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“The Influence of TikTok Food Trends on Customer Purchasing Behaviour and Restaurant Performance: A Case Study of Wagamama in the UK Hospitality Industry”

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ABSTRACT

Short-form video platforms are increasingly important for hospitality marketing, and this research aims to investigate the spread of food trends on TikTok and their impact on consumer behaviour, perception of restaurants and the business performance of restaurants. Wagamama, a UK food chain, is used as the case study for this research. Thematic analysis of secondary qualitative data from a variety of sources including academic articles, industry reports and credible online sources has identified three ways in which TikTok food trends can influence consumer purchasing behaviour, customer perceptions of restaurants and the business performance of restaurants – consumer demographics, content authenticity and influencer credibility. Overall, findings suggest that TikTok can be beneficial for increasing visibility of a restaurant and customer engagement and purchase intentions, particularly with younger consumers; however, demand for food created by viral TikTok trends can create challenges for restaurants in terms of operation. This research contributes to existing body of knowledge by focusing specifically on the impact of TikTok food trends within the UK hospitality industry and by applying the findings of this research to a specific case study of Wagamama. The research also highlights several practical implications for hospitality managers and outlines potential avenues for future research using primary data and social media analytics.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Background of the Study

The rapid development of social media has transformed the way businesses communicate with consumers. Within the hospitality industry, social media platforms have become important marketing tools that enable restaurants to promote products, increase brand awareness, and engage directly with customers (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Among these platforms, TikTok has emerged as one of the fastest-growing social media applications worldwide. Its short-form video format, algorithm-driven content distribution, and highly interactive features have created new opportunities for businesses to reach potential customers (Omar and Dequan, 2020).

TikTok is popular with younger people, like those in Generation Z and Millennials, who use it to find out about new things. One of the most popular types of content is about food - people love watching videos of restaurant reviews, cooking demos, and crazy food challenges. These videos can get millions of views and influence what people buy or where they go to eat. For example, if a certain restaurant or food item becomes popular on TikTok, people will start going there or buying it, just because they saw it on the app. This can happen quickly, and it's changing the way to make decisions about what to eat or where to go.

Within the UK hospitality industry, many restaurants have adopted TikTok as part of their digital marketing strategies. Wagamama, a leading UK restaurant chain with over 80 locations nationwide (Wagamama, 2019), actively uses social media platforms to engage customers and promote menu offerings (Tiktok.com, 2026). While previous studies have examined social media marketing within hospitality, limited research has investigated the influence of TikTok food trends on consumer purchasing behaviour and restaurant performance within a UK context (Djafarova and Bowes, 2021).

So, let's look at how food trends on TikTok affect what customers buy and how well restaurants do. Some studies have already shown that what happens on social media can really change how people think and feel about things, and even what they plan to do and buy (Ajzen, 1991). This is interesting because it can help us understand how social media is changing the way people make decisions about food and how restaurants can use this to their advantage. By studying this, we can get a better idea of how restaurants like Wagamama can use TikTok and other social media platforms to get more customers and do better in business.

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

In the new marketing era of TikTok, more restaurants are creating viral food videos on social media platforms to attract customers and create online engagement (Zeng, Abidin and Schäfer, 2021). While there is a growing body of work that investigates the role of TikTok in hospitality marketing, there is a lack of research that specifically focuses on the impact of TikTok food trends on consumers' purchasing behaviour and

restaurants' performance, especially within a Western context (Djafarova and Bowes, 2021).

Most of the current studies focus on general social media marketing or even on influencer marketing. They do not specifically investigate the role of viral food trends and their impact on the performance of restaurants (Stephen, 2016). Most of the existing studies were conducted in Asian markets and therefore based on markets with developed social commerce and customer behaviour when using digital platforms that strongly differ from Western markets (Omar and Dequan, 2020). As a result, there is a lack of research on the impact that TikTok food trends have on the UK hospitality industry.

This lack of knowledge hampers restaurants, who rely on innovative and effective digital marketing strategies, including social media marketing, and on TikTok to reach and attract their customers. They need to invest in digital marketing and understand the impact that certain trends such as those associated with food on TikTok can have on their customers' behaviour and on the performance of their business (Kotler and Keller, 2016). More research is required to gain insights into the relationships that exist between the TikTok food trends, consumers' purchasing behaviour and the performance of restaurants in the UK hospitality industry.

1.3 Scope of the Research

This study explores how the consumption and sharing of food trends on TikTok are influencing consumers' purchasing behaviour and restaurant performance within the context of the UK hospitality industry. The research focuses specifically on Wagamama's online presence on various social media platforms, including TikTok. The restaurant is a very well-established brand, providing an ideal case study of how a large corporation is utilizing social media marketing including the popular app TikTok to promote their food in their restaurants.

The study uses secondary data from journals, reports, books and websites, and they are used here to build on the knowledge of marketing by use of social media, consumer behaviour and the performance of restaurants (Saunders, m. n. k., Lewis, p., & Thornhill, a. 2023).

This study is looking at food trends created by the TikTok food content posted by users as opposed to other types of food content that may be posted on other social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram or X (formerly Twitter). An in-depth investigation of the TikTok food content is carried out to explore the role of TikTok in creating and influencing food trends and in influencing the purchasing behaviour of users (Omar and Dequan, 2020).

Research Aim

This research aims to investigate how TikTok food trends can affect the behaviour of consumers when purchasing food from restaurants within the UK hospitality industry. A case study of Wagamama will be used for this research. The research will aim to

contribute to current knowledge of social media marketing, specifically focusing upon how food content is presented upon TikTok and how it affects consumers' attitudes and purchasing intentions and influences the performance of restaurants (Stephen, 2016).

Research Objectives

1. To examine the influence of TikTok food trends on customer purchasing behaviour.
2. To evaluate the impact of TikTok food trends on Wagamama's restaurant performance.
3. To examine customer perceptions of food-related content shared on TikTok.

Research Questions

1. How do TikTok food trends influence consumers' purchasing behaviour in the restaurant industry?
2. To what extent do TikTok food trends impact the performance of Wagamama restaurants?
3. How do customers perceive food-related content shared on TikTok?

Research Propositions

As this study uses a qualitative secondary research approach, propositions rather than statistical hypotheses are proposed:

- P1: TikTok food trends positively influence consumer purchasing intentions.
- P2: Viral food content on TikTok contributes to improved restaurant performance.
- P3: Consumers perceive TikTok food-related content as a credible source of restaurant information.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This paper will contribute to existing knowledge and understanding in Social Media Marketing, digital and physical consumer behaviour, and Hospitality management. Within the remit of this research, it aims to discover how and to what extent TikTok Food Trends could be harnessed to change the Purchasing Behaviour of Consumers, and in doing so impact upon the performance of Restaurants within the UK's Hospitality industry. According to Kaplan & Haenlein (2010); Tuten & Solomon (2015), the rapid changes to the world which have occurred because of social media have created many differing views as to the functions that Social Media Marketing can fulfil.

The body of knowledge generated by this research will be of value to restaurant managers, hospitality practitioners, and marketers, particularly in relation to using TikTok to communicate with customers through engaging, graphical content. Such

information can be used by restaurant managers to incorporate user-generated content and viral food trends within the online marketing campaigns of restaurants to increase customer engagement and improve performance in terms of sales and competitiveness in the marketplace (Chu and Kim, 2011).

The research is further extended by identifying and confirming the changed behaviour of digital native consumers particularly Generation Z and younger Millennials that are increasingly utilizing social media, such as TikTok, to research, recommend and purchase restaurants and hospitality services.

1.5 Structure of the Dissertation

The proposed work shall be organized into 5 chapters.

Chapter 1 outlines the subject of the research, the problems, aims, objectives, the research questions and why the research is important. **Chapter 2** shapes the relevant information surrounding TikTok and social media marketing, consumer behaviour and purchasing decisions in respect of food, current food trends and the performance of restaurants; also outline the conceptual framework for the research. **Chapter 3** outlines the research methodology and include a description of the research philosophy, approach, data sources and analysis. **Chapter 4** compares the findings from the secondary data with the research objectives. **Chapter 5** discusses the findings from Chapter 4, outlines the conclusions from the research, sets out the implications of the research for practice and policy and highlights the limitations and suggestions for the future of the research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews current research and examines food trends currently promoted on TikTok. It also examines consumers' behaviour when purchasing food after seeing it promoted on social media platforms and assesses how restaurants are currently performing in the retail food marketplace. The chapter also outlines key findings from current research studies and outlines a conceptual framework for the research in this chapter.

2.2 Social Media Marketing in the Hospitality Industry

Marketing on social media has become a crucial component in the hospitality industry of today. The term social media refers to online interactive and communication between users and between users and companies, where information is created, (re)published, and distributed (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Restaurants today advertise mainly on social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and lately also on platforms like TikTok, since marketing on social media is cost-effective compared to most other types of advertising. Restaurants use images and short movies of their dishes as well as images of the interior and of the events and other happenings at the

restaurant to attract potential customers. The created content can raise interest for the menu items of a restaurant and increase engagement of customers by using so-called customer-generated content (Stephen, 2016).

2.3 The Rise of TikTok as a Marketing Platform

Digital marketing is being revolutionized by the short form videos of TikTok is releasing into the marketplace. Using the algorithm driven For You page as the methodology to distribute content to users, users can reach a very large audience very quickly. Content can spread and reach a very large audience in a matter of hours and days, as opposed to waiting for a creator to gain followers. For restaurants and other venues that have visually driven video, short videos can be distributed to a very large audience very quickly. Awareness and customer interest can be gained very quickly through positive and visually driven videos of dishes, cooking in the kitchen, customer experiences, marketing campaigns and more. Negative content can spread like wildfire and can have a huge reputation impact on a restaurant that they are unable to control. So, restaurants can use TikTok for marketing purposes to gain visibility and to attract customers. In the process of doing so, restaurants must manage to create a positive online reputation and engage with their customers, (Omar and Dequan, 2020).

2.4 TikTok Food Trends and Consumer Purchasing Behaviour

Research into purchasing behaviour of consumers and the influence social media is having on the way people behave as consumers has become increasingly important in recent years as social media is becoming a major source of information, advice and user-generated content that can influence the behaviour of customers.

When looking at food trends on TikTok, most tend to focus on certain food and drinks found on menus within restaurants and cafes. These trends can be in the form of a recipe or how to make a certain product, and consumers are being influenced by these trends greatly. Many of the food trend videos found on TikTok have received a lot of engagement as they have combined entertainment with information about products and services, and studies have shown that by exposing consumers to food content it can create curiosity, increase awareness of a product or service, and create purchasing intentions.

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) of behaviour was first proposed by Ajzen (1991). The TPB describes how individuals' behavioural intentions are influenced by their attitude toward the behaviour, subjective norms governing the behaviour, and perceived behaviour control. Therefore, food content on TikTok may influence users' attitudes toward eating and/or purchasing food (e.g. seeing food in a positive light) and/or their subjective norms (e.g. seeing that others also like food that has been posted in online videos and therefore should do so too) by providing social proof (e.g. views, likes and comments received by food-related videos).

As high viewed content is perceived by consumers to be trustworthy or socially approved, they are more likely to visit a restaurant after viewing a video of food being

served there. Therefore, trends created on TikTok have the potential to have a huge impact on restaurant visitation and menu purchases.

In addition, many younger consumers use social media when searching for products and services. Generation Z in particular uses TikTok for inspiration and for getting recommendations for products and services such as restaurants and menu items that they can eat.

2.5 Influencer Marketing and Electronic Word-of-Mouth

The audience beliefs of influencers according to Djafarova and Bowes (2021) is that they are authentic and closer to their audience than most traditional celebrities. The audience believes them, so the recommendations made by influencers have a positive influence on the consumers' purchasing intentions.

The other element affecting a consumer's purchasing decision is the so-called electronic word-of-mouth. It describes informal and online recommendations of products and services including opinions of other consumers which are distributed via different online channels. In the context of TikTok, the eWOM is expressed by comments, likes, shares, by all kind of reactions as well as by user-generated contents (UGC) which are created and distributed by end-consumers (Khodijah and Zahara, 2026).

Positive eWOM messages can motivate consumers who have not yet visited a restaurant to do so and to order specific dishes once they have visited (Khodijah and Zahara, 2026). Conversely, negative messages will have the opposite effect and can even negatively impact a restaurant's performance over time. While a restaurant's performance on TikTok can be affected by the content they publish, it will also be heavily affected by the subsequent interactions with and responses from users.

2.6 Customer Perceptions of Food-Related Content

The influence of Influence on food purchasing by the credibility, authenticity and entertainment value of provider-generated content is on the increase. More positive views of highly relevant and authentic content such as user-generated videos, customer reviews and behind-the-scenes insights into companies are held than for traditional marketing communications and advertisements (De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders, 2017). Online promotions, however, are easily influenced because they are normally presented with a positive spin and selectively highlighted. Thus, the effect of TikTok marketing is not merely based on the content provided but also on the perceived credibility of this content and the amount of trust the user places in the provider of that content (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

2.7 Impact of TikTok Food Trends on Restaurant Performance

There are many ways to measure the performance and success of a restaurant; sales, custom, brand awareness and online engagement to name a few (Fernandes et al., 2021). Demand for menu items to become a TikTok food trend can create huge

demand for single dishes, bringing in custom for a short time to increase sales and raise awareness of a brand. Utilizing TikTok could be a good platform for Wagamama to promote individual dishes to create customer generated content, which can also help to increase engagement with the online user. Online engagement can have a long-term effect on a brand and create repeat custom and customer advocacy. However, performance benefits of using TikTok to promote food from restaurants online would rely on the ability to change online visibility into custom and to manage the consequences of becoming a trend. These consequences include increased queues, running out of stock and a decrease in service quality.

2.8 Relationship Between Themes

We are studying the relationships between social media marketing, TikTok food trends, consumers' purchasing behaviour, consumers' perceptions towards restaurants and restaurants' performance.

As for the relationships between the key elements and TikTok food trends, there are several interactions that take place throughout the process. TikTok is the marketing medium through which consumers view food related content. The consumer's perception of the content will then affect their attitude towards a restaurant that has been featured in the content and will also affect their purchasing intentions towards that restaurant. Purchasing behaviour because of the trends seen on TikTok can have a positive effect on restaurants featured in the content by increasing the amount of customer visits, leading to increased sales and greater exposure for the brand through awareness (Analyn F. Sundo, 2025).

Influencer marketing and electronic word-of-mouth can either strengthen or weaken the relationships between TikTok, consumer perceptions and business performance. If customers have a good perception of a business and are highly engaged with it then this will increase the purchasing behaviour of a consumer and enhance the performance of a business.

2.9 Conceptual Framework

Based on the reviewed literature, the study adopts the following conceptual framework:

Independent Variable

- TikTok Food Trends

Mediating Variables

- Customer Perceptions
- Influencer Marketing
- Electronic Word-of-Mouth

Dependent Variables

- Consumer Purchasing Behaviour
- Restaurant Performance

The framework proposes that TikTok food trends influence customer perceptions and purchasing intentions, which subsequently affect restaurant performance.

Research Propositions

P1: TikTok food trends positively influence consumer purchasing behaviour.

P2: Positive customer perceptions strengthen the relationship between TikTok food trends and purchasing intentions.

P3: TikTok food trends positively influence restaurant performance through increased customer engagement and sales.

2.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter of the research looks to critically evaluate a considerable body of existing research already completed within the hospitality industry, focusing on restaurants utilizing social media in a variety of ways, in attempt to increase engagement, raise awareness of a brand and boost demand. In the chapter, this research evaluates ways in which restaurants are utilizing the short-form video platform TikTok, in terms of how they could be used for marketing a restaurant, and how they are able to affect consumer behaviour. Utilizing a considerable body of existing research, the foundational authors of Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) along with the seminal work of Stephen (2016), as well as more up-to-date research from 'TikTok marketing' and 'digital and/or online consumer behaviour' author Tuten and Solomon (2015), the chapter evaluates the research in considerable detail.

However, most the previous research studies have focused on social media in general terms; using marketing via influencer on various online platforms and/or within the Asian markets (Zeng, Abidin and Schäfer, 2021). As mentioned earlier, there are studies that focus on the impact of social media on consumer behaviour and the marketing of restaurants. However, a notable gap within the existing body of knowledge is the lack of research into the impact of TikTok food trends on restaurants within the UK. Therefore, this study will seek to address the research gap by investigating the impact of TikTok food trends on consumer behaviour and the effects on individual restaurants. The above-mentioned relationship between TikTok food trends and their effects on consumer behaviour and individual restaurants will be investigated through the case study of Wagamama, a UK-based restaurant chain.

The research is specifically focused on one case study of Wagamama in the UK hospitality industry. The research will investigate food trends on TikTok and the influence that they have on the behaviour of consumers and their interactions with restaurants to draw conclusions regarding performance. The study aims to add to

current knowledge of short-form video marketing and to provide practical application for hospitality managers in utilizing social media platforms, such as TikTok, to increase customer engagement and awareness of a restaurant to gain competitive advantage.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the method of the research will be presented and the specific approach taken by this research into the impact of TikTok food trends on consumers' purchasing behaviour and on the performance of restaurants within the UK hospitality industry, specifically Wagamama. The research philosophy, approach, design, methods for data collection and for data analysis, as well as the ethics of the research will be presented. The quality of the resulting findings and the limitations of this ongoing research will also be outlined. By using the appropriate method within a research study, the researcher's questions will be dealt with in an appropriate manner to produce reliable and relevant findings (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2023).

The qualitative research methodology is chosen for this exploratory academic work to study the interrelationship between TikTok food trends, the purchasing behaviour of consumers and the performance of restaurants like Wagamama. Secondary qualitative research refers to secondary research that contains written information of a mainly qualitative nature such as articles, reports, inside and outside publications of a company and other documents (Johnston, 2017).

3.2 Justification of Research Approach

In the context of short-form video on social media platforms, there are many ways to study trends of food content on TikTok and the influence of said content on consumption trends and restaurant performance. As Wagamama are currently using TikTok to increase awareness of their brand and individual menu items, we will focus on these trends and ways of consumption. In terms of methodology, a quantitative study could take the form of a survey to gauge the extent to which consumers' purchasing intention has been influenced by a video of food at Wagamama on TikTok. However, this would have limitations. Firstly, the study would not be able to explain the reasons behind the findings. Specifically, the study would not be able to gauge whether the user perceived the video to be authentic, entertaining, credible, relatable etc. (Cabeza-Ramírez et al., 2022).

A mixed-methods study could collect both quantitative data (from surveys) and qualitative data (from in-depth interviews with selected participants). However, as it would take too long to collect and analyse the primary data for this research, it is not a viable option.

For the purposes of this research, a qualitative secondary research approach shall be adopted. There are many examples of qualitative research into complex social

phenomena, and how and why people behave in the way that they do (Bryman, 2016; Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). Research has been conducted into the different types of content found on TikTok, such as short videos of restaurant food and drink, customer reviews, influencer recommendations, and user-generated videos created by customers after they have visited a restaurant (Bryman, 2016). Secondary qualitative research into these examples of research into complex social phenomena can be synthesized to gain in-depth insight into the different types of content on TikTok and how users interact with them (Johnston, 2017).

The use of secondary qualitative research will enable the researcher to draw upon existing research within the area of marketing and tourism. This will allow the researcher to identify the key themes that are relevant to the study and to compare existing research that has been conducted within different geographical locations as well as within different types of hospitality settings (Johnston, 2017). Much of the existing research that has been conducted into the impact of TikTok and other forms of digital marketing has been conducted within Asian markets (Zeng, Abidin and Schäfer, 2021). Therefore, applying this to the UK hospitality industry, and to the case study of Wagamama, will allow for an in-depth examination of the impact that TikTok food trends are having on increasing awareness of specific menu items within a restaurant, customer engagement and influencing customer behaviour to visit a restaurant.

There is however also a potential negative effect for the restaurant of a TikTok video going viral. Not only could the restaurant suffer from increased demand, leading to long wait times and reduced service quality where stock runs out, the video could also cause damage to the brand's reputation and make customers run a mile. In this sense, a video that is intended to promote a menu item through a short video created by and shared by others, could in fact have the opposite effect, if it is not managed effectively. Therefore, a qualitative research approach is more suitable to investigate the research questions of this study, because the effects of TikTok cannot be measured in numbers of views and engagement.

This approach is the most suitable for this research as it aligns with the interpretivist philosophy adopted by this research and the inductive approach used. It will compare and critically analyse existing body of knowledge on the impact that TikTok food trends have on consumers' perception, purchasing behaviour and restaurant performance. Furthermore, this qualitative secondary research approach will be primarily used to explain how TikTok food trends can influence consumption by examining case studies of restaurants, such as Wagamama and other organizations within the UK hospitality industry (Anggara, Rahma and Yanti, 2025).

3.3 Research Philosophy, Approach and Design

For the research at hand, the researcher's choice of methodology to develop understanding of knowledge and to interpret information to achieve the research aims and objectives (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2023) is based on an interpretivist

philosophy. This perspective recognizes that social reality is produced by individual actions and social interactions (Bryman, 2016). An investigation into the effects of social media upon consumer behaviour in the food service industry will seek to uncover more about the subjective consumer response to images of food posted on the app TikTok and the effect that they have on a consumer's purchasing decisions in the hospitality industry.

The study takes an inductive approach as the main objective of the study is to develop new understanding from existing evidence and not to test hypotheses generated prior to the study. As discussed in the previous section, a large amount of literature has been reviewed to establish facts, theories, patterns and models which are relevant to food trends on TikTok, consumer behaviour and performance of restaurants in the hospitality industry. This body of knowledge will be used to develop new understanding and draw relevant conclusions that could be of use to digital marketing professionals in the hospitality industry in the UK (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2023).

The qualitative study using secondary data drawn from academic papers, industry reports and credible web sites was limited in that it could not be expressed in numbers (Creswell, J.W. and Creswell, J.D., 2023).

The chosen case study of Wagamama is one of the biggest restaurant brands, online active and utilizes social media marketing within the hospitality industry of the UK. With many followers and presence online, Wagamama is a good case study to show how the food trends on TikTok could affect the purchasing behaviour of consumers and how it can impact on the performance of a restaurant.

3.4 Research Method

In the study of this research, secondary qualitative data has been used. Secondary data are the data that other people have collected for their purposes than the research in which these data are being used (Johnston, 2017).

Data were collected from a variety of reliable academic and professional sources, including:

- Peer-reviewed journal articles
- Academic textbooks
- Industry reports
- Government publications
- Hospitality market reports
- Wagamama corporate publications
- Credible online databases

The use of multiple sources enhances the credibility of the findings by allowing evidence to be compared across different publications (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2023).

3.5 Data Collection

Secondary data were collected through a structured review of published literature relating to:

- TikTok marketing
- Social media marketing
- Consumer purchasing behaviour
- Hospitality marketing
- Restaurant performance
- Influencer marketing
- Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM)

For Wagamama's marketing strategy further information was gathered from company literature, annual reports and from various online resources.

3.6 Data Analysis

The collected secondary data were analysed using thematic analysis.

Braun and Clarke (2022) propose six stages of thematic analysis:

1. Familiarisation with the data.
2. Initial coding.
3. Searching for themes.
4. Reviewing themes.
5. Defining and naming themes.
6. Producing the final report.

Following these stages, the literature was carefully reviewed to identify common themes relating to TikTok food trends and consumer behaviour.

3.7 Research Quality

To guarantee the quality of any research conducted it must be as accurate and complete as possible for the findings to be of use.

When assessing the quality of qualitative research Lincoln and Guba (1985) (aaronjt.libros, 2026) proposed criteria for evaluation, they are known as:

- **Credibility:** the degree to which one can have confidence in research findings. The credibility of this study has been enhanced by using a few peer reviewed studies and where possible the findings have been compared throughout.
- **Dependability:** concerns the consistency of the research process. The researcher has detailed the methodology used for choosing, analysing and interpreting the relevant literature for the study.
- **Confirmability:** refers to reducing researcher bias. The study's findings are based on evidence from the published studies and thus have been kept to a minimum and are based on existing research.
- **Transferability:** refers to the issue of how far findings generated by a particular study can be transferable to and applicable within other studies and contexts.

The findings from this study of the marketing use of TikTok by Wagamama of relevance to other brands, and to companies within the UK hospitality industry.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Although this research does not involve human participants, ethical principles remain important.

Observing to these principles helps maintain academic integrity and ensures the credibility of the research (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2023).

3.9 Limitations of the Research

Several limitations should be acknowledged.

- . The research is based on secondary data, therefore there are limitations with the views and experiences of customers that attend Wagamama currently.
- . The research on TikTok is changing so fast as it is currently, the studies on consumer behaviour and marketing trends may not be relevant after a period.

3.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter sets out the methodology for the research conducted into the influence that food trends on TikTok have on human behaviour in terms of customer purchasing decisions within individual restaurants within the UK hospitality industry. An interpretivist research philosophy has been used within an inductive qualitative methodology in terms of the analysis of data already in existence, and a case study of Wagamama used as the focal point for the research. Secondary data were collected from existing sources of information in the form of published academic papers, reports from within the hospitality industry and from publications produced by the case study company itself. Themes have been identified using thematic analysis, a method of qualitative data analysis, which identified recurring themes within the analysed data. The possibility for critical evaluation of the research in terms of quality, consideration of key ethical issues, and limitations encountered during the research have also been

outlined. The following chapter will set out the findings from the analysed data and compare these against the research objectives and existing published works in relation to the influence that food trends on TikTok have on human behaviour in terms of customer purchasing decisions within individual restaurants within the UK hospitality industry.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings

4.1 Introduction

The secondary data has been analysed by means of thematic analysis, as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2022). A few existing academic papers, industry reports, company publications as well as other relevant information and data have been collected from within the UK hospitality industry in relation to food trends on social media TikTok, the human behaviour of consumers and the performance of restaurants in the hospitality industry. This chapter will elaborate and present by means of thematic analysis of the secondary data the recurring themes will be presented. The themes that have been found by means of the secondary data analysis will be related to the issue how TikTok is able to influence the human behaviour of consumers to generate sales. In addition, the themes will be presented in relation to the performance of restaurants within the hospitality industry. Wagamama has been used as the case study to answer the research questions and to achieve the research objectives of this study.

4.2 Application of Thematic Analysis

This thematic analysis followed the six stages as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2022). The first stage of familiarisation with the information was critical to the success of this research. Therefore, all relevant journal articles, books, reports from industry and Wagamama as well as other publications were read and re-read to gain a deeper understanding of the current knowledge. During this process, several recurring themes were identified. These themes were social media marketing and TikTok food trends, consumer behaviour, the use of influencer marketing and its effect on restaurant performance, customer perceptions and electronic word-of-mouth.

The second stage is based on the repeated finding within the literature and thus, the corresponding codes were recorded as principal codes in paragraph 3.7.

Analysis of the codes revealed that they could be grouped into several themes. Most of the codes related to digital content and the way in which it can influence purchasing decisions that consumers make regarding products that they purchase (Iqbal et al., 2024). These themes were made up of codes that were primarily associated with social media marketing, food trends on the app of TikTok and the way in which human behaviour can be influenced by the way consumers interact with digital content, and how this can lead to their purchasing behaviour. Other themes that were developed from the codes that were analysed consisted of the ways in which factors can influence

human trust, and their attitudes towards the online content of food. Finally, analysis of the themes in relation to the research objectives was assessed to establish whether they had fulfilled the objectives of the research. The analysis of the themes in relation to the performance of restaurants, was supported by evidence that was used to develop an assessment of brand awareness, customer engagement and sales.

During the fifth stage, the subject was **defined and named**, resulting in three overarching themes:

- Theme 1: The Influence of TikTok Food Trends on Consumer Purchasing Behaviour
- Theme 2: Customer Perceptions of TikTok Food Content
- Theme 3: The Impact of TikTok Food Trends on Restaurant Performance

Finally, the **producing the report** stage involved critically analysing each theme, comparing previous studies, identifying areas of agreement and disagreement, and relating the findings to the conceptual framework presented in Chapter 2 (Braun and Clarke, 2022).

4.3 Thematic Analysis of the Literature

TikTok food trends can influence consumers' purchasing behaviour, especially a generation of customers who use the platform to search for new restaurants, foods, and trends to try. This visually led platform can have a positive influence on consumers' attitudes towards food and services, increasing their purchase intentions. The influence of other users within the social network of a user can be affected by factors such as likes, shares, and comments on a post (Djafarova and Bowes, 2021). However, there are also some consumers who are less likely to be influenced by a food trend posted on TikTok, including older consumers who are more likely to search for information about restaurants and food using more traditional sources (Collectif, 2018).

The two most important factors affecting perceptions of restaurants are the sense of authenticity offered by the restaurant and the level of credibility the consumer believes the restaurant to hold. Those consumers that regularly interact with online content, such as videos, are more likely to have a positive perception of a brand where they perceive the online content to be of high quality and authentic, rather than commercialized and overly promotional (De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders, 2017). The credibility of influencers online, as well as of user-generated content, is a key factor in the effectiveness of electronic word-of-mouth (Chu and Kim, 2011). Online reviews are becoming increasingly influential to consumers, but these must be deemed credible by the individual to have any impact (Thakur, 2018).

Enhanced restaurant performance through increased brand visibility and customer engagement leading to increased sales of restaurants (Stephen, 2016). The example of Wagamama's use of TikTok to post short video clips to promote their menu and to

engage with their customers can lead to increased demand for a restaurant, however managing demand created by individual posts can become a problem and place pressure on restaurants to manage demand created by viral posts and to maintain service quality in terms of delivering a good service to customers.

The study found that the extent to which the trends affected the purchasing behaviour of and the perceptions of consumers by restaurants was influenced by a number of factors including the demographic characteristics of the consumer, the authenticity of the content and the way in which the organization managed demand when a particular dish or offer became viral.

4.4 Discussion of Findings and Chapter Summary

The results from the thematic analysis can be seen to be supporting the relationships between the variables in the proposed conceptual framework. First, how TikTok food trends affect the consumer, through the various aspects of the visual food posted online, through the method of influencer marketing and electronic word-of-mouth. The consumers' perceptions of a food item and their intention to purchase that food item, because of online food trends. Consumers' behaviour as influenced by online food trends and the effects on restaurants, through increased brand awareness, customer interaction and sales.

However, there are several factors that need to be taken into consideration when relating TikTok food trends to a restaurant. For example, the demographics of potential consumers, the level of authenticity that they believe a post is portraying and the credibility of the influencer that a restaurant uses. Restaurants will also need to have the ability to manage the increased demand for table that TikTok food trends are likely to generate. As a result, TikTok food trends can be used as a strategic marketing tool; delivering results if the digital content is of a high standard and the organization is able to manage the demand that it generates (Kumsawat, Suttikun and Mahasuweerachai, 2024).

By synthesizing the findings of this research, it will be possible to provide a comprehensive insight into the ways in which TikTok food trends affect a consumer's purchasing behaviour and perceptions of restaurants. The findings will also enable an examination into the ways in which these trends can affect restaurant performance and, more generally, provide an insight into their potential implications for and of this research from both a theoretical and managerial perspective. Finally, potential avenues for future research will also be identified.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This research paper examines how TikTok food trends can influence consumers and the perceptions that customers have of restaurants. It will also look at how restaurants such as Wagamama can perform within the ever-changing environment of the UK hospitality industry. As more consumers are utilizing applications and browsing on their

mobiles, social media sites such as TikTok are increasingly affecting how consumers behave. The primary group of Generation Z have been known to be highly influenced by short-form video, in the form of clips on platforms like TikTok, and by how they have been exposed to the content through algorithms on the app, and through interactions with other users on the site (Stephen, 2016). But the influence that TikTok can have on consumer behaviour is variable, in that older consumers are known to be more influenced by more 'traditional' methods (Iqbal et al., 2024). Thus, TikTok can be seen as another marketing tool to be utilized, but with focus on certain demographics of consumers, and not as a cure all for the issues that are faced within the marketing mix.

This study extends previous research into social media marketing by focusing on the emerging trend of TikTok food trends within the UK hospitality industry. Much of the previous research into social media marketing has been conducted within the Asian markets (Tuten & Solomon, 2015), therefore the current study contributes to the body of knowledge within a Western context. The findings of this research will be of use to restaurant managers in terms of creating targeted content, managing to be authentic, customer interaction and demand management.

One of the limitations of this study was that secondary qualitative data were used from a single case study (Wagamama). Thus, it is not possible to generalize the findings from this study to other sectors of the hospitality industry. Furthermore, this study did not seek to measure the impact of TikTok food trends on consumers' real-time purchasing decisions. In addition, it was not possible to establish a precise statistical relationship between a consumer's engagement with food trends on TikTok and the performance of restaurants. Future research could address these limitations by employing a combination of secondary analysis and primary qualitative and quantitative data. This could include surveys, in-depth interviews and focus groups with consumers of different ages from a variety of restaurants from around the world. The use of TikTok engagement analytics in conjunction with primary data from restaurants and customers would strengthen the findings from such research in terms of more effectively establishing the relationship between viral food trends and restaurant performance (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2023).

Appendix A: Areas for Further Research

In this research, there were several areas which were identified and consequently could not be explored in greater depth due to the limitations of this research in terms of time, word count, access to primary data and the scope of the secondary thematic analysis.

Area for further research	Potential research focus	Supporting literature
Customer loyalty	Examine whether TikTok trends create long-term loyalty and repeat visits or only short-term purchase intentions.	Stephen (2016); Tuten (2023)
TikTok engagement and sales	Compare views, likes, shares and comments with actual restaurant sales, bookings and customer numbers.	Stephen (2016)
Different restaurant types	Compare the effects of TikTok marketing on restaurant chains, independent restaurants and different hospitality sectors.	Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2023)
TikTok algorithms	Investigate how algorithmic recommendations increase exposure to food content and contribute to the creation of viral trends.	Omar and Dequan (2020); Zeng, Abidin and Schäfer (2021)
Influencer marketing	Compare the effectiveness and credibility of micro-, macro- and celebrity influencers in influencing restaurant choices.	De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders (2017); Djafarova and Bowes (2021)
Operational consequences	Examine how restaurants manage stock shortages, increased demand, waiting times and service quality following viral exposure.	Tuten (2023)
Future methodology	Use surveys, interviews, focus groups, TikTok analytics and restaurant performance data to provide stronger empirical evidence.	Creswell and Creswell (2023); Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2023)

These limitations could be addressed by future research, including use of qualitative and quantitative data and an examination of several individual restaurants through the thematic analysis of their online presence as well as a tracking of real-time activity on TikTok against real world results for participating businesses in order to establish the

extent to which current trends are influencing consumer behaviour and wider patterns in the UK hospitality industry.

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