

Public Relations in the Restaurant Industry:
Using Visual Social Media to Increase Consumer Relationships

A Senior Project

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ABSTRACT

As daily social media usage grows, marketing through these platforms become increasingly important for public relations professionals. Instagram, one of the most popular social media platforms, provides a new way to instantaneously reach millions of potential customers through the use of visuals. However, with limited knowledge of this new public relations tool, standing out and creating a successful presence for your business is difficult. This study is to explore how visual social media, specifically Instagram, can be used to increase consumer knowledge in the restaurant industry.

Investigation of current literature regarding the topic and gathered opinions of industry professionals will provide data which will be analyzed to draw conclusions. These finding will help to understand the best practices in promoting restaurants on visual social media platforms.

TABLE OF CONTENT

Chapter 1	1
Introduction.....	1
Statement of Problem	1
Background of Problem	2
Purpose of Study	2
Setting for Study	3
Research Questions	3
Definition of Terms.....	4
Organization of Study	6
Chapter 2	7
Literature Review.....	7
Social Media Usages in the Restaurant Industry	7
Emerging Visual Social Media (Instagram).....	8
Increasing Knowledge with Visual Social Media.....	10
Consumer Participation in Social Media	11
Successful Industry Examples	12
Measuring Success of Visual Social Media Campaigns	14
Chapter 3	15
Methodology	15
Data Sources	15
Participants	15
Interview Design	16

Data Collection.....	17
Data Presentation	17
Limitations.....	18
Delimitations	18
Chapter 4	19
Data Analysis.....	19
Description of Participating Experts in Related Fields.	19
Public Relations Professional Questionnaire	21
Visual Social Media Usage Research Questions.....	31
Visual Social Media in Public Relations Data	34
Chapter 5	43
Discussion and Recommendations	43
Summary.....	43
Discussion.....	44
Recommendations for Practice.....	50
Recommendations for Further Research.....	51
Study Conclusion	52
References.....	53
Appendix A.....	57
Appendix B.....	60
Appendix C.....	65
Appendix D.....	68

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. <i>Social Media's Role in the Restaurant Industry</i>	36
Table 2. <i>Instagram usage by Restaurants</i>	37
Table 3. <i>Increasing knowledge on Instagram</i>	38
Table 4. <i>Importance of User Involvement on Instagram</i>	40
Table 5. <i>Successful Examples of Restaurant Social Media Use</i>	42

Chapter 1

Introduction

Statement of Problem

This study focuses on social media marketing in the restaurant industry using visual communication. It will closely examine current trends in the industry, including user-generated content the popular outlet, Instagram. Tinnish (2013) explains that visuals are the restaurant industry is the most effective way to engage an audience because ““Visual communication can capture the attention of the target audience and engage them in ways that data cannot through the use of color, layout, balance, arrangement, size and images” (p. 1).

The main problem with the current culture of user-generated content is the control public relations relinquish when engaging an audience through this means. With the increased popularity of smartphone photography, public relations practitioners lose control over the quality of images being posted to social media. This creates the challenge of dealing with pictures taken with dim lighting, from the wrong angle, or misleading representations of their products. This has become such a problem, that according to Manzoori-Stamford (2014), “a group of leading French restaurateurs, including one with three Michelin stars, came together to campaign for a ban on smartphones in restaurants - in a bid to end the culture of photographing dish after dish with them” (p. 46). While this new marketing strategy comes with its challenges, using visual social media allows

restaurants to interact with consumers on a more personal way and increase word-of-mouth marketing.

Background of Problem

The trend of using visuals on social media started to emerge in 2010 with the introduction of the app Instagram. The idea behind this iOS application is a social networking site focused on photography rather than written statuses. According to Kernwood (2015) “[Instagram] experiences such extraordinarily high engagement because people crave to share visually. We want to share stories and life experiences. Instagram offers the perfect solution, with social discovery built in” (p. 50).

Visuals have been used in food campaigns since David Ogilvy coined the term “appetite appeal” over 50 years ago. However, incorporating social media into the equation forces public relations professionals to not only craft the best visuals to represent themselves, but ensure their consumers are also posting favorable images of their brand.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the current tactics public relations practitioners are using to engage users to post about their restaurants. By examining the current tactics, restaurants can identify what is working the best to increase knowledge and what is causing negative publicity of their institution. This research is to assist small restaurants in their social media marketing

strategies by determining what will result in the most favorable brand representation.

Setting for Study

This study will be conducted as part of the data collection for a senior project at California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo, California. Interviews will be held with leading professionals of the restaurant and hospitality public relations industry. This study will also include insight from local San Luis Obispo restaurant owners and employees.

Research Questions

The following research questions have been designed to gain more insight into the field of social media marketing, visual communication, and how these topics apply to the restaurant industry. These questions were designed to compare and contrast tactics currently used in the public relations industry and the opinions of key players. The questions will help distinguish the positive and negative effects of visual social media.

1. How is social media used in the restaurant industry?
2. How is Instagram used in PR for restaurants?
3. How can we use Instagram to impact consumers' knowledge of restaurants?
4. How can we use this knowledge to drive business to the restaurants?

5. How can we get consumers more involved in the social media presence of the restaurants?
6. What are examples of restaurants that have successfully used Instagram to enhance their PR?
7. How can small restaurants use consumer participation in Instagram to increase their PR?

Definition of Terms

- **Brand:** the associations people have with the company, product or service that are beyond its real, tangible aspects. It is a unique idea or concept owned inside the mind of the prospect. (Neubert, 2013)
- **Brand Identity:** The visible elements of a brand (color, design, logo, symbol, etc.) that identify and distinguish the brand in the consumer's mind. (Business Dictionary, 2016)
- **Brand Differentiation:** What it is about a company, brand, product, or service that makes it unique or more desirable than competitors. (Neubert, 2013)
- **Brand Equity:** how well known and regarded the brand is. The more equity a brand has, the more valuable it is to the company or organization that owns it. (Neubert, 2013)
- **Facebook:** One of the most popular social media sites attracting people of all ages from all over the world. (Business Dictionary, 2016)

- **Geotag:** Tags your photo with your current location. This data is collected by the GPS device in your phone or tablet and is accessible to Instagram if you grant permission. (“Instagram Geotag”)
- **Hashtag:** a word or phrase preceded by the symbol # that classifies or categorizes the accompanying text (Merriam-Webster’s online dictionary, n.d.)
- **Instagram:** an online photo-sharing web service that lets you share your life with friends through a series of pictures captured with a mobile device. (Beal, n.d)
- **Social Media:** Primarily Internet or cellular phone based applications and tools to share information among people. It involves blogging and forums and any aspect of an interactive presence, which allows individuals ability to engage in conversations with one another, often as a discussion over a particular blog post, news article, or event. (Business Dictionary)
- **Uses and Gratification Theory:** asserts that people are active users of media and select how they will use it. Researchers have found that people use media in the following ways:
 - As entertainment
 - To scan the environment for items important to them personally
 - As a diversion
 - As a substitute for personal relationships
 - As a check on personal identity and values

User-generated Content: anything on the web that users have a hand in making. Most of the photos, videos, and posts you see on the web are pieces of user-generated content. (Marrs, 2014)

Word-of-Mouth Marketing: Oral or written recommendation by a satisfied customer to the prospective customer of a good or service. Considered to be the most effective form of promotion. (Business Dictionary)

Organization of Study

Chapter one contains the statement of the problem, background of the problem, purpose of the study, and definition of key terms used in this study. Chapter two reviews current literature on the topic. Chapter three will present the methodology used to conduct the study. Chapter four features the ideas and findings that will be used in to answer the original research problem. Chapter five consists of a summary of the study that will discuss current trends and make suggestions of how industry professionals can improve in the future.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The review of literature focuses on the existing literature of social media and how it is used in the restaurant industry. This includes current trends, methods for assessment, case studies, and research into the influence social media has on the success of small to mid-sized restaurants.

Social Media Usages in the Restaurant Industry

According to Ioanna and Yioula (2012), social media is a natural extension of the communications world (p. 2). Howard and Parks organize the definition of social media into three parts: "(a) the information infrastructure and tools used to produce and distribute content that has individual value but reflects shared values; (b) the content that takes the digital form of personal messages, news, ideas, that becomes cultural products; and (c) the people, organizations, and industries that produce and consume both the tools and the content" (p. 359).

With social media becoming an increasingly viable source for public relations, Laroche, Habibi, and Richard (2012) say that there is an ongoing debate over companies using social media to further their brand. Some researchers believe social media provide a unique opportunity for brands to foster their relationships with customers, while others believe the contrary (p. 1457).

Industry professional that believe that using social media in the restaurant industry is an opportunity for businesses to easily reach a broad spectrum of consumers instantly. Marris and Rae (2009) state, “the internet impacts business innovation by expanding reach and minimizing the time-lag to market” (p. 1). Ioanna and Yioula believe that “social media is a powerful tool that can be used by companies in their integrated marketing communication campaigns since it enables them to interact in an informal and more personal way” (p. 1459).

While many believe that social media has its rightful place in the restaurant industry, others think that it compromises the integrity of the establishment. According to Manzoori-Stamford (2014), “a group of leading French restaurateurs, including one with three Michelin stars, came together to campaign for a ban on smartphones in restaurants - in a bid to end the culture of photographing dish after dish with them” (p. 46). The increase in social media in marketing plans also required businesses to relinquish some control of the content reaching consumers. Buscall (2015) finds that “One bad tweet on Twitter or a negative comment on Facebook can lose your business up to thirty customers” (p. 1).

Emerging Visual Social Media (Instagram)

Instagram, which was introduced in 2010, has become one the leading sources of social media on the market. Why has this iOS app become so popular? According to Kernwood (2015) “it experiences such extraordinarily high engagement because people crave to share visually. We want to share stories

and life experiences. Instagram offers the perfect solution, with social discovery built in” (p. 50).

One of the most prominent ways for restaurants to reach their customers through social media is with visual communication. Tinnish (2013) defines visual communication as “(1) reveal hidden or not apparent information and (2) reduce and clarify complex information in an understandable manner that is aesthetic and visually pleasing.” Tinnish then states that “images are processed 60,000 times faster than text” making them perfect for the instant gratification culture of social media. Tinnish then goes on to explain why visuals have emerged as the most compelling component to social media marketing. “Visual communication can capture the attention of the target audience and engage them in ways that data cannot through the use of color, layout, balance, arrangement, size and images.”

According to Brandau (2013), “Cultivating Instagram engagement is worthwhile because it encourages restaurant traffic, and the shared nature of those photos creates thousands of social media impressions”

Not everyone is fond of this creative display of their restaurant’s dishes. Teitel (2014) describes a viral rant from a Manhattan restaurateur arguing “that smartphone use at the table has drastically increased wait times in his restaurant, to the point where some customers were so busy looking at their phones and photographing their food that when they were finally ready to take a bite, their food was cold and the server had to reheat it.”

Increasing Knowledge with Visual Social Media

Not only is Instagram popular, it has a high success rate of increasing brand knowledge. According to Kerwood (2015), “at 2.261%, the level of brand engagement is higher on Instagram than on any other major social network. Facebook's brand engagement ranks at 0.216%, LinkedIn is 0.055% and Twitter is 0.035%. Instagram, therefore, delivers 65 times more engagement than Twitter and ten times more than Facebook.”

The first step to creating a successful Instagram account is to generate a large following. According to Kerwood (2015) “the addition of '@mentions', relevant hashtags and location tags can help your follower-count and reach to skyrocket.” Once you have developed a following it goes beyond just posting pictures. Keating (2013) states “It's useful as a storytelling platform... a place to connect your brand with audiences at a human level”

Visual social media is especially important for the restaurant and hospitality industry. According to Hollander (2015), “There are people who decide on where they want to go out to eat by their Instagram feed, and that's a fact that we in the hospitality industry just cannot ignore”

Bowling (2015) asked restaurant owners what they liked about Instagram and found that “It's a great way to get a message or information to potential guests, locals or regulars. It also gives people a chance to do the same. They can tag us, leave comments, leave feedback, ask questions, or all of the above.” (p. 15).

According to Cohen (2013), “The best strategy is to embrace those who will inevitably help tell your story. Host events, provide the tools to create great images and educate them on your brand.”

Consumer Participation in Social Media

While using a restaurant or brand’s own social media to promote themselves is a great strategy, word-of-mouth marketing seems to be the most influential way to recruit new customers. According to Richards and Tiwari (2014), “marketer-uncontrolled sources such as word-of-mouth (WOM) are generally more credible and influential than marketer-controlled sources such as paid advertising” (p. 5). Consumer participation in visual social media gives public relations professionals a whole new realm to explore. Cohen (2013) states, “Unlike in traditional advertising, the content is not being created by brands but by consumers, which presents a host of new opportunities as well as challenges. The key is leveraging these new mediums to tell your brand narrative while employing your consumers to do so in an authentic and powerful way.” (p. 35)

Many restaurants are using promotions and deals to those who use their social media to post positive reviews. Cohen (2013) “welcoming visual content from your consumers rewards, encourages and celebrates them for expressing their affinity for your brand (p. 36).

Consumer involvement has proven to be such a key part of the visual social media industry, individuals have created a career out of it. According to Hollander (2015), “professional food Instagrammers, courted by restaurants for

their six-figure followings and stylish, sometimes over-the-top photography. Some have turned their accounts into full- or part-time professions, earning up to \$350 for posting a flattering image, while others have parlayed their social-media savvy into free meals or public-relations jobs.”

Snader (2015) “Some choose to focus on the fact that more posted pictures can mean more exposure. Others lament the fact that amateur photographers might not represent the design of the food in the right ways, thus broadcasting an image that is what the chef had in mind for the presentation. Either way, chefs are starting to make decisions within their restaurants about how to deal with the constant photo-snapping.”

There is a downside to this free exposure. According to Krummet (2015), “poor-quality smartphone snapshots may have the opposite effect. They can make even the most desirable restaurant meal look like something no customer would want to eat.”

Successful Industry Examples

According to Scott (2013), “Spanish hotel chain NH Hotels uses the hashtag #wakeuppics to curate photos taken by users of their hotel-room views in beautiful locations as soon as they wake up - an effective way to stir the travel bug in anyone. Meanwhile, luxury fashion retailer Bergdorf Goodman, using the tag #bgshoes, aggregates its Manhattan-based customers' Instagram photos of their favorite footwear on an interactive map, under the Shoes About Town campaign. In both these examples, the companies benefit from the fact that social media users like to show off online.”

Stossel, (2013) recommends to, “Use contests to drive more than web traffic. When Milwaukee's Stack'd Burger Bar turned to Company B for help naming its new house beer, the marketing and PR firm instead used the opportunity to engage the restaurant's Facebook fan base. The "Name That Beer" contest asked Facebook users to submit name ideas in hopes of winning a complimentary tap of beer a day all summer. The prize was more than the beer, but also "bragging rights,"... .. "Stack'd Blonde" was the contest winner, but the restaurant was the real victor. It saw a 61-percent increase in new fans and a 75-percent boost in fan impressions for the month. Cross-promotion on the website and on property led to greater web and foot traffic, and a 16-percent increase in sales (p. 36).”

Another successful restaurant on Instagram is Shake Shack. According to Moutinho (2015), “Goldman Sachs analysts explain that Shake Shack is 100 times more successful on Instagram than McDonald's. This seems extraordinary because Shake Shack has 63 locations, while McDonald's has 36,000.” The key to their success is quality interactions on their social media. They are quick to respond to comments and engage their audience.

Another example of a successful restaurant is Del Posto in New York, who have 12,4000 followers. This Italian restaurant not only features beautiful images of their dishes, but offers followers a behind-the-scenes look at the restaurant. The background view of the business humanizes the business and creates a personal connection between them and their consumers (Moutinho, 2015).

Measuring Success of Visual Social Media Campaigns

One way to measure success of visual social media campaigns is to examine the amount of location-tags the restaurant is generation. According to Ruggless (2013), "Generally speaking, you can look at local engagement on the channel as a representative proxy for foot traffic, so there could be fewer people in the stores. That's a potential explanation. Or people, for whatever reason, might be engaging less... There's a correlation between check-ins and sales, and this is something we will continue to monitor."

Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter introduces the methods used to obtain original data for the study including participants, interview design, data collection and presentation methods, and limitation and delimitations.

Data Sources

For this study, industry experts were consulted from the fields of public relations, marketing, and hospitality. Each questionnaire distributed was specifically tailored to address the original research questions regarding the subject of visual social media usage in the restaurant industry.

Participants

Ali Grant is the Founder and CEO of BeSocial Public Relations. BeSocial public relations firm that focuses on lifestyle, beauty, and health related clients. Ali uses social media heavily in every account she works on. Tess Stevenson is a Digital Account Executive at Bread & Butter PR. Bread & Butter is a nationwide public relations firm that focuses on the restaurant and bar industries. For her role, she deals with the social media accounts of their clients. Mark Mantel is the founder and owner of Kravabowl, an acai bowl and smoothie restaurant located in Avila Beach, California. Molly Kiely is the marketing manager of Luna Red, a restaurant located in Downtown San Luis Obispo. Kiely is also the owner of BAMB: Bright Age Media & Marketing.

Interview Design

My interviewees ranged from public relations and marketing professionals to local restaurant owners. This required the need for multiple questionnaires to generate the most in-depth and relevant responses.

Questionnaire 1 (PR & Marketing Professionals)

1. How have you seen social media influence the public relations industry?
Can you give an example?
2. What, in your expert opinion, are the keys to being successful on social media and standing out to consumers? Can you list a few key components?
3. How have you seen Instagram become a crucial component in social media marketing?
4. What do you think makes Instagram so successful as a marketing tool?
5. How have you seen Instagram utilized by restaurants? Can you think of any specific examples of successful brands?
6. How important is user-generated content in visual social media marketing?
7. What are the biggest challenges when marketing or promoting a restaurant?

Questionnaire 2 (Restaurant Owners)

1. What is your current marketing plan?

2. How is social media used in your marketing efforts? Has it been successful?
3. What role do you think visuals have in social media marketing? Can you list a few examples?
4. Have you used Instagram in your social media plan? If so, has it been successful? If not, why not?
5. How important do you think user-generated content is for marketing on social media, specifically Instagram?
6. Have you seen an increase in business due to social media?
7. What are the negatives effects social media, specifically Instagram, has had on your business?

Data Collection

The method of data collection for this study will be various interviews with industry experts. Each interview was conducted during February 2016. The participants were given a questionnaire and responded with in-depth answers reflecting their own experiences in the public relations and/or restaurant industry.

Data Presentation

The data collected during these interviews was documented through email and copied verbatim into the interview transcripts. This method of data collection ensures that the data is presented the most complete and objective way.

Limitations

In order to collect real life data and test if the theories laid out in this paper are successful, the performance of a public relations campaign may be beneficial. However, due to the short period of time this project was composed in, it was impossible to include this component. Therefore, the research developed in this study will serve as the base for practitioners to use in future campaigns.

Delimitations

A delimitation of this study was the far proximity to restaurant hubs in large cities like Los Angeles, New York, and San Francisco. The most successful public relations firms with a focus on restaurants are located in these cities. In order to conduct interviews with industry professionals, an email questionnaire was used. This allows the participants to give thoughtful responses while being hours away from San Luis Obispo. While an email questionnaire runs the risk of being less personal than a face-to-face interview, it also allows respondents to look back on successful accounts and give detailed recollections of why they were successful. Biased towards their own customers and PR firms should be noted.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis

This chapter includes written accounts of the industry experts interviewed to collect data for this study. Chapter 4 will summarize the respondents' answers to the questionnaires disseminated via email. Since the participants responded with written answers to these questions, the data will be presented in form of direct quotations or paraphrased responses. The answers the experts provided will then be analyzed and compared to the original research questions and current literature on the restaurant industry and the effect of visual social media on public relations in Chapter 2.

Description of Participating Experts in Related Fields.

Public Relations.

Ali Grant is the public relations expert for the study. Grant is the CEO and Founder of Be Social Public Relations in Solana Beach, California. Not only was Grant named by San Diego Magazine as "a dynamic public relations expert," she boasts the achievement of being a finalist for the San Diego Business Journal's "Women Who Mean Business Awards," a nominee for San Diego Magazine's "2014 Women of the Year" and San Diego Business Journal's Emerging Generation: 25 in their 20s. Be Social is an award winning boutique PR firm that focuses on lifestyle, beauty, and bloggers. After graduating with a B.S. in Journalism from California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, Grant

went on to work for a ecommerce company and then start Be Social Public Relations.

In addition to Ali Grant, I interviewed local public relations specialist, Molly Kiely. Kiely is the owner of BAMB: Bright Age Media & Marketing in San Luis Obispo, California. BAMB represents three very prominent restaurants in SLO county: Novo, Luna Red, and Robin's. In her role, Kiely develops the yearly marketing plans, determine the strategies each restaurant will take to achieve their revenue goals and implements the day-to-day tactics.

Social Media.

The social media specialist chosen for this study is Tess Stevenson. Stevenson is a digital account executive at Bread and Butter Public Relations. Bread and Butter is a public relations firm based out of Los Angeles whose main clients are restaurants and bars. In her position as digital account executive, she is responsible for overseeing clients' online presence. This requires an abundance of knowledge about social media and how to apply it in order to increase visibility. Before working at Bread and Butter, Stevenson was a marketing intern at Warner Bros. Records and attended UCLA.

Restaurant Owner.

Mark Mantel is the founder and owner of Kravabowl located in Avila Beach, California. Kravabowl was one of the first restaurants to bring acai bowls to the central coast. Within the first year of business, Mantel used his knowledge of social media marketing to develop a following on Instagram of nearly 6000 people.

Public Relations Professional Questionnaire

This questionnaire was designed specifically for the sources who look at the restaurant industry from a public relations professional standpoint:

1. How have you seen social media influence the public relations industry?

Can you give an example?

- Question #1 was asked to gain insight into the role that social media has had in the public relations industry. This questions was designed to determine if the public relations professionals believe that social media has had an impact on the PR industry and if the impact is positive or negative.
 - Ali Grant: “Social media is an integral part of the public relations industry. If we are doing a product launch and pitching to the media, it’s important that it’s also pushed through social media outlets like Instagram and seen in the hands of social media influencers” (Appendix A)
 - Tess Stevenson: “Social media has become a powerful tool for the public relations industry. In the current climate, social media is responsible for driving trends, creating new business and reaching mass audiences. PR Firms that are able to capitalize on the influence of social media are better able to represent their clients. The firm I work for, Bread & Butter Public Relations, has an entire division dedicated to social media and digital growth. In addition to

supporting clients' social media accounts, the digital team works collaboratively with the public relations division to share press hits on client social media accounts. We also tag and engage with local media and publications from client accounts to increase visibility, in addition to sharing emerging trends and news relevant to the PR space with the team.

- Example: Our client, Pitchoun Bakery & Café, was recently featured in a roundup of best brunch spots in LA in a local, online publication. In addition to traditional PR outreach, I tagged the publication in every Instagram post featuring a brunch dish in order to engage the writers from all angles. The editor reached out via DM on Instagram for more information – and I put him in touch with our PR team.”
(Appendix B).

2. What, in your expert opinion, are the keys to being successful on social media and standing out to consumers? Can you list a few key components?

- Question #2 was designed to get participants expert opinion on the most influential ways to use social media to reach your audience. This question allows us to investigate if different experts use social media in similar or different ways to engage an audience.

- Ali Grant: “Beautiful content is key to social media success. It’s a competitive space. You have to build unique, engaging content.” (Appendix A)
- Tess Stevenson: “Know your audience: Every platform (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) and client has a different audience, so knowing how to speak to them and curate content that will truly engage each unique audience is key. Visually appealing content: In a time when Instagram is the most popular social media platform out there, creating beautiful, interesting and thoughtful images can make or break your brand. Followers spend an average of 2 seconds on each Instagram post, making the actual copy less important than the image. Community Management: Fans have found social media is an easy way to ask questions, give feedback and voice complaints about a brand conveniently and quickly. Being engaged and reactive is crucial to humanizing a brand and keeping customers coming back for more.” (Appendix B).

3. How have you seen Instagram become a crucial component in social media marketing?

- Question #3 was asked to look specifically at Instagram as it pertains to social media marketing and public relations. In the analysis of the current literature, there was not much information about this emerging platform. This question was asked to gauge if the professionals thought it was an important platform.

- Ali Grant: “Instagram is the fastest growing platform and provides the unique ability to engage directly with consumers. Fashion and beauty brands have created marketing budgets specific to Instagram, seeing as it’s such an influential platform.” (Appendix A).
- Tess Stevenson: “Instagram has surpassed Facebook as the fastest growing social media platform. The opportunities Instagram provides for brands are endless. Many have built their business solely with Instagram (Shop Jeen), used Instagram influencers to raise awareness about their brand and shared new products/updates easily with an infinite audience. Being featured on a viral account like @infatuation can now make or break a business.” (Appendix B).

4. What do you think makes Instagram so successful as a marketing tool?

- Question #4 is used as a follow up for question #3. After establishing if Instagram is a crucial component in social media marketing and public relations, this question looks at what about it makes it so important. This question allows us to compare and contrast what different experts believe makes Instagram different from any other social media platform.
 - Ali Grant: “It is user-friendly and is built for a fast-paced world for easy and quick content previewing.” (Appendix A).
 - People like pictures – and Instagram capitalizes on that. Instagram is a visually appealing and easy to use platform that encourages users to engage with each other. Hashtags – hashtags make

brands discoverable and are easy to include in content. Paired with the explore tab, a brand's reach capabilities become endless.

Influencers – There is a whole population of bloggers who now make a living solely off of their Instagram. Brands can use these influencers to reach new, engaged audiences. There is nothing comparable to this on Facebook or Twitter.” (Appendix B).

5. How have you seen Instagram utilized by restaurants? Can you think of any specific examples of successful brands?
 - Question #5 looks at Instagram specifically for the restaurant industry. It is designed for the experts to give specific examples of successful campaigns and what made them successful.
 - Ali Grant: “Yes, I see that most restaurants are on Instagram... sharing food, customers, and the ambiance.” (Appendix A)
 - Tess Stevenson: “Specifically in Los Angeles and New York, if a restaurant does not have an Instagram account they are considered irrelevant. People have started using Instagram as a tool for deciding where they want to grab dinner – so it is definitely something our PR firm recommends to our clients. Instagram is a great way for restaurants to showcase not only their food, but their staff and space. Fans really enjoy seeing what goes on behind the scenes, where the actual food is coming from and how the chef prepares what ultimately ends up on their table. Knowing your voice

and audience is the most important component to a successful Instagram. Here are a few that do a good job:

- Corporate: @superbafoodandbread – it is clear they have a professional photographer and thoughtfully scheduled out content and promotions. Their feed is beautiful and engaging and reflects the food they offer.
- Organic: @bestiadtla – they share photos anyone can take and their captions are a little more conversational. The vibe and personality of the restaurant comes through effortlessly. (Appendix B).

6. How important is user-generated content in visual social media marketing?

- Question #6 looks at a subject that wasn't discussed heavily in current literature. This question is to gather information about the importance of user-generated content for public relations professionals. The question raises the question of which is more important: your own content or the content about you created by others.
 - Ali Grant: "It's an important aspect of the overall content, but it's integral that you have your own unique content." (Appendix A).
 - Tess Stevenson: "Depending on the brand, UGC can be a huge asset. For restaurants, it is a great way to engage your audience and give followers incentive to share photos from their experience at the restaurant. @alfredcoffee is a great example of a coffee shop

that built an empire on Instagram, specifically through a feed made up entirely of UGC.” (Appendix B).

7. What are the biggest challenges when marketing or promoting a business on Instagram or other social media?

- Question #7 is used to understand the negative effects social media marketing has on the PR of your clients. This question looks at challenges different industry professionals have when promoting their clients.

- Ali Grant: “ It’s a competitive landscape! You have to create something unique and different to be able to stand out.” (Appendix A).

- Tess Stevenson: “The single biggest challenge for a restaurant on social media is gaining and maintaining fans. Social media’s fast-paced nature makes it challenging for accounts to grasp a user’s interest and keep them captivated. With so much content out there to compete with, strategies like hashtags, social media contests and community management are crucial to a restaurant’s success.” (Appendix B).

Restaurant Professionals Questionnaire

This questionnaire was given to restaurant professionals to collect data about social media's influence on restaurants from an insider's perspective:

1. What is your current marketing plan?
 - Question #1 was developed to gain an understand what the restaurant is currently doing to reach consumers. This was used to understand if social media is currently part of their marketing plan.
 - Molly Kiely: “We have minimal paid media (some radio, some print ads in New Times special edition guides and a Visitor Guide Ad), we focus a lot on social media, blogging, monthly newsletters and in-house signage to market our news and events.” (Appendix C).
 - Mark Mantel: “To simply engage with my followers daily while showcasing tagged photos in an effort to create a lifestyle around our product.” (Appendix D).
2. How is social media used in your marketing efforts? Has it been successful?
 - Question #2 was used as a follow up to question #1. Once it was established that social media was used in their marketing plan, this question asks how specifically the restaurant owners use it. Asking if it has been successful is the understand if they feel social media helps their business grow.
 - Molly Kiely: “All 3 restaurants post to Instagram, Facebook and Twitter almost daily. It's very beneficial for getting the word out

about our specials and events. Restaurants are social experiences and tend to become part of people's lifestyles so Facebook works quite well to extend this experience. Instagram is all about photos so it's a good channel for posting appetizing food & drink shots." (Appendix C).

- Mark Mantel: "We created a tag and win campaign early last summer and received thousands of posts in by summer gaining almost 6,000 followers in less than a year." (Appendix D).

3. What role do you think visuals have in social media marketing? Can you list a few examples?

- Question #3 is meant to understand how restaurants use visuals in social media marketing. I asked for examples to do further research on how they used visuals.

- Molly Kiely: "For sure appetizing food, drink and atmosphere photos help since that is what we sell. It entices people and reminds them to visit us." (Appendix C).
- Mark Mantel: "Visual stimulants are everything.. If you look at our posts we receive 30% more feedback and likes on images that are high quality." (Appendix D).

4. Have you used Instagram in your social media plan? If so, has it been successful? If not, why not?

- Question #4 is meant to see how different professionals feel about Instagram. This new form of social media is controversial and has had

positive and negative reviews from restaurant professionals, as seen in the current literature on the topic.

- Molly Kiely: “Yes, for all 3 restaurants and it’s a channel that is becoming very popular with the millennials especially. It has definitely helped us stay top of mind when people are considering where to eat.” (Appendix C).

5. How important do you think user-generated content is for marketing on social media, specifically Instagram?

- Question #5 is used to understand what professionals think of user-generated content. This is important to gather data on whether it is an important part of restaurant marketing or not.
 - Molly Kiely: “It’s very important because people trust their friends and if they are posting photos of our businesses it is way more effective. It’s the new form of “Word of Mouth” marketing” (Appendix C).
 - Mark Mantel: “There is no better way to reach your customers for free daily than using Instagram. It is vital.” (Appendix D).

6. What are the negatives effects social media, specifically Instagram, has had on your business?

- Question #6 addresses the problems that social media causes for businesses. In the current literature we saw that not all social media was beneficial to a business. This data allows us to compare and contrast the positive and negatives of social media in public relations.

- Molly Kiely: “I guess it would be if there’s a competitor who is outshining us with their posts. But honestly it’s hard to say if that’s really negative. So far, it has just been an extra tool and positive. We’ve never received any negative comments to any of our posts.” (Appendix C).
- Mark Mantel: “There was a point where our Instagram success actually became so trendy that people stopped following us due to seeing too many of our bowls in their newsfeed. It has since been dialed down but sometimes you can have too much of a good thing and it can work as a disadvantage. We got close to that.” (Appendix D).

Visual Social Media Usage Research Questions

For this project, the following research questions were created to determine what strategies and practices are currently being used in the field of public relations to promote restaurants on social media. The collected data from industry professionals gives us insight into how visuals play a part in public relations via social media.

1. How is social media used in the restaurant industry?

- “Social media is a powerful tool that can be used by companies in their integrated marketing communication campaigns since it enables them to interact in an informal and more personal way” (Ioanna and Yioula, 2012, p. 1459).

2. How is Instagram used in PR for restaurants?

- “Cultivating Instagram engagement is worthwhile because it encourages restaurant traffic, and the shared nature of those photos creates thousands of social media impressions” (Brandau, 2013).
- “[Instagram is] useful as a storytelling platform... a place to connect your brand with audiences at a human level” (Keating).

3. How can we use Instagram to impact consumers’ knowledge of restaurants?

- The best strategy is to embrace those who will inevitably help tell your story. Host events, provide the tools to create great images and educate them on your brand” (Cohen, 2013).
- “The addition of '@mentions', relevant hashtags and location tags can help your follower-count and reach to skyrocket” (Kerwood, 2015)

4. How can we get consumers more involved in the social media presence of the restaurants?

- “At 2.261%, the level of brand engagement is higher on Instagram than on any other major social network. Facebook's brand engagement ranks at 0.216%, LinkedIn is 0.055% and Twitter is 0.035%. Instagram, therefore, delivers 65 times more engagement than Twitter and ten times more than Facebook” (Kerwood, 2015).
- “Welcoming visual content from your consumers rewards, encourages and celebrates them for expressing their affinity for your brand” (Cohen, 2013, p. 36).

5. What are examples of restaurants that have successfully used Instagram to enhance their PR?

- When Milwaukee's Stack'd Burger Bar turned to Company B for help naming its new house beer, the marketing and PR firm instead used the opportunity to engage the restaurant's Facebook fan base. The "Name That Beer" contest asked Facebook users to submit name ideas in hopes of winning a complimentary tap of beer a day all summer. The prize was more than the beer, but also "bragging rights,"... .. "Stack'd Blonde" was the contest winner, but the restaurant was the real victor. It saw a 61-percent increase in new fans and a 75-percent boost in fan impressions for the month. Cross-promotion on the website and on property led to greater web and foot traffic, and a 16-percent increase in sales" (Stossel, 2013 p. 36).
- "Goldman Sachs analysts explain that Shake Shack is 100 times more successful on Instagram than McDonald's. This seems extraordinary because Shake Shack has 63 locations, while McDonald's has 36,000." The key to their success is quality interactions on their social media. They are quick to respond to comments and engage their audience." (Moutinho, 2015).
- Another example of a successful restaurant is Del Posto in New York, who have 12,4000 followers. This Italian restaurant not only features beautiful images of their dishes, but offers followers a behind-the-scenes look at the restaurant. The background view of the business humanizes the business

and creates a personal connection between them and their consumers (Moutinho, 2015).

Visual Social Media in Public Relations Data

For this study, it was important to gather the opinions of industry professionals due to the relatively small amount of key information currently existing on the topic of Instagram, social media marketing, and how it has affected the restaurant industry. In order to generate this data for the study, Ali Grant, a public relations expert, Tess Stevenson, a social media expert, Molly Kiely, a restaurant marketing expert, and Mark Mantel, a restaurant owner were interviewed. Grant and Stevenson were given a questionnaire designed specifically for public relations professionals while Kiely and Mantel were given a questionnaire designed for professionals associated directly with a restaurant. These questionnaires were designed to answer the original research questions set forth to generate data for in this study. The following tables present the respondents' answers in the form of their personal opinions on the research questions.

1. How is social media used in the restaurant industry?

- This research question was studied concerning the current literature on the topic of social media. Since this is a relatively new area for the public relations and marketing world, the current literature discusses the sudden emergence of this new tool and how it has revolutionized PR for businesses. A large portion of the literature claims that “social media is a powerful tool that can be used by companies in their integrated marketing

communication campaigns since it enables them to interact in an informal and more personal way” (Ioanna and Yioula, 2012, p. 1459). The research shows that the vast majority of experts believe that social media gives businesses an opportunity to engage with their audience in a way that has never been available to them. While there is an abundance of research on social media usage in public relations and marketing, the research into how it is used in the restaurant industry specifically is scarce. This question was used to gain insight into how restaurants currently use social media. The literature makes it clear that the strategic planning of social media in the restaurant industry is not widespread. This question was asked to understand how important industry professionals believe social media is to the success of their organization’s relationships with consumers. Table 1 summarizes the answers to this question. Both of the public relations experts had generally similar responses that aligned with the current literature. Both view social media as an important tool to use in the restaurant industry.

Table 1

Social Media's Role in the Restaurant Industry

Respondent	Social Media's role	Why	Examples
Ali Grant	Integral part of the public relations industry	Allows you to connect with influencers and be seen by your audience	---
Tess Stevenson	A powerful tool for the public relations industry	Responsible for driving trends, creating new businesses, and reaching mass audiences	Pitchoun Bakery & Cafe

2. How is Instagram used in PR for restaurants?

- This research question was studied with the intent of discovering the main ways restaurants use Instagram in their public relations efforts. Because Instagram is a relatively new social media platform, the current literature on the subject was light. However, most of the literature agrees that Instagram is a great storytelling platform. “[Instagram is] useful as a storytelling platform... a place to connect your brand with audiences at a human level,” (Keating, 2015). In order to get more information on the subject, this question turned to the industry professionals to research the ways Instagram is strategically used to promote their business.

Table 2

Instagram Usage by Restaurants

Respondent	Usages of Instagram by restaurants	Why is it popular?
Ali Grant	Sharing pictures of food, customers, and ambience	User-friendly and built for face-paced viewing
Tess Stevenson	Showcase food, staff, and space.	Encourages engagement between users, hashtags, influencers, explore tab
Molly Kiely	Getting word out about daily specials and upcoming events.	Social experience of Instagram related directly to the social experience of a restaurant

3. How can we use Instagram to impact consumers' knowledge of restaurants?

- This research question was examined to understand how to use Instagram to increase brand awareness by consumers. Similar in form to the previous research question, question number three studies the specific ways to increase knowledge of a business. The most important step to creating a successful Instagram account for your restaurant is to generate a large following on the social media. "The best strategy is to embrace those who will inevitably help tell your story. Host events, provide the tools to create great images and educate them on your brand" (Cohen, 2013).

In order to tell the story of your business and develop a brand identity that allows consumers to relate to you, “the addition of '@mentions', relevant hashtags. and location tags can help your follower-count and reach to skyrocket” (Kerwood, 2015). This question was proposed in both the public relations professional questionnaire and the restaurant owner questionnaire. The goal of this question is to determine the steps to create a large following and knowledge of a restaurant on Instagram.

Table 3

Increasing knowledge on Instagram

Respondent	How to increase consumer knowledge	Why will this lead to increased knowledge?
Ali Grant	Beautiful, unique content is key	Need to stick out of the crowd
Tess Stevenson	Know your audience, visually appealing content, be responsive, being shared on a viral account	Allows you to target your posting, sets you apart, and humanizes your brand, WOM marketing technique.

4. How can we get consumers more involved in the social media presence of the restaurants?

- This question looks at the role user-generated content has in a restaurant’s social media plan. The current literature on this subject

suggests that word of mouth (WOM) marketing seems to be the most influential strategy to gain popularity. Why has it been shown to be so effective? “Marketer-uncontrolled sources such as word-of-mouth (WOM) are generally more credible and influential than marketer-controlled sources such as paid advertising” (Richards and Tiwari, 2014, p. 5). This gives social media platforms, like Instagram, a whole new realm of possibility. “unlike in traditional advertising, the content is not being created by brands but by consumers, which presents a host of new opportunities as well as challenges. The key is leveraging these new mediums to tell your brand narrative while employing your consumers to do so in an authentic and powerful way.” (Cohen, 2013, p. 35). The current literature shows that many restaurants are using audience-based contests to get customers and potential customers to post about their brand. “Welcoming visual content from your consumers rewards, encourages and celebrates them for expressing their affinity for your brand (Cohen, 2013, p. 36). Consumer involvement has become so important that many freelance photographers and bloggers have made a career out of it. “professional food Instagrammers, courted by restaurants for their six-figure followings and stylish, sometimes over-the-top photography. Some have turned their accounts into full- or part-time professions, earning up to \$350 for posting a flattering image, while others have parlayed their social-media savvy into free meals or public-relations jobs.” (Hollander, 2015). This research question was used to validate the

current literature and find out how important customer engagement is to industry professionals. Overall, the participants believed that customer involvement was just as important, if not more important than, brand generated content.

Table 4

Importance of User Involvement on Instagram

Participant	Is user-generated content important?	How can you employ user-generated content to promote your restaurant?
Ali Grant	Important, but less so than your own content	---
Tess Stevenson	Importance depends on your brand.	Incentives to share photos
Molly Kiely	Very important	Encourage to share with friends, leave reviews and comments
Mike Mantel	Extremely important	Tag and win campaigns, contests

5. What are examples of restaurants that have successfully used Instagram to enhance their PR?

- This question is to study brand who have successfully used Instagram to promote their restaurant. The best way to track a brand's success if by the

number of followers they have and the average number of likes per picture they receive. The current literature listed several successful brands and why they are successful. When Milwaukee's Stack'd Burger Bar turned to Company B for help naming its new house beer, the marketing and PR firm instead used the opportunity to engage the restaurant's Facebook fan base. The "Name That Beer" contest asked Facebook users to submit name ideas in hopes of winning a complimentary tap of beer a day all summer. The prize was more than the beer, but also "bragging rights,"... .. "Stack'd Blonde" was the contest winner, but the restaurant was the real victor. It saw a 61-percent increase in new fans and a 75-percent boost in fan impressions for the month. Cross-promotion on the website and on property led to greater web and foot traffic, and a 16-percent increase in sales" (Stossel, 2013 p. 36). "Goldman Sachs analysts explain that Shake Shack is 100 times more successful on Instagram than McDonald's. This seems extraordinary because Shake Shack has 63 locations, while McDonald's has 36,000." The key to their success is quality interactions on their social media. They are quick to respond to comments and engage their audience." (Moutinho, 2015). Another example of a successful restaurant is Del Posto in New York, who have 12,4000 followers. This Italian restaurant not only features beautiful images of their dishes, but offers followers a behind-the-scenes look at the restaurant. The background view of the business humanizes the business and creates a personal connection between them and their consumers

(Moutinho, 2015). While many of the respondents listed their own client or restaurants as successful examples, Tess Stevenson was the only expert to provide multiple examples of successful restaurants.

Table 5

Successful Examples of Restaurant Social Media Use

Respondent	Successful restaurant	Why they are successful
Tess Stevenson	@superbafoodandbread	Professional photographers, thoughtful scheduling, and promotions
	@bestiadla	Humanized posts, conversational captions, and personality of brand shows through.
	@alfredcoffee	Completely dependent on user-generated content

Chapter 5

Discussion and Recommendations

Summary

This study was conducted in response to the emergence of visual social media applications, specifically Instagram, as an influential tool in public relations. Over the last 10 years social media marketing has created an entirely new way for public relations professionals to reach and engage with their target audience. Using visuals in this medium allows for a message to be delivered with just a glance. Because this study involves the fields of public relations, social media marketing, and restaurants, it was vital to collect data from experts in each of these fields. The data gathered is in regards to their opinions on how to use Instagram and other visual social media to successfully engage consumers.

In order to gather information of the current strategies being employed, professionals from each industry was interviewed based on a questionnaire designed to answer the following research questions for the study:

1. How is social media used in the restaurant industry?
2. How is Instagram used in PR for restaurants?
3. How can we use Instagram to impact consumers' knowledge of restaurants?
4. How can we get consumers more involved in the social media presence of the restaurants?
5. What are examples of restaurants that have successfully used Instagram to enhance their PR?

When creating the questionnaire, these research questions were slightly altered to generate the most relevant questions for the interviews with each respondent. The questionnaires resulted in a range of responses that were then tied back to the current literature on visual social media for public relations in the restaurant industry.

Discussion

After analyzing the data collected in Chapter 4, relationships between the responses gathered from industry experts and the current literature, found in Chapter 2, were created. Based on these connections, it is possible to make conclusions regarding the original research questions.

1. How is social media used in the restaurant industry?

All four of the industry experts elaborated on this question in individual ways. Grant discussed general social media tactics in the public relations industry because her experience is in lifestyle and beauty brands rather than restaurants. Stevenson, Keily, and Mantel all described the efforts of their clients and/or restaurants on social media. While they all came from different perspectives, the general consensus was that the restaurant industry uses social media to reach their audience in order to increase knowledge of their business or increase sales.

Because social media has become such a powerful tool in recent years due to the minimal cost for large return. Stevenson claims that

social media now drives trends and creates new businesses because it allows instant access to a mass audience.

A large portion of the current literature claims “social media is a powerful tool that can be used by companies in their integrated marketing communication campaigns since it enables them to interact in an informal and more personal way” (Ioanna and Yioula, 2012, p. 1459). While most of the literature agrees with the responses received by the industry professionals, some data suggested that the spread of social media has had a negative effect on the restaurant industry. “One bad tweet on Twitter or a negative comment on Facebook can lose your business up to thirty customers” (Buscall, 2015, p.1).

While the restaurants do relinquish some control of the perception of their website by placing themselves on social media, the benefits, for the most part, outweigh the risks. Stevenson claims that if a restaurant doesn't have a social media presence in large metropolitan cities like Los Angeles and New York, they are considered irrelevant.

Overall, the conclusion drawn from the industry experts and current literature claims that social media is used by restaurants to increase their consumers knowledge of their services to ultimately increase sales.

2. How is Instagram used in PR for restaurants?

The study now looks more specifically at the usage of Instagram, a newly popular application, by restaurant for public relations. This iOS application, introduced in 2010, has steadily risen in popularity since its

creation, now being considered by many as the most important social media platforms for businesses. But why is Instagram so popular? “It experiences such extraordinarily high engagement because people crave to share visually. We want to share stories and life experiences. Instagram offers the perfect solution, with social discovery built in” (Kerwood, 2015, p. 50).

This analysis for its popularity is shared amongst the industry experts. Grant and Stevenson both claim that the best way for a restaurant to use Instagram is to tell their story. This allows the restaurant to humanize their brand by giving customers a “behind the scenes” look at their business, which increases brand loyalty.

Another reason that Instagram has seen such an increase in popularity is because of the photography aspect platform offers. All of the industry professionals credit the rapid growth of this application to the use of photography. Mantel claims that Instagram is so important with restaurants because dining is partly a visual experience. Instagram makes it easy to instantly share daily specials and deals to tantalize your customers’ appetite. The current literature agrees with this reasoning. “Images are processed 60,000 times faster than text... Visual communication can capture the attention of the target audience and engage them in ways that data cannot through the use of color, layout, balance, arrangement, size and images.” (Tinnish, 2013).

While the majority of literature finds Instagram to be essential for a restaurant's brand, some believe it has negative effects on the overall experience for customers. Teitel (2014) describes a viral rant from a Manhattan restaurateur arguing "that smartphone use at the table has drastically increased wait times in his restaurant, to the point where some customers were so busy looking at their phones and photographing their food that when they were finally ready to take a bite, their food was cold and the server had to reheat it." (Teitel 2014).

Overall, the experts and current literature conclude that Instagram has become an important social media tool because it allows you to tell your story in just a glance.

3. How can we use Instagram to impact consumers' knowledge of restaurants?

When describing how restaurants can use Instagram to impact consumers' knowledge of their services, each expert had a different strategy. All experts agreed that when attempting to increase knowledge of your business, the overall goal is to generate a large following. Gaining a substantial following increases your chance of getting on the "Explore Instagram" page which allows you to be seen by other users.

Stevenson and Grant claim that engaging influencers to promote your page will help increase consumers' knowledge of your restaurant. Current literature agrees with this theory. "Professional food Instagrammers, courted by restaurants for their six-figure followings and

stylish, sometimes over-the-top photography. Some have turned their accounts into full- or part-time professions, earning up to \$350 for posting a flattering image, while others have parlayed their social-media savvy into free meals or public-relations jobs.” (Hollander, 2015).

One strategy that all the experts, as well as the current literature, agree upon is the importance of high quality pictures. People will choose what they eat off of how visually pleasing it is. Posting beautiful pictures will increase the knowledge of your restaurant.

Overall, the best ways to increase consumers’ knowledge of a restaurant is to tell a story through high quality photography. Using trend influencers is an option to gain a greater following and increase your brand’s presence on Instagram.

4. How can we get consumers more involved in the social media presence of the restaurants?

When the experts were asked how important user-generated content (UGC) was to a restaurant’s success on social media, the responses varied. Grant claimed that while UGS was a great tool, it is more important to focus on creating and posting quality content for your own business. Stevenson said the importance of UGC varied depending on the restaurant and their target audience. Kiely and Mantel agreed that UGC was one of the most important things for a brand. Mantel has based his business’s entire social media strategy off of UGC.

Current literature states that the best way to engage your consumers and promote them to post about your restaurant is to offer rewards for action. “Welcoming visual content from your consumers rewards, encourages and celebrates them for expressing their affinity for your brand (Cohen, 2013, p. 36). Mantel agrees with this method and has developed a “tag and win” contest on Kravabowl’s Instagram account. This campaign was very successful and resulted in an increase of almost 6,000 followers over the span of a few months.

Overall, the current literature and expert opinions state that UGC is just as important as creating original content for your Instagram account. The best way to encourage your audience to participate in your social media branding is through contests, giveaways, and rewards.

5. What are examples of restaurants that have successfully used Instagram to enhance their PR?

For this research question, the current literature lacked specific examples of successful accounts paired with the reasons behind their success. This lack of information held true for the industry experts too. Three out of the four experts only wanted to discuss their particular restaurant which resulted in biased opinions. Stevenson, however, provided four different examples of successful restaurant Instagram accounts. Success for an Instagram account will be measured by the number of followers an account has and the number of likes received per picture posted.

The overall keys to success from these brands were their ability to converse with their audience in a personal manner, contests that promoted posting about the restaurant, and providing a behind-the-scenes look at the business.

Recommendations for Practice

After completing this study, considerable data has been accumulated and analyzed on the subject of visual social media usage in public relations for the restaurant industry. Given the depth of the information, it is important to highlight the most paramount conclusions and offer them for the use of future public relations, social media, and restaurant professionals. Some recommendations for practice include tell the story of your restaurant in a personal and unique way, use beautiful photography when posting pictures to your account, and engage your audience using contests and rewards for brand loyalty.

Tell your story.

The goal of any business is to bring something new to the table. This saying holds true especially for restaurants. In a society that has different eating options lining streets, restaurants should use social media as an opportunity to explain what makes them different. The key to forming a relationship with consumers is to humanize your business and give them a behind the scene look at how your products are created. By forming this personal relationship, consumers are more likely to feel loyal to your brand and continue to follow and promote your business.

Use beautiful photography.

When choosing what to post on their Instagram page, a restaurant should only use high-quality, professional-grade photography. When choosing where to go for dinner, consumers will not only choose with their stomachs but with their eyes. If they go on a restaurant's Instagram page and the food looks unappealing, the likelihood of them choosing to go there decreases significantly. On the contrary, if a restaurant displays beautiful images of their dishes, consumers will be more likely to bring their business there.

Engage your audience.

User-generated content has proven to be a perk of social media. This allows consumers to post organically about their favorite restaurants and promotes a business in a whole different way. In order to increase the buzz around their restaurant, it can be beneficial for businesses to offer rewards and contests in exchange for posts promoting their services. Consumers are very likely to trust the opinions of their peers, so increasing the amount of word-of-mouth marketing on social media will only benefit your business.

Recommendations for Further Research

Because this study combined a niche field of restaurants with a relatively new tool in social media, the current literature was light. Further research could be done on the importance of user-generated content and word of mouth

marketing usage in Instagram. Studies could also be done on the effect that the quality of photos has on the desirability of a restaurant's product. It would also be interesting to analyze in more depth the influence that professional Instagrammers have on the restaurant industry and determining what is trendy.

Study Conclusion

In conclusion, the study presented opinions of several experts in the fields of public relations, social media, and restaurants in conjunction with a review of current literature on the topic. The study discussed social media usage in the restaurant industry, how Instagram has become one of the most popular social media platforms, user-generated content, and how they can all be used to increase consumer knowledge of a business. It is meant to present knowledge of public relations and how they are utilized in the restaurant industry. As stated early, the field of social media is rapidly growing and is being explored by public relations professionals daily. As the popularity grows, more research should be done to understand how this can be used by businesses to better reach their target audiences.

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Appendix A

Interview Transcripts: Ali Grant

The following interview was conducted to get expert opinions from a public relations perspective based on a questionnaire about visual social media usage for public relations in the restaurant industry.

Interviewer: Carly Cady

Respondent: Founder and CEO of Be Social Public Relations (Ali Grant)

Date of Interview: 2/24/2016

Interview Transcription:

Carly Cady: “How have you seen social media influence the public relations industry? Can you give an example?”

Ali Grant: “Social media is an integral part of the public relations industry. If we are doing a product launch and pitching to the media, it’s important that it’s also pushed through social media outlets like Instagram and seen in the hands of social media influencers.”

CC: “What, in your expert opinion, are the keys to being successful on social media and standing out to consumers? Can you list a few key components?”

AG: "Beautiful content is key to social media success. It's a competitive space. You have to build unique, engaging content."

CC: "How have you seen Instagram become a crucial component in social media marketing?"

AG: "Instagram is the fastest growing platform and provides the unique ability to engage directly with consumers. Fashion and beauty brands have created marketing budgets specific to Instagram, seeing as it's such an influential platform."

CC: "What do you think makes Instagram so successful as a marketing tool?"

AG: "It is user-friendly and is built for a fast-paced world for easy and quick content previewing."

CC: "How have you seen Instagram utilized by restaurants? Can you think of any specific examples of successful brands?"

AG: "Yes, I see that most restaurants are on Instagram... sharing food, customers, and the ambiance."

CC: "How important is user-generated content in visual social media marketing?"

AG: "It's an important aspect of the overall content, but it's integral that you have your own unique content."

CC: "What are the biggest challenges when marketing or promoting a business on Instagram or other social media?"

AG: "It's a competitive landscape! You have to create something unique and different to be able to stand out."

Appendix B

Interview Transcript: Tess Stevenson

The following interview was conducted to get expert opinions from a public relations perspective based on a questionnaire about visual social media usage for public relations in the restaurant industry.

Interviewer: Carly Cady

Respondent: Digital Account Executive at Bread & Butter PR (Tess Stevenson)

Date of Interview: 3/8/2016

Carly Cady: “How have you seen social media influence the public relations industry? Can you give an example?”

Tess Stevenson: “Social media has become a powerful tool for the public relations industry. In the current climate, social media is responsible for driving trends, creating new business and reaching mass audiences. PR Firms that are able to capitalize on the influence of social media are better able to represent their clients. The firm I work for, Bread & Butter Public Relations, has an entire division dedicated to social media and digital growth. In addition to supporting clients’ social media accounts, the digital team works collaboratively with the public relations division to share press hits on client social media accounts. We also tag and engage with local media and publications from client accounts to

increase visibility, in addition to sharing emerging trends and news relevant to the PR space with the team.

- Example: Our client, Pitchoun Bakery & Café, was recently featured in a roundup of best brunch spots in LA in a local, online publication. In addition to traditional PR outreach, I tagged the publication in every Instagram post featuring a brunch dish in order to engage the writers from all angles. The editor reached out via DM on Instagram for more information – and I put him in touch with our PR team.”

CC: “What, in your expert opinion, are the keys to being successful on social media and standing out to consumers? Can you list a few key components?”

TS: “Know your audience: Every platform (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) and client has a different audience, so knowing how to speak to them and curate content that will truly engage each unique audience is key. Visually appealing content: In a time when Instagram is the most popular social media platform out there, crating beautiful, interesting and thoughtful images can make or break your brand. Followers spend an average of 2 seconds on each Instagram post, making the actual copy less important than the image. Community Management: Fans have found social media is an easy way to ask questions, give feedback and voice complaints about a brand conveniently and quickly. Being engaged and reactive is crucial to humanizing a brand and keeping customers coming back for more.”

CC: “How have you seen Instagram become a crucial component in social media marketing?”

TS: “As mentioned above, Instagram has surpassed Facebook as the fastest growing social media platform. The opportunities Instagram provides for brands are endless. Many have built their business solely with Instagram (Shop Jeen), used Instagram influencers to raise awareness about their brand and shared new products/updates easily with an infinite audience. Being featured on a viral account like @infatuation can now make or break a business.”

CC: “What do you think makes Instagram so successful as a marketing tool?”

TS: “People like pictures – and Instagram capitalizes on that. Instagram is a visually appealing and easy to use platform that encourages users to engage with each other.

- Hashtags – hashtags make brands discoverable and are easy to include in content. Paired with the explore tab, a brand’s reach capabilities become endless.
- Influencers – There is a whole population of bloggers who now make a living solely off of their Instagram. Brands can use these influencers to reach new, engaged audiences. There is nothing comparable to this on Facebook or Twitter.”

CC: “How have you seen Instagram utilized by restaurants? Can you think of any specific examples of successful brands?”

TS: “Specifically in Los Angeles and New York, if a restaurant does not have an Instagram account they are considered irrelevant. People have started using Instagram as a tool for deciding where they want to grab dinner – so it is definitely something our PR firm recommends to our clients. Instagram is a great way for restaurants to showcase not only their food, but their staff and space. Fans really enjoy seeing what goes on behind the scenes, where the actual food is coming from and how the chef prepares what ultimately ends up on their table. Knowing your voice and audience is the most important component to a successful Instagram. Here are a few that do a good job:

- Corporate: @superbafoodandbread – it is clear they have a professional photographer and thoughtfully scheduled out content and promotions. Their feed is beautiful and engaging and reflects the food they offer.
- Organic: @bestiadtla – they share photos anyone can take and their captions are a little more conversational. The vibe and personality of the restaurant comes through effortlessly.”

CC: “How important is user-generated content in visual social media marketing?”

TS: “Depending on the brand, UGC can be a huge asset. For restaurants, it is a great way to engage your audience and give followers incentive to share photos from their experience at the restaurant. @alfredcoffee is a great example of a coffee shop that built an empire on Instagram, specifically through a feed made up entirely of UGC.”

CC: “What are the biggest challenges when marketing or promoting a restaurant?”

TS: “The single biggest challenge for a restaurant on social media is gaining and maintaining fans. Social media’s fast-paced nature makes it challenging for accounts to grasp a user’s interest and keep them captivated. With so much content out there to compete with, strategies like hashtags, social media contests and community management are crucial to a restaurant’s success.”

Appendix C

Interview Transcript: Molly Kiely

The following interview was conducted to get expert opinions from a public relations and perspective based on a questionnaire about visual social media usage for public relations in the restaurant industry.

Interviewer: Carly Cady

Respondent: (Molly Kiely)

Date of Interview: 3/8/2016

Carly Cady: "What is your current marketing plan?"

Molly Kiely: "I market 3 different restaurants but they have similar plans. We have minimal paid media (some radio, some print ads in New Times special edition guides and a Visitor Guide Ad), we focus a lot on social media, blogging, monthly newsletters and in-house signage to market our news and events."

CC: "How is social media used in your marketing efforts? Has it been successful?"

MK: "All 3 restaurants post to Instagram, Facebook and Twitter almost daily. It's very beneficial for getting the word out about our specials and events.

Restaurants are social experiences and tend to become part of people's lifestyles so Facebook works quite well to extend this experience. Instagram is all about photos so it's a good channel for posting appetizing food & drink shots."

CC: "What role do you think visuals have in social media marketing? Can you list a few examples?"

MK: "For sure appetizing food, drink and atmosphere photos help since that is what we sell. It entices people and reminds them to visit us."

CC: "Have you used Instagram in your social media plan? If so, has it been successful? If not, why not?"

MK: "Yes, for all 3 restaurants and it's a channel that is becoming very popular with the millennials especially. It has definitely helped us stay top of mind when people are considering where to eat."

CC: "How important do you think user-generated content is for marketing on social media, specifically Instagram?"

MK: "It's very important because people trust their friends and if they are posting photos of our businesses it is way more effective. It's the new form of "Word of Mouth" marketing."

CC: "Have you seen an increase in business due to social media?"

MK: "Yes"

CC: "What are the negatives effects social media, specifically Instagram, has had on your business?"

MK: "I guess it would be if there's a competitor who is outshining us with their posts. But honestly it's hard to say if that's really negative. So far, it has just been an extra tool and positive. We've never received any negative comments to any of our posts."

Appendix D

Interview Transcript: Mike Mantel

The following interview was conducted to get expert opinions from a restaurant owner's perspective based on a questionnaire about visual social media usage for public relations in the restaurant industry.

Interviewer: Carly Cady

Respondent: Owner and Founder of Kravabowl (Mike Mantel)

Date of Interview: 2/29/2016

Carly Cady: "What is your current marketing plan?"

Mike Mantel: "To simply engage with my followers daily while showcasing tagged photos in an effort to create a lifestyle around our product."

CC: "How is social media used in your marketing efforts? Has it been successful?"

MM: "We created a tag and win campaign early last summer and received thousands of posts in by summer gaining almost 6,000 followers in less than a year."

CC: "What role do you think visuals have in social media marketing? Can you list a few examples?"

MM: “Visual stimulants are everything.. If you look at our posts we receive 30% more feedback and likes on images that are high quality.”

CC: “How important do you think user-generated content is for marketing on social media, specifically Instagram?”

MM: “There is no better way to reach your customers for free daily than using Instagram. It is vital.”

CC: “Have you seen an increase in business due to social media?:

MM: “Everyday!”

CC: “What are the negatives effects social media, specifically Instagram, has had on your business?”

MM: “There was a point where our Instagram success actually became so trendy that people stopped following us due to seeing too many of our bowls in their newsfeed. It has since been dialed down but sometimes you can have too much of a good thing and it can work as a disadvantage. We got close to that.”