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In the week where love is on everyone's mind, a comprehensive survey into the UK's eating out market by, Guest Experience Management expert, HGEM has revealed that experience is still the number one turn on, or turn off, for customers – with 82% stating they would 'dump' a hospitality brand following a bad customer experience.



The study has also revealed that customers value brands that focus on 'honesty', 'reliability' and 'willingness to go above and beyond' twice as much as brands that focus on being 'fun' and 'social'. 72% of customers also believe one single team member has the power to influence their decision to fall in love with a hospitality brand, or not, indicating that operators should focus on training their staff to understand the impact their role has on the customers' experience.

When it comes to consumers falling out of love with a hospitality brand, the survey revealed they are willing to overlook bad reviews (30%) for a brand they are already invested in. However, operators shouldn't rest on their laurels as the survey reveals millennials are less forgiving than older generations and certainly won't allow for any slipups when it comes to speed of service – with 66% revealing they would never overlook this.

The survey has also revealed that 60% of millennials fall in love with a brand through Instagram, over other forms of social media including Facebook (17%), Twitter (4%), Snapchat (3%) and YouTube (5%), suggesting that operators should spend their marketing efforts on Instagram for this demographic. Perhaps predictably, traditional forms of marketing, such as emails (25%) and magazine advertising (32%), are still preferred amongst baby boomers.

Sally Whelan, Founding Director of HGEM stated "It is vital that hospitality operators understand their customers' needs at all points of the consumer journey. Whilst an individual's reasons to fall in love with a brand are not always obvious, the survey clearly demonstrates the importance of customer experience in the process. A positive experience can drive loyalty and strong brand engagement, driving repeat visits and sales.

"Front of house teams are often the key to unlocking the hearts and minds of customers; operators should make the most of this influence by introducing effective staff training and reward schemes."

