



Research Article

THE FOOD AND BEVERAGE INDUSTRY IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA: FLAVORS, TRENDS, AND INTERACTIONS FROM THE CONSUMER PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This article examines the multifaceted impacts of social media on the food and beverage industry. It is emphasized that social media platforms have become a powerful marketing tool for food and beverage brands, significantly shaping consumer behavior and bringing innovative approaches to the sector. The study, based on qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews with eight participants from diverse demographic backgrounds, details how brands leverage platforms like Instagram and TikTok for visual appeal, influencer marketing, and direct customer engagement. It also analyzes how these platforms influence consumer preferences, accelerate the spread of new trends, and transform the discovery of new flavors and dining experiences through the concept of "digital aesthetic fit". The findings reveal that visually driven, shareable food and venues are now key drivers of consumer choice and confirm that social media is an indispensable tool for businesses to gain a competitive advantage. The integration of technological innovations such as online ordering systems, virtual menus, live broadcasts, and augmented reality into the sector is also discussed. Additionally, the challenges and risks posed by social media (negative comments, fake accounts, increased competition, and algorithm volatility) are addressed.

Keywords: Social Media, Food and Beverage Industry, Marketing, Food Trends

Introduction

Social media has profoundly altered how individuals communicate, access information, engage in entertainment, and conduct commerce. This transformation has significantly impacted the food and beverage (F&B) industry (Boyd and Ellison, 2007; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Social media platforms have evolved beyond mere marketing channels for F&B businesses; they have become influential agents that shape consumer behavior, catalyze trends, and redefine competitive dynamics within the industry (Ashley and Tuten, 2015; Chung and Koo, 2015).

Existing literature highlights the crucial role of social media in shaping marketing strategies within the food and beverage (F&B) sector, where digital platforms are no longer passive communication channels but active arenas of consumer engagement, brand storytelling, and cultural meaning-making. Visually-driven platforms such as Instagram and TikTok have transformed food into a visual spectacle, popularizing a "visually appealing" marketing approach that emphasizes aesthetic presentation, composition, and sensory appeal beyond taste itself (Gün, 2024; Wahyuni et al., 2023). This shift has elevated food consumption into an experience that is shared, curated, and performed online, where the photogenic qualities of a dish or venue increasingly determine its commercial success (Selvakumar et al., 2025; Waheed and Kumar, 2025). In this highly visual and competitive environment, social media marketing serves not only to promote products but also to construct brand identities aligned with contemporary digital cultures, fueling consumer curiosity, aspiration, and lifestyle association (Sarkis et al., 2025). Influencer marketing has emerged as one of the most impactful strategies in this ecosystem, as influencers function as digital opinion leaders whose authenticity, credibility, and creativity foster consumer trust, enhance brand awareness, and stimulate purchase intentions (De Veirman et al., 2017; Cheah et al., 2024; Pan et al., 2025). Beyond macro-influencers, micro-influencers and niche content creators also play a decisive role by appealing to highly specific consumer communities, thereby amplifying brand resonance in fragmented digital markets, while studies further reveal that influencer-led promotion of unhealthy food products has significant implications for vulnerable consumer groups such as

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children and adolescents (Potvin Kent et al., 2024). At the same time, the rise of user-generated content has democratized F&B marketing, granting consumers a central role as co-creators of brand narratives and active participants in shaping marketplace dynamics. Social media offers an interactive environment where users share their dining experiences, preferences, and visual representations of food, turning ordinary meals into public cultural performances and powerful signals of identity and belonging (Sezgin and Duman, 2023). This participatory culture not only amplifies the visibility of F&B brands but also directly affects consumer behavior, influencing how individuals discover new flavors, compare options, select venues, and even make purchase decisions such as online ordering (Ye et al., 2011). Within this framework, the notion of digital aesthetic fit has emerged as a critical construct, underlining the necessity for food products and establishments to align with the visual and cultural expectations set by social media audiences (Aktuna and Aktuna, 2024; Barmanbay, 2024; Taşbağ et al., 2024). Rather than relying solely on taste or service quality, modern F&B businesses are compelled to adapt to aesthetic codes that dominate digital platforms, including presentation styles, color palettes, and cultural symbolism embedded in food imagery. Meeting these aesthetic benchmarks is no longer optional but essential for competitiveness in an era where visibility and virality dictate survival. Altogether, this growing body of scholarship demonstrates that social media has revolutionized the F&B sector by intertwining marketing, consumer culture, and digital aesthetics into a powerful nexus that continuously redefines how food is marketed, consumed, and experienced worldwide.

This study aims to conduct an in-depth qualitative investigation of the multifaceted effects of social media on the F&B industry, specifically within the Turkish context. The primary objective is to understand the impacts of social media on the sector's marketing strategies, consumer behaviors, trend formation, and competitive landscape, from both the business and consumer perspectives. The research focuses on the experiences of F&B businesses actively using social media and the preferences and behaviors of social media users regarding food and beverages. In order to capture the complex and multidimensional impacts of social media on the F&B sector, a qualitative orientation was deemed suitable, as qualitative approaches are particularly effective in exploring emerging social phenomena and providing context-rich insights (Creswell and Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). This perspective allows the study to go beyond surface-level descriptions and to uncover deeper dynamics of marketing practices, consumer behaviors, and cultural patterns shaped by digital platforms. Although this study refers to the food and beverage (F&B) industry in general, the analysis is primarily conducted from the consumer perspective, focusing on participants' experiences, preferences, and interpretations of social media practices.

While prior studies have examined the relationship between social media and the F&B sector, this study distinguishes itself by offering a qualitative and context-specific perspective that has been largely underexplored. It provides original findings derived from the Turkish context, adopts a holistic approach that incorporates both business and consumer perspectives, and emphasizes current digital trends while integrating mediating variables into the analysis. In doing so, the study not only advances academic understanding by deepening insights into the multidimensional impacts of social media, but also delivers practical value for the sector by generating knowledge that can guide businesses, practitioners, and other stakeholders in developing more effective strategies. The research findings thus make a dual contribution: enriching the scholarly literature with an empirically grounded and contextually nuanced account, and offering actionable insights that can support the design of innovative social media practices and more informed consumer engagement.

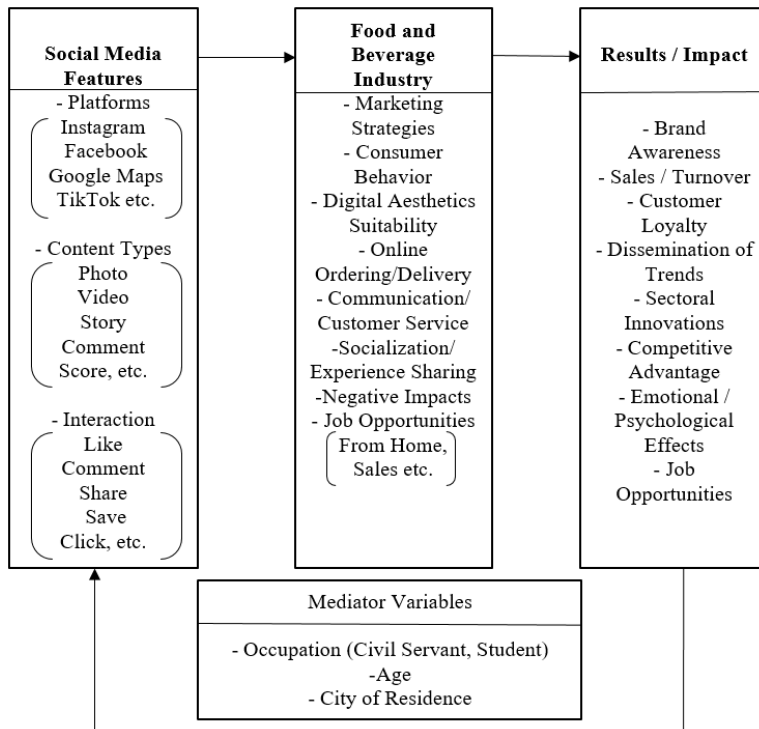
Conceptual Model

Social media has profoundly transformed the dynamics of the food and beverage (F&B) industry, influencing both business strategies and consumer behaviors (Boyd and Ellison, 2007; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). To reflect these complex effects, this section presents the conceptual model developed for the study. Social media platforms have transcended their role as mere marketing and communication tools for F&B businesses; they have become influential forces that shape consumer behavior, establish trends, and redefine the competitive dynamics within the sector (Ashley and Tuten, 2015; Chung and Koo, 2015).

Although the proposed model embodies analytical cause–effect relationships, it is presented here as a conceptual model since it synthesizes insights from the literature with the qualitative findings of this research. The social media features dimension (platforms, content types, interaction mechanisms) builds on foundational studies of social networking and online interactions (Boyd and Ellison, 2007; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). The F&B industry dynamics (marketing strategies, consumer behavior, digital aesthetics, online services, and challenges) are informed by prior work on digital marketing and consumer engagement in the sector (Ashley and Tuten, 2015; Sarkis et al., 2025; Cheah et al., 2024). The results/impacts dimension (brand awareness,

loyalty, competitive advantage, emotional and psychological effects) reflects evidence from empirical research on influencer marketing, consumer responses, and social media advertising outcomes (De Veirman et al., 2017; Pan et al., 2025; Potvin Kent et al., 2024). Finally, the mediating variables (occupation, age, city of residence) draw on methodological discussions emphasizing the importance of demographic and contextual factors in qualitative research (Patton, 2015; Creswell and Poth, 2018). Figure 1 presents the conceptual model developed in this study, which integrates insights from the literature and empirical findings. The model provides a holistic representation of how social media features interact with industry dynamics, mediating variables, and resulting outcomes within the food and beverage (F&B) sector.

Figure 1. Conceptual Model for the Effects of Social Media on the Food and Beverage Industry



The model presented in Figure 1 addresses the effects of social media on the food and beverage (F&B) industry in a multifaceted and multi-layered manner. The key components of the model and the relationships between them can be explained as follows. The following subsections do not represent separate models but rather the main components of the proposed conceptual framework, each of which synthesizes constructs identified in the literature.

Social Media Features Dimension

This component of the model encompasses the characteristics of social media as the primary input influencing the food and beverage (F&B) sector. These characteristics can be categorized as follows: diverse platforms (Instagram, Tiktok, Facebook, YouTube, Google Maps and Guides, etc.), the types of content on these platforms (photographs, videos, stories, live streams, Reels, comments, ratings, etc.), and the ways in which users interact with this content (liking, commenting, sharing, saving, clicking) (Boyd and Ellison, 2007; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

Arslan (2023) points out that visually oriented social media platforms, particularly Instagram and TikTok, emphasize the aesthetic presentation of food and beverages, thereby popularizing a “visually appealing” marketing approach. Influencer marketing, wherein social media personalities promote products, is effective in building consumer trust and increasing brand awareness (De Veirman et al., 2017; Cheah et al., 2024). In addition, the rise of user-generated content—such as comments, photos, and ratings—has significantly influenced consumers’ decision-making processes and fostered the development of online brand communities (Sunar, 2021; Ye et al., 2011).

Food and Beverage Sector Dimension

This component of the model addresses the impacts of social media on the F&B industry, from both business and consumer perspectives. These impacts are structured around several themes, which are also supported by the qualitative findings of the research.

One of the most prominent effects of social media within the F&B sector is the fundamental shift it has caused in marketing strategies. Social media provides businesses with the ability to reach their target audiences directly, interactively, and cost-effectively, transforming the traditional marketing paradigm (Ashley and Tuten, 2015; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Businesses actively utilize social media to enhance brand awareness, promote their products and services, organize campaigns, and cultivate customer loyalty. Prior studies indicate that businesses view social media as an integral part of their marketing mix, placing significant emphasis on visual content and customer reviews (Ashley and Tuten, 2015; Sezgin and Duman, 2023).

The impact of social media on consumer behavior is also undeniable. Consumers actively use social media to inform their food and beverage choices, select restaurants or cafes, and share their experiences. The images, videos, and reviews of food and beverages encountered on social media significantly influence consumers' decision-making processes, facilitate the tracking of new trends, and create a form of "digital word-of-mouth" marketing (Ye et al., 2011; Chung and Koo, 2015).

In today's world, it is not enough for food and beverages to be merely palatable; they are also expected to be visually appealing and shareable on social media. The concept of "digital aesthetic fit" defines this new consumer expectation and has become an increasingly important factor in the presentation of food and beverages, venue design, and even menu creation (Aktuna and Aktuna, 2024; Barmanbay, 2024). Businesses are adapting to this trend by shaping their menus, presentations, and venues according to the visual norms of social media platforms.

Social media also plays a critical role in the growth of online food ordering and delivery services. Studies show that platforms are widely used for menu sharing, order facilitation, and customer engagement, enabling businesses to reach wider audiences and increase their sales (Sarkis et al., 2025).

Another important function of social media is that it creates a fast and direct communication channel between F&B businesses and customers. Prior research highlights that businesses respond to customer inquiries, resolve complaints, and gather feedback through social media, thereby strengthening customer relationships and increasing satisfaction (Cheah et al., 2024; De Veirman et al., 2017).

Beyond marketing and communication, social media has also transformed food consumption into a means of socialization and identity expression. Individuals seek to try foods that are popular online, visit "trendy" venues, and share these experiences, thus interacting with their social circles and expressing themselves (Gün, 2024; Sezgin and Duman, 2023).

However, the effects of social media are not solely positive. Literature suggests that online content can create unrealistic expectations, highlight income inequalities, and even contribute to negative emotional outcomes such as envy (Vogel et al., 2014; Appel et al., 2016).

Finally, social media has the potential to generate new business opportunities in the F&B field. Studies emphasize that alternative business models, including home-based sales, are increasingly visible through digital platforms, providing individuals with additional income opportunities (Wahyuni et al., 2025).

Results/Impacts Dimension

The consequences of social media's impact on the food and beverage sector can be both positive and negative for businesses and consumers. For businesses, social media contributes to brand awareness, consumer engagement, sales growth, customer loyalty, and competitive advantage, as widely demonstrated in recent studies (Ashley and Tuten, 2015; Sarkis et al., 2025). For consumers, social media offers opportunities such as discovering new flavors, accessing information, and sharing experiences; however, it can also trigger emotional and psychological effects such as food craving, unrealistic expectations, and even envy (Vogel et al., 2014; Appel et al., 2016; Filippone et al., 2022). Moreover, qualitative research has shown that young adults are particularly influenced by influencer-led food advertising, which shapes their perceptions and impulsive buying behaviors (Alhothali and Aljefree, 2023). Altogether, these findings underline that while social media provides clear benefits for both businesses and consumers, it also introduces challenges that require more critical and conscious engagement with digital platforms.

Mediating Variables Dimension

In this study, factors such as the participants' occupation (civil servant, student) and age, along with the location (province) of the businesses, were analyzed as mediating variables that could potentially moderate the effects of social media on the food and beverage sector. Prior research confirms that demographic and contextual variables can significantly shape social media use and its perceived impact, with occupation and age influencing both the intensity and purpose of engagement (Auxier and Anderson, 2021; Dhir et al., 2017). Similarly, location-based differences have been shown to alter online consumer behavior, particularly in food-related decision-making, by embedding social media practices within local socio-cultural contexts (Liu et al., 2021).

This conceptual framework provides a foundation for understanding the complex and multifaceted effects of social media on the food and beverage industry. The qualitative data from the study demonstrate that this framework, encompassing both opportunities and challenges for businesses and consumers, reveals that the act of eating and drinking has evolved beyond a physical necessity into an experience with social, economic, and psychological dimensions, all of which are further shaped by mediating variables such as age, occupation, and location, thereby reinforcing the multifaceted nature of these dimensions (Creswell and Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015).

Method

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the complex and multidimensional impacts of social media on the food and beverage (F&B) industry. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it allows for in-depth investigation of participants' experiences, perceptions, and contextual factors that are not easily captured by quantitative measures (Creswell and Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the primary data collection method, as they provide both flexibility to probe emerging issues and consistency in covering core topics. This method is widely recognized for generating rich and detailed insights, particularly when studying consumer behavior and business strategies in dynamic and socially constructed environments such as social media (Kallio et al., 2016). The rationale for this methodological choice lies in the study's aim: to understand both business and consumer perspectives regarding how social media shapes marketing strategies, consumer preferences, and industry practices. *Ethics committee approval for this study was obtained from the Mardin Artuklu University Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee (Date: 30.10.2025, Meeting No: 10, Decision No: 29).*

The research process followed three main steps: (1) participant selection, with attention to demographic diversity to capture different experiences and perspectives; (2) data collection through semi-structured interviews, designed to address the study's guiding questions; and (3) data analysis thematic analysis, which is particularly suitable for identifying recurring patterns and themes in qualitative interview data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The details of these steps are explained in the following subsections.

Data Analysis

This section presents the analysis of the qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews, along with the findings derived from this analysis. The interviews were conducted face-to-face between September and December 2024 in quiet and accessible locations to ensure participant comfort and data reliability. In the first phase of the research, a personal information form was used to determine the demographic characteristics of the participants. The participants were selected using purposive sampling to capture diverse demographic and social media usage characteristics. A total of eight participants were included, which is consistent with qualitative research guidelines emphasizing depth rather than breadth, and was deemed sufficient based on the principle of data saturation (Guest, et al. 2006; Creswell and Poth, 2018).

Each interview lasted approximately 5–10 minutes and focused on the effects of social media on the F&B sector and consumer preferences. Participants represented diverse occupational groups such as teachers, psychological counselors, healthcare workers, tax officers, and students, and resided in different cities including Mardin, Diyarbakır, Cizre, Yozgat, Adana, and Ankara. This demographic and geographical diversity was intended to capture a broad range of perspectives and allowed the findings to be interpreted within different socio-cultural contexts.

Details regarding the demographic characteristics of the individuals participating in the research are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Gender	Age	Education Status / Profession	City of Birth / Place of Residence
Male	35	Bachelor's Degree / Teacher	Mardin / Mardin
Female	25	Bachelor's Degree / Teacher	Ankara / Mardin
Male	24	Bachelor's Degree / Psychological Counselor	Diyarbakır / Diyarbakır
Male	33	Bachelor's Degree / Health Worker	Şırnak / Cizre
Male	42	Bachelor's Degree / Teacher	Yozgat / Yozgat
Female	28	Bachelor's Degree / Tax Officer	Mardin / Mardin
Male	19	Bachelor's Degree / Student	Hatay / Adana
Female	39	Bachelor's Degree / Teacher	Diyarbakır / Diyarbakır

Table 1 shows that the eight research participants comprised five men and three women. Their ages ranged from 19 to 42, with a mean age of 30.6. All participants were university graduates, representing professions such as teaching, psychological counseling, healthcare, tax administration, and studentship. The participants resided in diverse cities, including Mardin, Diyarbakır, Cizre, Yozgat, and Adana. While this provides demographic and occupational variation, it should be noted that the sample is regionally concentrated within Turkey, which represents a limitation of the study.

The participants' responses were examined through thematic analysis, which involved systematic coding, categorization, and the identification of recurring themes. This approach allowed for the organization of interview data into meaningful patterns that reflected participants' perceptions and experiences (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Krippendorff, 2018). To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, procedures recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were followed, including the use of verbatim quotations to support themes, triangulation of data sources, peer debriefing during the coding process, and attention to credibility and dependability.

The semi-structured interview questions were developed based on a review of the relevant literature on social media and consumer behavior (Ashley and Tuten, 2015; De Veirman et al., 2017; Sarkis et al., 2025) and aligned with the study's research objectives. Accordingly, the following five open-ended questions were posed to the participants:

1. How do you think social media affects the marketing and promotional activities of food and beverage businesses?
2. To what extent do the food and beverage posts you see on social media (photos, videos, comments, etc.) influence your eating/drinking preferences or venue choices? Can you provide an example?
3. What are the positive and negative aspects you observe regarding food and beverages on social media?
4. How important do you think "digital aesthetic fit" (food and venues being visually appealing and worthy of sharing on social media) is in the food and beverage sector? How does this affect businesses or consumers?
5. Beyond the food and beverage sector, what other effects of social media do you observe in your life or the lives of those around you? (For example, work, socialization, information acquisition, etc.)

Thematic analysis of the participants' responses revealed a series of recurring themes, which are presented in detail in the Findings section.

Findings

The findings of this study are presented in line with the themes that emerged from the thematic analysis of semi-structured interview data. The analysis revealed that social media exerts profound and multidimensional influences on the food and beverage (F&B) sector, both from the perspective of businesses and consumers. To ensure clarity, the results are organized according to the guiding interview questions and supported with illustrative quotations from participants. In addition, the codes and themes derived from participant responses are summarized in Table 2, which provides a concise overview of the main patterns identified through the analysis.

Table 2. Codes and Themes Derived from Participant Responses

Theme	Codes (Examples)	Illustrative Meaning
Impact on Businesses	Marketing power, customer interaction, visibility, competition, influencer marketing	Social media strengthens brand reach, competitiveness, and customer relations
Impact on Consumers	Information seeking, inspiration, reviews, trendy venues, experience sharing	Consumers shape preferences via social media and seek shareable experiences
Positive Aspects	Discovering new venues, promotional opportunities	Enhances visibility for businesses and variety for consumers
Negative Aspects	Misleading visuals, envy, unrealistic expectations	Risks of distorted perception and consumer dissatisfaction
Digital Aesthetic Fit	Visual appeal, shareability, design-oriented choices	Both businesses and consumers prioritize aesthetic presentation
Other Impacts	Entrepreneurship, rapid information flow, socialization	Social media fosters new income models and social connection

- Question 1: The Impact of Social Media on Food and Beverage Businesses

- **Transformation in Marketing:** Participants emphasized that social media provides businesses with a powerful marketing opportunity. One participant stated, "Social media has given food and beverage businesses incredible marketing power. Now, even a small cafe can reach thousands of people by sharing beautiful photos on Instagram." (Participant 3, Male, 24, Psychological Counselor).
- **Customer Interaction:** It was noted that businesses can communicate directly with their customers through social media. The statement, "Thanks to social media, businesses can talk directly to their customers. When there is a problem, you can write immediately and get an answer," (Participant 7, Male, 19, Student) exemplifies this.
- **Visibility and Competition:** Participants stated that social media increases visibility, thereby affecting the competitive environment. The opinion, "Thanks to social media, I discover places I never knew," (Participant 6, Female, 28, Tax Officer) is noteworthy.

- Question 2: The Impact of Social Media on Consumer Preferences

- **Source of Information and Inspiration:** Participants stated that they use social media as a tool to discover new venues and examine menu options. The statement, "I follow new places and different flavors from there," (Participant 8, Female, 39, Teacher) is an example.
- **Experience-Orientedness and Sharing:** It was emphasized that the motivation to create shareable content on social media is effective in venue choices. "We now go to places not just to eat, but also to share that food," (Participant 5, Male, 42, Teacher) illustrates this situation.
- **Impact on the Decision-Making Process:** Participants stated that comments and evaluations made through social media shape their preferences. The comment, "Before I go to a place, I look at the reviews," (Participant 1, Male, 35, Teacher) is noteworthy.

- Question 3: Positive and Negative Aspects of Social Media

- **Positive Aspects:** Participants stated that social media offers the opportunity to discover new venues and flavors and provides businesses with the opportunity to promote themselves. The statement, "It's a great resource for discovering new flavors and places," (Participant 2, Female, 25, Teacher) stood out.
- **Negative Aspects:** Prominent negative aspects included misleading visuals, the creation of excessive expectations in consumers, and the facilitation of a culture of online shaming. The opinions, "Photos can be very misleading," (Participant 7, Male, 19, Student) and "The constant sharing of luxury venues can make people feel envious," (Participant 4, Male, 33, Healthcare Worker) are noteworthy.

- Question 4: The Importance of Digital Aesthetic Fit

- **From a Business Perspective:** Participants stated that businesses make menu, presentation, and decoration choices with visual aesthetic concerns in mind. The statement, "Every business, especially newly opened ones, has to be 'Instagram-sharable and aesthetic'," (Participant 1, Male, 35, Teacher) reflects this theme.
- **From a Consumer Perspective:** It was emphasized that consumers prefer visually appealing venues and food. The statement, "I also prefer good-looking food and stylish places," (Participant 2, Female, 25, Teacher) demonstrates this situation.

- Question 5: Other Effects of Social Media

- **Impact on Business:** Participants stated that opportunities for entrepreneurship have increased through social media. The example, "My wife contributes to our family budget by selling the products she makes at home thanks to social media," (Participant 5, Male, 42, Teacher) is noteworthy.
- **Information Acquisition:** It was emphasized that social media provides rapid information flow. The statement, "When something happens, I immediately look at Twitter," (Participant 7, Male, 19, Student) stands out.
- **Socialization:** It was stated that social media strengthens social relationships. The opinion, "Even if we are far away, we are aware of each other's lives," (Participant 6, Female, 28, Tax Officer) reflects this situation.

Diversity and Usage Purposes of Social Media Platforms

The research findings indicate that different social media platforms serve distinct needs and purposes related to the food and beverage (F&B) sector.

Instagram, through the power of visual content, stands out as an ideal platform for the aesthetic presentation of food, beverages, and venues. Participants stated that they primarily use Instagram as a source for discovering new venues, examining menus, and drawing inspiration from "eye-catching" food photographs. As one participant noted, "I usually check Instagram to see photos of food and the atmosphere before I go" (P2, Female, 25, Teacher).

Platforms such as Google Maps and Guides are primarily used to obtain information about venue locations, operating hours, contact details, and the reviews and ratings of other users. These platforms serve as a "digital compass," assisting consumers in making more informed and rational decisions. For example, one participant emphasized, "Google Maps helps me find the place, check reviews, and see the opening hours" (P6, Female, 28, Tax Officer).

While other platforms like Facebook and TikTok are also used for sharing and following F&B-related content, they did not emerge as prominently as Instagram and Google Maps/Guides in the participants' responses. This situation highlights the differing roles of various platforms specifically within the F&B sector and suggests that users utilize these platforms for distinct purposes. The key themes and illustrative quotations are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Codes and Themes for Diversity and Usage of Social Media Platforms

Platform	Primary Use / Codes	Illustrative Quote
Instagram	Visual aesthetics, menu exploration, venue discovery	"I usually check Instagram to see photos of food and the atmosphere before I go." (P2, Female, 25, Teacher)
Google Maps/Guides	Location info, operating hours, reviews, ratings	"Google Maps helps me find the place, check reviews, and see the opening hours." (P6, Female, 28, Tax Officer)
Facebook	General sharing, following venue pages, event updates	"Sometimes I see new restaurants or events on Facebook through friends' posts." (P4, Male, 33, Healthcare Worker)
TikTok	Trend discovery, short videos, entertainment-based content	"TikTok videos make me curious about new dishes or cafes that people recommend." (P7, Male, 19, Student)

Impacts of Social Media on Food and Beverage Businesses

The research findings indicate that social media is far more than a mere marketing and communication tool for food and beverage (F&B) businesses. It profoundly affects their operational methods, competitive strategies, and overall sector dynamics.

Participants unanimously agreed that social media provides businesses with unique opportunities to directly reach their target audiences, enhance brand awareness, promote their products and services, and cultivate customer loyalty. Visually oriented platforms such as Instagram and TikTok have pushed the aesthetic presentation of food and beverages to the forefront, positioning the concept of "digital aesthetic fit" as a central strategic concern. As one participant articulated, "Even a small café can now reach thousands of people by sharing beautiful photos on Instagram." This situation encourages businesses to create products and venues that are not only delicious but also visually appealing and "shareable."

Another significant impact of social media is the transformation of communication practices between businesses and customers. Companies can interact with their customers instantly through social media, answer their questions, receive their feedback, and even resolve their complaints. This not only increases customer satisfaction but also provides businesses with valuable insights to improve their service quality. As one participant stated, "Thanks to social media, businesses can talk directly to their customers. When there is a problem, you can write immediately and get an answer."

Furthermore, social media intensifies the competitive environment in the F&B sector. Businesses are compelled to be increasingly creative and innovative to stand out and differentiate themselves from competitors. This contributes to the elevation of overall quality standards in the sector and to the provision of more diverse and appealing options to consumers. As summarized in Table 4, these impacts were categorized under marketing transformation, customer interaction, competition, and influencer marketing, each reflecting recurring themes identified in participants' responses.

Finally, influencer marketing, a rising trend on social media, has become a significant promotional channel for F&B businesses. Participants stated that the posts of social media personalities ("phenomena") and influencers influenced their own venue and product preferences.

Table 4. Codes and Themes for "Impacts of Social Media on Food and Beverage Businesses"

Theme	Codes (Examples)	Illustrative Quote
Marketing Transformation	Powerful marketing, direct reach, brand awareness	"Even a small café can now reach thousands ..." (P3, Male, 24)
Customer Interaction	Direct feedback, instant communication, service quality	"Thanks to social media, businesses can talk directly ..." (P7, Male, 19)
Competition & Innovation	Visibility, need for creativity, quality improvement	"Thanks to social media, I discover places I never knew ..." (P6, Female, 28)
Influencer Marketing	Influence of social media personalities, phenomena	"Phenomena and influencers affected my choices ..."

Impacts of Social Media on Consumer Preferences

The research reveals that social media profoundly affects not only businesses but also consumers' food and beverage preferences, behaviors, and experiences. Social media has become a source of information and inspiration, a platform for sharing experiences, and even a means of socialization for consumers.

The vast majority of participants stated that they use social media to discover new venues, learn about menus, compare prices, and access the experiences of other consumers. As one participant expressed, "I can see the menu of the place I'm going to, and I can examine the atmosphere with the photos taken by other customers... Thanks to social media, I both make more informed decisions and make my dining experience more enjoyable." Social media empowers consumers with the ability to "know what to expect" before visiting an establishment, thus facilitating decision-making processes and reducing uncertainty.

Another significant impact of social media is its transformation of the food and beverage experience into a vehicle for socialization and identity expression. Individuals seek to try foods that are popular on social media, to visit "trendy" venues, and to share these experiences through photos and comments, thereby interacting with their social circles and expressing themselves. As one participant noted, "We now go to places not just to eat, but also to take photos of the food and share it on social media." This highlights the growing importance of "digital aesthetic fit," not only for businesses but also for consumers.

However, the influence of social media on consumer preferences is not always positive. Some participants expressed concerns that content shared on social media can be misleading, create unrealistic expectations, and trigger feelings of envy. One participant's statement, "Even though I don't ignore the impact of social media, I don't care much about this effect in my food choices. I usually think that these advertisements are just for attracting customers and that what is actually there is not like the advertisement," underscores the need for a conscious and critical approach to the influence of social media.

Furthermore, one participant's mention of their spouse selling homemade products through social media points to the potential of social media platforms to create new business opportunities and alternative income models in the food and beverage field. The key themes, codes, and illustrative quotations are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Codes and Themes for Consumer Impacts

Theme	Codes (Examples)	Illustrative Quote
Information & Inspiration	Venue discovery, menu exploration, price comparison	"I can see the menu ... Thanks to social media, I make more informed decisions ..." (P8, Female, 39, Teacher)
Experience Sharing & Socialization	Trend-following, identity expression, social validation	"We now go to places not just to eat, but also to take photos ..." (P5, Male, 42, Teacher)
Decision-Making Process	Reviews, peer evaluations, reduced uncertainty	"Before I go to a place, I look at the reviews ..." (P1, Male, 35, Teacher)
Negative Effects	Misleading visuals, unrealistic expectations, envy	"Photos can be very misleading ..." (P7, Male, 19, Student)
Entrepreneurship & Alternatives	Home-based sales, new income opportunities	"My wife contributes ... by selling the products she makes at home ..." (P5, Male, 42, Teacher)

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study highlights how social media is reshaping the food and beverage (F&B) sector in practice, not merely as a communication channel but as a driver of new consumer behaviors, marketing strategies, and competitive dynamics. The qualitative findings show that social media fosters direct interaction between businesses and customers, elevates the importance of visual aesthetics in food and venue presentation, and influences consumers' dining choices and socialization patterns. Rather than confirming what is already well known in the literature, these results underline the context-specific dynamics observed in Turkey, emphasizing both the opportunities and challenges that emerge for businesses and consumers in a digitally mediated environment.

One of the most striking findings of the research is that participants consistently emphasized the indispensability of social media as a marketing and communication tool for F&B businesses. According to their accounts, both small and large enterprises are now able to reach wide audiences, promote their products effectively, and establish closer relationships with their customers. These participant insights illustrate a shift in competitive dynamics, compelling businesses to become more innovative, creative, and responsive.

The findings also show that consumers actively use social media to guide their food and beverage choices. They rely on platforms to discover new venues, compare options, and evaluate experiences before making decisions. Social media has transformed dining into a social and symbolic act, where sharing and visibility are as important as the food itself. However, participants also highlighted risks, such as misleading content, inflated expectations, and the spread of consumption-oriented lifestyles, which point to the need for more critical and conscious engagement with digital platforms.

This study contributes by emphasizing the dual nature of social media's impact: while it creates opportunities for growth, communication, and visibility, it also introduces challenges related to consumer perception, competition, and social well-being. By analyzing mediating factors such as age and occupation, the research also provides a more nuanced understanding of how these effects vary across different groups.

Nevertheless, the study has some limitations, including the relatively small number of participants, reliance on qualitative data, and restriction to specific regions and professional groups. Future research could address these limitations by including larger and more diverse samples, integrating quantitative methods, and examining the effects of specific social media platforms in more detail. Although demographic diversity (e.g., age, occupation, location) provided context to the findings, these were not treated as analytical variables but rather as descriptive characteristics of the sample.

Based on the findings, several recommendations can be made for both practitioners and policymakers in the F&B sector. Businesses should strategically invest in building a strong and authentic digital presence, while also prioritizing transparency to avoid misleading consumers. Training programs could be developed to enhance digital literacy and social media management skills among small business owners. At the same time, consumers should be encouraged to engage critically with online content, recognizing the difference between curated digital images and real-life experiences. Finally, policymakers and sectoral organizations may consider developing guidelines or awareness campaigns to promote responsible and ethical use of social media in the F&B industry, ensuring that its benefits are maximized while its risks are mitigated.

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