Beyond The Plate

Investigating the Role of Instagram Marketing on Trust in Restaurant Brands

Student Name: Carletta Meyza Sudono
Student Number: 612734

Supervisor: dr. Aviv Barnoy

Master Media Studies - Media & Business
Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication
Erasmus University Rotterdam

Master's Thesis
June 2025

Word Count: 12147 words

Beyond the Plate: Investigating the Role of Instagram Marketing on Trust in Restaurants

ABSTRACT

In the era of digital communication, Instagram has become an emerging marketing platform for restaurant brands looking to establish trust and engage with consumers. Given the high-involvement nature of restaurant services, consumers increasingly rely on social media cues to form expectations. Though prior research has explored the role of social media in enhancing brand loyalty and consumer satisfaction, limited attention has been given to how platform-specific functionalities impact trust especially in the restaurant industry. This study addresses the gap by exploring how social media marketing functionalities (SMMF) on Instagram is associated with trust in restaurant brands, with a focus on the mediating role of consumer brand engagement (CBE).

This research adopts a quantitative approach using an online survey design. A total of 316 respondents were exposed to standardized Instagram stimuli from Joe & The Juice, a globally recognized brand with a strong digital presence. Participants assess the brand based on perceived functionalities, engagement, and trust-related outcomes. Key variables were measured using adapted and validated scales, and the data were analyzed through multiple linear regressions and mediation models.

This study offers theoretical contributions by refining the application of the Honeycomb Model to the restaurant context and by supporting the context-specific validity of the engagement framework. Practically, it highlights the strategic value of Instagram affordances as tools for shaping consumer perceptions and enforcing brand trust. Brands operating in the competitive restaurant industry are encouraged to prioritize cognitive resonance and perceived authenticity in their digital marketing efforts. The results contribute to a broader understanding of how trust is constructed in digital service environments and highlight the evolving role of platform design in consumer-brand relationships.

KEYWORDS: *Instagram, social media marketing, consumer brand engagement, brand trust*

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to express my gratitude to everyone who supported me during the writing of my thesis. First, I would like to thank my thesis supervisor, dr. Aviv Barnoy, who guided me throughout the entire process since day one. He is always fast with responding and providing clear and constructive feedback. I truly appreciated how supportive he was at every stage. I could not have asked for a better supervisor, and I am sincerely grateful for his help in shaping each chapter with care and attention.

Furthermore, I would like to thank my family, especially my parents, who have been by my side every step of the way. This thesis would not have been possible without them as they supported me both financially and emotionally throughout the years. Thank you for your patience, encouragement, and endless belief in me.

I would also like to thank my boyfriend and my friends for their support. I am incredibly grateful to be surrounded by such wonderful and caring people. Thank you for keeping me company and lifting my spirits every day during the writing process.

Finally, I would like to thank all participants of my research, who took the time to share their perspectives and made this thesis both meaningful and possible.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

In today's digital era, Instagram has become more than just a communication and online sharing platform. It is a powerful marketing platform for businesses that offer brands an interactive and visual platform to engage with customers. Instagram has been rising with over 1.4 billion monthly active users globally which provides brands the flexibility to show their products and services through Instagram's features (Dixon, 2024). Instagram's visual format allows brands to go beyond traditional advertising and create narratives that makes consumer want to connect. Instagram becomes a crucial tool for businesses looking to build relationships with consumers.

The rapid growth in social media usage made platforms like Instagram a source to assess credibility for businesses and brands including restaurants. As consumers increasingly rely on online platforms to make decisions, Instagram has become the touchpoint for consumers to evaluate whether a restaurant is worth to visit (Mejova et al., 2015, p. 5). Restaurants have a high involvement service considering its intangibility and experiential consumption. Instagram being a visual driven platform, allows businesses to enhance brand perception and create connection (Kim & Ko, 2012, p. 1481). This leads to Instagram and the visual approach especially important in industries like restaurant where aesthetics play a major role consumer decision-making.

The intangibility of restaurants drives customers to rely heavily on factors like social media marketing to form expectations. Previous studies have shown that effective social media marketing enhances customer engagement, strengthens brand trust, and ultimately drives consumer decision-making in the hospitality sector (Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2023, p. 14). On the other hand, Namkung and Jang (2007, p. 387) noted that food quality significantly influences customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions which emphasize the importance of trust in this industry. Considering the outcomes of social media marketing and the importance of food quality, a strong social media marketing is a key indicator for consumers in the restaurant industry to assess dining options.

The monthly active users on Instagram and its functional affordances naturally makes Instagram the place where customers review the extent to which a restaurant is appealing. The presentation of food, ambiance, and overall dining experiences can be easily shown through content creation to attract consumers' visual senses and further influence their dining choices (Gambetti & Han, 2022, p. 970). Moreover, the interactive features of Instagram such as stories, reels, and live sessions, allow restaurants to engage with their followers in real-time, creating a sense of community and trust. Understanding the dynamics behind how digital interactions shape brand perceptions becomes essential.

6

At the same time, trust has become fragile in today's digital era. The amount of branded content, influencer partnerships, and algorithm makes it harder for consumers to determine authenticity. Thus, understanding how brands can strategically make use of Instagram functionalities to develop trust becomes both academically and socially relevant. Academics have emphasized the relevance of social media in stimulating consumer relationships, yet it often focuses on outcomes such as loyalty or satisfaction. Though prior research has emphasized the role of social media in relationship building, studies on how Instagram's platform-specific functionalities contribute to trust formation in the restaurant sector remain limited (Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2023, p. 7).

From a societal perspective, brand trust plays an important role in purchasing decisions and brand loyalty. The overwhelming volume of branded contents that users are constantly exposed to makes trust a filter to help consumers decide which messages to believe in and which brands to support. For restaurant brands, the stakes are high as trust is closely tied to perceived authenticity, quality, and transparency. These attributes are often communicated visually and contextually through social media platforms like Instagram.

Scientifically, there is growing interest in how social media marketing contributes to developing trust. Previous literature has examined social media's role in enhancing loyalty, satisfaction, and relationship quality (Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2023, p. 7). However, fewer studies have focused on trust as an outcome within the context of visual-driven platforms like Instagram. Furthermore, there is a lack of research that integrates platform-specific functionalities into a framework to explain trust formation in the restaurant industry. Although the Honeycomb Model by Kietzmann et al. (2011) and engagement frameworks by (Hollebeek et al. (2014) are conceptually established, they are rarely tested together in a quantitative mediation model.

The study aims to dive further into the dynamics of Instagram marketing and explore the role of consumer engagement. Engagement in the digital environment is increasingly seen as more than just interaction as it entails emotional, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions (Hollebeek et al., 2014, p. 149). Previous research has suggested that engagement can mediate the relationship between brand communications and consumer responses yet there is a lack of empirical studies exploring this mediation in the context of Instagram based marketing for restaurant brands (Brodie et al., 2013, p. 105). As restaurant brands utilize Instagram features to stimulate engagement, it becomes relevant to ask whether that engagement leads to greater trust or if the factors intervene. Thus, there is the need to study how engagement is not only an outcome of social media marketing but

also as a psychological mechanism that shapes consumer trust towards brands.

The restaurant industry calls for academic attention due to its rapid growth globally and its dependence on digital marketing for consumer outreach. According to recent industry forecasts, the global food service market is projected to grow from 2.5 trillion USD in 2023 to over 4.4 trillion USD by 2030 (Statista, 2024). This was driven by changing consumer lifestyles and growing middle class. Digital transformation has played a role in this growth since restaurants adopt online platforms to manage reservations, show menus, and interact with customers. Instagram specifically has become the marketing channel to attract tech savvy consumers.

This study addresses the gaps by exploring the role of Instagram based social media marketing functionalities in shaping consumer trust in restaurant brands with a mediating role of consumer engagement. The study takes Joe & The Juice as a case study as it is a globally recognized food and beverage brand known for its aesthetic appeal, energetic brand persona, and minimal political affiliations. The brand's strong digital presence on Instagram makes it a suitable context for this study. The study is further guided by the following research question:

How do social media marketing functionalities (SMMF) on Instagram influence trust in a restaurant brand, considering the role of consumer engagement?

This study aims to fill the gap on trust being the primary outcome of platform specific marketing functionalities. Furthermore, the study is specific to the restaurant industry considering its lack of research combined with the growing demand in restaurant business. Exploring this gap is important considering trust is critical in situations where consumers cannot evaluate a product or service in advance. Therefore, this study investigates how Instagram's social media marketing functionalities are associated with trust in restaurants by using consumer engagement as a mediating variable.

The following chapters of this thesis will provide a structured exploration of this topic. Chapter 2 presents a theoretical framework, discussing key concepts such as social media marketing functionalities, consumer brand engagement, and brand trust. Chapter 3 outlines the research design, including the methodology, sampling approach, and operationalization. Chapter 4 presents the results of the analysis, followed by Chapter 5, which offers a discussion of the findings, practical implications, limitations, and directions for future research.

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter presents the concepts relevant to the study by exploring the theoretical frameworks related to understanding how Instagram based social media marketing functionalities is associated with trust in restaurant brands with consumer brand engagement as a mediating role. The framework is structured to first define the core concepts before critically analyzing their relationships and further leading to the development of hypotheses. The aim is to establish a coherent line of reasoning that connects theory to empirical measurement.

2.1. Social Media Marketing Functionalities on Instagram

The integration of social media into modern brand strategies has significantly altered the way brands communicate with consumers. Among various platforms, Instagram has become especially important because of its visual storytelling, interactivity, and user generated content features (Liu et al., 2022, p. 199). Previous scholars have emphasized that Instagram allows brands to shift from traditional advertising by creating spaces for engagement, community building, and interactive dialogue (Ginsberg & Murshed, 2020, p. 115). Its format is driven by images, stories, reels, and comments which supports both passive exposure and active participation. Hence, Instagram is a relevant platform for brands to do market research.

To conceptualize how these social media features can transform into brand communication tools, understanding the framework of social media marketing functionalities (SMMF) is essential. Kietzmann et al. (2011) introduced the Honeycomb Model which outlines seven core functionalities of social media including identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups. For instance, identity involves how brands express themselves through visual branding while conversations capture real time interaction through comments or direct messaging (Kietzmann et al., 2011, p. 244). These functionalities help explain how social media platforms allow users and brands to interact, present themselves, and collaborate.

Instagram aligns well with several of these functionalities especially identity, presence, sharing, and conversations. For example, image grids and story highlights allow users for visual branding and storytelling (Ashley & Tuten, 2015, p. 21). As previously highlighted, Instagram features like live streaming, interactive polls, and question boxes in stories allow for ongoing user and brand interaction. This made Instagram a leading platform for executing complex marketing strategies with the goal to stimulate user engagement and emotional resonance. Considering the findings, this study applies identity, presence, and conversation as part of the social media marketing functionalities construct which makes the concept a suitable lens.

Khan and Jan (2019) extended the theoretical framework into a measurable construct, developing a scale that allows for SMMF to be measured. Their study highlighted the importance of platform-specific functionalities including informativeness, interactivity, and credibility in shaping user evaluations of brand social media presence (Khan & Jan, 2019, p. 4). They argue that on top of content's quality, consumers judge brand performance by how well the platform's affordances are leveraged. This finding supports the proposition that the way brands utilize Instagram's interactive features will be positively associated with consumer responses.

Another theoretical lens that enhances the understanding of SMMF is Affordance Theory. The theory was originally conceptualized by Gibson (1979) and adapted to technology contexts by Treem and Leonardi (2013). Affordance Theory focuses on the perceived and actual possibilities that technology provides to its users. The theory suggest that what users perceive they can do with the platform determine how it is used (Gibson, 1979, p. 127; Evans et al., 2017, p. 39). The perspective is beneficial for analyzing how Instagram shape user behavior and brand interaction beyond technical functionality.

In the context of Instagram, affordances refer to what users perceive they can do with the platform (e.g., post images, interact with polls, watch stories), and what these actions mean within a specific communication context. Affordance theory emphasizes that it is not merely the presence of features that matter but the way users interpret and apply these features in their brand interactions. Affordance theory becomes highly relevant for the restaurant industry since consumers evaluate overall credibility and make judgment through perceived affordances like behind-the-scenes reels, digital menu, and so on.

Furthermore, Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) offers a complementary explanation of why users engage with certain functionalities on Instagram. UGT suggests that individuals actively seek out media that satisfies specific needs, such as information, social interaction, or personal identity (Katz et al., 1973). Applying UGT to Instagram, restaurant consumers may engage with content not just because it is available but because it meets psychological or social gratifications. For example, visually appealing food content that inspires dining choices or story-based interactions that offer a sense of inclusion. Hence, UGT explains the motivational drivers behind why certain Instagram functionalities are more effective in influencing consumer attitudes.

Despite the various theories and their utilities, they are not without critique. Peters et al. (2013, p.

284) argue that the Honeycomb model can become diminishing when applied without adaptation to platform specific or industry specific contexts. Instagram also constantly update its features which often blur the boundaries between the seven dimensions. Kietzmann et al. (2012, p. 112) further noted that while the model provides a useful base, it lacks predictive power unless integrated with empirical instruments. Thus, it is important to adapt the model into a specific industry or platform.

Further concerns have been raised regarding the increasing commercialization of social media functionalities. Although features such as presence and reputation can be indicators of authenticity, De Veirman et al. (2017, p. 807) observe that they might also be manipulated through strategies like influencer marketing or fake follower counts. These practices can make it difficult for the consumers to evaluate brand credibility which potentially undermine the trust that SMMF aims to create. These concerns suggest that despite the framework's adaptability, it should still be critically applied and updated in line with platform developments and user behavior patterns.

Overall, social media marketing functionalities on Instagram offer a valuable lens for analyzing how specific platform affordances impact different things like attention, development of engagement, and trust. This study focuses on those functionalities that can be operationalized through visible Instagram actions such as identity cues, interactive communication, and presence, to explore how they can stimulate engagement and trust. To understand how these functionalities are interpreted by consumers, it is essential to explore how users cognitively and behaviorally interact with brand content. The next section introduces the concept of consumer brand engagement as the psychological link between Instagram features and user responses.

2.2. Consumer Brand Engagement

Consumer brand engagement (CBE) has become a main construct in marketing research especially within the context of social media. It captures the depth and quality of consumers' interaction with branded content and has been associated with a range of outcomes including trust, loyalty, and advocacy (Brodie et al., 2011, p. 258). Hollebeek et al. (2014) defines engagement as a multidimensional construct composed of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. Cognitive engagement reflects the consumer's level of concentration and interest while emotional engagement represents feelings of enthusiasm and behavioral engagement further refers to participation related actions such as commenting, liking, or sharing branded content (Hollebeek et al., 2014, p. 150). The framework is one of the most influential conceptualizations of engagement making it relevant for this research.

This study focuses on cognitive and behavioral dimensions of consumer brand engagement. The emotional dimension was not included because of practical considerations. Although Hollebeek et al. (2014) consider engagement as a multidimensional construct, they also emphasize that the relevance of each dimension might vary depending on the brand context and the nature of the consumer brand interaction. In the case of Instagram, engagement often occurs through likes, comments, and shares which makes cognitive attention and behavioral interaction especially important. This makes emotional engagement less relevant for the research compared to cognitive and behavior.

Furthermore, this study used a standardized stimulus which are screenshots of Joe & The Juice's Instagram page to anchor brand exposure. Since not all participants may have prior experience with the brand, emotional engagement was considered less suitable for measurement in this context because the dimension draws on personal experience or affective connection. Therefore, this study focuses on cognitive and behavioral engagement as the most relevant and valid dimensions for collecting user responses to Instagram based brand communication.

However, it is important to acknowledge that emotional engagement may still emerge in some contexts even without prior brand attachment or knowledge, especially through contents displaying emotional resonance. Therefore, this exclusion should be viewed not as a theoretical denial of emotional engagement's relevance but as a practical adjustment based on the nature of the stimulus and the assumed limited brand familiarity among participants. The decision to exclude emotional engagement was intended to maintain conceptual clarity and measurement reliability.

Further, other scholars argue that engagement's boundaries often blur with similar concepts like involvement or flow (Calder et al., 2009, p. 327). The operationalization of engagement also varies across studies. For instance, Hollebeek (2014) emphasize multidimensionality while other researchers measure engagement simply through behavioral traits such as likes or comments (Dolan et al., 2019). This has led to calls for more context specific applications of the concept especially in areas where cognitive factors might be as important as behavioral ones.

On Instagram, the theories previously mentioned could manifest through entertainment, information, or interaction offered by brands in return for user attention. These theories help frame engagement not just as a user action, but as a socially and psychologically motivated process influenced by perceived brand responsiveness and reward. The interpretation aligns with the

restaurant industry's need to establish connection and familiarity before a physical transaction.

Despite these limitations, the consumer brand engagement framework offers valuable theoretical grounding for this study. The comprehensive view of engagement allows for an in-depth understanding of how consumers mentally, emotionally, and behaviorally interact with branded content on Instagram. In relation to social media marketing functionalities, engagement does not only become a response to brand actions but also a critical mediator that links brand communication to consumer trust.

Lastly, consumer brand engagement is relevant in the restaurant industry because visually rich and interactive Instagram content is used to spark consumers' interest. Prior research shows that such engagement creates emotional connections and brand familiarity especially when dining decisions are shaped by the perceptions customers get from digital impressions (Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2023, p. 1725). Given the high frequency nature of dining experiences, engagement on social media is a key for consumers' psychological connection to restaurant brands. With this understanding, it becomes relevant to explore how Instagram's functionalities are associated with consumer brand engagement. The next section dives deeper into this relationship leading to the development of the first hypotheses.

2.3. Impact of Instagram Marketing Functionalities on Consumer Brand Engagement

As previously introduced in the social media marketing functionalities conceptual framework, this section further explores how the functionalities translate into consumer brand engagement. The relationship between social media marketing functionalities (SMMF) and consumer brand engagement has been increasingly highlighted in digital marketing research. Although SMMF describes the strategic affordances provided by platforms like Instagram, consumer engagement captures the psychological and behavioral responses of users to these affordances. Instagram's features offer both passive and active engagement opportunities, ranging from viewing content and reading captions to liking, commenting, or sharing posts.

Previous scholars have explored how such functionalities can shape consumer brand engagement outcomes when implemented effectively (Godey et al., 2016, pp. 582-583). Godey et al. (2016, p. 583) showed that social media marketing efforts positively influence brand equity components like brand awareness and brand image which further affect consumer behaviors like brand preference, loyalty, and willingness to pay. Similarly, Khan and Jan (2019, p. 4) showed that when consumers perceive brand content as informative and credible, they are more likely to engage actively with it.

These studies confirm that when brands optimize features like responsiveness, visual branding, and comment interaction, they stimulate meaningful consumer responses.

Unlike traditional marketing, Instagram has an inviting dynamic and ongoing interactions between users and brand pages. Features such as story polls, carousel posts, reels, and interactive stickers allow brands to maintain presence and direct interaction. These features support communication and facilitate the creation of content that feels timely and relevant. Ibrahim and Aljarah (2023, p. 7) found that consumers respond more favorably to brands that show high levels of engagement on platforms. The ability to interact with brand content provides users with a sense of involvement and recognition which reinforces both cognitive attention and behavioral actions.

In the context of this study, consumer engagement is not assumed to occur naturally but is considered a likely outcome when consumers are exposed to Instagram functionalities in a structured environment. This study simulates a realistic digital brand encounter by presenting a standardized Instagram screenshots as stimuli. This allow for the further evaluation of how cognitive and behavioral engagement may be triggered by the affordances. The approach aligns with the conceptualization of SMMF with its operational treatment.

The impact of SMMF on engagement becomes relevant as Instagram is widely used to shape consumer perceptions of restaurant customers. Restaurants frequently rely on Instagram's interactive features to engage customers in a saturated digital market. In food related context, interactive Instagram features such as user tagging and real time commenting are found to enhance consumer interaction and behavioral responses (Godey et al., 2016, pp. 582-583). Similarly, Villarroel-Ordenes et al. (2019, p. 410) emphasized that the entertainment value and visual appeal of content is crucial in triggering consumer actions such as liking, saving, or reposting posts. In such contexts, behavioral engagement often precedes trust as consumers associate brand responsiveness and trendiness with credibility.

Taken together, these findings reinforce that social media marketing functionalities are not just platform features but strategic engagement mechanism. Utilizing these in alignment with user expectations and platform norms, the platform's features create higher levels of brand engagement. Based on this theoretical connection, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1a: Social media marketing functionalities on Instagram are positively associated with cognitive consumer brand engagement

H1b: Social media marketing functionalities on Instagram are positively associated with behavioral consumer brand engagement

2.4. Brand Trust

In digital environments with no physical interaction, brand trust plays an important role in shaping consumer attitudes and behaviors. Brand trust is defined as the willingness of a consumer to rely on a brand based on the expectation that it will deliver on its promises (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001, p. 82). The idea is essential for reducing perceived risk, encouraging repeat purchases, and create long term brand relationships. In the context of social media, trust becomes even more important as consumers are continuously exposed to curated content, influencer collaborations, and brand narratives that may or may not align with their actual experiences.

Trust is found to be conceptually related to constructs such as credibility, authenticity, and brand attitude. However, it is important to distinguish trust from those three. Credibility refers to the perceived expertise and reliability of a brand's communication (Nayeem et al., 2019, p. 823). Authenticity captures the perceived genuineness and consistency of a brand's values and actions (Morhart et al., 2015, p. 211). Brand attitude represents a consumer's overall judgment on the extent to which a brand is favorable (Yang & Battocchio, 2021, p. 1177). In contrast, brand trust focuses on a consumer's confidence in a brand to embody their values especially under risky conditions (Delgado-Ballester, 2004, as cited in Kim et al., 2021, p. 426). Focusing on trust in this study is relevant to reduce perceived uncertainty in restaurant environments.

Authors such as Delgado-Ballester et al. (2003) have highlighted the multifaceted idea of brand trust which distinguishes reliability and intentionality. Reliability is how consistently a brand performs while intentionality is a brand's perceived goodwill and care for consumers' interest (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2003, p. 37). These dimensions are relevant in an era where digital saturation increases and users are constantly exposed to promotional content that further creates the need to assess authenticity of each brand encounter. Therefore, trust serves as a psychological filter that allows consumers to determine which messages or brands are worth to rely on.

Previous studies have highlighted the importance of brand trust in online contexts. Laroche et al. (2013, p. 79) found that trust mediates the relationship between brand communication and outcomes such as brand loyalty and advocacy on social media platforms. These findings indicate that trust does not simply follow awareness or engagement, but it actively determines whether brand exposure translates into consumer relationships. Similarly, Godey et al. (2016, p. 583) noted

that consumers' trust in a brand's social media presence significantly influences brand preference and purchase intention. Hence, exploring the role of trust within a specific context in the technologically dependent era is important for businesses to leverage and drive growth.

An additional theoretical lens relevant to this study is Signaling Theory. In the restaurant industry, consumers often make dining decisions without prior experience which creates an imbalance of information that leads them to depend on brand-generated contents (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016, p. 190). On social media, these signals can include visual contents, customer feedback, or the frequency and tone of brand messaging. In this context, trust emerges when consumers perceive these signals as authentic and aligned with their expectations. This theory is particularly relevant for restaurant brands since consumers cannot evaluate product quality in advance and instead rely on such cues. Thus, Instagram becomes a signaling mechanism for restaurant quality, ambiance, hygiene, and transparency.

Despite wide agreement on the importance of trust, there are ongoing debates regarding its stability. Other scholars believe that trust in digital spaces can be more volatile, shaped by individual experiences, third party endorsements, or algorithms (Erdem & Swait, 2004, p. 197). A brand might enjoy high trust among certain consumer groups as a result of influencer partnerships or viral content, yet others might still not trust due to perceived inauthenticity. These differences highlight the contextual nature of trust and suggest that its development is influenced by both strategic brand actions and the broader social media environment.

Restaurants often rely on social proof, consistency, and aesthetic presentation to create trust in digital environment. Since food is hard to judge digitally, consumers rely on reviews, profile, and visuals to assess brand credibility. Godey et al. (2016, p. 583) and Villarroel Ordenes et al. (2019, p. 410) support this by showing that digital visuals and community feedback shape consumer judgments of trust and quality. Ibrahim and Aljarah (2023, p. 7) further emphasize that brands who manage to sustain interactive and consistent communication on Instagram are more likely to be trusted. This makes trust a central metric of successful digital marketing in the restaurant industry.

The importance of brand trust is amplified by the highly competitive nature of the restaurant industry. Dining out is often influenced by perceptions of brand safety, quality, and reliability. This further confirms the idea that trust developed through digital environments become a significant indicator. Restaurants that fail to build or maintain trust may lose out to competitors with stronger online reputations, regardless of actual product quality. This is especially relevant for newer

establishments that lack offline brand recognition and needs to compete entirely through their digital presence.

However, brand trust still has its limitations including separating itself from related concepts like credibility or reputation. Although they are interconnected, these concepts differ in scope and formation (Erdem & Swait, 2004, p. 197). Moreover, trust might not be generalizable to all consumers or cultural contexts because what builds trust in one market might not work in another (Laroche et al., 2013, p. 84). Consequently, trust can be easily built through engaging content but can also be easily lost through inconsistent messaging or wrong steps in social media (Godey et al., 2016, p. 583). Nonetheless, brand trust remains a critical outcome of social media marketing strategy to sustain consumer relationships (Laroche et al., 2013, p. 79).

2.5. Consumer Brand Engagement and Brand Trust

Building on the definitions of engagement and trust, this section focuses on path that connects the two. As digital interactions continue to replace traditional face to face interaction, understanding how consumer brand engagement enhances trust has become an important question for authors. In social media contexts where consumers lack physical interaction with brands, engagement is often the foundational step toward developing trust which further helps individuals assess brand authenticity and reliability. When consumers cognitively and behaviorally engage with a brand, they are more likely to form favorable impressions that lead to trust (Hollebeek et al., 2014, p. 150).

The relationship between engagement and trust is supported by several literatures. Dessart et al. (2015, p. 36) suggest that high levels of engagement lead to relational closeness which further enhances trust in brands. Similarly, Laroche et al. (2013, p. 79) found that brand engagement on social media significantly contributes to trust development through consistency, openness, and responsiveness. Consumers who invest time and cognitive effort into a brand's content are more likely to perceive it as credible. Emotional and behavioral signs of engagement are also indicators of brand legitimacy within networks which further reinforces trust.

On Instagram, engagement appears as visible actions like commenting, tagging, and sharing. In addition to showing consumer interest, these behaviors also enhance perceived authenticity which is important to brand trust (Godey et al., 2016, p. 583). The digital world makes engagement a social endorsement that strengthens the trustworthiness of a brand in the eyes of consumers. Moreover, Ibrahim and Aljarah (2023, p. 7) found that consumer engagement with interactive Instagram features positively influences emotional brand attachment and trust.

Within the restaurant industry, the relationship of engagement and trust is even more significant. Restaurants use Instagram not only to showcase what they are selling but to invite interaction by encouraging user generated content and respond to feedback. By encouraging interaction and responsiveness, restaurants build a sense of community that strengthens trust (Villarroel Ordenes et al., 2019, p. 410). In dining, trust is not only based on product quality but on interactions across digital media. These findings provide strong theoretical grounding for the proposition that consumer engagement with Instagram content leads to increased trust in restaurant brands. Based on these insights, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H2a: Cognitive consumer brand engagement on Instagram is positively associated with trust in restaurant brands.
H2b: Behavioral consumer brand engagement on Instagram is positively associated with trust in restaurant brands.

2.6. Social Media Marketing Functionalities and Brand Trust

While the previous section established brand trust as a critical outcome in digital contexts, this section shifts focus to the direct influence of social media functionalities. Instagram allows brands to leverage features like stories, direct messaging, tagged content, and user interaction to build perceptions of transparency and reliability. Kietzmann et al. (2011, p. 243) emphasize that functionalities such as presence, conversation, and reputation offer affordances that allow brands to demonstrate openness and authenticity which are key factors in trust formation.

Previous studies have explored the main attributes of social media functionalities that contributes to a brand's trustworthiness. Khan and Jan (2019, p. 4) highlight informativeness, interactivity, and credibility as central social media functionalities that positively affect the extent to which consumers trust a brand. Similarly, Godey et al. (2016, p. 583) found that social media marketing attributes like content quality and responsiveness significantly influence trust-related outcomes across various consumer markets. These studies highlight how functional design and communication strategy together influence the way consumers form trust in digital contexts.

As previously mentioned, in the restaurant industry consumers cannot evaluate food products directly on Instagram making trust crucial. Consumers depend on high-quality images, customer testimonials, and interaction to assess credibility which are part of social media functionalities. Villarroel-Ordenes et al. (2019, p. 410) highlight that for service-based industries, sustained digital

interaction reinforces competence which is also core dimension of trust. The frequency, tone, and responsiveness of a brand's social media communication, rather than just its visual aesthetic, is a sign of relational intent.

Nevertheless, trust outcomes depend on how these functionalities are implemented. As De Veirman et al. (2017, p. 807) suggest, strategic misuse such as excessive promotional content, disingenuous messaging, or a lack of user interaction can erode trust even in highly visible brands. In this sense, the link between SMMF and trust is conditional since functionalities serve as potential trust builders but only when deployed in a way that aligns with consumer expectations for authenticity and consistency. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed but this direct relationship may be further explained through consumer engagement which will be explored in the next section through a mediation lens.

H3: Social media marketing functionalities on Instagram are positively associated with trust in restaurant brands.

2.7. Consumer Brand Engagement as a Mediator

Social media marketing functionalities (SMMF) and consumer brand engagement (CBE) have been shown to individually contribute to brand trust with recent literature suggesting that their relationship is more nuanced. However, rather than acting in isolation, consumer brand engagement may function as a mediating role through which social media marketing functionalities impact trust. In this view, the features and strategies that brands use on Instagram stimulate engagement which further builds the psychological conditions necessary for trust to develop.

The process of consumer brand engagement as a mediator is not merely transactional but cognitive and psychological in nature. When users encounter Instagram features, they are not only consuming content but actively processing brand signals. This interpretive work by the consumer becomes key in determining whether trust will be formed. Consequently, engagement becomes a gateway that translates exposure into a worthwhile outcome.

This perspective is supported by Hollebeek et al. (2014, p. 151), they suggested that engagement acts as a medium linking brand stimuli to evaluative outcomes. Similarly, Brodie et al. (2011, p. 258) argue that engagement facilitates relationship building by creating interactive brand experiences that enhance trust. Rather than acting in parallel, SMMF and trust are linked through the psychological process of engagement. Particularly in restaurant industry where consumers require a

sense of involvement before they can feel trust. Thus, this section will further theorize that engagement serves as a filter which shapes how consumers interpret functional features as signs of credibility.

This idea aligns with the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) which distinguishes between two routes of persuasion: the central route where individuals process information carefully and critically, and the peripheral route where judgments are based on surface-level cues such as aesthetics or heuristics (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986, p. 125; Shareef et al., 2019, p. 3). Consumers who are cognitively engaged with a brand's Instagram presence are more likely to follow the central route which means they process the content deeply, reflect on brand values, and are more likely to develop trust based on perceived quality and authenticity. In contrast, low engagement might push users to rely on shallow cues like follower count or influencer popularity which may not make long lasting trust. Therefore, engagement is not only a response to SMMF but also determines the route through which brand information is processed, making it critical to trust formation.

Furthermore, Dessart et al. (2015, p. 37) found that engaged consumers exhibit higher levels of trust because they perceive the brand as more reliable and aligned with their values. On Instagram, this process is enhanced through socially shared behaviors. Social media marketing functionalities such as presence and conversation enhance consumers' cognitive and behavioral involvement which then serves as the psychological foundation for trust (Khan & Jan, 2019, p. 4). In this sense, engagement functions as both an outcome of SMMF and a predictor of trust.

The reason behind this progression can also be explained by Social Exchange Theory (SET) which theorizes that social behavior is guided by the expectation of reciprocal value (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005, p. 875). When users feel that a brand offers valuable content, they are more likely to reciprocate with their attention, time, or interaction. Over time, this mutual value exchange can foster a relationship of trust. For example, when a restaurant brand consistently posts contents and responds to comments, consumers may perceive the relationship as balanced and fair. This perception encourages future interaction, enhance loyalty, and builds trust. Importantly, SET highlights that trust is not only formed through exposure, but through the perception of mutual respect and benefit which is a dynamic well captured through cognitive and behavioral engagement patterns.

In the restaurant industry, where consumer decisions often rely on indirect cues rather than direct cues, this mediation becomes especially important. Instagram features like story polls, customer

posts, and campaign videos increase both cognitive interest and participatory behavior. These forms of engagement contribute to greater trust in the brand's credibility and care (Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2023, p. 7; Villarroel Ordenes et al., 2019, p. 410).

This interpretation is further supported by Attachment Theory as applied in consumer-brand relationships. The research explains how repeated and significant brand interactions can stimulate feelings of closeness and emotional security (Japutra et al., 2014, p. 619). Despite the exclusion of emotional engagement, the presence of strong cognitive and behavioral engagement can lay the groundwork for affective bonds to develop over time. Attachment Theory suggests that trust emerges not just from rational evaluation but from the emotional safety and predictability perceived in a brand's communication behavior (Japutra et al., 2014, p. 620). On Instagram, consistent content creation, predictable tone of voice, and visual aesthetics may simulate this sense of familiarity to make consumers more comfortable in placing trust in the brand.

However, engagement's mediating role also has its limitation. If consumers perceive content as inauthentic or overly commercialized, it can weaken the impact of SMMF on trust. Erdem and Swait (2004, p. 197) highlight that perceived sincerity is essential for trust to flourish, even when engagement levels are high. When engagement is perceived as manipulative such as using clickbait tactics or excessive promotional language, the brand risks undermining the trust-building process. Therefore, authenticity in content design and interaction becomes a precondition for engagement to fulfil its mediating role. This notes the importance of generating engagement that feels genuine and aligned with the brand's values. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H4a: Cognitive consumer brand engagement mediates the relationship between social media marketing functionalities and trust in restaurant brands.
H4b: Behavioral consumer brand engagement mediates the relationship between social media marketing functionalities and trust in restaurant brands.

All of the theoretical frameworks presented in this chapter provide a multi layered foundation for understanding how social media marketing functionalities on Instagram contribute to trust in restaurant brands. The Honeycomb model by Kietzmann et al. (2011) and the scale developed by Khan and Jan (2019) conceptualize how features on Instagram that are express social media functionalities like identity cues, presence, and conversation function as brand communication tools. Moreover, Affordance theory enriches this by explaining how users perceive and act upon these features in context specific ways while Uses and Gratification theory highlights the

motivations that drive consumers to engage with Instagram content in the first place.

Building on this foundation, the multidimensional model of consumer brand engagement by Hollebeek et al. (2014) positions cognitive and behavioral engagement as critical psychological responses to social media marketing stimuli. Finally, social exchange theory, attachment theory, and elaboration likelihood model help explain how these engagement experiences contribute to the formation of trust by framing it as a process driven by reciprocity and familiarity. All things considered, these frameworks offer a coherent lens to analyze how platform design, user motivation, and interaction quality interconnects to shape digital trust outcomes in the restaurant industry.
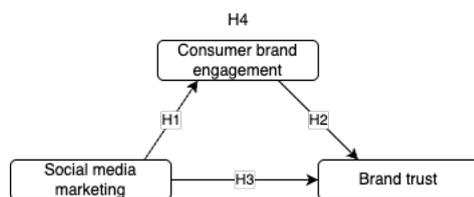

Figure 1. Conceptual model of the framework

3. Method

3.1. Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative survey-based research design to investigate how social media marketing functionalities on Instagram is associated with consumer trust in restaurant brands with consumer engagement being the mediating variable. The decision to adopt a quantitative method stems from the need to gather standardized and generalizable data from a large and diverse population which is needed to explore the relationships among the variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 12). By leveraging survey research, this study allows for the empirical testing of hypotheses drawn from the theoretical frameworks.

The survey method is appropriate for the main research question since it facilitates statistical analysis between variables. The method allows for the testing of direct and indirect effects through multiple regression models. Furthermore, this approach aligns with the exploratory nature of the research to test existing theoretical assumptions and uncover new insights into digital consumer behavior in the restaurant industry. Additionally, a survey is suitable for exploring platform-based visual experiences such as Instagram because it shows the behavioral responses in a scalable manner.

3.2. Population and Sampling

The target population for this study consisted of Instagram users aged 18 and above. The decision to include all Instagram users without narrowing to a specific demographic group was intentional considering the diverse nature of Instagram users. Since the study aimed to explore generalized consumer responses to a brand's digital marketing communication, setting strict criteria could have introduced sampling bias. Although the sampling strategy did not involve pre-screening based on demographics, this allowed for broader representation across different people.

To obtain a diverse and unbiased sample, a randomized online sampling strategy was applied. This approach aligns with Sarstedt et al. (2017, p. 653) who argue that non-probability samples in online research can still provide valid results if demographic variation is reasonably achieved. The survey was distributed through Instagram and WhatsApp group for worldwide survey sharing while also shared through the researcher's network between April 16 and April 21, 2025, using Qualtrics.

A total of 316 responses were collected. However, for any analysis involving age as a control variable, a cleaned variable was created (age2_clean) to exclude incomplete or implausible age entries. This reduced the sample size for those models to 245. Gender was self-identified by 308

respondents and categorized as follows: male (1), female (2), non-binary/third gender (3), and prefer not to say (4). Respondents also reported their continent of residence and categorized into 7 categories: Asia (1), Europe (2), Africa (3), North America (4), South America (5), Australia (6), and Antarctica (7). This data cleaning step was implemented to maintain statistical validity and avoid skewed results in analysis that include age groups.

For analyses involving age as a control variable, the sample size reduced to 245 after excluding responses with typographical errors or non-numeric inputs in the open-ended age question. The age item in the survey is a continuous variable which makes irregular responses difficult to avoid. Similarly, gender identity was self-reported by 308 participants as this question was optional in the survey. These exclusions were necessary to ensure data validity especially for continuous variables like age where irregular responses could skew results.

Although the demographic diversity of the sample strengthens the external validity of the study, it also offers insight into how different users might perceive and respond to Instagram-based brand communication. The inclusion of participants across multiple continents allows for more globally relevant conclusions even though regional digital behaviors may vary. The high proportion of younger respondents also aligns with Instagram's user base and supports the study's relevance for brands targeting digitally savvy consumers. These implications are important to consider when applying the results in marketing contexts.

This sampling method ensured representation across age, gender, and global region, reducing bias and enhancing the external validity of the findings. No participants were excluded based on brand familiarity since the survey used a standardized stimulus to provide a shared reference point. The overall sample size meets the minimum threshold recommended for multiple regression and mediation analysis to ensure strong statistical analysis (Green, 1991).

3.3. Operationalization

3.3.1. Social Media Marketing Functionalities

The independent variable Social Media Marketing Functionalities (SMMF) was measured using an adapted version of the scale developed by Khan and Jan (2019). The original scale included 7 dimensions such as identity, conversation, sharing, presence, reputation, relationships, and groups. Each dimension was assessed with individual Cronbach's alpha values ranging from .76 to .94, all exceeding the minimum reliability threshold (Khan & Jan, 2019, p. 5). For this study, 11 items were adapted to reflect the brand-specific context of Joe & The Juice.

Only 11 items were included out of the 22 items from the original scale because some dimensions, such as 'relationships' and 'groups,' refer more to peer-to-peer interaction or community forums than to brand-consumer interactions on public Instagram profiles. The selected items reflect core functionalities such as identity, presence, conversation, and reputation that are observable and measurable through a brand's Instagram activity. The exclusion of certain items was also to streamline the survey and prevent participant fatigue. Sample items included "Joe & The Juice's Instagram page keeps updating information about their products", "I can easily recognize Joe & The Juice by its profile picture on its Instagram page", and "Joe & The Juice replies to the comments of their followers on their Instagram page". The adapted scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of .93.

3.3.2. Consumer Brand Engagement

Consumer Brand Engagement was measured using the multidimensional scale developed by Hollebeek et al. (2014). The scale conceptualizes engagement as comprising cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. The original scale reported Cronbach's alpha values of .83 for cognitive processing, .91 for affection (emotional), and .89 for activation (behavioral). The overall 10 item scale demonstrated excellent reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of .93 (Hollebeek et al., 2014, p. 151).

This study focused only on the cognitive and behavioral dimensions by measuring six and four adapted items respectively. Emotional engagement was excluded because of concerns in overlapping concepts and measurement load. Previous studies suggest that cognitive and behavioral components are especially relevant in Instagram where visual stimuli and interaction features dominated user brand contact (Hollebeek et al., 2014). Though emotional responses are important, the decision is simply practical not a theoretical dismissal. Given the standardized stimulus and the likelihood that many participants would have limited emotional familiarity with Joe & The Juice, the reliability of emotion based responses was expected to be lower. Thus, focusing on cognitive and behavioral dimensions keeps the study clear.

To ensure reliability of each dimension, two separate reliability analysis were conducted. Six items were used to assess cognitive consumer brand engagement such as "Viewing Joe & The Juice's Instagram content makes me think about the brand". The cognitive items make up a Cronbach's alpha of .86. While behavioral consumer brand engagement was measured with four items such as "I like, comment, or share posts from Joe & The Juice's Instagram page". The behavioral items make

up a Cronbach's alpha of .89. These results confirm high internal consistency for both adapted dimensions.

3.3.3. Brand Trust

Brand Trust was measured using the scale proposed by Delgado-Ballester (2004) who developed a five item scale validated across different brand contexts. The original scale reported high internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of .88 (Delgado-Ballester, 2004, p. 579). For this study, the scale was adapted to focus on the trustworthiness of Joe & The Juice's brand communication on Instagram. Sample items include "With Joe & The Juice, I obtain what I look for in a brand" and "I feel confidence in Joe & The Juice". The adapted version retained all five items and showed strong reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of .82.

3.4. Stimuli

Participants were shown a set of five Instagram screenshots from Joe & The Juice's official account. These images included visuals of product posts (e.g., smoothies and sandwiches), in-store experiences, influencer collaborations (e.g., Kevin Durant promotion), interactive comment sections, and milestone achievements (e.g., 400 stores worldwide). The stimulus was curated to reflect the brand's identity and Instagram functionalities such as presence, sharing, and conversation.

The selected screenshots collectively simulate a typical exposure to the brand on Instagram. This shows how consumers engage with visual content on the platform. These were shown immediately after the brand familiarity filter and prior to the main survey questions to ensure all respondents had a consistent reference point. The use of a screenshot rather than a live link prevented variability because the brand's feed may change from time to time. The screenshots of stimulus are included in Appendix A.

3.5. Procedure

Participants were first informed about the study's purpose and assured of their anonymity and data confidentiality through the consent form. When providing their consent, participants proceeded to the survey which began with a familiarity question "Have you heard of the brand Joe & The Juice?". Furthermore, the participants were shown the visual stimulus. The screenshot included visible aspects of the brand's online presence such as recent posts, follower count, profile photo, bio, and comment section (see Appendix A).

Following the stimulus, participants completed a structured online questionnaire which entails four parts, social media marketing functionalities, consumer brand engagement (cognitive and behavioral), brand trust, and demographic questions (see Appendix B). The survey was created and distributed using Qualtrics and required around 6-8 minutes to complete. Respondents were not required to have a personal relationship with the brand prior to participation as the study is intended to be generalized on all restaurant brands.

Ethical standards were maintained throughout the data collection process. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any point and were ensured of their anonymity. No personal or identifying information was collected and data was stored in accordance with university data protection protocols.

3.6. Descriptive Statistics

The final dataset consisted of 316 valid survey responses after removing incomplete entries. Furthermore, 308 respondents provided valid data for gender identity: 28.2% identified as male (n = 87), 71.4% as female (n = 220), and 0.3% selected "prefer not to say" (n = 1). This indicates a sample that skews female but includes meaningful variation.

The average participant age was 24.85 years (SD = 5.54), with ages ranging from 17 to 55. To ensure quality, implausible or incomplete entries were excluded with a cleaned variable (age2_clean), resulting in a reduced sample size of 245 for age-specific analyses. This cleaning step enhanced the reliability of age-based models.

Geographical diversity was also achieved. Respondents reported their continent of residence, revealing a participant base primarily located in Europe and Asia. The mean coded region value was 1.55 (SD = .76, N = 307), indicating a concentration of responses from these two regions. While the survey reached a global audience, it is particularly reflective of digitally active users from those areas.

The slight variation in total responses across variables (e.g., gender = 308, age = 245) is typical of online survey data and resulted from optional question formats and quality filters during cleaning. This approach prioritized completeness and validity of responses used in regression models. Importantly, while gender and age were not main constructs in the theoretical model, they were retained as controls in relevant models to better contextualize trust-related outcomes.

Overall, the dataset met the important criteria for statistical power and validity. With 316 observations in the full dataset and sufficient responses across variables, the sample size aligns with established guidelines for conducting multiple regression and mediation analysis (Green, 1991).

4. Results

4.1. Predictors for Social Media Marketing Functionalities

A Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with direct oblimin rotation was conducted on the 11 items measuring social media marketing functionalities (SMMF) to examine their underlying dimensional structure. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was .949, which exceeds the recommended minimum value of .60 (Kaiser, 1970), indicating that the data were well suited for factor analysis. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant, $\chi^2(55) = 1918.55$, $p < .001$, suggesting sufficient correlations among the items for PCA (Bartlett, 1954). The analysis revealed a one-factor solution with eigenvalues greater than 1, which accounted for 57.53% of the total variance. All 11 items loaded strongly on this single component, with factor loadings ranging from .671 to .800, indicating that they collectively represent a unified construct of perceived marketing functionalities on Instagram. The factor included items related to content frequency, interactivity, responsiveness, visual appeal, and informativeness of Joe & The Juice's Instagram presence. Reliability analysis showed excellent internal consistency for the SMMF scale, with a Cronbach's alpha of .93.

4.2. Predictors for Brand Trust

A Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with direct oblimin rotation based on eigenvalues (> 1.00) was used to explore the underlying dimensions of the five brand trust items. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value of .838 verified the sampling adequacy for the analysis, as this exceeds the acceptable minimum value of .60 (Kaiser, 1970). Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant, $\chi^2(10) = 497.88$, $p < .001$, thereby indicating that the correlations between items were sufficiently large for a PCA (Bartlett, 1954). The analysis resulted in a one-factor solution, which explained 58.32% of the variance in brand trust. The factor consisted of items referring to brand reliability, confidence, satisfaction, and alignment with consumer expectations, such as obtaining what one looks for in a brand, and consistently meeting consumer needs. The scale demonstrated a Cronbach's alpha of .82.

4.3. Predictors for Consumer Brand Engagement

A Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with direct oblimin rotation based on eigenvalues (> 1.00) was used to explore the underlying dimensions of the 10 consumer brand engagement (CBE) items. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value of .925 verified the sampling adequacy for the analysis, as this exceeds the acceptable minimum value of .60 (Kaiser, 1970). Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant, $\chi^2(45) = 1710.62$, $p < .001$, thereby indicating that the correlations between items were sufficiently large for a PCA (Bartlett, 1954). The resultant model consisted of two factors, which together explained 66.52% of the variance in consumer brand engagement. The first factor included

six items related to cognitive and emotional reactions to content, such as feeling positive about the brand and thinking about it after viewing its Instagram content. The second factor included four items reflecting behavioral actions such as interacting with, following, or emotionally connecting with the brand on Instagram. The scale demonstrated a Cronbach's alpha of .91.

4.4. H1a Linear Regression Model

A simple linear regression with cognitive consumer brand engagement (COG_CBE) as the dependent variable and social media marketing functionalities (ALL_SMM) as the predictor was conducted. The model was found to be significant, $F(1, 314) = 707.48$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .69$. Social media marketing functionalities had a positive significant association with cognitive consumer brand engagement ($b^* = .83$, $p < .001$). The hypothesis that higher social media marketing functionalities are associated with greater cognitive engagement is accepted.

4.5. H1b Linear Regression Model

A simple linear regression with behavioral consumer brand engagement (BHV_CBE) as the dependent variable and social media marketing functionalities (ALL_SMM) as the predictor was conducted. The model was found to be significant, $F(1, 314) = 252.31$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .45$. Social media marketing functionalities had a positive significant asssociation with behavioral consumer brand engagement ($b^* = .67$, $p < .001$). The hypothesis that higher social media marketing functionalities are associated with greater behavioral engagement is accepted.

4.6. H2a Linear Regression Model

A simple linear regression with brand trust (BT_ALL) as the dependent variable and cognitive consumer brand engagement (COG_CBE) as the predictor was conducted. The model was found to be significant, $F(1, 314) = 226.91$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .42$. Cognitive consumer brand engagement had a positive significant association with brand trust ($b^* = .65$, $p < .001$). The hypothesis that higher cognitive engagement is associated with greater brand trust is accepted.

4.7. H2b Linear Regression Model

A simple linear regression with brand trust (BT_ALL) as the dependent variable and behavioral consumer brand engagement (BHV_CBE) as the predictor was conducted. The model was found to be significant, $F(1, 314) = 120.50$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .28$. Behavioral consumer brand engagement had a positive significant association with brand trust ($b^* = .53$, $p < .001$). The hypothesis that higher behavioral engagement is associated with greater brand trust is accepted.

4.8. H3 Linear Regression Model

A simple linear regression with brand trust (BT_ALL) as the dependent variable and social media marketing functionalities (ALL_SMM) as the predictor was conducted. The model was found to be significant, $F(1, 314) = 264.33$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .46$. Social media marketing functionalities had a positive significant association with brand trust ($b^* = .68$, $p < .001$). The hypothesis that higher social media marketing functionalities are associated with greater brand trust is accepted.

4.9. H4a Mediation Analysis

A multiple linear regression was conducted with brand trust (BT_ALL) as the dependent variable. Predictors were social media marketing functionalities (ALL_SMM) and cognitive consumer brand engagement (COG_CBE). The model was found to be significant, $F(2, 313) = 144.80$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .48$. Social media marketing functionalities were found to be a significant positive predictor of brand trust ($b^* = .45$, $p < .001$), thus offering support for H3. Furthermore, cognitive engagement also had a significant positive association with brand trust ($b^* = .28$, $p < .001$), which supports H4a.

4.10.   H4b Mediation Analysis

A multiple linear regression was conducted with brand trust (BT_ALL) as the dependent variable. Predictors were social media marketing functionalities (ALL_SMM) and behavioral consumer brand engagement (BHV_CBE). The model was found to be significant, $F(2, 313) = 137.29$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .47$. Social media marketing functionalities were found to be a significant positive predictor of brand trust ($b^* = .59$, $p < .001$), thereby offering support for H3. Furthermore, behavioral engagement also had a significant positive association with brand trust ($b^* = .14$, $p = .015$), which supports H4b.
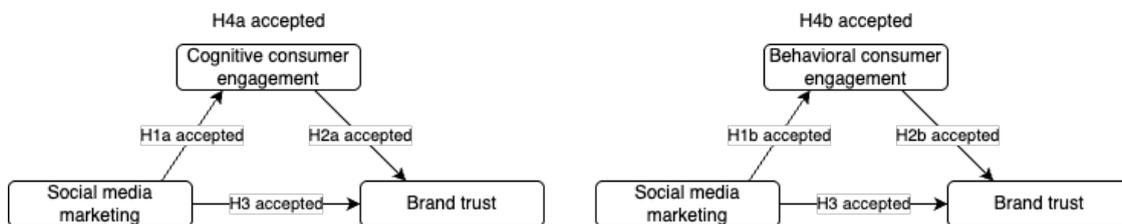

Figure 2. Conceptual model of the result from all hypotheses

4.11.   H4a with Age as Control Variable

A multiple linear regression was conducted with brand trust as the dependent variable. Predictors were social media marketing functionalities, cognitive consumer brand engagement, and age. The model was found to be significant, $F(3, 268) = 137.73$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .61$. However, when age was included the result shows that age was a significant negative predictor of brand trust ($b^* = -.17$, p <

.001), indicating that younger participants were more likely to develop trust in the brand based on Instagram content.

4.12. H4a with Gender as Control Variable

A multiple linear regression was conducted with brand trust as the dependent variable. Predictors were social media marketing functionalities, cognitive consumer brand engagement, and gender identity. The model was found to be significant, $F(3, 304) = 88.10$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .47$. However, gender identity was not a significant predictor ($b^* = -.01$, p = .879), indicating no observable difference between male and female participants in their formation of trust based on cognitive engagement.

4.13. H4b with Age as Control Variable

A multiple linear regression was conducted with brand trust as the dependent variable. Predictors were social media marketing functionalities, behavioral consumer brand engagement, and age. The model was found to be significant, $F(3, 268) = 121.15$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .58$. However, when age was included, the result also shows a negative association with trust even with only cognitive engagement.

4.14. H4b with Gender as Control Variable

A multiple linear regression was conducted with brand trust as the dependent variable. Predictors were social media marketing functionalities, behavioral consumer brand engagement, and gender. The model was found to be significant, $F(3, 304) = 82.47$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .45$. However, gender remained non-significant ($b^* = -.01$, $p = .836$), suggesting no meaningful difference in trust based on gender in this sample.

5. Conclusion

This study explored how Instagram-based social media marketing functionalities (SMMF) is affiliated with trust in restaurant brands, focusing on the mediating role of consumer brand engagement (CBE). The study integrates the Honeycomb Model (Kietzmann et al., 2011, p. 243), the multidimensional engagement framework (Hollebeek et al., 2014, p. 150), and brand trust (Delgado-Ballester, 2004) which contributes to an ongoing academic debate about the psychological impact behind brand trust in digital environments. The study was aimed to explore a critical gap in the literature where it was found that engagement and loyalty have been widely studied while the relationship between Instagram's affordances and trust in high involvement service contexts like restaurants have barely been studied.

The central research question of "How do social media marketing functionalities (SMMF) on Instagram influence trust in a restaurant brand, considering the role of consumer engagement?" was addressed through a structured survey experiment using stimuli from Joe & The Juice's Instagram profile. This case allowed for the standardization of visual exposure regardless of prior brand familiarity or experience. The research design ensured internal validity and allowed for robust hypothesis testing across a sample of 316 participants. The research revealed that SMMF had a significant direct effect on trust with both cognitive and behavioral engagement partially mediating this relationship. This highlights the character of digital trust development and explains how Instagram based experiences are translated into trustworthiness and engagement in brands.

The results emphasize that features like visual consistency, interactivity, and responsiveness on Instagram can enhance both consumer engagement and trust in the restaurant industry. The strength of the direct effect from SMMF to trust ($b^* = .68$, $R^2 = .46$) reflects how users use visual and functional elements on Instagram as indicators of brand credibility to form trust. As previously discussed, consumers in the restaurant industry cannot evaluate the product (food or service) in advance. As a result, cues shown on social media platforms such as responsiveness and visual quality become crucial to reduce uncertainty and further enhancing trust.

These findings further support previous conceptual assumptions by De Veirman et al. (2017) and Godey et al. (2016) who emphasized that visual affordances and engagement-based design are central to significant digital brand interactions. This finding was also supported by the integration of Affordance Theory which clarifies how Instagram's platform specific features afford specific user interactions such as liking, commenting, and sharing which enhances relational cues between consumers and brands (Evans et al., 2017, p. 39). These interactions not only encourage user

engagement but also serve as process through which trust is gradually built in the digital environment.

Beyond visual engagement, the study also integrated Uses and Gratifications Theory to explain why consumers are drawn to Instagram for entertainment, identity construction, or information, aligning with the cognitive and behavioral dimensions of consumer brand engagement (Katz et al., 1973, p. 167). The alignment between consumer motives and platform functionalities enhances perceived relevance and personal connection. As a result, the compatibility between user expectations and Instagram's affordances strengthens the pathway from social media marketing functionalities to brand trust by reinforcing relevant interactions with the brand.

The study's mediation analysis showed that engagement functions as a psychological filter that facilitates the development of trust. Cognitive engagement emerged as a stronger mediator (b^* = .28, $p < .001$) compared to behavioral engagement (b^* = .14, $p = .015$). However, despite behavioral engagement being statistically significant, it is evidently weaker. Although behavioral engagement (e.g., likes, comments) is often used in industry practice as a metric of success, the findings suggest that internal cognitive processing plays a more impactful role in building brand connection.

Furthermore, cognitive engagement involves internalized brand reflection which emerged as the stronger mechanism for building long-term trust. The presence of consistent cognitive and behavioral engagement suggests early stage attachment through brand communications. This supports Hollebeek et al.'s (2014) emphasis on the multidimensionality of engagement. Taken everything into consideration, this finding adds nuance to its relative importance across different digital contexts.

Further insights appeared when control variables were introduced into the regression analysis. Age was a statistically significant negative predictor of trust in the model with cognitive engagement (b^* = -.17, $p < .001$), suggesting younger users are more likely to develop trust through Instagram marketing. However, this age effect became non-significant in the model with behavioral engagement (b^* = -.08, $p = .090$), indicating that the relationship between age and trust depends on the type of engagement considered. For brands, this implies that younger audiences are more receptive to thought-driven trust cues whereas behavioral engagement may appeal across age groups. However, older users might still rely on additional signals like reviews or referrals for deeper trust formation.

On the other hand, gender did not significantly predict trust across any model. This finding implies that the relationship between SMMF, engagement, and trust is consistent regardless of gender identity or at least within the boundaries of the current sample. In practical terms, this could be interpreted as evidence that Instagram-based marketing appeals broadly across gender identities in the restaurant category or it may suggest that the design and tone of Joe & The Juice's content is sufficiently neutral or universally appealing. From a research perspective, this finding adds credibility to the model's generalizability at least in gendered terms.

These results also shed light on the applicability and limitations of the theoretical frameworks applied. The decision to focus on selected dimensions of Honeycomb model including identity, conversation, presence, and reputation proved theoretically and empirically valid. These dimensions aligned with Instagram's main affordances and showed high internal consistency in measurement (α = .93). The results show that despite the significance of the seven dimensions, it is crucial to select and apply the dimensions relevant to the study.

However, the study also highlighted critiques raised by Peters et al. (2013) and Kietzmann et al. (2012). They argued that the model's conceptual clarity may diminish when applied without contextual adaptation. It was found that some Honeycomb functionalities, such as "groups" or "relationships" are less applicable to Instagram's visual oriented nature. Thus, frameworks like the Honeycomb model needs to be critically applied and works best in a platform-specific context.

Despite the exclusion of few dimensions, the multidimensional engagement framework was strongly supported by the data. The cognitive and behavioral subscales showed high internal consistency (α = .86 and .89). The statistical mediation models confirmed their theory-based roles in the SMMF-trust relationship. The results highlight the significant influence of consumer brand engagement as a mediator that reinforces its conceptual relevance within the model.

Furthermore, this study's decision to not include the emotional dimension which was often viewed as core to engagement was proven to be methodologically sound. Participants who had no prior emotional relationship with Joe & The Juice would most likely provided unreliable emotional responses, highlighting Hollebeek et al.'s (2014) point that engagement dimensions should be context-dependent rather than universally applied. Thus, the findings not only validate the engagement framework but also encourage a more flexible operationalization based on user-brand familiarity and brand exposure design.

By exposing all participants to the same five Instagram screenshots, the research controlled for differences in prior brand awareness and created a realistic simulation of an Instagram experience. This methodological choice enhanced internal validity and ensured that observed effects were suitable to perceived platform functionalities and not to prior brand knowledge. The method's compatibility with the theoretical aims including measuring responses to digital marketing features further justifies its use. The approach further explains that survey-based design is relevant to this study as it allowed for the inclusion of demographic controls, contributing to the study's explanatory power.

Critically, this thesis emphasize a deeper insight into how digital trust is built and what constitutes meaningful brand interaction in a visually mediated environment. Traditional models of trust often emphasize consistency, reliability, and shared values but these are difficult to signal in the digital environment. Instead, brands nowadays should encode these qualities into the very format and functionality of their social media presence. For example, the frequency of posting, tone of captions, responsiveness to comments, and visual coherence of the feed serve as proxies for transparency, professionalism, and care. The traits mentioned are associated with trustworthiness which makes it crucial especially in industries where consumers make fast decisions based on visual impressions.

Finally, the findings carry practical implications for brands operating in the highly competitive serviced based restaurant industry. Restaurant entrepreneurs should recognize that platform affordances are not just tools, but they are strategic methods of persuasion. Efforts should be made to align marketing content with user expectations of transparency, interaction, and aesthetic consistency. Moreover, marketeers should invest in content that reflect and conveys authenticity especially if they aim to engage and build trust among younger audiences. Finally, engagement metrics should be evaluated beyond surface-level numbers to include indicators of cognitive involvement, which may be harder to track but more influential in driving outcomes like trust and loyalty.

To conclude, this study demonstrates that Instagram's marketing functionalities significantly contribute to trust in restaurant brands, both directly and through engagement. These insights reinforce existing theories while advancing our understanding of how trust forms in visually driven, interactive digital environments. The findings illustrate that trust is no longer built solely on experience or reputation but also on how effectively a brand designs and curates its digital identity on platforms like Instagram. This thesis confirms the theoretical significance and commercial

urgency of understanding digital trust-building as a layered process, and one where functionalities, user cognition, and platform design converge.

5.1. Limitations

Although this study offers important theoretical and practical insights, several limitations should be acknowledged to contextualize the findings and guide future research. First, the use of a stimulus-based survey which is undoubtedly beneficial for controlling exposure might impose a constraint by limiting participants to a curated and static set of Instagram screenshots. While this approach helped eliminate variability and prior brand familiarity, it may not fully capture the dynamic, time-sensitive, and algorithmically affiliated nature of real-life Instagram interactions. Social media experiences are known to be nonlinear and personalized. Hence, future research with extra research time could build on this by employing longitudinal or experimental designs that better reflect users' organic engagement with live content over time.

Second, the study focused on a single brand (Joe & The Juice) as a representative case. Though this brand was chosen for its strong digital presence and neutral public image, the generalizability of the findings may be limited. Joe & The Juice's marketing style is trendy, lifestyle-oriented, and visually appealing which may not be the same to restaurant brands with different positioning, such as luxury fine dining or budget-friendly chains. Additionally, since the stimuli emphasized curated brand content, the role of user-generated content (UGC) was not included in the analysis. Future studies may incorporate multiple brand types or compare brand-generated and user-generated content to explore different trust trajectories.

A further limitation lies in the exclusion of the emotional engagement dimension. Although theoretically justified due to the possible lack of prior brand experience among respondents, emotional responses are an important part of consumer-brand relationships in service based industries. Dessart et al. (2015) highlighted that emotions can influence memory, sharing behavior, and affective trust thus, leaving this out may have excluded a valuable dimension of the engagement and trust dynamics. Future research could include the emotional component under conditions where participants have real-life experience with the brand or where emotional triggers are embedded into the stimuli.

The sampling approach also presented limitations. The survey was distributed primarily through online platforms and digital networks, which may have skewed the sample toward younger, more digitally literate individuals. Nevertheless, it appears that age emerged as a significant predictor in

the study which confirm that generational differences in media literacy and platform use can shape how consumers evaluate trust cues. This raises the question of whether older demographics might respond differently to Instagram marketing or rely more on offline indicators of trust. Future studies could conduct cross-generational comparisons to better understand age-related trust differences.

Lastly, despite the insights from the regression-based mediation analysis into the relationships among SMMF, engagement, and trust, the design only captures a single point of time. This limits the ability for the study to draw causal reasoning or observe long term trust development. Though the theoretical logic and statistical significance support the hypotheses, future research would benefit from experimental studies that trace how engagement and trust develop over repeated interactions and brand exposures.

In acknowledging these limitations, it is important to emphasize that they do not undermine the validity of the findings but rather outline the study's scope. Addressing these areas in future research can further refine the understanding of digital trust-building and offer more tailored recommendations for brands seeking to navigate complex consumer expectations in the evolving social media landscape.

Appendix A
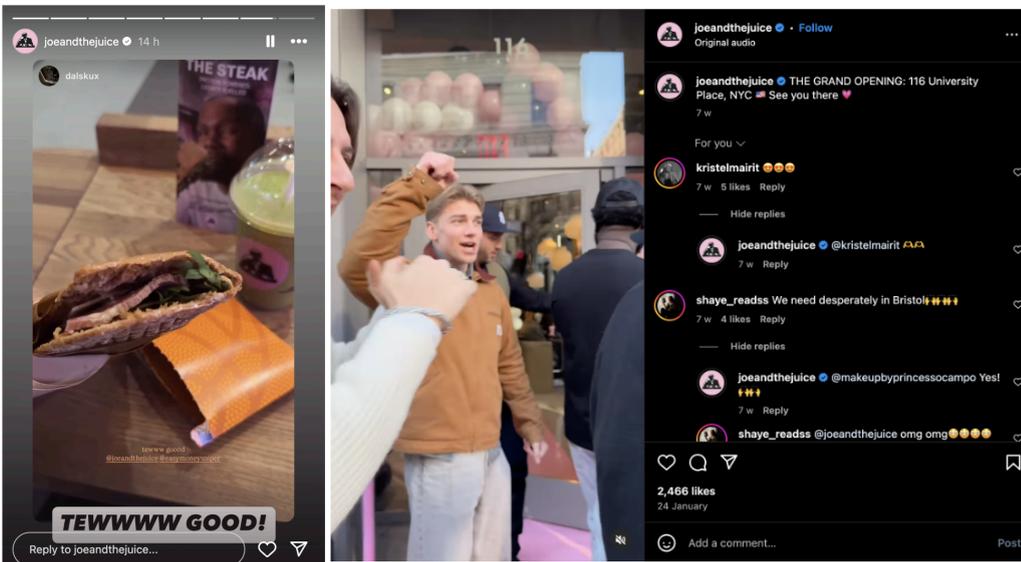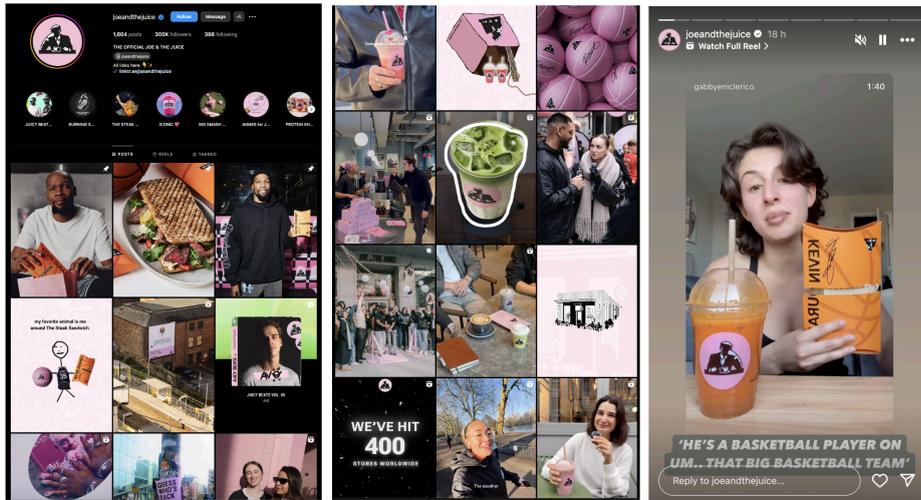
Appendix B

read the theoretical framework chapter and assess it based on the assessment guide i have attached here

review the format of the overall thesis draft, see where i can make a better flow maybe by splitting a paragraph in two or something

find me a valid, reliable, traceable scale for social media marketing functionality. it has to already been used and can be adapted to my thesis which is specific to restaurant brands. send me the apa7 reference so i can dive deeper myself

what is a restaurant brand that i can use in my online survey that is basically neutral so people wont be bias when using it as a benchmark (eg. mcdonalds can be too politically tied so not a good option)

Appendix C

Master Thesis

Q1 Dear respondent,   Thank you for your interest in this research. I am inviting you to fill in a questionnaire. In this questionnaire, I will evaluate the influence of social media marketing in the restaurant industry.   The questionnaire will take approximately 5 minutes to fill in. Please answer each question carefully and honestly, I am sincerely interested in your personal opinions. There are no right or wrong answers.   CONFIDENTIALITY OF DATA All research data remain completely confidential and are collected in anonymous form. I will not be able to identify you. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts associated with participating in this research.   VOLUNTARY If you now decide not to participate in this research, this will not affect you. If you decide to cease your cooperation while filling in the questionnaire, this will in no way affect you either. You can cease your cooperation without giving reasons.   FURTHER INFORMATION If you have questions about this research, in advance or afterwards, you can contact the responsible researcher, Carletta Sudono, email: 612734cs@eur.nl.

- -

Consent Form By clicking the button below and starting the survey, you acknowledge: I have read the instructions and understand the purpose of the survey. I give consent for my responses to be processed confidentially. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw at any time. I confirm that I am 18 years of age or older.   Thank you for your time and participation!

　　○ I do not agree (1)

　　○ I agree (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If By clicking the button below and starting the survey, you acknowledge: I have read the instructio... = I do not agree

BF1 Have you heard of the brand *Joe & The Juice*?

○ No (18)

○ Maybe (19)

○ Yes (20)

Instagram Page Please take a close look at the following Instagram page. *Joe & The Juice* is a juice bar and coffee shop that was first founded in Copenhagen. The chain now has over 400 stores worldwide with more than 4,000 employees, offering people-centric food & beverage.   Example of *Joe & The Juice's* Instagram story: Example of *Joe & The Juice's* Instagram post:

SMMF0 Please evaluate the following statements based on what you observe on *Joe & The Juice's* Instagram page. (1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 5 = *Strongly Agree*)

SMM1 *Joe & The Juice's* Instagram page keeps updating the information about their products

○ Strongly disagree (1)

○ Somewhat disagree (2)

○ Neither agree nor disagree (3)

○ Somewhat agree (4)

○ Strongly agree (5)

SMM2 I can easily recognize *Joe & The Juice* by its profile picture on its Instagram page

○ Strongly disagree (1)

○ Somewhat disagree (2)

○ Neither agree nor disagree (3)

○ Somewhat agree (4)

○ Strongly agree (5)

SMM3 *Joe & The Juice* replies to the comments of their followers on their Instagram page

○ Strongly disagree (1)

○ Somewhat disagree (2)

○ Neither agree nor disagree (3)

○ Somewhat agree (4)

○ Strongly agree (5)

SMM4 *Joe & The Juice's* Instagram page is interactive

○ Strongly disagree (1)

○ Somewhat disagree (2)

○ Neither agree nor disagree (3)

○ Somewhat agree (4)

○ Strongly agree (5)

SMM5 *Joe & The Juice* share interesting pictures of their products on their Instagram page

○ Strongly disagree (1)

○ Somewhat disagree (2)

○ Neither agree nor disagree (3)

○ Somewhat agree (4)

○ Strongly agree (5)

SMM6 *Joe & The Juice* share informative captions on their Instagram page

○ Strongly disagree (1)

○ Somewhat disagree (2)

○ Neither agree nor disagree (3)

○ Somewhat agree (4)

○ Strongly agree (5)

SMM7 *Joe & The Juice* share important links on their Instagram page

○ Strongly disagree (1)

○ Somewhat disagree (2)

○ Neither agree nor disagree (3)

○ Somewhat agree (4)

○ Strongly agree (5)

SMM8 The frequency of updates from *Joe & The Juice* is very high

○ Strongly disagree (1)

○ Somewhat disagree (2)

○ Neither agree nor disagree (3)

○ Somewhat agree (4)

○ Strongly agree (5)

SMM9 *Joe & The Juice* has large number of followers compared to other brands I know on Instagram

○ Strongly disagree (1)

○ Somewhat disagree (2)

○ Neither agree nor disagree (3)

○ Somewhat agree (4)

○ Strongly agree (5)

SMM10 *Joe & The Juice* receives positive comments on their Instagram posts

○ Strongly disagree (1)

○ Somewhat disagree (2)

○ Neither agree nor disagree (3)

○ Somewhat agree (4)

○ Strongly agree (5)

SMM11 *Joe & The Juice* receives lots of likes on their Instagram posts

◯ Strongly disagree (1)

◯ Somewhat disagree (2)

◯ Neither agree nor disagree (3)

◯ Somewhat agree (4)

◯ Strongly agree (5)

BT Please read each of the statements carefully and think about *Joe & The Juice*. Use the provided scale to indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statement. (1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 5 = *Strongly Agree*)

BT1 With *Joe & The Juice*, I obtain what I look for in a brand

◯ Strongly disagree (1)

◯ Somewhat disagree (2)

◯ Neither agree nor disagree (3)

◯ Somewhat agree (4)

◯ Strongly agree (5)

BT2 *Joe & The Juice* is a brand that meets my expectation

○ Strongly disagree (1)

○ Somewhat disagree (2)

○ Neither agree nor disagree (3)

○ Somewhat agree (4)

○ Strongly agree (5)

BT3 I feel confidence in *Joe & The Juice*

○ Strongly disagree (1)

○ Somewhat disagree (2)

○ Neither agree nor disagree (3)

○ Somewhat agree (4)

○ Strongly agree (5)

BT4 *Joe & The Juice* is a brand that never disappoints me

○ Strongly disagree (1)

○ Somewhat disagree (2)

○ Neither agree nor disagree (3)

○ Somewhat agree (4)

○ Strongly agree (5)

BT5 *Joe & The Juice* constantly satisfy my needs

○ Strongly disagree (1)

○ Somewhat disagree (2)

○ Neither agree nor disagree (3)

○ Somewhat agree (4)

○ Strongly agree (5)

CBE1 Viewing *Joe & The Juice's* Instagram content makes me think about the brand

○ Strongly disagree (1)

○ Somewhat disagree (2)

○ Neither agree nor disagree (3)

○ Somewhat agree (4)

○ Strongly agree (5)

CBE2 I find myself interested in learning more about *Joe & The Juice* after seeing its Instagram page

○ Strongly disagree (1)

○ Somewhat disagree (2)

○ Neither agree nor disagree (3)

○ Somewhat agree (4)

○ Strongly agree (5)

CBE3 *Joe & The Juice's* Instagram content keeps me engaged and thinking about the brand

○ Strongly disagree (4)

○ Somewhat disagree (5)

○ Neither agree nor disagree (6)

○ Somewhat agree (7)

○ Strongly agree (8)

CBE4 Seeing *Joe & The Juice's* Instagram posts makes me feel positive about the brand

○ Strongly disagree (1)

○ Somewhat disagree (2)

○ Neither agree nor disagree (3)

○ Somewhat agree (4)

○ Strongly agree (5)

CBE5 *Joe & The Juice*'s Instagram content gives me a sense of excitement or enjoyment

○ Strongly disagree (1)

○ Somewhat disagree (2)

○ Neither agree nor disagree (3)

○ Somewhat agree (4)

○ Strongly agree (5)

CBE6 *Joe & The Juice's* Instagram presence creates an emotional connection for me

○ Strongly disagree (1)

○ Somewhat disagree (2)

○ Neither agree nor disagree (3)

○ Somewhat agree (4)

○ Strongly agree (5)

CBE7 I like, comment, or share posts from *Joe & The Juice's* Instagram page

○ Strongly disagree (1)

○ Somewhat disagree (2)

○ Neither agree nor disagree (3)

○ Somewhat agree (4)

○ Strongly agree (5)

CBE8 I often interact with or engage with *Joe & The Juice* through Instagram

○ Strongly disagree (1)

○ Somewhat disagree (2)

○ Neither agree nor disagree (3)

○ Somewhat agree (4)

○ Strongly agree (5)

CBE9 When thinking of juice or cafe brands, I tend to follow or check *Joe & The Juice's* Instagram

○ Strongly disagree (1)

○ Somewhat disagree (2)

○ Neither agree nor disagree (3)

○ Somewhat agree (4)

○ Strongly agree (5)

CBE10 I am more likely to visit *Joe & The Juice* after engaging with its Instagram content

○ Strongly disagree (1)

○ Somewhat disagree (2)

○ Neither agree nor disagree (3)

○ Somewhat agree (4)

○ Strongly agree (5)

End of Block: Consumer engagement

Start of Block: Control Group

Age What is your age? Please type in full numbers only.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Gender Which of the following best describes your gender identity?

○ Male (1)

○ Female (2)

○ Non-binary / third gender (3)

○ Prefer not to say (4)

Residence Where do you live?

○ Asia (1)

○ Europe (2)

○ Africa (3)

○ North America (4)

○ South America (5)

○ Australia (6)

○ Antarctica (7)

End of Block: Control Group

References

Brodie, R. J., Ilic, A., Juric, B., & Hollebeek, L. D. (2013). Consumer engagement in a virtual brand community: An exploratory analysis. *Journal of Business Research, 66*(1), 105–114. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.07.029

Chaudhuri, A., & Holbrook, M. B. (2001). The chain of effects from brand trust and brand affect to brand performance: The role of brand loyalty. *Journal of Marketing, 65*(2), 81–93. https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.65.2.81.18255

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed., p. 12). SAGE Publications.

Cropanzano, R., & Mitchell, M. S. (2005). Social exchange theory: An interdisciplinary review. *Journal of Management, 31*(6), 874–900. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206305279602

Delgado-Ballester, E., Munuera-Aleman, J. L., & Yague-Guillen, M. J. (2003). Development and validation of a brand trust scale. *International journal of market research, 45*(1), 35-54. https://doi.org/10.1177/147078530304500103

Delgado-Ballester, E. (2004). Applicability of a brand trust scale across product categories: A multigroup invariance analysis. *European Journal of Marketing, 38*(5/6), 573–592. https://doi.org/10.1108/03090560410529222

Dessart, L., Veloutsou, C., & Morgan-Thomas, A. (2015). Consumer engagement in online brand communities: A social media perspective. *Journal of Product & Brand Management, 24*(1), 28–42. https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-06-2014-0635

De Veirman, M., Cauberghe, V., & Hudders, L. (2017). Marketing through Instagram influencers: The impact of number of followers and product divergence on brand attitude. *International Journal of Advertising, 36*(5), 798–828. https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2017.1348035

Dixon, S. (2024). Instagram – statistics & facts. *Statista*. https://www.statista.com/topics/1882/instagram/

Dixon, S. (2024). *Instagram: Global active users 2025.* Statista. https://www.statista.com/statistics/183585/instagram-number-of-global-users/

Erdem, T., & Swait, J. (2004). Brand Credibility, Brand Consideration, and Choice. *Journal of Consumer Research, 31*(1), 191-198. https://doi.org/10.1086/383434

Evans, S. K., Pearce, K. E., Vitak, J., & Treem, J. W. (2017). Explicating affordances: A conceptual framework for understanding affordances in communication research. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 22*(1), 35–52. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcc4.12180

Evans, N. J., Phua, J., Lim, J., & Jun, H. (2017). Disclosing Instagram influencer advertising: The effects of disclosure language on advertising recognition, attitudes, and behavioral intent. *Journal of Interactive Advertising, 17*(2), 138–149. https://doi.org/10.1080/15252019.2017.1366885

Gambetti, A., & Han, Q. (2022). Camera eats first: Exploring food aesthetics portrayed on social media using deep learning. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management, 34*(3), 967–987. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-09-2021-1206

Gibson, J. J. (1979). *The ecological approach to visual perception*. Houghton Mifflin.

Godey, B., Manthiou, A., Pederzoli, D., Rokka, J., Aiello, G., Donvito, R., & Singh, R. (2016). Social media marketing efforts of luxury brands: Influence on brand equity and consumer behavior. *Journal of Business Research, 69*(12), 5833–5841. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.04.181

Green, S. B. (1991). How many subjects does it take to do a regression analysis? *Multivariate Behavioral Research, 26*(3), 499–510. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327906mbr2603_7

Hollebeek, L. D., Glynn, M. S., & Brodie, R. J. (2014). Consumer brand engagement in social media: Conceptualization, scale development and validation. *Journal of Interactive Marketing, 28*(2), 149–165. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2013.12.002

Ibrahim, B., & Aljarah, A. (2022). The role of social media marketing activities in driving self–brand connection and user engagement behavior on Instagram: A moderation–mediation approach. *European Journal of Innovation Management, 26*(6), 1541–1561. https://doi.org/10.1108/EJIM-08-2022-0452

Japutra, A., Ekinci, Y., & Simkin, L. (2014). Exploring brand attachment, its determinants and outcomes. *Journal of Strategic Marketing, 22*(7), 616–630. https://doi.org/10.1080/0965254X.2014.914062

Katz, E., Blumler, J. G., & Gurevitch, M. (1973). Uses and gratifications research. *The Public Opinion Quarterly, 37*(4), 509–523. https://doi.org/10.1086/268109

Katz, E., Gurevitch, M., & Haas, H. (1973). On the use of the mass media for important things. *American Sociological Review, 38*(2), 164–181.

Khan, M. F., & Jan, A. (2019). A Measure of Social Media Marketing: Scale Development and Validation. *Jindal Journal of Business Research, 8*(2), 158-168. https://doi.org/10.1177/2278682119850285

Kim, A. J., & Ko, E. (2012). Do social media marketing activities enhance customer equity? An empirical study of luxury fashion brand. *Journal of Business Research, 65*(10), 1480–1486. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.10.014

Kim, S. H., Kim, M., & Holland, S. (2021). Consumer-based brand authenticity and brand trust in brand loyalty in the Korean coffee shop market. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research, 45*(4), 628–651. https://doi.org/10.1177/1096348020980058

Kietzmann, J. H., Hermkens, K., McCarthy, I. P., & Silvestre, B. S. (2011). Social media? Get serious! Understanding the functional building blocks of social media. *Business Horizons, 54*(3), 241–251. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2011.01.005

Mejova, Y., Haddadi, H., Noulas, A., & Weber, I. (2015). # foodporn: Obesity patterns in culinary interactions. *In Proceedings of the 5th International Conference on Digital Health 2015* (pp. 51-58).

Morhart, F. M., Malär, L., Guèvremont, A., Girardin, F., & Grohmann, B. (2015). Brand authenticity: An integrative framework and measurement scale. *Journal of Consumer Psychology, 25*(2), 200–218. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcps.2014.11.006

Namkung, Y., & Jang, S. (2007). Does food quality really matter in restaurants? Its impact on customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research, 31*(3), 387–409. https://doi.org/10.1177/1096348007299924

Nayeem, T., Murshed, F., & Dwivedi, A. (2019). Brand experience and brand attitude: examining a credibility-based mechanism. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning, 37*(4), 821–835. https://doi.org/10.1108/MIP-11-2018-0544

Peters, K., Chen, Y., Kaplan, A. M., Ognibeni, B., & Pauwels, K. (2013). Social media metrics—A framework and guidelines for managing social media. *Journal of Interactive Marketing, 27*(4), 281–298. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2013.09.007

Sarstedt, M., Bengart, P., Shaltoni, A. M., & Lehmann, S. (2017). The use of sampling methods in advertising research: A gap between theory and practice. *International Journal of Advertising, 37*(4), 650–663. https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2017.1348329

Statista. (2024). Forecast of the global food service market size 2023–2030. *Statista*. https://www.statista.com/statistics/1095667/global-food-service-market-size/

Treem, J. W., & Leonardi, P. M. (2013). Social media use in organizations: Exploring the affordances of visibility, editability, persistence, and association. *In Communication Yearbook* (Vol. 36, pp. 143–189). Routledge.

Yang, J., & Battocchio, A. F. (2021). Effects of transparent brand communication on perceived brand authenticity and consumer responses. *Journal of Product & Brand Management, 30*(8), 1170–1183. https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-03-2020-2803

Zhou, Y., Huang, Y., McGlynn, J., & Han, A. (2017). Who will you share a ride with: Factors that influence trust of potential rideshare partners. *arXiv*. https://arxiv.org/abs/1707.04284

Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication

Declaration Page: Use of Generative AI Tools in Thesis

Student Information
Name: Carletta Meyza Sudono
Student ID: 612734
Course Name: Master Thesis CM5000
Supervisor Name: dr. Aviv Barnoy
Date: 25 June 2025

Declaration:

Acknowledgment of Generative AI Tools
I acknowledge that I am aware of the existence and functionality of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools, which are capable of producing content such as text, images, and other creative works autonomously.

GenAI use would include, but not limited to:
-   Generated content (e.g., ChatGPT, Quillbot) limited strictly to content that is not assessed (e.g., thesis title).
-   ~~Writing improvements, including~~ grammar and spelling corrections (e.g., Grammarly)
-   Language translation (e.g., DeepL), without generative AI alterations/improvements.
-   Research task assistance (e.g., finding survey scales, qualitative coding verification, debugging code)
-   Using GenAI as a search engine tool to find academic articles or books (e.g.,

☒ I declare that I have used generative AI tools, specifically DeepSeek, in the process of creating parts or components of my thesis. The purpose of using these tools was to aid in generating content or assisting with specific aspects of thesis work.

Extent of AI Usage
☒ I confirm that while I utilized generative AI tools to aid in content creation, the majority of the intellectual effort, creative input, and decision-making involved in completing the thesis were undertaken by me. <u>I have enclosed the prompts/logging of the GenAI tool use in an appendix.</u>

Ethical and Academic Integrity
☒ I understand the ethical implications and academic integrity concerns related to the use of AI tools in coursework. I assure that the AI-generated content was used responsibly, and any content derived from these tools has been appropriately cited and
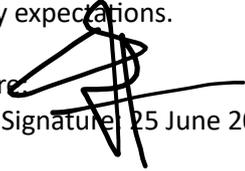
☐ I declare that I have NOT used any generative AI tools and that the assignment concerned is my original work.

Signature: [digital signature]
Date of Signature: [Date of Submission]

attributed according to the guidelines provided by the instructor and the course. I have taken necessary steps to distinguish between my original work and the AI-generated contributions. Any direct quotations, paraphrased content, or other forms of AI-generated material have been properly referenced in accordance with academic conventions.

By signing this declaration, I affirm that this declaration is accurate and truthful. I take full responsibility for the integrity of my assignment and am prepared to discuss and explain the role of generative AI tools in my creative process if required by the instructor or the Examination Board. I further affirm that I have used generative AI tools in accordance with ethical standards and academic integrity expectations.

Signature
Date of Signature: 25 June 2025