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Social Media Presence in Dubrovnik & Peljesac Restaurants

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Abstract

Apart from staying connected with people across the world, social media platforms are being used as marketing tools too. With benefits such as staying connected with customers, enhancing customer experience, and improving their trust and loyalty, many businesses, including restaurants, are trying to gain a competitive advantage. Therefore, social media usage of restaurants in the Dubrovnik and Peljesac area has been analyzed. To achieve that, the survey was distributed among 32 owners or employees of the restaurants operating in these areas. The biggest result came from the research that the participants are aware of the benefits that social media platforms provide to the restaurants, but are not highly prioritizing or using them. Results of this survey could raise awareness of the importance of social media platforms as a marketing tool, and restaurants could learn about the benefits that these platforms may bring.

Keywords: social media, restaurants, Dubrovnik, Peljesac

Social Media Presence in Dubrovnik & Peljesac Restaurants

Dubrovnik & Peninsula Peljesac

Dubrovnik, a historic city is lying at the Adriatic Sea in the south part of Croatia. With various cultural-historical sites, a world-famous Old Town, and gastronomy offers, Dubrovnik is one of the most famous touristic destinations in the world. According to “Condé Nast Traveler”, a luxury travel magazine, Dubrovnik has been ranked in the top 5 cities to visit in the world (Bradbury, 2021). Its beauty is confirmed in the words of an Irish writer George Bernard Shaw, who visited Dubrovnik in 1931. He wrote: “Those who seek paradise on Earth must come to Dubrovnik”. Peninsula Peljesac is the second largest peninsula in Croatia (Vuleta, 2022), located just 1-hour drive away from Dubrovnik. Its richness and value have been recognized early in history by the former Dubrovnik Republic, which bought it in 1333 (Vekaric, 2019). “Aminess” described Peljesac by renaming it as a “half-island and half paradise”, as it contains wavy coastlines, turquoise bays surrounded by rich nature, and some of the most beautiful beaches in Croatia. Starting from the small city of Ston, which is famous for its “Ston Wall” or so-called “European Great Walls of China” (Delahaye, 2018), up to the historical sea captains’ town of Orebic, Peljesac has various offers and sights worth seeing. From its unique gastronomy, provided by traditional “konoba” restaurants, and high-quality wine offers from dozens of wineries across the peninsula up to historical builds, monasteries and churches and natural beauties, and windsurfing and kitesurfing for sports types, Peljesac has been attracting many tourists every year. Visitors from all around the world spare their time to enjoy the products, services, and natural beauties which these areas offer. Mostly focusing on the summer season period, where the offer is greatest and the beautiful Mediterranean climate supports the experience tourists gather.

With the introduction of social media platforms, it is easier for the users to find information about the destination they are looking for, or to discover the destination when planning a journey. Before, methods such as “word of mouth” were used in order to promote themselves and gain loyal customers. Word of mouth is known as one of the most crucial marketing tools of any brand, because of its reliability, since its sources come from family and friends (Kavanagh, 2018). Marketing through social media platforms is different than the traditional one because it involves direct interaction with a business’s customers. (Needles, 2013). With social media platforms, restaurants can easily promote their products and services and communicate with their customers, which would raise their business to a higher level. Today, if restaurants are not relying on social media, there is a risk of not reaching their full potential in the form of the number of customers they have, and their competitive level in the market. Therefore, this research seeks to determine if restaurants in Dubrovnik and Peljesac area are incorporating social media strategies and efforts into their marketing operations.

Restaurant Background

Dalmatian food and beverage offering is rich and famous. Guests who arrive do not miss the opportunity to taste the famous Ston mussels and oysters, which were farmed there since Roman times (Zibar, 2021). Various seafood dishes from grilled fish, octopus, and black risotto up to the famous dalmatian “brodet”, which contains mixed fish boiled in a sauce can be found in almost every restaurant. The signature culinary style which is believed was founded back in the Bronze age is “peka”, where food such as octopus, bread, and meat is being grilled inside a steel bell covered by coal. (Luxoria, 2020). Countless vineyards across the peninsula provide high-quality wines, with some of the finest Croatian wines and grapes coming from the Peljesac region (Silvia, 2021). The so-called “konoba” restaurants are the most traditional ones you can find in these areas. Speaking with Anamarija Zajec (Konoba

Owner, lives in Orebic, Croatia. Personal communication, March 2022), she described “konoba” as an old-fashioned restaurant usually designed in wooden or stone architecture, lead with love and tradition. The goal of “konoba” is to enable its customers to experience the tradition in terms of food, beverage, and atmosphere. Apart from traditional ones, there are several types of restaurants, from fine-dining ones to fast foods, that provide delicious products from recipes originating from other parts of Croatia, but also the world as well.

Social Media

Social media is a term that cannot be avoided in everyday life for the past 2 decades. It is a collective name for all the websites and applications which enable the community to communicate online (Luktevich, 2021). It first started with the first social media platform “Six Degrees” application in 1997, where users were able to create their profiles and add “friends” (Milner, 2016). It had around 1 million users who were able to connect with each other. In a couple of years, it expanded into the “online world”, with applications where people could express their thoughts, post pictures, communicate with friends, etc. According to “Statista Research Department” (Feb, 2022), there were approximately 3,6 billion social media users, and the number keeps growing every day. With this level of increase, they predict that by 2025, the number will reach 4,41 billion. Apart from communicating with friends online, various occasions made social media as important and useful as it is today. Businesses saw the opportunity to use social media platforms to advertise and promote their products and services, so-called “social media marketing”. According to the “UpMenu” blog (2021), some of the most suitable, but also most popular social media platforms for the purposes of the restaurant are Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. These platforms enable businesses to promote their service products in many ways:

- Facebook is used for creating your own business profile and advertising purposes, and it has an option of tracking the results of advertisements. Another plus is it has the option of creating and managing the advertisements for specific target groups. And of course, keeping personal contact with a customer. Currently, it has approximately 2,9 billion monthly users (Statista, 2022). Also, Facebook is the most-used platform for marketers, more precisely 93% of them (Barnhart, 2022).

- Instagram is another perfect social media platform for businesses, especially ones that target younger populations, who make up most Instagram users. It is all about sharing pictures and posting short videos. With the help of various filters and tools, businesses such as restaurants can promote their products, making them look even more attractive. More than 1,4 billion monthly users can be found on Instagram (Statista, 2022). Instagram follows Facebook as 2nd most-used platform for marketers, 78% of them to be exact (Barnhart, 2022).

- Twitter, being like Facebook, has a unique way of promoting a business with Twitter tags, more known as “hashtags”. By providing information about your business, or users tagging it, a link can be created which leads from the hashtag to your business’s web page. Over 436 million monthly users (Statista, 2022). Although it is not in the same range as Facebook or Instagram, Twitter also finds its success in marketing, having around \$647 million in advertising revenue in the third quarter of 2021 (Barnhart, 2022).

With social media, customers can search for a place they are willing to visit and based on posts, pictures, and reviews, make a quick decision whether they want to visit it or not (Verma, 2012). Social media also allows businesses to stay in contact, and enable them to reach their target customers. That is the reason these platforms are proven to be the most valuable channels to promote products and services online (Fatbit, 2020).

Social Media in Restaurants

Today, social media is a “mega-trend” which had a huge impact on the tourism system (Leung, 2013). Before social media, restaurants had other ways of advertising, such as newspapers, billboards, radio ads, and the "word of mouth” technique. However, in the past 15 years, social media became a crucial factor for restaurants to stay in contact with their customers and update them with any news they might have about new events or exclusive discounts that they might introduce. Apart from restaurants advertising themselves, their customers also play part in the process by writing reviews and posting pictures of their experience on the spot. Over 88% of customers trust the online reviews posted by others, therefore restaurants normally focus on having a “digital strategy”, which includes perfecting their website, taking advantage of online reviews, and using influencer marketing, that will attract new, and keep their old customers (Vadukiya, 2020). There are many advantages and benefits of these platforms that restaurants may have if using them strategically (Wimpsett, 2020):

1. Trust and loyalty improvement – when looking for a restaurant, customers want to make sure that the service and quality of the food will be consistent. Social media platforms are the best ways of providing transparency. The purpose is for the guests to leave comments and provide pictures of their experience at the restaurant.
2. Brand advocacy – as social media stated, food is the most photographed subject on Instagram. Therefore, there is no better way of promoting your products than posting pictures of them.
3. Affordability – unless using paid ads, which are also cheaper than other ways of advertising, social media is a completely free way of advertising your products and service. It is a fantastic way of saving daily wage costs.

4. Staying connected with guests – social media is a great way to stay in contact with your customers and even build a personal relationship with them.
5. Providing restaurant updates – the fastest way to update your customers with new menu items, events, promotions, etc., is through social media platforms they use, which in this case should be updated daily.

TripAdvisor in Restaurants

TripAdvisor is a travel website based on writing reviews and providing pictures for customers about travel destinations around the world. It is founded in 2000 and it started an “internet era” of online customer reviews. Today, it has more than 65 million unique visitors daily searching for reviews of hotels, restaurants, and other destinations which other customers already experienced (Bussgang, 2012). How popular this website states the fact that until August of 2020, over 884 million reviews and opinions were written on the TripAdvisor website by customers (Statista, 2021). Users can search for destinations such as hotels, restaurants, and cafe bars, and sort them out either by price or rating. Like social media platforms, the TripAdvisor platform is used by businesses for advertising purposes and as a way of communicating with their customers. We can easily compare the social media platforms to the ones on Trip Advisor based on their features (Christianson, 2013):

- Every restaurant has its own TripAdvisor page, from which the potential customers will be able to see their worktime and a menu. It also enables posting pictures of the restaurant interior and exterior and sample dishes will induce the viewers and legitimate the menu. This is a crucial factor since customers want to know where they are going and what to expect before they try it.
- Restaurants’ goal is to provide the best products and services possible and encourage their customers to leave a review on the website, to attract other customers. That is why the

TripAdvisor restaurant page also contains a section where customers grade them from 1 to 5 and leave a comment and post pictures of the food, restaurant itself, and atmosphere they experienced. Restaurants should read all the reviews and make sure they reviewed them by responding to positive ones with gratitude, and to negative ones with an apology and stating that the errors have been acknowledged. Restaurants' presence in the reviews shows their will of caring for their customers and listening to their opinions.

According to the TripAdvisor webpage, the platform introduced new features including getting recommendations and inspiration in planning your whole journey to a specific location and adding friends, travel experts that users trust, and social media influencers. As a result, we can now classify Trip Advisor as a social media platform.

Social Media Presence in Dubrovnik and Peljesac Restaurants

This project aims to determine the level of usage of social media platforms as a marketing tool in Dubrovnik and Peljesac restaurants. For the purpose of the study, the questionnaire will be provided to the restaurants, which will focus on the level of usage of the specific social media platforms, regularity of use, and their own opinions about the benefits of using it will be identified.

Method

The aim of this research was to investigate how much restaurants in Dubrovnik and Peljesac area rely on Social Media platforms as a method of their marketing operations. An instrument in form of a survey was applied for this study, written in the English language. The instrument was created based on Kristen Herhold's 2017 business survey; the questions of that survey were used as the base of this research's instrument.

The survey contained 19 questions divided into 3 sections. The first section involved 2 questions that were related to the overall opinion of the survey contestants about the importance of social media platforms in restaurants and their benefits. The responders rated whether they disagree or agree with the importance on a five-point Likert scale, from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree", while for the benefits, they were provided with several benefits that social media offers to restaurants, and they had an option of checking three benefits they find most important. The second section contained 10 questions that were related to the usage of social media platforms in the participants' restaurants. Participants were asked what social media platforms were their restaurants using. For each social media they checked as used, they were provided with two additional questions in which they would rate how often they check their accounts, and how often would they post pictures, comments, etc. The exception is the TripAdvisor question, where they rated in percentages the number of reviews they respond to. The last section involved 7 demographic questions where participants would provide information about the restaurant; their location, period of work, type, age, and seating number, concluded by the age of the participant and their role in the restaurant.

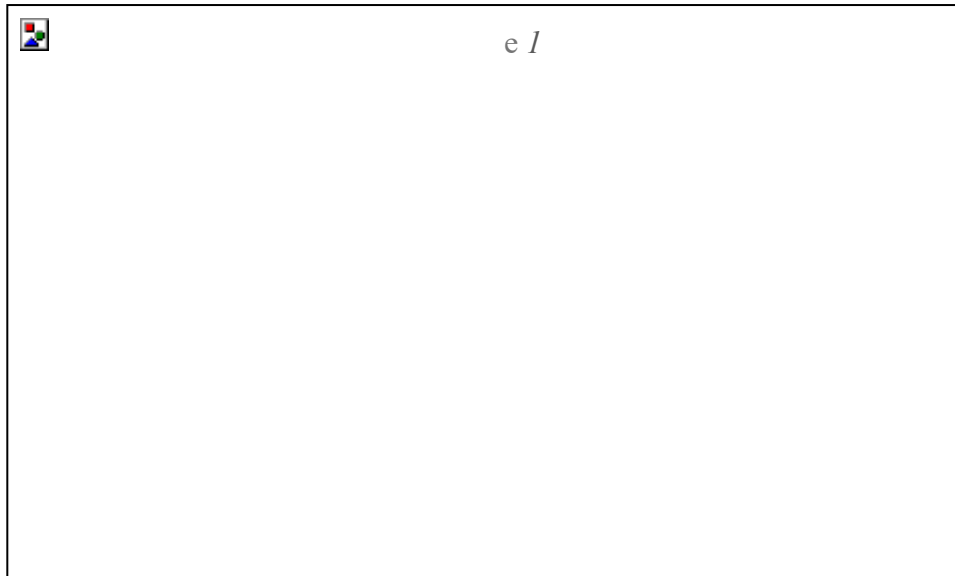
The survey was conducted in the online form, via Google forms, and in-printed version. The targeted audience for this survey were Dubrovnik and Peljesac area restaurant owners or

employees in the marketing department. Potential participants were located through the “TripAdvisor” platform. Before the survey, a pilot survey was conducted. Responses confirmed the survey’s structure. Out of 20 invitations for participating in an online survey, 8 responses were collected, producing a response rate of 40%, while 40 distributed printed versions of the survey were distributed, and 24 were returned, producing a response rate of 60%. The data collected includes 32 responses in total, collected from 08/04/2022 until 21/04/2022.

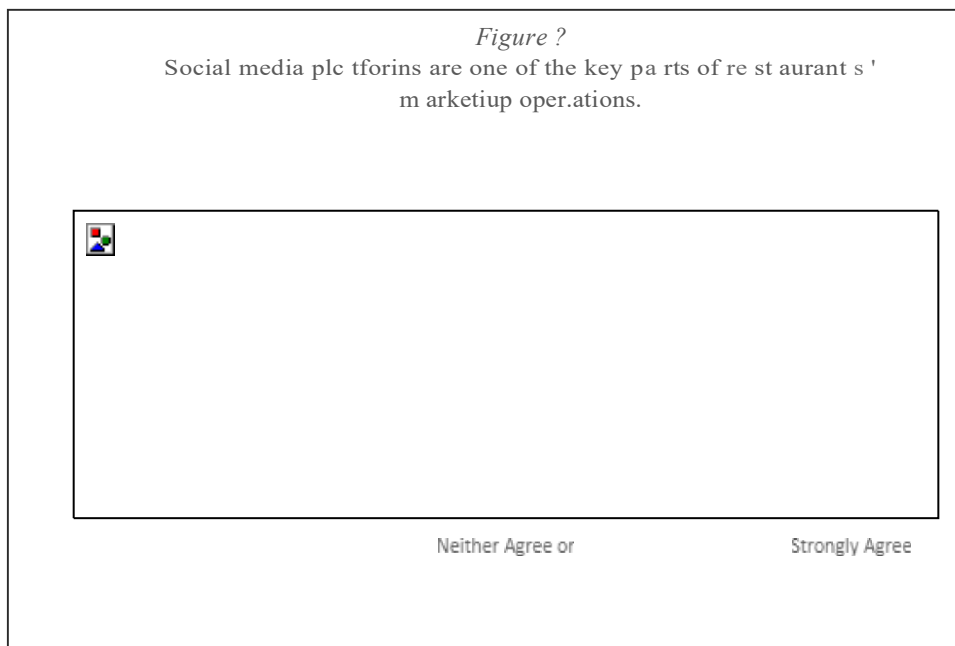
Results

The purpose of this project was to analyze the restaurant owners' opinions about the benefits of social media platforms as a marketing tool, as well as the activity of these owners' restaurants on social media platforms. Participants of the survey were divided into two sections; ones operating in the Dubrovnik area, and ones in Peljesac. Of the 32 respondents, 16, or 50% of them were operating in the Dubrovnik area, and the same number operates in the Peljesac area. 53.1% or 17 of the participants' restaurants operated in a seasonal period, while 46.9 or 15 of them were opened in a full-year period.

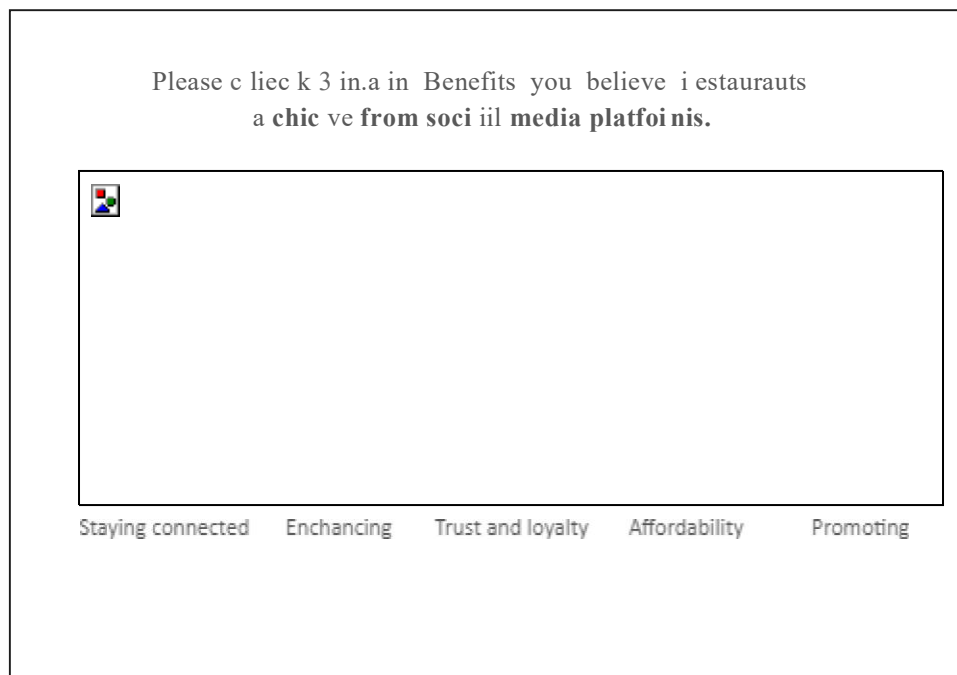
Respondents of the instrument were mostly middle-aged. The age range was divided into six groups; from 32 participants, the largest number of them, 37.5% or 12 participants were 35-44 years old, and 37.5% or 12 participants were from 45-54 years old. 15.6% or 5 participants were 55-64 years old, 6.3% or 2 participants were from 25-34 years old, and one participant was 65+ years old (*Figure 1*). 31.3% or 10 of participants had a role in the marketing department of the restaurant, while the same percentage of participants were owners/managers. The largest number of them, 34.4% or 11 participants had a role in the organizational management, while 1 participant was a shift manager.



When it comes to surveying their own opinion about social media platforms, 53.1% or 17 participants stated that they agree with the statement that social media is one of the key parts of restaurants' marketing operations. 34.4% or 11 of them strongly agree with this statement, while the rest of them, 12.5% or 4 participants stated that they neither agree nor disagree (Figure 2).

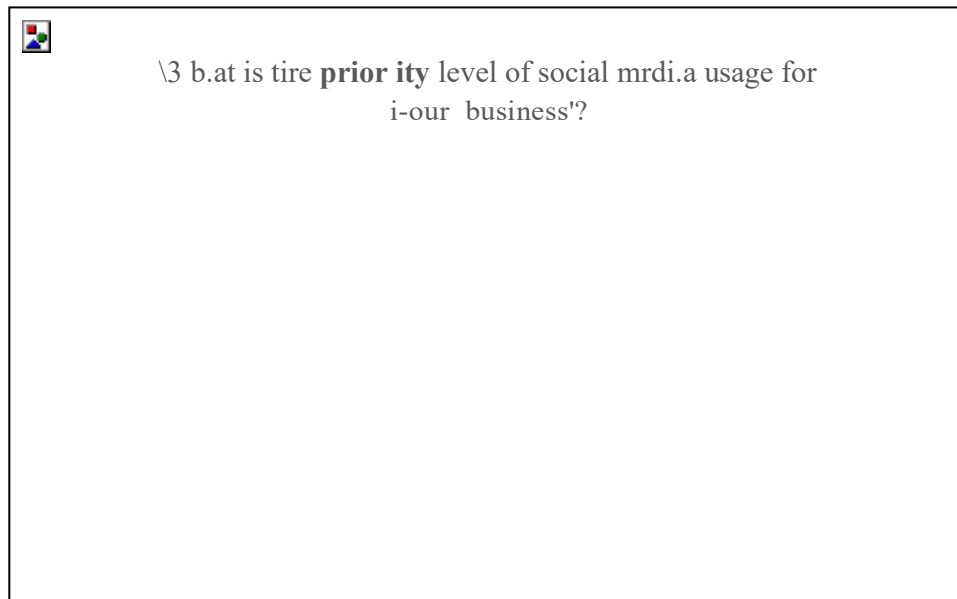


Participants were provided with 6 different benefits that restaurants can achieve from social media platforms and were asked to pick 3 benefits that they believe were the main ones. As shown in *Figure 3*, all 32 participants picked the “Staying connected with customers” benefit, while 81.3% or 26 of them picked the “Enhancing customer experience” benefit. 53.1% or 13 participants picked “Trust and loyalty improvement” benefit, while 34.4% or 11 of them picked “Affordability”. 25% or 8 participants picked “Promoting products” as one of the main benefits, while the least number of participants, 6.3% or 2 of them, picked “Providing restaurant updates” benefit.

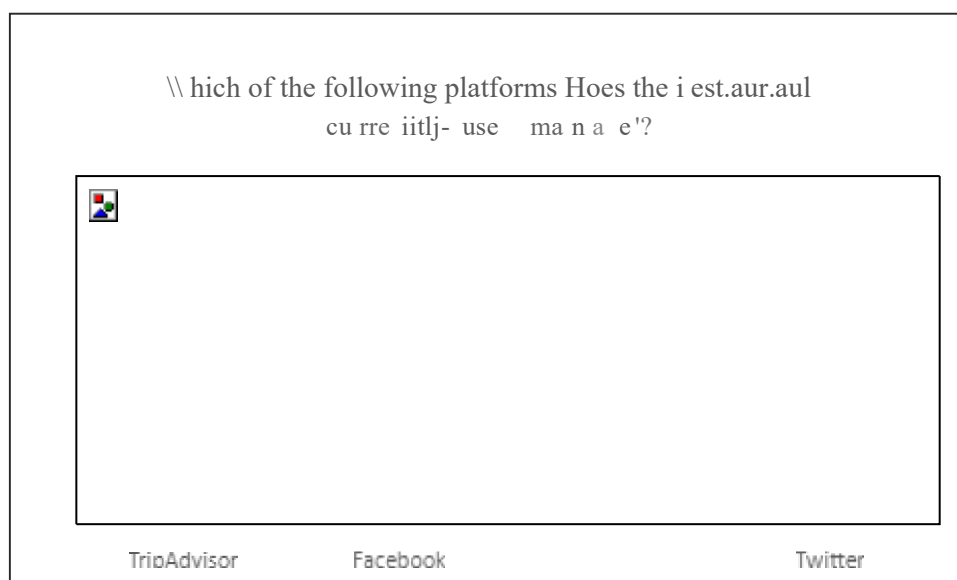


As shown in *Figure 4*, when it comes to the priority level of social media usage in participants’ restaurants, 40,6% or 13 of them have a high priority level, 10 of them operating in Dubrovnik, and 3 of them in the Peljesac area, while the most participants, 46.9% or 15 of them, have medium priority level, 11 of them operating in Peljesac, and 4 of them in Dubrovnik area. Other 2 of the participants, both operating in the Dubrovnik area, stated that

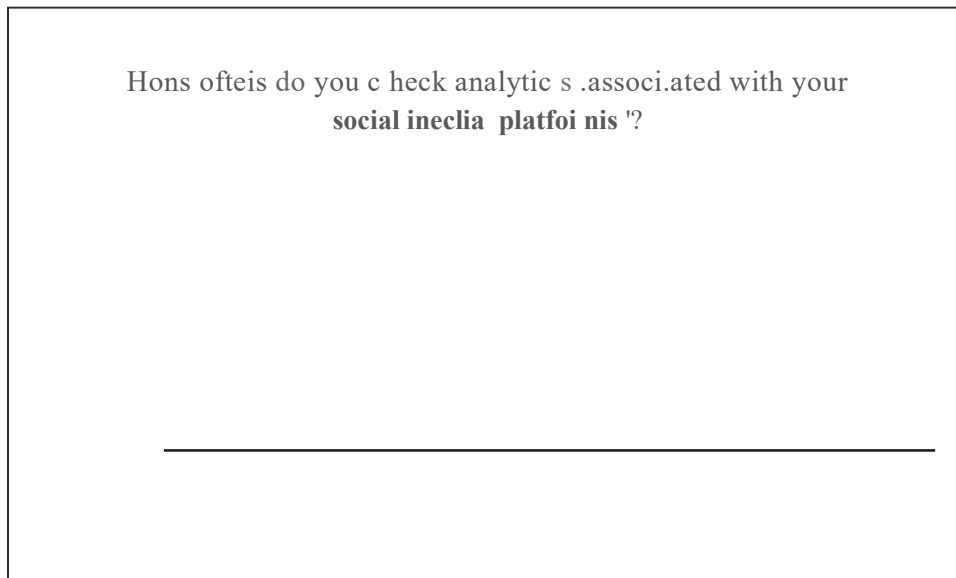
their level of usage is essential, while 2 of the participants, operating in the Peljesac area, have their priority level low.



All of the 32 participants stated that their restaurant uses/manages TripAdvisor platform, while 87.5% or 28 of them use Facebook, followed up by 62.5% or 20 of them using Instagram. Only 4 participants stated that their restaurant has a Twitter account {Figure 51.



Answering to the question about checking the analytics related to the social media platforms, around 90% of participants stated that for each social media platform they use, they check analytics once a week or less, while others do it two times a week *{Figure 6}*.



However, despite large numbers of participants stating that they use/manage social media platforms, they do not use it a lot. As shown on *Figure 7*, 65.7% or 21 participants post pictures or comments on Facebook at least once a week, while only 9.4% or 3 participants stated they do it on daily basis. 15.6% or 5 participants stated that they do it less than once a week. For Instagram, 65% or 13 out of 20 participants who post pictures or comments at least once a week, while 15% or 3 participants do it on daily basis. 20% or 4 participants stated that they post it less than once a week. For Twitter platform, all 4 participants who stated they use or manage the page use it less than once a week.



How' often does your business post pictures. comments etc. on ils social media pt.alfoi ins'?

Statistics are low when it comes to responding to reviews of customers too, with 75% stating they respond to between 0-20% of reviews, 15,6% responding to between 21-40%. 2 participants stated they respond to between 41-60% while one responds to between 81-100%
{Figure 81.

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Discussion

Based on all the data collected from the survey, the majority of the participants agree that social media platforms are important when it comes to restaurant operations. All of the participants acknowledge the benefit of staying connected with customers when it comes to social media platforms, while more than half of them find enhancing customer experience and trust and loyalty improvement as important too. When it comes to affordability, providing restaurant updates, and promoting products, participants find these benefits somewhat beneficial, but not as important as the other three. We can conclude that for the restaurants, it is most important to analyze who are their customers, how to attract them, and how to make them loyal in the end, so providing restaurant updates and promoting products is not that important. Affordability of the social media is real since it is a free way of advertising, but there are also paid ads which would increase the chance of future customers finding out about the restaurant, therefore you would have to invest some resources in the platform in order to achieve the maximum of it.

Despite the majority of participants agreeing that social media platforms should be one of the key parts of the restaurants' business and being aware of its benefits, there is a difference in the restaurants when it comes to using these platforms. Unlike those operating in the Dubrovnik area, restaurants in the Peljesac area do not have social media platforms listed as a high priority in their marketing operations. They have stated that the usage of social media platforms is at medium priority, while the small group has high, but also a low priority level, while a majority of those operating in Dubrovnik area have high priority, with small group operating at medium priority, and 2 of the restaurants find these operations as essential. Obviously, there is a higher competition of restaurants in the Dubrovnik area when it comes

to attracting customers than on Peljesac, so it might seem obvious they use social media platforms more than on Peljesac as a marketing tool.

When it comes to platforms they use, there is not much surprise there, with all of the participants' restaurants having a Trip Advisor page, which is a primary platform that customers use to judge and choose their next place to go. Also, many restaurants, with the exception of some Peljesac area ones, use Facebook and Instagram's benefits as their advantage, while a small group of participants stated that they own a Twitter page, but use it rarely. Since Facebook and Instagram are one of the most popular social media platforms today, these statistics are not surprising. Twitter is also popular, but mostly on the west continents, so it is not surprising that almost nobody really relies on this platform as their marketing tool. Although active, these restaurants do not respond to the reviews of the customers often, with 75% stating that they respond to between 0-20% of the reviews. One of the conclusions would be that they only respond to negative reviews with the goal to apologize for failed service, while the rest 25% acknowledge their customers' negative and positive reviews with a comment.

This study proves that social media platforms are beneficial as a marketing tool in restaurants. If we exclude paid ads, it is completely free, and all it takes is the will and time to manage it in order to benefit from it. This research project can be the root of potential future research about the marketing tools of restaurants. It would be desirable to identify the reasons why the restaurants in Dubrovnik, and especially Peljesac areas are not prioritizing the social media platforms despite being aware of their benefits, and what marketing tools are they using instead.

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