involved in the food industry because the researcher assumed that they would have a better chance of visiting a fine dining restaurant.

The researcher contacted a wine bar owner in the city of Zagreb and asked to be connected to food and wine lovers who tend to visit restaurants and to interview them for the purpose of this research. Eight out of ten participants had several years of experience in the food or marketing industry, which helped provide the study with rich study results because some participants’ shared both their customer point of view, as well as their business experience and knowledge.

For instance, participants with a marketing background shared useful tips for future marketing techniques tied to social media marketing along with their personal fine dining

experiences and what they would like to see in the future regarding marketing and fine dining offers. Food and beverage experts shared their knowledge in what customers want and how they can be attracted, as well as what they would like to see and experience as a customer. Food critiques provided in depth answers about what a fine dining restaurant should provide the customer with, how it should be marketed and what they would like to see and experience in the future based on their thirteen year experience of visiting many fine dining and other restaurants. Participants who visited fine dining restaurants but were not involved in any of these backgrounds provided the researcher with insight on what they expect from fine dining restaurants and how they should be marketed. Their answers were similar to the experts', but they provided the researcher with less information. A chart including the participants, their years of experience in the marketing or hospitality industry and how often they visit fine dining restaurants can be found below in Table1:

*Figure 1: Participants*

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Years of Experience in Marketing or Food and Beverage/Hospitality Industry</b>	<b>How Often They Visit Fine Dining Restaurants</b>
Participant #1	Over 10 years of experience in marketing and the food and beverage industry, worked as marketing and sales director at Croatian National Tourist Board, knowledge in social media	Every couple of months, visits often, pleasure and business
Participant #2	10 years of experience in marketing in Croatia, Italy and Germany for international companies, also some	Visits at least once a month, pleasure and business

	experience in the food and beverage industry	
Participant #3	10 years of experience in a PR agency, experience in marketing and organizing events, social media, copywriting, owns their own agency for organizing events and also a sommelier	A few times a year
Participant #4	More than 10 years of experience in the marketing and food industry, owns their own restaurant	Visits 2 fine dining restaurants a month
Participant #5	3 years of experience in the food industry, working at restaurants and bars	Has visited most of the fine dining restaurants in Zagreb, frequently
Participant #6	13 years of experience as food critiques	Have visited all of the fine dining restaurants in Zagreb and further, very frequently
Participant #7	Over 10 years of experience in marketing and wine bar owner	A few times a year
Participant #8	7 years of experience in the hospitality industry	Visits fine dining restaurants from time to time
Participant #9	Business major	A few times a year
Participant #10	Pharmacist	Enjoys visiting fine dining restaurants on business occasions

## Data Collection

Participants were contacted before the interview via Facebook messenger and informed that they would receive interview questions sent to their e-mail addresses. The e-mail included a heading, the researcher and participant's name (Creswell, 2014). Each participant received the e-mail interview with eleven questions. The participants were given instructions in the e-mail and a time period by when they should return their answers to the researcher. This helped them be familiar with how they should approach the e-mail interview (Creswell, 2014).

The e-mail interview began with a question that allowed the interviewer and interviewee to "break the ice" such as, "how are you". These questions were followed by open ended questions that allowed the researcher to learn more about the participant's opinions on what types of social media posts could impact their decision making to visit a fine dining restaurant in Zagreb. For example, the participants were asked to examine the social media pages (Facebook and Instagram) of the five fine dining restaurants in Zagreb (Noel, Vinodol, Dubravkin put, Pod Zidom Bistro & Wine Bar and Ristorante Carpaccio) and give their feedback. For instance, what they liked, what they disliked, what could be added and what would make them actually visit rather than just like a post. They answered from a customer's point of view, but some also added their knowledge and perspective from a business point of view. The participants were asked eleven questions about social media, fine dining restaurants and details about them to explore the possible answers to the research question.

The interviews were conducted by e-mail with the intention of allowing participants to feel that the interview is casual and convenient in today's busy world when doing things online makes everything easier. The interviewee could feel relaxed and open to share their answers. Their relaxed home or personal environment gave them enough time and comfort to answer the questions. Three participants that were available for additional questioning were contacted after

the e-mail interview for about a half an hour phone call in order for the researcher to collect more information. One participant was contacted after the e-mail interview through Facebook messenger and also asked additional questions. The three participants that were contacted additionally for a telephone interview had over ten years of experience in the food or marketing industry and were frequent visitors at fine dining restaurants. They were asked questions such as “What is your favorite fine dining restaurant and what are the reasons that you always return to it?”, “What is the definition of fine dining to you?”, “Why do you visit fine dining restaurants?”, “What would you recommend fine dining restaurants market/communicate on their social media pages, or what type of content or offer on a fine dining restaurant’s social media page would motivate you to visit their restaurant?”, “What type of food do you enjoy eating a fine dining restaurants?” and “What is your association to fine dining restaurants?”. All ten participants were asked how many years of experience they had in the food or marketing industry and how often they visited fine dining restaurants. A thank you statement was sent to each interviewee for taking the time to participate in the interview and for sharing their time and valuable answers and opinions.

The interview questions explored what types of posts and what leading factors could motivate the participants to visit a fine dining restaurant in Zagreb. It also explored what participants expected from fine dining restaurants both online (social media marketing) and offline (restaurant offer, service and atmosphere). Specifically, the interview questions aimed to explore whether social media marketing through Facebook and Instagram could have an effect on the participants’ buying decision to visit a fine dining restaurant in Zagreb, and if so what social media tactics and content would be most effective to use in a social media strategy. Additional goals of the interview questions were to discover what emotions could trigger the

customer to visit a fine dining restaurant, whether word of mouth is more powerful than social media marketing for fine dining restaurants and whether the participants used Facebook or Instagram more to follow their favorite restaurants.

The interview questions can be found in Appendix A. The five fine dining restaurants that were selected for this study were: Noel, Vinodol, Dubravkin put, Pod Zidom Bistro & Wine Bar and Ristorante Carpaccio in Zagreb. They were defined as fine dining restaurants in this study due to their specific and unique menu offers, elegant atmospheres, high prices and social status of being expensive restaurants that serve quality food in Zagreb.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The interview questions were sent by e-mail to the respected participants during the first part of the data gathering process. The research paper and interview questions were looked over by RIT's institutional review board to determine if there were any risks and to protect the human rights of the participants before conducting the interview. Participants received a thank you letter as a sign of respect and gratitude for their time and help. Participants were not forced to do anything and they could decline to participate if they are not able to. All of the information collected from participants is kept confidential by the researcher and represented only in statistical form in order to protect the privacy of the participants.

### **Reliability and Validity**

The research was meant to be descriptive and describe the opinions of participants based on their experiences related to the research question (Creswell, 2014). In order to make sure the study had validity and reliability, the researcher checked the transcript with the informants to eliminate researcher bias and made sure that the researcher understood what the participants wanted to communicate to the researcher through their answers (Descombe, 1998, p. 200). Also, the plausibility of the data was checked. Participants were asked if they had experience in the food, marketing industry or of just visiting fine dining restaurants and how many years of experience. This determined how much knowledge the participants could provide in their answers (Descombe, 1998, p. 200). Finally, the researcher used the data triangulation method to reduce bias as well. Various sources of information that could be found in the literature review provided the researcher with a clearer view on the results received from participants (Descombe, 1998, p. 200). Last, but not least, the researcher searched for themes throughout the participants' answers throughout the data analysis, in other words repeated answers that could be validated as reliable answers to the research question in the study (Descombe, 1998, p. 200).

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysed in this study was from the researcher's interviews with participants who were foodies, had experience in the fields of marketing or the food industry and have had a normal tendency to visit fine dining restaurants, as well as use Facebook or Instagram on a daily basis. After receiving the participants' answers by e-mail, the researcher reviewed the transcripts several times to avoid any misinterpretations or wrong conclusions (Creswell, 2014). Also, the researcher asked additional sub questions in order to collect more data from participants that were able to participate in further questioning. Three participants were asked sub questions

through a phone call and one participant through Facebook messenger. Through phone calls with three participants and e-mails with all ten participants, the researcher contacted the participants and used the member checking method to assure that the descriptions of the transcripts were correct (Creswell, 2014). Each participant was also asked how many years of experience they have in the food industry or marketing and how much experience they have in visiting fine dining restaurants in order to assure the validity of the participants' answers.

After the data was checked for accuracy, the researcher created codes by highlighting the most important information that was tied to answering the research question. Based on the codes, themes about the most common information stated by the participants were created and those that were irrelevant were dismissed. The themes and sub themes connected to whether social media marketing can influence a user to visit a fine dining restaurant in Zagreb, and what social media tactics and overall factors should be considered when creating an effective social media strategy can be found below in Figure 1 and Figure 2:

### Quality visual content

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- Photos and videos
- Storytelling
- Personal/"human" touch

### Special offers

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- Tasting menus
- Hosting different chefs
- Value for money
- Sampling menu, special price, and daily offer
- Seasonal produce and traditional dishes with a modern twist

### Positive word of mouth

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- Traditional and online word of mouth
- Word of mouth and decision making

*Figure 1: Data analysis codes and themes Part 1*

### Social media tactics

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- Brand personality, stories and be approachable with excellent service
- High quality photos and videos, team pictures and special offers
- Post frequently but use a human approach

### Price

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- Menu prices should be communicated on website, special offers on social media
- Prices must match value of the offer

### Emotions and reasons to visit

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- Top reasons to visit fine dining restaurants
- Emotions and motives

*Figure 2: Data analysis codes and themes Part 2*

### **Role of the Researcher**

According to Creswell (2014, p. 185), the researcher is the key instrument in a qualitative study. In this qualitative study, the researcher collected the data (Creswell, 2014, p. 207). The researcher has had three years of experience working as a social media specialist for a Croatian hotel chain, marketed their hotels and all of their services including food, excursions, hotel accommodation and more. The researcher held responsibility for seventeen Facebook pages, two Instagram profiles, one Twitter profile, one Pinterest, and one Youtube account. One of the hotels had a fine dining restaurant. Therefore, the researcher has had some experience in marketing fine dining restaurants. The researcher's background experience helped the research be create quality research questions that were up to date with social media trends in the hospitality and restaurant industry according to both the literature references and the researcher's personal experience in the industry and social media marketing.

The way that the researcher perceived social media marketing is as an effective, low-cost, and efficient marketing tool in today's world. The researcher believes that all other forms of marketing have been dying out and that more and more people were paying for Facebook, Instagram, and Google ads. The researcher believed that companies that are not investing in social media marketing are missing out on opportunities.

The researcher was aware of the bias that her background work experience in digital marketing could have possibly brought to this study, which is why she was very careful when selecting her sample and creating her interview questions. She was also very aware and careful when collecting, analysing and presenting the results that the participants provided her with for this study.

## Results

In the previous section, the researcher described how the data was gathered and analysed after interviewing the participants. In this section the researcher presented the results found from the collected interview data through themes that were detected during the coding process. These themes answered the research question. The research question being explored is: What factors and social media tactics are important to consider when creating an effective social media strategy for a fine dining restaurant in Zagreb? Sub research questions are: What will make customers actually visit the fine dining restaurant rather than just liking a post?

This section focuses on participants' perspectives about whether social media could influence their buying decision to visit a fine dining restaurant in Zagreb, what they expect from a fine dining restaurant (both their social media pages and restaurant experiences) and their experiences with previous fine dining restaurants and what type of a posts and social media tactics would motivate them to visit a fine dining restaurant in Zagreb in the future. This section will allow the reader to learn how fine dining restaurants can differentiate themselves in the market and tend to their user's needs through Facebook and Instagram.

### Visual Quality Content

**Photos and videos.** According to participants' results, visual quality content, more specifically photo or video is one of the most important factors to incorporate in a social media strategy when using social media marketing to promote fine dining restaurants in Zagreb. All ten of the participants agreed that quality photos or videos were an important factor in attracting them to be interested to visit a fine dining restaurant in Zagreb based on the restaurant's social media pages Facebook and Instagram. Pictures, videos or Instagram stories that are inviting and engage the user with compelling questions by telling an emotional story or posting content that

the user can relate to are all ways to attract users to be more interested in visiting the fine dining restaurant. Participant #1 stated: “Instagram stories catch my eye lately, together with Instagram posts and videos of famous chefs. For example, Dabiz Munoz and Quique Dacosta are Spanish chefs that have a range of restaurants from 3 star Michelin to street food places and their Instagram stories are quite interesting”.

**Storytelling.** Similarly, but with a different emphasis on the quality of visual content and storytelling, Participant #5 stated: “High quality and or creative videos/pictures connected to a story in some way. It can be funny or serious but quality and unique content is important to me”. The participant is saying that their attention can be caught by high quality pictures and videos that tell a story. The next participant showed a strong connection to emotions and content that they can relate to, Participant #2 stated: “Videos and photos which are positive/inspirational/thoughtful/looking nice, stories I can relate to, quotes/motivational sayings...” With both an emphasis on emotions and behind the scenes content, Participant #6 stated: “Educational/backstage videos (even better if emotional), photos and stories with compelling engaging questions that address hot topics in the areas we are interested in”. Last but not least, this participant explained that if their attention is caught in the beginning, they will take time to research and see what the post or information is about in more detail. Participant #8 stated: “Photos or stories that I can relate to. I like long, meaningful texts. Also, if content is relevant to me and the subject line and first few buzz words are interesting, I’ll invest some time in researching and reading the article”.

Participants #1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 mentioned that there should be an equivalent balance when posting photos/content. The ideal balance is to post photos of food, the atmosphere so that they can get a “feel” of what the restaurant is like and the people (include the team, spontaneous

moments, what they are doing in the kitchen and also guests having a good time). Participant #2 stated: “I like a combination of spontaneous moments, food and drinks, a feeling of the interior and everyday working situations that are portrayed (inside of the kitchen, etc.)” On the other hand, Participant #9 liked that mostly food and menus were portrayed on the restaurant’s social media pages. For them, they were mostly focused on the food and their biggest motivators were food portion, quality and price. Participant #10 did not mention any specific details on this particular topic (Participant #10 only mentioned that he or she would like to see an equality of men and women shown on the page’s pictures and videos).

**Personal touch.** All expect for Participant #10 would also like to see a personal “touch” such as having the cook post how they are cooking something in the kitchen, more “real life” moments open to the public and behind the scenes photos or videos. Eight out of ten participants said that they would like to see posts that they can relate to, that have a story behind them and are meaningful, that they show the restaurant’s philosophy or target the emotions of the user. Participant # 6 said, “For us to make a reservation based on a social media post, the photo and the status should strongly articulate and reflect ethics and philosophy of the restaurant. Beautiful photo of a plate would not be enough”. Therefore, there should be an equivalent of photos or videos that communicate the restaurants’ atmosphere, food and drink offer and also the team behind the action. All of the participants were intrigued by behind the scenes content, meaningful stories and high quality videos and pictures.

## Special Offers

Special offers, special events and unique menus all have an impact on motivating participants to want to visit a fine dining restaurant in Zagreb. Each participant had their own unique response.

**Tasting menus.** Participant #8 stated: “I like tasting options”, which meant that they would be interested in attending an event with tasting menus.

**Hosting different chefs.** Participant #1 stated: “I would be attracted by an offer that is different and original – which could be some special events, hosting of different chefs, etc.”. This participant consistently put an emphasis on hosting different chefs and creating diverse events to attract customers on social media.

**Value for money.** Participants # 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6 also mentioned that the quality of the food must be very fresh, seasonal, preferably organic and top quality, but also at a “value for money” price. These do not want to be overpriced, but if the offer/food is worth it, than they are willing to pay.

**Sampling menu, special price, and daily offer.** Participant #2 stated: “I would be interested in trying a sampling menu for a special price or to have daily/special offers which are priced less”. If fine dining restaurants would promote special daily menus or similar at a special price, all of the participants would be interested in that type of special offer.

**Seasonal produce and traditional dishes with a modern twist.** Participant #5 stated: “Seasonal produce, new twists on well-known dishes, fusion of traditional and new cuisine, and most of all simple, good meals done right for whatever price, no fancy meal names or presentation needed as long as the chef has the right skills and food”. Participant #5 explains that creating traditional dishes with modern and creative minor changes or additions is sometimes better than eating a fancy named meal. Participant #4 stated: “Some special food and wine

pairings”. Participants # 3, 4 and 7 also mentioned unique menu presentations. Participants # 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9 and 10 mentioned daily offers with special prices, special days, happy hours and discounts would motivate them to visit a fine dining restaurant in Zagreb.

### **Positive Word of Mouth**

**Traditional and online word of mouth.** When it comes to word of mouth, both traditional and online word of mouth have a great impact on the decision making of participants to visit a fine dining restaurant. Generally, traditional word of mouth has a more powerful impact. However, online word of mouth can influence social media users to either be interested based on what they see on the fine dining restaurants’ social media pages (restaurant atmosphere, reviews, comments, user generated content and menu) or decide to not visit. Six out of ten participants said that they would rely on traditional word of mouth as a number one source such as recommendations from friends and family when making a decision to visit a fine dining restaurant in Zagreb. However, they also noted that they would use social media as a secondary source. Participant #1 stated: “Both. Word of mouth is definitely stronger, but I would always check on social media to see what the ambiance is like, what the food style is, etc. Moreover, I would also check on different food blogs, especially if I am traveling and I want to book interesting restaurants in different locations”. Similarly, Participant #2 stated: “I would say both have the same effect because in today’s world where anyone can comment on anything social media is also a digital form of word of mouth. I like to hear a verbal opinion but I also like to read a restaurant review online”. Likewise, Participant #7 stated: “Word of mouth is more powerful - but in my case, it depends who it is coming from. If I got two to three recommendations for a place and I had to make a decision about where to go, than social media jumps in; I would look at Facebook/Instagram and TripAdvisor and pick my place based on the feedback I find there”. Participant #9 stated: “Word of mouth and reviews are most powerful,

then comes pictures of the food and the restaurant”. Most participants rely on traditional word of mouth recommendations first hand, but they also like to rely on social media depending on the situation to help them make their decision. On the other hand, four participants clearly stated that word of mouth had a more powerful impact on their decision making than social media.

Participants also looked for positive comments that are not “overly positive and fake” on social media, a nice feeling of the restaurant atmosphere that they can perceive through pictures and other content such as videos, Instagram stories and more, and nice pictures of food, as well as an offer that provides good value for money.

**Word of mouth and decision-making.** Participant #1 stated: “Sometimes the motivation for visiting was simply curiosity about food and sometimes it was just a business dinner opportunity. In case of curiosity, social media did impact my decision making, especially in such cases when restaurants would organize special events – such as a dinner with a certain winemaker, or special menu presentation, etc.” Five participants said that social media had an influence on their decision making to visit a fine dining restaurant in Zagreb to some extent. These participants relied on social media only after hearing recommendations from their friends and family and used social media to check Facebook reviews, comments below posts, or if the restaurant posted interesting special events and just as a reminder that the restaurant exists – it was not their main influencer. Four participants said that their decision making was never based upon their social media use but rather from direct word of mouth from friends, family and people who they can trust is knowing what restaurants are worth visiting because they have knowledge or experience in visiting fine dining restaurants. Participant # 9 said that they found a fine dining restaurant through social media and the pictures of the restaurant and food made them want to visit.

### **Social Media Tactics**

The top social media tactics that participants mentioned frequently and put a strong emphasis on when articulating what content would motivate them to be attracted to visit a fine dining restaurant in Zagreb were: advertise to a user using a meaningful and humanistic approach such as telling a story (mentioned by six out of ten participants), show the user what the restaurant looks like and what the restaurant's philosophy is by adding a personal touch to the social media pages (seven out of ten participants) and target the emotions of the participants through high quality videos, pictures and Instagram stories (all of the participants). Participant #3 said, "Be more approachable. Show how the entire process of the food creation happens. Show the audience that you are offering something exquisite but yet approachable".

**Brand personality, stories and be approachable with excellent service.** Seven out of ten participants wanted to see character and brand personality on the social media pages. Eight out of ten participants found it important for the fine dining restaurants' social media pages to provide them with equivalent service that they would experience in the fine dining restaurants. For example, fast answered questions and knowledgeable and friendly, approachable social media pages. Participants #3, #8 and #9 perceived that responding to reviews and messages is important. The participants want to get a general "vibe" of what the restaurant and service is like through pictures, comments, reviews, posts and contact with the employees through the restaurants' social media pages. Participant #1 stated: "The trend in this segment as far as I am concerned is that the most interesting posts come directly from chefs, and through their personalized stories. The main point is to differentiate yourself by creating the original strategy of your presence on social media and not forgetting who your potential audience is and what their behavior on social media is". Therefore, restaurants should communicate personalized and unique stories to their target markets, preferably delivering stories directly from the chef.

Participant #1 also stated: “From their social media pages I expect them to differentiate themselves by showing how the whole process of getting the ingredients, to delivering the original menu, in an interesting and original way”.

**Portray behind the scenes moments.** It is important to portray the entire process of buying the ingredients to creating the meal and to show personal, behind the scenes moments to the audience. This can help users learn more about what the restaurant offers, what their philosophy is and give them a deep insight on who and what is really behind the whole restaurant. It makes is easier for them to trust the restaurant and know what they can expect.

**Represent best services and special events.** Participant #7 said: “I like the representing of services and special events. This allows potential customers to get an added value and to read more about the restaurant’s offering, special events and services. I like a combo of pictures - the atmosphere (the people) and the food. Pictures that indicate that people are having so much fun while enjoying their meals - definitely something “inviting”, something I want to be part of”. Participants like to understand what is going on at the restaurants, how it happens and when the restaurants' services are being offered.

**High quality photos and videos, team pictures and special offers.** Overall, all of the participants’ preferred high quality videos, pictures and Instagram stories. All of the participants like inviting posts with vibrant colors that show the restaurant atmosphere, food, drinks and team. All of the participants appreciate informative posts that present the restaurants’ and chefs’ philosophy. All ten of the participants mentioned that promotions of daily special offers and special events would be a motivation for them to visit a fine dining restaurant in Zagreb. Eight out of ten participants mentioned that if there is a special offer the price should be promoted, as well as the menu descriptions depending on the situation. Ten out of ten participants said that

they would like to see an occasional funny post, different/unique content, storytelling posts and the promotion of fresh, seasonal, organic ingredients of the fine dining restaurants. Additional marketing tips mentioned by Participant #3 were to use the repost app to repost customer's experiences and promote user generated content, to use a combination of professional photos and amateur photos to portray an approachable and personal touch of the restaurant on social media, and Participant #2 said that if contests are run they should be as easy as possible. For instance, the user should be able to enter the contest by taking a picture and posting it.

**Post frequently but use a human touch.** All of the participants mentioned that fine dining restaurants should post frequently without spamming users. According to the participants, the fine dining restaurants should show a “human” touch on their social media pages by revealing the behind the scenes spontaneous moments and their moments of truth. This should include everything from the team, how the food is made, what shopping for ingredients and a visit to the market looks like and similar. There should be a perfect balance of photos that show the atmosphere, food and team and the restaurant’s best services and features should be highlighted. Participant #2 suggested hiring an influencer, Participant #1 suggested marketing through blogs and Participant #10 suggested treating the social media page as if it was a blog.

### **Price**

Price can be an important factor to consider when creating an effective social media strategy. If a special price is offered, it can be promoted on social media and motivate participants to visit a fine dining restaurant in Zagreb.

**Menu prices should be communicated on website, special offers on social media.** All of the participants said that price should probably be communicated to reduce any negative surprises when visiting the restaurants. It should be promoted for special discounts and offers on

social media, but for normal offers, the price should be able to be found on the restaurant's website.

**Prices must match the values of the offers.** Participant #3 stated: "If the value of the offer is of high quality, the price does not matter to me. As long as the price matches the value – I will try it, but I would always check with friends or someone who is knowledgeable with food about what restaurant to visit, I would not rely only on social media". The price is not important to participants, but if there were any discounts or special deals all of the participants would be interested in visiting. However, they are also ready to pay any amount of money if the quality of the offer matches the price.

### **Emotions and Reasons to Visit**

Last but not least, when creating an effective social media strategy for fine dining restaurants in Zagreb, important factors to consider are the emotions that participants tied to visiting fine dining restaurants and their reasons why they visit fine dining restaurants.

**Top reasons to visit a fine dining restaurant.** Curiosity, enjoyment, business and recommendations are top reasons that participants decide to visit a fine dining restaurant. All of the participants visit fine dining restaurants for enjoyment, two of the participants mentioned curiosity as a reason, three participants mentioned business as a reason to visit and one participant was motivated by recommendations. They are intrigued to try new and different meals, learn about new approaches or just to go out and enjoy pure hedonism – excellent food, a great atmosphere, a good time with close ones along with top wines and service. Participant # 6 said, "We chose restaurants that manage to convince us that their chefs are talented enough, skilled and honest that their food would make us smarter by sheer power or their vision and

talent. When we get a glimpse of hope that a restaurant and its chef could give us an experience that will teach us something, we make reservations. Our second motive is pure hedonism”.

**Emotions and motives.** They are looking for something different that they have not yet tried and cannot make at home by themselves. Participant # 5 said, “A comfortable ambience in the restaurant with happy guests, as well as nice food can spark my interest. My motive is to eat something I cannot cook in that way or that quality at home, and have a nice experience away from home socializing in a lively environment”. They are curious about new meals, tasting them and learning about new approaches to cooking from experienced chefs. Participant # 1 said, “Curiosity of trying something new and different”. Similarly, Participant #4 said, “A number of emotions, but I do enjoy the food and wine and I feel that there is so much to learn and explore, in that way so much of it is my curiosity”. Last but not least, Participant #2 said what emotions or reasons trigger them to return to a fine dining restaurant in Zagreb, “Nice feeling, feeling of enjoyment, feeling of good taste, and feeling of being treated well and in a kind manner”. They expect high top quality service both online on social media pages (quality pictures, responses to messages and reviews) as well as from the restaurant itself (highly well trained staff that are professional but also friendly, a laid back atmosphere but a special experience where they are treated well, the food is excellent and different with fresh organic ingredients and a different approach, value for money). Based upon the participants’ responses: their most common reason to visit is to enjoy quality food and wine and have a good time, the second most common is curiosity to try new things and learn from experienced chefs, the third is business and the last are recommendations from friends or family.

These emotions and reasons can be used by marketing experts or fine dining restaurant owners to target their customers by using certain words, phrases or marketing ideas that are

connected to these reasons and emotions. Eight out of ten participants described fine dining as an “experience”. Five out of ten described it as enjoyment. Fine dining restaurants should then approach their guests with a special and unique experience that provides pure enjoyment. In the next section, the researcher created a simpler and clearer version of the findings that can help the reader quickly understand the results received from the participants.

The results are also presented in the form of pie graphs with specific answers to each interview question according to the data collected which can be found in Appendix B. This will help the reader acquire a clearer and quicker understanding of the study’s results.

### **Discussion/Recommendations**

The purpose of this qualitative research was to discover what factors and social media tactics are important to consider when creating an effective social media strategy for a fine dining restaurant in Zagreb. The researcher interviewed ten participants that have background experience in marketing, the food industry or in visiting fine dining restaurants, about five with over ten years of experience. The interviews were done through e-mail. Four of the participants were contacted additionally by phone or through Facebook messenger to be asked sub-questions in order to collect more detailed data. The data was collected, checked for validity, analysed, and presented as results in the findings section.

The factors that can potentially have the most impact on users’ decision making to visit a fine dining restaurant based on social media are quality visual content, special offers, positive word of mouth, social media tactics, price, and emotions and reasons to visit. The researcher compared the literature to the findings and found that much of the advice from the literature was connected to the participants’ answers.

According to Barrett (2016), a few social media tactics that can help companies enhance their image and engagement on social media channels are: showing behind the scenes moments,

answering customer complaints, beginning a conversation and using more video content.

Participant #1 said, “I would like to see a fine dining restaurant that markets themselves uniquely and mentions every step to the creation of their meals: where they get their ingredients from, how the chef makes the meal, how they present their meals, what types of wines they choose and more”. Participant #2 said, “I like seeing everyday working situations from the kitchen portrayed”. Barrett (2016) also explained that the key to gaining new customers is engaging in conversation with them, motivating communication and presenting the restaurant in its best light with amazing pictures and content. Participant #2 said, “If a social media page is meaningful and interesting it should have photos with good lightening that show attractive food shots, interior design photos, photos that convey energy and the atmosphere of the place”. However, sometimes even amazing content needs to be fulfilled with background meaning or personal fulfilment for users (Barrett, 2016). Participant #2 said, “Videos and photos that are positive, inspirational, thoughtful, nice looking, stories I can relate to, quotes and motivational sayings are all posts that can catch my attention”.

Similarly, in the study the researcher found that all of the participants prefer posts with quality videos and photos that have vibrant colors and are inviting. Three out of ten participants mentioned that they do not mind funny content, five out of ten participants mentioned that they enjoy content that they can relate to like a story or quote and all of the participants mentioned that they enjoy seeing behind the scenes content such as where the chef gets the food from, how it is made, and how it is served. Four out of ten participants appreciate informative posts that show the restaurants’ and chefs’ philosophy and adding a personal touch: presenting the team, spontaneous moments, the restaurant atmosphere and creative food dishes with creative and innovative posts. Two participants mentioned that responding to reviews and messages are

important. As well as, being approachable (professional but warm and friendly), adding character to the restaurants' social media channels and value by presenting the highlights of the restaurants' services and philosophy. Participant #7 said, "I like when they represent their services and special events. This allows potential customers to get an added value and to read more about the restaurant's offering, special events and services".

According to Cutrone (2015), user-generated content is one of the most effective ways of gaining trust from your followers on social media. Participant #3 mentioned sharing guest's posts to their social media pages (using a repost app to share user generated content) to show real life pictures and add variety to the page. Participant #3 also said, "Use repost option to convey visitor's experiences". To add onto videos, video content is a big thing. 80% of the content that people can see they can remember, while only 20% of the content that they read they can remember (Gamble, 2016, p. 47). According to Gamble (2016, p. 47), color visuals also increase users' willingness to read by 80%. It is no wonder that in our world today when people do not have time and are overloaded with information it is easier for them to learn and find out information through video content (Gamble, 2016). Videos also improve the transfer of learning by 80% and the brain processes visuals 60,000 times faster in the brain (Gamble, 2016, p. 47). Participant #5 said, "High quality and or creative videos/pictures connected to a story in some way. It can be funny or serious but quality and unique content is important to me". Eight out of ten participants mentioned that high quality videos and pictures that are unique and interesting could motivate them to be interested in visiting a fine dining restaurant in Zagreb. According to Weintraub (2012), answering messages on social media and communicating with your customers on a daily basis is very important. All ten participants also felt that it was necessary to post unique content daily (without spamming). Three out of ten participants believed it was very

important to answer messages and also respond to good or bad reviews. According to Fox (2016), users search for fast answers and dedicated brands. Fox (2016) proves some more good points. According to Fox (2016), communications must be distinctive, and restaurants must be able to transmit their own character through their social media content. Fox's study strongly supports the idea that restaurants in Dublin should be using flexible, laid back communication, different tactics for different social media channels, funny posts, storytelling and adapt everything to mobile (Fox, 2016).

Aaker and Smith (2010), put an emphasis on content that customers can benefit from such as funny content, a recipe or just connecting to the audience by posting about a happening that is going on in the world. It is important to give the audience content that they can relate to or connect to. Similarly, Fox (2016) says it is important to develop relationships with customers rather than just advertising to them. All of the participants of this study mentioned that they would like to see meaningful content, posts that have stories behind them, eye catching stories, posts with a "human touch" that use an emotional approach to attract them to visit a fine dining restaurant. Participant #3 said, "I would like to see the restaurant's philosophy portrayed on their social media pages and the pages should have character. I want to feel like both the restaurant and their social media pages are highly professional with top service, but also laid back and approachable". Eight out of ten participants said that they prefer a humanistic approach of advertisement rather than a clear ad. Participant #3 said, "It's always the humanistic approach for me. It means that someone put in effort to target my emotions and differentiate themselves from the competition, not only to make a random ad." Participant # 3 wants restaurants to put in the effort of targeting their emotions and seeing them as people, not just as customers who bring money. He or she wants to feel special and treated with care. Even though Participant #6 is

aware that the end result is still because of money, he or she would rather experience an escape and enjoy learning about a story rather than being directly advertised because they are just over advertised daily – Participant # 6 wants more than that.

There were several social media tactics that were not mentioned in the literature that participants agreed could potentially motivate them to visit a fine dining restaurant in Zagreb. Instagram stories were mentioned by Participants 1, 2, 3 and 8 because they are currently trendy and interesting for users to watch because they are easy and fast to follow. They update users on the latest information and provide them with stories that happen in “real time”. Promoting fresh and seasonal ingredients were another tactic mentioned. Participants # 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6 mentioned the importance of fine dining restaurants using fresh, organic and seasonal ingredients. If fine dining restaurants promote on social media that they are using these ingredients and show them, these participants would be more likely to visit the restaurant. Participants # 1, 2, 3, 6, 7 and 8 also suggested that a combination of professional photos and amateur photos should be used on the restaurants’ social media pages to welcome an approachable and personal touch to the restaurant. Participant # 6 believes that the restaurants should also be innovative and post different, unique content on their pages to reduce monotony and keep the users entertained. Participant # 2 said that contests should be as easy as possible (take a picture and post) to participate in because people are busy and do not want to bother with confusing instructions. Also, Participant # 2 suggested that the restaurants could invite an influencer to promote their restaurant on their Facebook or Instagram page. Finally, all of the participants agreed that promoting daily recommendations or special offers and organizing special events such as hosting international chefs, presenting a unique menu, hosting a winemaker and tasting menus would be appealing content to promote on social media and would motivate them to visit a fine dining

restaurant in Zagreb. Last but not least, showing the menu on social media and the price if there is a special offer or discount was mentioned by Participants # 7, 8 and 9. All of the participants agreed that the price should generally be on the restaurant's website, but if it is a good price or special offer then it should be promoted on the restaurant's social media channels. Participant #1 said, "I enjoy fresh, local and seasonal ingredients and I would be attracted by an offer that is different and original – which could be some special events, hosting of different chefs, etc." Participants #3 and 5 said that the meals and ingredients do not need to be anything special, they enjoy seeing a traditional meal with a new twist. Participant #3 said, "A good chef can take a sardine and make a miracle out of it".

According to Ariyasriwatana and Quiroga (2016), food is often linked to pleasure and strong emotions; it is also seen as fun and entertaining. A good way to promote food on social media is by using expressions of the five senses: taste (flavor), touch, smell, hear, visual, deliciousness, type of cooking, authenticity, variety of menu offering and more can attract a customer to want to eat whatever is on the photo or video (Ariyasriwatana & Quiroga, 2016). Photos that show texture and detail will appeal to the eye of the user (Ariyasriwatana & Quiroga, 2016). If the food speaks to the customers, they will most likely want to try it out. A good mixture of words and pictures or video will certainly attract users' attention on social media. Just like participant # 9 stated: "I found out about OXBO through social media. The pictures of the restaurant and the food made me want to visit".

All of the participants said that traditional word of mouth was more powerful to them than social media when making a decision to visit a fine dining restaurant. However, three of ten participants would also check Facebook reviews and comments along with TripAdvisor and food blogs to see what other peoples' experience were like, while two out of ten participants

exclusively relied on advice from their friends or family. Participant #1 said, “Both. Word of mouth is definitely stronger, but I would always check on social media to see what the ambiance is like, what is the food style is like, etc. Moreover, I would also check different food blogs, especially if I am traveling and I want to book interesting restaurants in different locations”. Participant #5 said, “For me, word of mouth is more powerful but social media serves to remind me of the existence of the restaurant after I have heard positive feedback from people.”

According to Liu et al., (2017), maintaining a consistent relationship with consumers on social media pages leads to more positive word of mouth. Word of mouth can increase sales and brand awareness (Fox, 2016) and social media is truly a powerful marketing tool for small business restaurants when used and properly implemented (Bennett, 2017). The research comes to the conclusion that fine dining restaurants must have amazing service, food and a great social media page, positive traditional word of mouth and then work on building positive word of mouth online by connecting to consumers through their Facebook and Instagram pages.

According to Gromfin (2016), before marketing a restaurant it is important to make sure that the restaurant is being run well. Otherwise, there is no point in marketing something that people would not like (Gromfin, 2016).

Three participants said that they use Instagram more often to follow their favorite restaurants; restaurants should look into adding Instagram to their daily life and including it or encouraging people to post their meals of the atmosphere or tag themselves when visiting the fine dining restaurants. For example, they can add an Instagram logo to their menu or add a note inside their menu or even run a contest and motivate the guests to post pictures and award them for doing so. According to Grub Street (2016), a chef that adapted his restaurant to being “Instagrammable” with putting hashtags on mirrors, providing free 5G Wi-Fi and USB ports and

creating a sense of a third place was successful because he tended to what the market was looking for (Grub Street, 2016, para. 16). Fine dining restaurants should be innovative and adapt to new changes. They should take it a step higher and be different.

According to Grub Street (2017), when restaurants connect to their customers by sharing the atmosphere of their restaurant, things going on in the community and creating unique and thoughtful ways to catch customers' attention, they can receive great benefits (Grub Street, 2017). Finally, according to Kim et al., (2015), social media positively affects businesses who use it correctly.

The purpose of this study was for the researcher to find out what social media tactics, marketing approaches and factors are most important to consider when creating an effective social media strategy using Facebook or Instagram to attract customers to visit a fine dining restaurant in Zagreb. By using in depth interviews and open-ended questions, participants were able to share their experiences and details about their perspectives on fine dining restaurants in Zagreb and how social media can or cannot influence their decision making. This study highlights what participants would like to see from the social media pages and posts of fine dining restaurants in Zagreb, as well as what they expect from their restaurants regarding food, atmosphere, and service. This study focuses on the customer perspective of how fine dining restaurants should approach their customers. The participants have experience in the fields of marketing, food industry and visiting fine dining restaurants – about fifty percent of the participants have over ten years of experience in these fields. By seeing the detailed perspectives of customers in this study, fine dining restaurants in Zagreb or marketing specialists can have a quality insight on how to target the fine dining market in Zagreb and simultaneously satisfy customers and attract them to visit fine dining restaurants in Zagreb.

In conclusion, fine dining restaurants in Zagreb should make their guests feel like they are in a different world when visiting. Their service, food and staff should be of the best quality. They should offer seasonal and organic ingredients, host special events such as hosting international chefs, winemakers, tasting menus, and presenting unique menus that portray the restaurant's and chef's philosophy. Their social media pages Facebook and Instagram should both be active and updated on a daily basis with unique content that varies from informative posts, funny posts, content that they can relate to, promotions for special events, discounts, offers and new menus. The social media pages should communicate what the restaurant's character and philosophy is. Their approach should be laid back but prompt when it comes to answering messages and writing back to reviews (bad or good). Customers want to see pictures or videos of high quality that show the restaurant's atmosphere, food, team and best services that they have to offer so that they know what to expect before visiting the restaurant. Fine dining restaurants should not forget that traditional word of mouth is their best friend and that if the restaurant is doing everything right, then social media can only additionally help in attracting customers, but if traditional word of mouth is poor, then customers will not even bother believing what the restaurant's pages write. Customers are looking for a special experience where they can enjoy amazing food, a great atmosphere and create wonderful memories. They appreciate uniqueness, creativity and top quality wine, food and service.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

This method of research included several limitations. The interview was done through e-mail which could limit an unlimited flow of communication. However, Participants # 1, 2 and 3 were contacted by telephone and asked additional sub questions in order to find more in-depth answers. Also, Participants #5 and 6 were contacted by e-mail for additional questions, while

Participant #4 was contacted by Facebook messenger because they preferred that social media channel for additional questions. All of the participants were contacted by e-mail and checked the transcript to make sure that the researcher understood the participants' point of view.

Another limitation was that each participant had their own view of the definition of fine dining restaurants in Zagreb. Even the researcher may have chosen a few restaurants that are not exactly fine dining but yet just expensive restaurants in Zagreb because there are not many in Zagreb. Most of the participants stated that they visited actual fine dining restaurants in Zagreb and introduced the researcher to more fine dining restaurants. However, Participant # 10 listed a fine dining restaurant that they visited, but he or she also listed a few restaurants in Zagreb that are not fine dining restaurants.

For the purpose of this study, fine dining is defined as restaurants that served main courses that are 70 kunas (Croatian currency) or higher, that provided a unique and outstanding overall experience and service (quality food, atmosphere, waiters, music, and high price) and had a status of being an expensive restaurant and restaurant with quality food in Zagreb. The interviewer was sure to have received valid data and asked the interviewees "What fine dining restaurants have you visited in Zagreb?", "What is your favorite fine dining restaurant and why?" and "How would you define fine dining or what is your definition of fine dining?" These questions helped the researcher understand what fine dining really means and how participants' perceive their fine dining experiences, because that is what the difference is between a regular restaurant and fine dining. Fine dining is an experience with top quality food and service.

These limitations provide insight for other researchers to take on the opportunity to develop further information on this topic and improve or update the results in the future. It would be beneficial to do real life interviews and take more time with the interviews. The researcher

predicts that the answers would be even richer and it would be possible to research deeper into the topic and expand the participants' answers even more. It could also be beneficial to do a mixed method research study and use both quantitative and qualitative research methods to find out more information and be able to see what results a quantitative study on this topic would bring. For example, the researcher could do a study on the topic "to what extent could social media motivate fine dining customers to visit a fine dining restaurant in Zagreb?". Also, the researcher believes that it would be interesting to see the difference between doing a quantitative survey with guests of fine dining restaurants with no marketing backgrounds and qualitative interviews with social media marketing experts to discover what guests want and need, but also to find out what the top trends or most effective tricks on social media are according to the experts.

The researcher also suggests that it would be beneficial to set up real Facebook and Instagram ads and test which ones would have the greatest effective on the users and why. It would also be useful to see whether gender, age, and similar factors could have an effect on overall results. Gender and background were also limitations of this study. For future studies, the researcher recommends that participants have an equal amount of female and male participants and an equal amount of participants with expertise in marketing or the food industry and those who are not involved in marketing or hospitality but just enjoy eating a fine dining restaurants to avoid any possible bias. This study used a qualitative research approach and the results cannot be generalized to the population. The results are indications that would need to be tested with a larger sample.

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## Appendix A

## Interview Questionnaire

Hi, how are you? 😊

Thank you for participating in this interview. Please relax, sit back, grab a cup of tea/coffee and take your time to answer these questions. I look forward to learning more about fine dining restaurants and the best social media tactics for them from your answers.

- 1) To start off, we have all become social media users and it seems like our whole worlds revolve around Facebook, Instagram and similar platforms. What social media posts usually catch your eye and heart/emotion (video, photo, contest, funny content, quotes, stories you can relate to)? Can you give an example please?
- 2) What fine dining restaurants have you visited in Zagreb and what motivated you to visit them? How did social media have an impact on your decision making?
- 3) Let's say you saw a really good post for the fine dining restaurant Noel in Zagreb. What would motivate you to actually decide to visit the restaurant rather than just like the post?
- 4) This one may take a few minutes, but please be creative! 😊

For this section you will need to look at the Facebook and Instagram profiles of Noel, Vinodol, Dubravkin put, Pod Zidom Bistro & wine Bar and Ristorante Carpaccio.

Looking at each of these FB & Instagram pages and what parts need improvement (if you would like you can send me screenshots).

Please let me know. 😊

Noel FB: <https://www.facebook.com/NoelZagreb/>

Noel Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/noelzagreb/?hl=en>

Vinodol FB: <https://www.facebook.com/vinodolzg/>

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Dubravkin put FB: <https://www.facebook.com/dubravkin.put/>

Dubravkin put Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/dubravkinput/?hl=en>

Pod Zidom Bistro & Wine Bar FB: <https://www.facebook.com/PodZidom/>

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Ristorante Carpaccio FB: <https://www.facebook.com/Ristorante-Carpaccio-Zagreb-208828649182907/>

Ristorante Carpaccio Instagram: There is no actual profile, but there is a location available where people have put their pictures and placed the location of the restaurant:

<https://www.instagram.com/explore/locations/18083540/ristorante-carpaccio-zagreb/?hl=en>

Next let's look at it from a customer's point of view, think "what would make me want to visit this restaurant based on these social media pages?"

Please let me know. 😊

Noel FB: <https://www.facebook.com/NoelZagreb/>

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Pod Zidom Bistro & Wine Bar FB: <https://www.facebook.com/PodZidom/>

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- 5) How does social media have an impact on your decision making for fine dining restaurants? How would you describe the impact word of mouth has on your decision making for fine dining restaurants?
- 6) Do you use Facebook or Instagram more to follow your favorite restaurants?
- 7) What types of offers would attract you to visit at a fine dining restaurant in Zagreb? What are your thoughts as to whether price should be communicated in a social media post?
- 8) Are you more likely to purchase something if it is marketed with a humanistic approach or if is a clear ad? Please explain why.

9) What do you expect from a fine dining restaurant?

10) What do you expect from their Facebook and Instagram pages?

11) What emotion can trigger you to visit a fine dining restaurant or what is your motive to visit a fine dining restaurant?

Thank you for participating and helping me complete my study!

Thank you and have a great day!

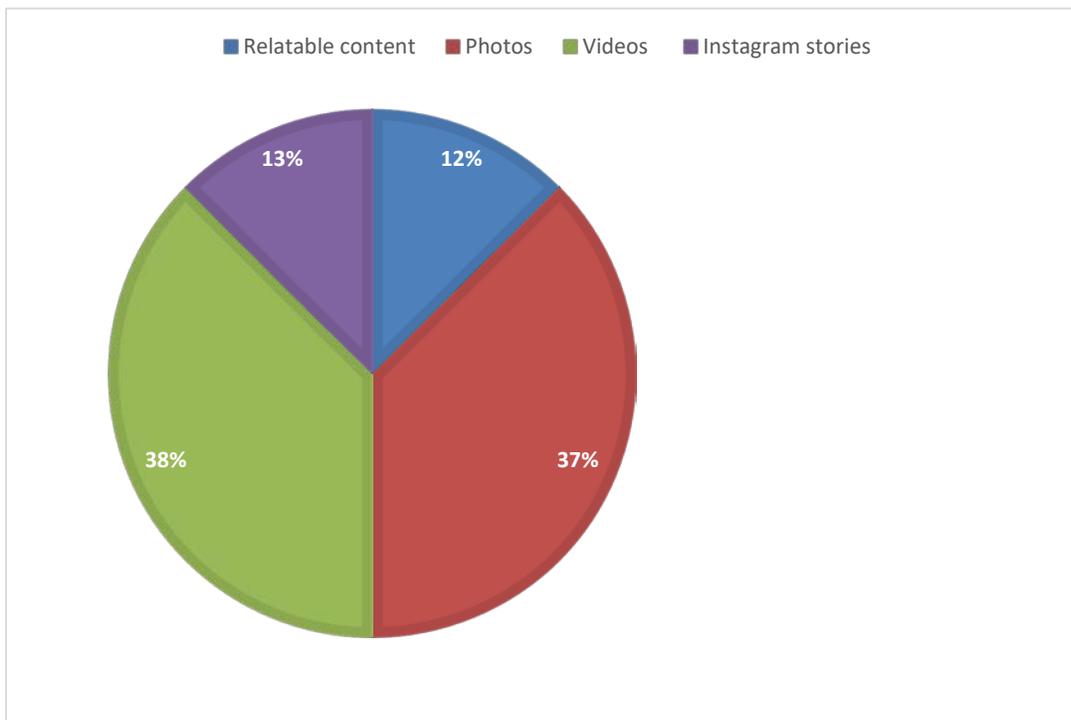
Kind regards,

Petra Malbaša

## Appendix B

The following section will present the findings from the previous section in the form of pie graphs and will specifically focus on each interview question so that the reader can have a clearer understanding of the study results.

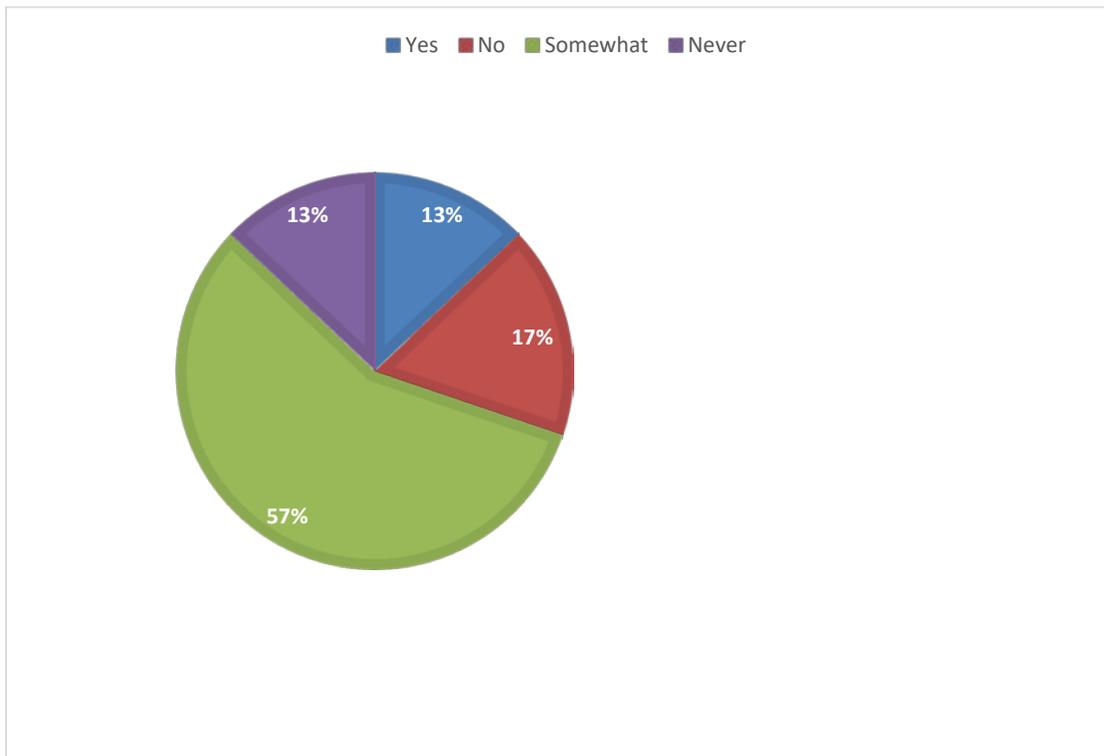
1) To start off, we have all become social media users and it seems like our whole worlds revolve around Facebook, Instagram and similar platforms. What social media posts usually catch your eye and heart/emotion (video, photo, contest, funny content, quotes, stories you can relate to)? Can you give an example please?



This pie chart represents that photo and video were equally important to all of the participants, particularly high quality photos and videos that either portray a story or contain relatable content. Instagram stories were mentioned by a few participants, specifically posts

made by chefs themselves. Also, eye catching stories, showing the creativity of dishes and overall catching the attention of the user by using unique content, funny content, stories that people can relate to and showing the philosophy of the restaurant.

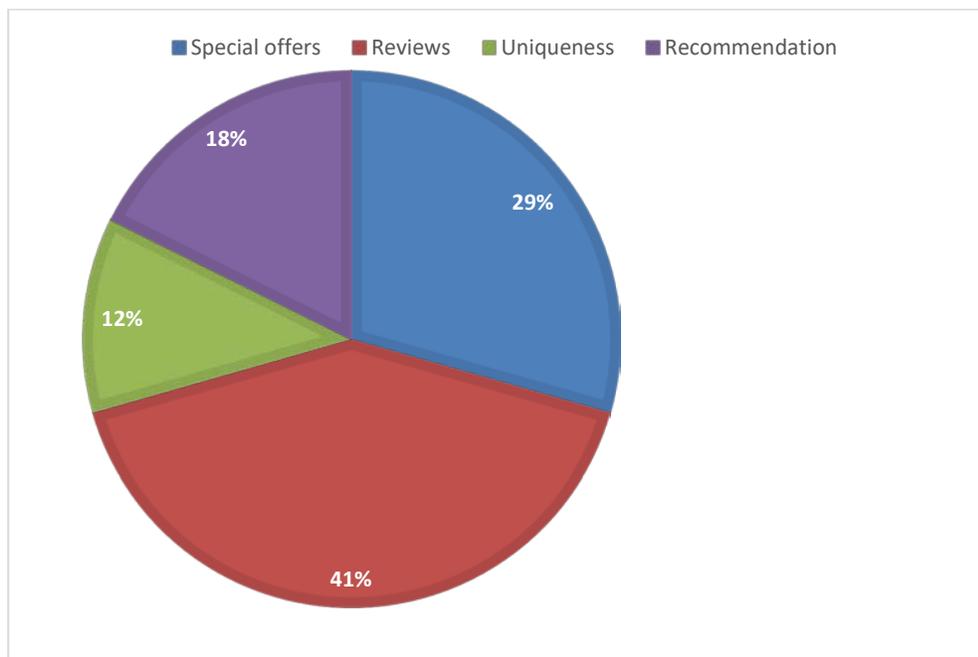
2) What fine dining restaurants have you visited in Zagreb and what motivated you to visit them? Did social media have an impact on your decision making?



Six out of ten participants said that social media was not their first option to lean on when making a decision to visit a fine dining restaurant in Zagreb. Traditional word of mouth (advice that they receive from friends and family is their number one source to finding out whether a fine dining restaurant is worth visiting or not. The reasons that they are somewhat influenced by social media are: if the restaurants promote special events such as unique winemakers or special menu presentations on social media, they will be intrigued to visit, they believe that social media is good for restaurants that have just opened and catching attention

and also social media gives them an idea of what to expect from the restaurant. One participant stated: “Word of mouth is more powerful - but in my case, it depends from whom it is coming from. If I got two or three recommendations for a place and I had to make a decision about where to go, than social media jumps in, I would look at Facebook/Instagram and Tripadvisor and pick my place based on the feedback I find there”. Four participants answered that they are clearly not influenced by social media, but rather by the curiosity of trying new and different foods that are recommended to them by word of mouth, mostly from their friends or family.

3) Let’s say you saw a really good post for the fine dining restaurant Noel in Zagreb. What would motivate you to actually decide to visit the restaurant rather than just liking the post?



Two participants said that a unique or different menu or hosting an international chef would motivate them to actually visit the restaurant. Four participants said they would look into

online reviews either on Facebook or TripAdvisor to check how other guests were satisfied, with one of the participants mentioning checking Facebook comments to not be “overly positive and fake”. Six participants mentioned that a recommendation from a friend, family or someone with food expertise would make them decide to ultimately visit or not visit a fine dining restaurant in Zagreb after being attracted to a post on Facebook or Instagram. Three participants put emphasis on value for money and being unique or creative with offers, while participant #6 whose opinion is usually that they are never influenced by social media to visit a fine dining restaurant stated: “For us to make a reservation based on a social media post, the photo and the status should strongly articulate and reflect ethics and philosophy of the restaurant. Beautiful photo of a plate would not be enough”.

4) This one may take a few minutes, but please be creative! 😊

For this section you will need to look at the Facebook and Instagram profiles of Noel, Vinodol, Dubravkin put, Pod Zidom Bistro & wine Bar and Ristorante Carpaccio.

Looking at each of these FB & Instagram pages and what parts need improvement (if you would like you can send me screenshots).

Please let me know. 😊

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Next let's look at it from a customer's point of view, think "what would make me want to visit this restaurant based on these social media pages?"

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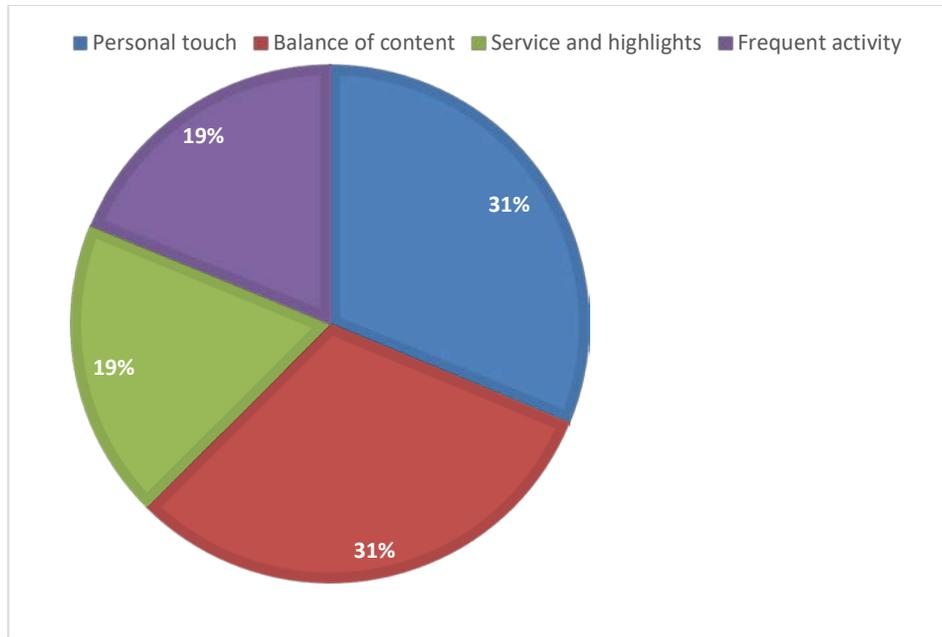
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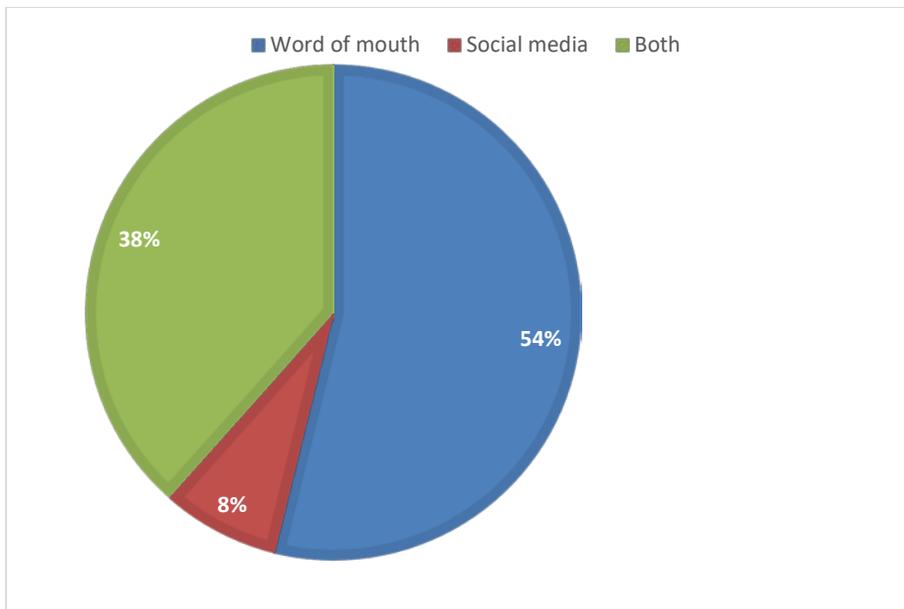
Based on the participants' answers, the researcher found that seven out of ten participants mentioned that they like to see a "human or personal touch" added to the Facebook and Instagram pages! They like to see what is really going on behind scenes, where the food is being bought (for example if they see it is being bought on the market then they know that the food is fresh and organic). All of the participants said that they enjoy a balance of photos or videos (content) – food, so that they can know what to expect, the atmosphere of the restaurant and the team behind it all to feel the human touch of what they may or may not experience tomorrow. Three participants with over ten years of experience in the food industry, said that they would like to see services and the best that the restaurant has to offer promoted on their social media pages and to really portray the philosophy of the cook and the restaurant itself. Seven out of ten participants mentioned that they would like to see frequent (daily) posts, with one participant that mentioned answering messages and another participant that mentioned the importance of writing back to reviews and thanking guests. Participant #1 stated: "I would be intrigued to see a fine dining restaurant promote their services from the beginning to the end: for example, the cook

showing where he bought the food (taking the customers to the market with them), then showing how the food is made and finally how it is served – a from the farm to the table approach”.

Participant #1, who has over ten years of experience in marketing in the tourism industry and a background of visiting fine dining restaurants, also mentioned that promoting seasonal and organic ingredients and having a more laid back approach would make her want to visit the restaurant. Participants #1, 2, and 3 all stated that they enjoy a laid back atmosphere where they can feel comfortable but yet high professionalism and quality (warmth, friendliness, but professionalism and care).

5) How does social media have an impact on your decision making for fine dining restaurants?

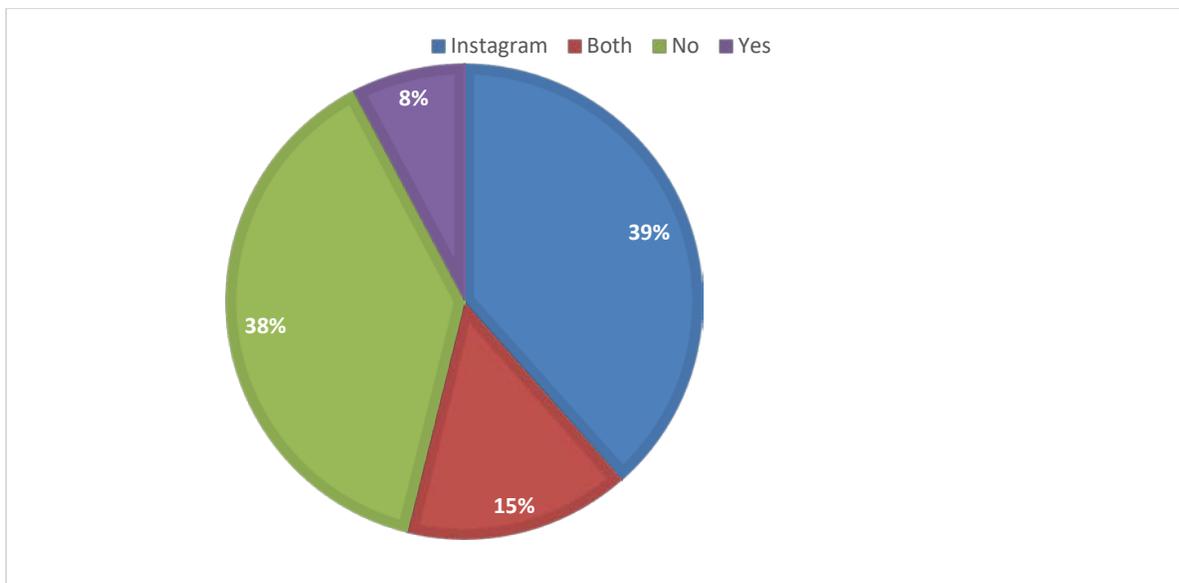
How would you describe the impact word of mouth has on your decision making for fine dining restaurants?



Every participant said that traditional word of mouth is more powerful when they are making a decision to visit a fine dining restaurant in Zagreb. However, six of the participants mentioned that social media is of secondary help to them such as, it allows them to look at

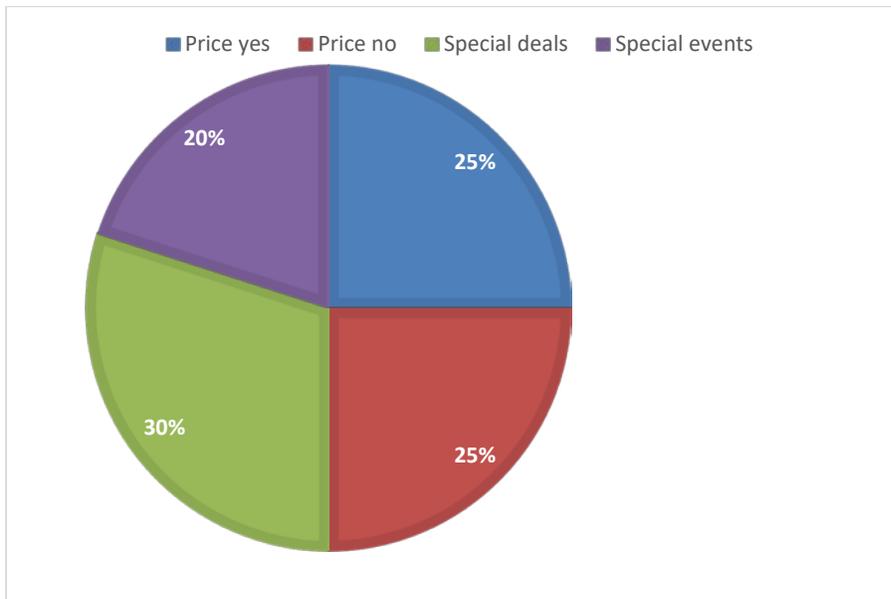
reviews, it reminds them that the restaurant exists, it shows them what the ambience is like helps them make a decision if they receive several recommendations and are not sure what to decide, they then make their decision based on the feedback found on Facebook reviews or Tripadvisor. While, four of the participants stated that word of mouth was more powerful than social media and they rely exclusively on recommendations from friends or family that they can trust.

6) Do you use Facebook or Instagram more to follow your favourite restaurants?



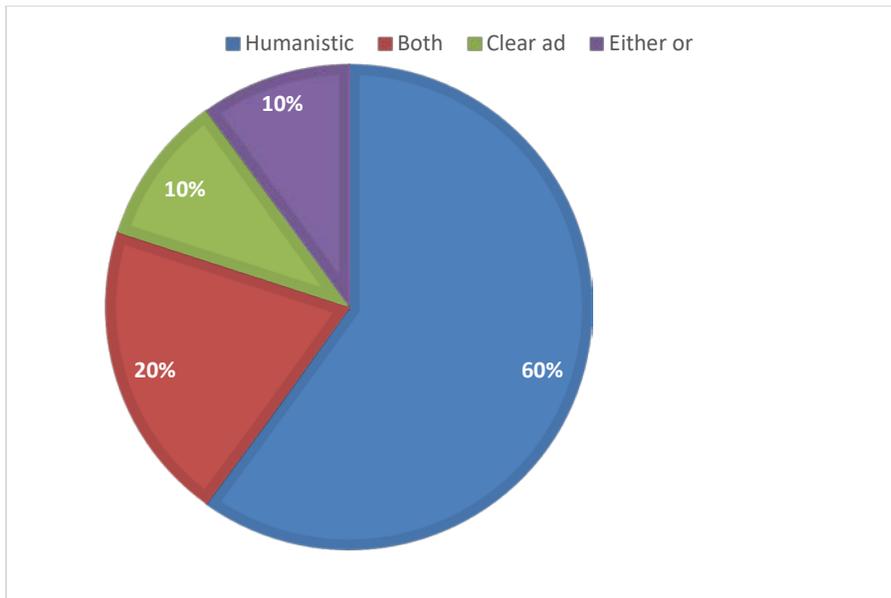
According to the pie chart above, three participants stated that they used Instagram more to follow their favourite fine dining restaurants (one participant mentioned that they also use TripAdvisor), three participants also stated no, meaning that they are not influenced by social media to visit a fine dining restaurant, two participants said that they use both (with one stating that they use Facebook a bit more) and two participants said yes to this question.

7) What types of offers would attract you to visit at a fine dining restaurant in Zagreb? What are your thoughts as to whether price should be communicated in a social media post?



Participant #6 stated: "Communication of the price depends on circumstances. If the restaurant offers fix price menu or the price is a selling argument, it should be communicated in social media post. If social media post only advertises new menus or a special event, price is not necessary". Participants # 9 and 10 stated that they would like to see the price on the restaurant's website. Eight participants said that it is probably a good idea to mention the price, especially in cases when there is a special offer or discount available. Participants #1, 2 and 3 also mentioned that posting expensive prices is not too attractive, but if it is value for money they would still visit (but they would rather see prices on social media tied to special offers or discounts, whereas for fix menus they would want to search for the price on their website. Special offers that were mentioned were: tasting menus, hosting different chefs, specials events and discounts, seasonal product, new twists on traditional foods, a workshop with food wine and live music and menu presentations that are unique.

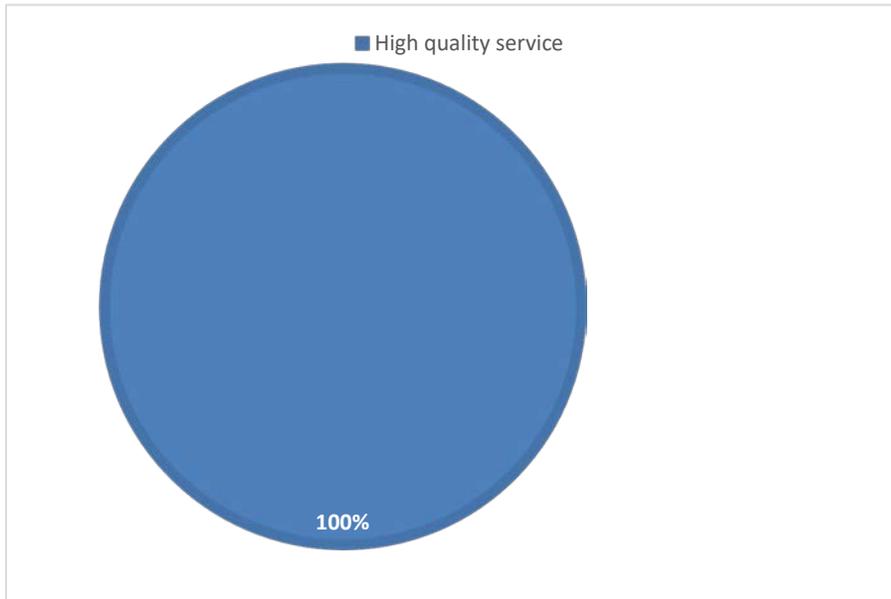
8) Are you more likely to purchase something if it is marketed with a humanistic approach or if is a clear ad? Please explain why.



60% of the participants said that they are more prone to a humanistic ad that tells a story, has an emotional approach, and portrays informative information about the restaurant and its philosophy. Participant # 5 stated: “Humanistic approach. I think we are over exposed to ads in everyday life, and even though a humanistic approach is also an ad, it offers escape from constant pop ups and caps lock text”. Participant #6 stated. “Humanistic approach because it usually gives more information on the product and brand philosophy”. Participant #3 stated: “Humanistic approach. It means that someone put in effort to target my emotions and differentiate from competition, not just make a random ad”. Participant #8 stated: “Humanistic approach: feelings and emotions. Whenever I see people enjoying and having fun, I would be more attracted to ads like this”. Participant #2 on the other hand stated: “No preference, but it is true that ads that don't seem like ads are more spontaneous and truthful”. Finally, participant #9

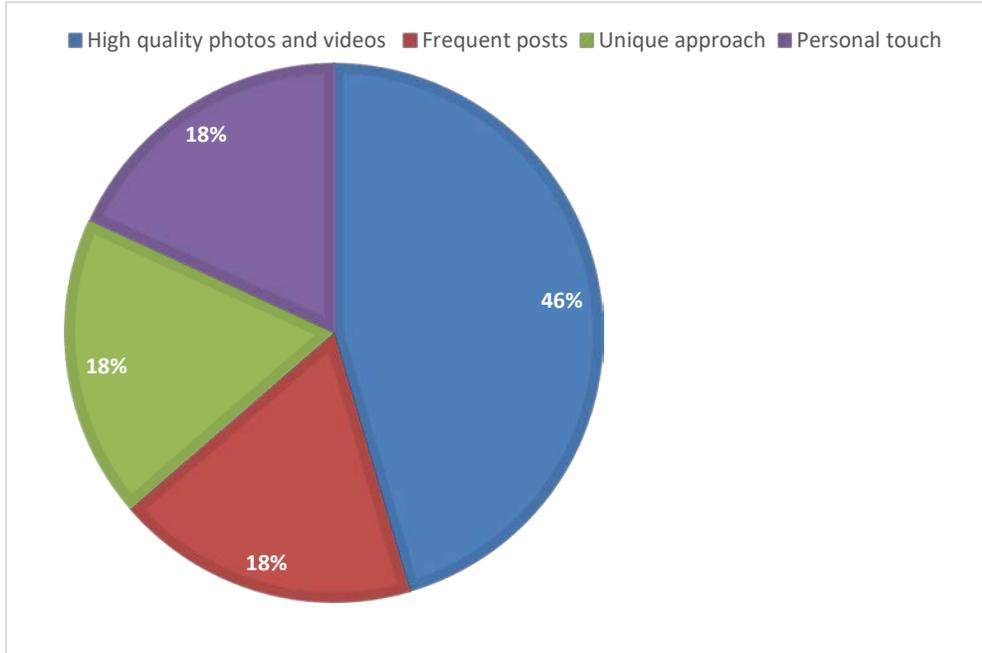
stated: “Clear add, I like to know exactly what I am getting”. The majority of the participants preferred a humanistic advertising approach over a clear ad approach.

9) What do you expect from a fine dining restaurant?



All of the participants expect nothing but high quality service from all aspects of the restaurant – well trained, professional staff that is extremely knowledgeable in food and wine, the best, fresh, organic and seasonal ingredients for food and creativity in dishes, a quality wine list, a feeling of comfort and politeness. Participant #6 with over 13 years of experience in food critiquing in Croatia and visiting every fine dining restaurant in Zagreb stated: “For a duration of your dinner, fine dining restaurant should teleport you to another world, that is perfectly tune to your desires and tastes. Exquisite food, artistic presentation, impeccable service, pristine tables, sumptuous ambience and an energy that convinces you that your short dream will not be spoiled by anything”.

10) What do you expect from their Facebook and Instagram pages?

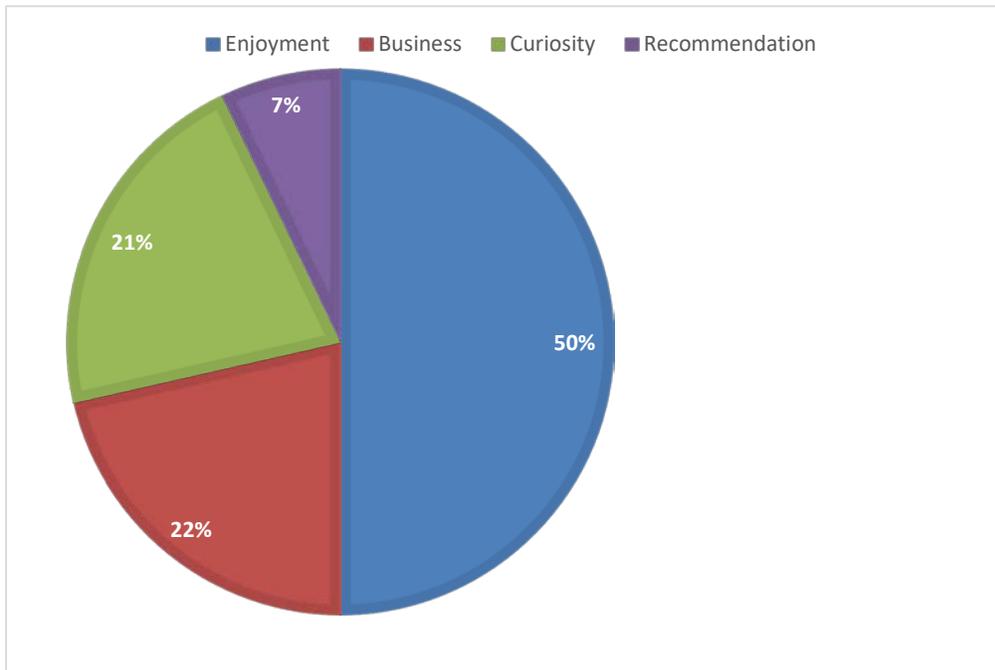


Participant #10 stated: “To be honest, from their Facebook and Instagram pages I expect creativity and innovation, frequency of posting pictures that include the restaurants team as well as food. I expect excellent service and amazing food of course from the restaurant itself. If I want to spend more money than usually, I want to indulge. And I think those restaurants need to understand that they should be selling an experience and not only food”.

Participant # 1 stated: “From the restaurant I expect a high level of service, best ingredients in food and original and interesting menu and good selection of wines. From their social media pages I expect them to differentiate themselves by showing the whole process of getting the ingredients, to delivering the original menu, in an interesting and original way.”

Participant #3 stated: “I want to feel comfortable and welcome in the restaurant, not surrounded by robots. The same goes for their social media pages, I would like to see professionalism, yet warmness“.

11) What emotion can trigger you to visit a fine dining restaurant or what is your motive to visit a fine dining restaurant?



A majority of the participants said that they visit fine dining restaurants to feel enjoyment, have a good time and eat quality food in a nice looking restaurant; three of them mentioned business as a reason to visit (along with enjoyment); two participants are specifically motivated curiosity and learning about new meals and approaches to food and also enjoy tasting the food, while one participant noted that their motivation is recommendations of others. The researcher believes that all of these factors are important to each participant but they chose to highlight their most significant reason to visit a fine dining restaurant.

Participant #1 stated: "Curiosity of trying something new and different". Participant #4 stated: "Number of emotions, curiosity, food and wine, so much to learn and explore. Cause I like to taste new things and experience the same dishes with the different approach. Wine lists and food, but as well good service". Participant #3 stated: "Hunger. It is the overall experience that should be in place for me to visit the restaurant. Food is of course the main reason, wine

list should be carefully designed, and service should be friendly and knowledgeable.

Memories are being created at such places – you always go with your loved ones to fine dining restaurants (significant other, good friends, and family)”.