



HGEM reveals the importance of social media in how diners make decisions

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HGEM has gleaned further insight on the importance of social media in how diners make decisions, with the Guest Experience Management expert revealing that two thirds of consumers (66%) will visit a restaurant's social media pages before eating out.

According to its latest research, 58% of millennials were found to go to a restaurant's social media pages before every visit or ahead of the majority of their visits, with 53% of 56– 65 year olds following this pattern, reinforcing that social media audiences extend beyond 'Generation Y'.

When questioned as to why they had visited a restaurant's social channels, almost one third of all respondents (30%) said they were looking for menu information, while almost a quarter (22%) were seeking customer reviews, highlighting the effect these platforms can have on a customer's decision making process.

Although on-site conversations with staff were deemed to be more important than social media conversations for 62% of consumers, more than one third (34%) of those surveyed believed social media interactions to be an equally important part of the guest experience. With this figure rising to 43% amongst the millennial audience, the study highlights the demand for consistent communications between consumer and operator, online and offline.

The research dug deeper to look at what content was most appealing to consumers when visiting a site's social media page. Offers and promotions proved the most popular type of content, followed by photos, events and competitions. Facebook proved the most widely used platform – almost two thirds (64%) of diners chose the world's largest social media network as their chosen channel for interacting with restaurants.

Reflecting on the results, Steven Pike, managing director of HGEM, commented: "We know that social media is an incredibly powerful tool for operators to monitor customer feedback and maintain a seamless guest experience, however the results emphasise the influence that such platforms have over what drives diners to visit a venue in the first instance.

"Ensuring that your restaurant's channels are updated regularly with pertinent and engaging information for customers is crucial to meet guest expectation of what content is available – and shareable - on these social networking sites.

"While many operators will of course devote considerable resource to ensuring their social media presence is well managed, the findings highlight that on site conversations still remain important to the overall guest experience, and we encourage restaurant to consider all elements of the customer journey when considering how to manage and improve the conversations had with customers."