



Social Media Marketing and Service Decision among Working-Age Consumers of Japanese Yakiniku Buffet Restaurants in Thailand

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Abstract: Social media has emerged as an important channel for information regarding restaurants since in many cases, service attributes cannot be fully evaluated until after a visit. The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationships of consumer perception and perceived social media marketing with service decision in a group of working-age consumers who had experience with Japanese yakiniku buffet restaurants in Thailand. The study was conducted using a quantitative cross-sectional survey available through an online questionnaire in a buffet-oriented Facebook community. The final sample comprised 385 complete responses from consumers aged 25–59 years. The questionnaire included consumer perception, dining behavior, and four dimensions of perceived social media marketing, as well as service decision. Descriptive statistics, comparisons between groups, simple linear regression and multiple regression were used. Consumer perception had a positive relationship with service decision ($\beta = 0.875$, $p < 0.001$). When all four dimensions of social media marketing were examined together, e-WOM ($\beta = 0.432$), trend-related appeal ($\beta = 0.355$) and entertainment ($\beta = 0.203$) maintained statistically significant positive relationships with service choice. In the second model, after controlling for the other social media marketing dimensions, the interaction dimension showed no independent relationship ($\beta = -0.043$, $p = 0.496$).

Keywords: Social Media Marketing, Electronic Word of Mouth, Consumer Perception, Service Decision, Japanese Yakiniku Buffet Restaurant, Thailand.

1. Introduction

Certain characteristics of services cannot be fully evaluated before consumption, which creates uncertainty in selecting a restaurant. Consumers can do some research by checking menus, prices, images and marketing materials beforehand, but the actual service experience — food quality, atmospherics, employee attentiveness and overall online ratings comes only after they step through the door. As a result, social media has emerged as an integral medium of information when it comes to choosing a restaurant. Enabling consumers to compare restaurant-created content to reviews and ratings, photos and comments by other customers. Instead of serving purely as a promotion platform, social media is a place where consumers assemble to review and evaluate service-related information prior to decision-making (Dellarocas, 2003; Sussman & Siegal, 2003).

The value of online information depends on how consumers interpret the information they encounter. Information adoption theory suggests that a person is more likely to use information when they see it as useful and credible (Sussman & Siegal, 2003). The elaboration likelihood perspective further argues that consumers may pay attention to both the message content and the cues related to its source in consideration of alternatives, particularly when they are motivated to make a careful choice (Bhattacharjee & Sanford, 2006). For consumers, this means weighing whether other customers' experiences support a promotional claim, whether reviews are detailed enough with the relevant information, and if the information is consistent across various places online. With the expansion of online feedback systems, these evaluations have become more relevant as consumer opinions can remain publicly accessible and reach audiences outside informal networks (Dellarocas 2003).



Social media communication has become a multidimensional activity including entertainment, interaction, price-related offerings, personalization, and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) all of which contribute to value perceptions and relational cues driving consumer behavioral responses (Kim & Ko, 2012). Measurement studies that followed have also approached consumers' perceptions of SMM activities as a multidimensional construct influencing consumer responses in digital environments (Yadav & Rahman, 2017). In the restaurant markets, attract: Entertainment content may attract consumers' attention, interactive features may allow them to ask questions about a specific topic, trend-related information may increase awareness about current menu items or promotions and electronic word of mouth (eWOM) will provide consumers with an opportunity to consider the experiences and recommendations of others. These dimensions commonly manifest in tandem, yet the relationships of each to service decisions may not be identical.

Japanese yakiniku buffet restaurants offer an important context in which to study these relationships. The service encompasses menu variety, food freshness; interactive cooking; ambience; employee support; and price-value evaluation. Consumers typically pay a set price and make their choice before being able to fully glean whether the food, ambience and service will meet their expectations. The dining format is socially visible because consumers usually eat with friends, partners, family members or co-workers and can post pictures, videos, ratings or comments on the meal. In response, those operating a restaurant often have social media accounts to share menus, announce promotions, preview seasonal items and connect with their customers. Electronic word of mouth particularly comes into play in this environment because it provides potential customers with direct accounts of previous dining experiences. This type of information could be some positive or negative ratings, photographs of real dishes, waiting-time information and price-to-quality comparisons. Earlier studies demonstrated that the impact of electronic word of mouth varies according to message characteristics, perceived utility, and source-related factors (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Erkan & Evans, 2016). Likewise, research in online review settings has found that review characteristics, including inconsistent review content, can influence perceived helpfulness and consumer evaluation (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Mudambi & Schuff, 2010; Luca, 2016; Steur *et al.*, 2022). These, combined with our findings highlight that online communication by consumers should be viewed (albeit in a more abstract way) as part of the information set available for restaurants.

Consumer perception remains decisive because communication affects behavior primarily through the way consumers interpret service quality and value. Research in restaurant settings has shown that favorable dining experiences are associated with positive electronic word-of-mouth motivations, suggesting a feedback process in which perceived service performance shapes online communication and, in turn, contributes to subsequent consumer decisions (Jeong & Jang, 2011). In this respect, social media marketing is expected to be most relevant when it strengthens credible, decision-relevant perceptions of service performance and value, rather than relying solely on popularity or visibility cues.

Despite the growing literature on social media marketing and electronic word of mouth, limited attention has been given to working-age consumers' service decision in the context of Japanese yakiniku buffet restaurants in Thailand. Existing evidence from Thailand has shown that marketing-related consumer perceptions are associated with purchasing decisions in other categories, yet comparable evidence in experiential restaurant services remains limited (Supapon & Sukhawattanakun, 2023), particularly regarding which dimensions of perceived social media marketing are most strongly associated with decision outcomes in an experiential buffet setting. This study addresses this gap by examining the associations of perceived social media marketing and consumer perception with service decision and by determining whether service decision differs across personal-characteristic and prior dining-behavior groups. The study contributes by positioning social media marketing as a structured set of decision cues, integrating information adoption logic with online word-of-mouth mechanisms to explain service decision, and providing context-specific evidence from Thailand's buffet restaurant market.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1 Social Media Marketing as Decision Cues

Social media marketing comprises organizational communication activities on social platforms (Kim & Ko, 2012; Balakrishnan *et al.*, 2014; Yadav & Rahman, 2017; Beig & Khan, 2018), and is used to create awareness among consumers within an environment in which users participate actively. Social media is particularly distinct from



traditional one-way promotional communication, as the potential for continuous interaction and visible exchange between firms and consumers guided by two-way information would influence not only communication reach but also how a consumer interprets brand meaning (aesthetic/experience) and expected service performance. One common conceptualization sees social media marketing as a multi-dimensional construct comprising entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization and word of mouth (Kim & Ko 2012). These dimensions can be read as decision cues in service contexts and help consumers make salient the dimensions of latent attractiveness, responsiveness, timeliness (currently relevant), and information from prior customers' experiences." However, some dimensions may be more strongly associated with service decision than others and their heterogeneity must be analyzed separately but also collectively.

From a decision-making perspective, entertainment cues enhance attention and affective engagement, thereby increasing receptivity to service-related information and value claims. Interaction cues signal responsiveness and accessibility, which consumers may interpret as indicators of operational reliability and service readiness. Trend-related appeal provides visibility and perceived popularity, which can serve as social proof in socially visible consumption settings. Word-of-mouth-related cues, including user sharing and the circulation of consumer opinions, contribute to peer-based credibility and strengthen confidence in service evaluation. Empirical research in digital environments has further supported the use of consumers' perceptions of social media marketing activities as measurable dimensions associated with behavioral outcomes (Kim & Ko, 2012; Yadav & Rahman, 2017; Beig & Khan, 2018). Accordingly, social media marketing can be framed as a structured cue environment through which consumers reduce uncertainty and form service decisions in experiential restaurant markets.

The relational capability perspective has been challenged with new findings from Thai firms that as a service, digital marketing may fulfill the role of continuous and relevant customer engagement in time and place (Sukhawattanakun, 2026). Even though this evidence was gathered using an organisational–organisational context rather than the restaurant–customer one, it does point to the broader premise that digitally mediated communication create experiences in which customers are able to interact more closely with service providers.

2.2 Electronic Word of Mouth and Information Adoption

Electronic word of mouth (EWOM) is any positive or negative statement made by consumers online about a product, service, brand or company to the Internet audience. Because such content is public, searchable, and often assumed to be less controlled by firms than promotional communication, it has emerged as an important source of information (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). This is especially important in service contexts, because services are experience-based and difficult to evaluate before consumption. A conceptual electronic word-of-mouth framework illustrates that consumer responses are conditional on message elements, source credibility, audience-related factors, and information utility. Consequently, its influence is based on the diagnostic importance of information rather than mere exposure (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Liu *et al.*, 2024). Findings from social media settings indicate that information quality and credibility as well as perceived usefulness are relevant for the electronic word of mouth behavioral intention relationship (Erkan & Evans, 2016).

This also coincides with the Information Adoption Theory, stating while individuals consider information credible and helpful (Sussman & Siegal, 2003), they use it to make decisions. Dining customers tend to check out reviews, ratings, pictures and feedback on their predicted service value (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Kang & Namkung, 2019; Li *et al.*, 2019; Park *et al.*, 2021). The resulting restaurant experiences might then create eWOM accessible to future customers — those who are the potential clientele for all-you-can-eat Japanese restaurants (Jeong & Jang, 2011; Sutanto *et al.*, 2022). In the current study, however, credibility and information adoption were not directly measured but are only used to explain the observed association.

2.3 Trust, Consumer Perception, and Service Decision

The decisions that consumers make about services rely not only on the information presented to them but also on how they find context for that information in terms of trust and perceived value. The issue of trust becomes especially pertinent to restaurant services, as food quality and atmosphere may not meet customer expectations, service performance and service experience may leave a lot to be desired, and customers might not feel they need what they get for the price paid. Research in social commerce and restaurant context suggests that platform features,



online reviews, and user-generated content can facilitate trust and purchase intention by providing consumers with insights from the experiences of other customers (Hajli, 2015; Kang & Namkung, 2019; Park *et al.*, 2021). This is also the reasoning behind restaurant choice, as consumers may check social platforms to assess who has realistic service information before even going to a restaurant.

Consumer perception functions as an evaluative filter through which communication cues are translated into judgments about expected performance and value. Prior restaurant research has shown that quality-related attributes and evaluations of the dining experience are closely associated with restaurant image, perceived value, customer satisfaction, behavioral intentions, and electronic word of mouth in restaurant settings (Ryu *et al.*, 2008; Ryu *et al.*, 2012; Uslu, 2020). These findings support the expectation that consumer perception is positively associated with service decision outcomes by consolidating multiple experiential evaluations into an overall judgment. When social media cues and electronic word of mouth reinforce favorable perceptions of service quality, atmosphere, and price–value fairness, consumers are more likely to develop stronger decision confidence and proceed to service use.

2.4 Hypotheses

Personal traits and past experiences in dining may filter consumer perceptions of foodservice environments by driving familiarity, tastes, purchasing ability and assessment routines. Therefore, variations in the outcome of decision making regarding service are likely due to demographic variables (age, income), occupation type and frequency and experience with restaurants. While consumers active online have typically similar platform-obtained information, their interpretation and utilization of such exchange will likely differ based on personal and behavioral characteristics (Ajzen, 1991; Sussman & Siegal, 2003). Thus, the factors that guide to service decision differs for different personal characteristic and dining behavior groups and this study attempts to test this. The proposed relationships among the study variables are presented in Figure 1

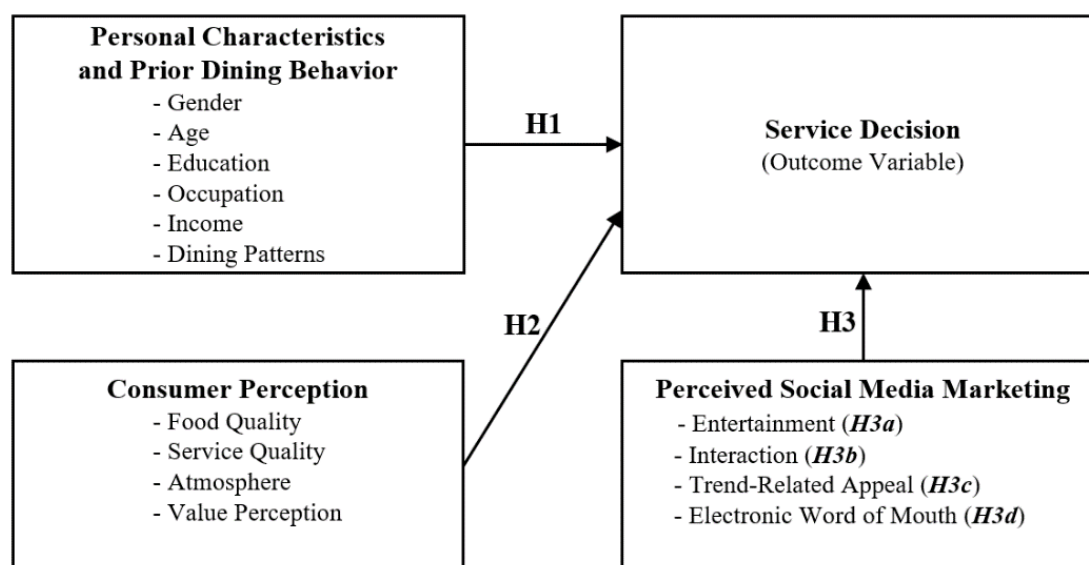


Figure 1. Conceptual Model and Hypotheses.

Source: Developed by the authors.

- H1.** Personal characteristics and prior dining behavior significantly differentiate service decision outcomes in the present sample (Ajzen, 1991; Sussman & Siegal, 2003).
- H2.** Consumer perception is positively associated with service decision among working-age consumers of Japanese yakiniku buffet restaurants (Ryu *et al.*, 2008; Jeong & Jang, 2011; Ryu *et al.*, 2012).
- H3.** Perceived social media marketing is significantly associated with service decision (Kim & Ko, 2012; Yadav & Rahman, 2017).
- H3a.** Entertainment is significantly associated with service decision (Kim & Ko, 2012; Hanaysha, 2022).

5. **H3b.** Interaction is significantly associated with service decision (Kim & Ko, 2012; Hajli, 2015; Beig & Khan, 2018).
6. **H3c.** Trend-related appeal is significantly associated with service decision (Kim & Ko, 2012; Seo & Park, 2018; Yüksel & Akar, 2021).
7. **H3d.** Electronic word of mouth is positively associated with service decision (Sussman & Siegal, 2003; Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Erkan & Evans, 2016; Park *et al.*, 2021; Liu *et al.*, 2024).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional survey design to examine the associations of consumer perception and perceived social media marketing with service decision and to determine whether service decision differed across personal-characteristic and dining-behavior groups. This design was appropriate for hypothesis testing because the study was grounded in a deductive logic in which the hypotheses were derived from prior literature on social media marketing, electronic word of mouth, information adoption, trust, and consumer evaluation in service contexts (Sussman & Siegal, 2003; Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Kim & Ko, 2012; Hajli, 2015; Erkan & Evans, 2016). Data were collected at a single point in time to capture respondents' contemporaneous perceptions, behavioral patterns, and decision tendencies within a platform-mediated restaurant information environment.

3.2 Population and Sample

The study population included Thai consumers in the working-age group of 25–59 years who had previously been to a Japanese yakiniku buffet restaurant. In particular, 385 respondents were recruited through a Facebook community dedicated to buffet restaurants using convenience sampling. For a large or unknown population, a sample size was calculated based on a confidence level of 95%, margin of error of $\pm 5\%$ and assumed population proportion of 0.50. The result of this calculation was at least 384 participants (Cochran, 1963; Israel, 1992). The required sample size was calculated to be 325, and the final sample of 385 respondents therefore satisfied this requirement and provided adequate power for group comparisons and regression analyses.

Convenience sampling offers less generalizability than probability sampling. However, it is beneficial when researchers need to recruit participants meeting the study criteria, albeit with transparent reporting of the ensuing limitations (Andrade, 2021). By recruiting from the Facebook community, researchers were able to recruit consumers with relevant restaurant experience and who interacted frequently with online information pertaining to restaurants. Before delving deeper into the details, it should also be noted that these findings should be interpreted as evidence of digitally active consumers within this online community (and not estimates for all working-age consumers in Thailand).

3.3 Data Collection Procedure

This survey, designed with Google Forms, was conducted between 1 January and 15 February 2026. This method was appropriate as consumers who frequently use social media with the aim of encouraging participation from internet and social media users. Participants were also informed about the study prior to completing the questionnaires and answered screening questions. Eligibility criteria of respondents: 25–59 years old and previous experience in Japanese yakiniku buffet restaurants. Respondents participated on a voluntary basis, completing the questionnaire independently. Another advantage of using an online survey was that it enabled them to recruit individuals across different geographic locations, allowing the researchers to administer identical questions and measurement scales to each participant.

The dataset was screened for missing values and duplicate records before analysis. No incomplete or duplicate responses were identified. The data were also examined for invariant response patterns. Because the original data-collection design did not include attention checks or completion-time measures, response quality could not be assessed using these additional indicators. All eligible responses were therefore retained, and this limitation was considered when interpreting the findings.



3.4 Research Instrument

The questionnaire was divided into six parts: demographic characteristics; consumer perception; dining behavior; perceived social media marketing, service decision and a suggestion question with an open – ended answer. Screening questions to determine eligibility appeared prior to the six core sections. Consumer perception measured by 27 items in nine dimensions and perceived social media marketing measured with 16 items in four dimensions. The service decision was measured by using five items regarding service desire, information search, alternative evaluation, choice certainty and post-use review or recommendation.

Table 1. Construct Operationalization, Source Basis, and Sample Items

Construct / dimension	Number of items	Source basis	Sample item (translated from Thai)
Consumer perception: perceived food quality	3	Ryu et al. (2008, 2012); Uslu (2020)	"The food served at Japanese yakiniku buffet restaurants is fresh."
Consumer perception: atmosphere	3	Ryu et al. (2012); Uslu (2020)	"The lighting and interior color scheme create a comfortable atmosphere."
Consumer perception: health value	3	Ryu et al. (2008, 2012); Uslu (2020)	"I pay attention to the nutritional value of the food I consume."
Consumer perception: price value	3	Ryu et al. (2008, 2012)	"The quality and freshness of the ingredients are worth the price paid."
Consumer perception: physical environment	3	Ryu et al. (2012); Uslu (2020)	"The dining area of the restaurant is clean."
Consumer perception: attitude toward taste	3	Ryu et al. (2008, 2012); Uslu (2020)	"The taste of the food meets my expectations."
Consumer perception: service quality	3	Parasuraman et al. (1988); Ryu et al. (2008, 2012)	"Restaurant employees are willing to provide service."
Consumer perception: trust	3	Hajli (2015); Park et al. (2021)	"I believe that Japanese yakiniku buffet restaurants maintain appropriate service standards."
Consumer perception: satisfaction	3	Ryu et al. (2008, 2012); Uslu (2020)	"I am satisfied with the quality of service provided by Japanese yakiniku buffet restaurants."
Social media marketing: entertainment	4	Kim and Ko (2012); Yadav & Rahman (2017)	"I enjoy searching for information about Japanese yakiniku buffet restaurants on social media."
Social media marketing: interaction	4	Kim and Ko (2012); Hajli (2015); Yadav & Rahman (2017); Beig & Khan (2018)	"I am satisfied when a Japanese yakiniku buffet restaurant responds quickly on social media."
Social media marketing: trend-related appeal	4	Kim and Ko (2012); Seo & Park (2018); Yadav & Rahman (2017)	"I am interested in current and trending content about Japanese yakiniku buffet restaurants on social media."
Social media marketing: electronic word of mouth	4	Cheung & Thadani (2012); Erkan and Evans (2016)	"I trust recommendations from people close to me about Japanese yakiniku buffet restaurants on social media."
Service decision	5	Ajzen (1991); Hanaysha (2022)	"I evaluate alternatives before deciding to use a Japanese yakiniku buffet restaurant."

Note: Consumer perception comprised 27 items across nine dimensions. Perceived social media marketing comprised 16 items across four dimensions, and service decision comprised five items. All sample items were translated from the Thai questionnaire used in the study.



All questionnaire items were prepared in Thai and adjusted for the Japanese style of yakiniku buffet restaurant. They were based on previous work on restaurant quality, value and satisfaction (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988), trust in the social media marketing (Kim & Ko, 2012), electronic word of mouth (Ryu *et al.*, 2012) and consumer decision making (Yadav & Rahman, 2017). A detailed description of the source basis, number of items and a sample item for each dimension measured is provided in Table 1. The full Thai-language questionnaire was supplied as additional material to facilitate replication.

3.5 Measurement Scale

For Sections 2, 4 and 5 items were answered on a five-point Likert scale (Likert, 1932), with answer options ranging from 1 (lowest level of agreement or perception) to 5 (highest level). The scale includes the consumer perception, perceived social media marketing and service decision. Mean scores that are higher on all items indicated more favorable consumer perceptions and a higher level of service decision. Mean scores were defined into five interims respectively: 1.00 to 1.80 low level, 1.81 to 2.60 low level, 2.61 to 3.40 moderate level, and finally high level from the scale of mean scores including every (group) participants: 6a). Sections 1 and 3 contained questions about demographic factors and dining behavior (multiple choice type).

3.6 Validity and Reliability

According to the relevant theories and prior empirical studies on social media marketing, electronic word of mouth, and restaurant consumer behavior are used as references in developing the questionnaire items. Subsequently, three academic specialists assessed whether each item aligned with the study aims (Rovinelli & Hambleton, 1977). through the Item–Objective Congruence process. IOC values ranged between 0.60 and 1.00; hence, all items demonstrated acceptable content validity.

For consumer perception Cronbach's alpha was 0.977, for social media marketing it was 0.956 and for service decision it was 0.950 respectively as shown in Table 2. These values indicate coefficient alpha with excellent internal consistency, but coefficients of this magnitude could also reflect item redundancy or primarily patterned responding (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). The HTMT values ranged from 0.906 to 0.933. All three HTMT values exceeded both the conservative threshold of 0.85 and the more permissive threshold of 0.90 (Table 3). Discriminant validity among the three broad constructs was therefore not established. Harman's single-factor test showed that the first unrotated factor accounted for 67.64% of the total variance, exceeding the commonly applied 50% threshold. This result indicates a potential common method variance concern. Accordingly, potential common method variance cannot be ruled out, and the observed associations should be interpreted cautiously.

Table 2. Reliability and Common Method Variance Diagnostic Results

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's alpha	Diagnostic result
Consumer Perception	27	0.977	Excellent internal consistency
Social Media Marketing	16	0.956	Excellent internal consistency
Service Decision	5	0.950	Excellent internal consistency
Harman's first factor	48	—	67.64%; potential common method variance concern

Table 3. HTMT Discriminant Validity Assessment

Construct	Consumer Perception	Social Media Marketing	Service decision
Consumer Perception	—	0.913	0.906
Social Media Marketing		—	0.933
Service Decision			—



3.7 Data Analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data. Frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation described the respondents' demographic characteristics, dining behavior, consumer perception, perceived social media marketing, and service decision. Independent-samples t-tests and one-way analysis of variance examined differences in service decision across demographic and dining-behavior groups. Simple linear regression tested the association between consumer perception and service decision, while multiple regression assessed the independent associations of entertainment, interaction, trend-related appeal, and electronic word of mouth with service decision. Discriminant validity was examined using the heterotrait–monotrait ratio, and Harman's single-factor test was applied as a diagnostic assessment of potential common method variance. Statistical significance was evaluated at the 0.05 level.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

The study protocol was reviewed by the Kasetsart University Research Ethics Committee and granted an exemption under Certificate of Exemption No. COE68/043, issued on 26 December 2025. Before completing the questionnaire, all participants received information concerning the study's purpose, procedures, voluntary nature, and confidentiality provisions. Participation was entirely voluntary. The questionnaire collected only the demographic information necessary for the analysis and did not request any personally identifiable information. Data were analyzed and reported only in aggregate form, ensuring that responses could not be linked to or used to identify individual participants.

4. Results

4.1 Respondent Profile

The analysis was carried out with 385 responses that were completely answered. Women comprised 51.17% of the sample, and respondents aged between 25–30 years made up the largest age group (29.35%). The sample comprised mainly being bachelor degree (70.39%); also, private-sector employees were the largest occupational category with 44.68%. 54.29% of those reported earning a monthly income that ranged from THB 15,001–30,000 as the most common range. It followed that the sample consisted mostly early and mid-career consumers recruited from an online community focused on buffet restaurants.

4.2 Consumer Perception of Japanese Yakiniku Buffet Restaurants

Overall consumer perception scored the highest rating ($M = 4.722$, $SD = 0.369$). Of the nine dimensions service quality perception exhibited the highest mean ($M = 4.749$) and food quality perception depicted the lowest mean ($M = 4.652$). While all dimensions were rated positively, the distribution of scores and clustering at the high end of the scale needs to be taken into account when interpreting subsequent inferential results. Results are displayed in detail in Table 4.

Table 4. Consumer Perception of Japanese Yakiniku Buffet Restaurants

Dimension	Mean	S.D.
Food quality perception	4.652	0.436
Atmosphere	4.728	0.394
Health value	4.727	0.406
Price value	4.739	0.394
Physical environment	4.739	0.414
Taste attitude	4.729	0.405
Service quality perception	4.749	0.404
Trust	4.710	0.432
Satisfaction	4.724	0.389
Overall	4.722	0.369



4.3 Dining Behavior of Japanese Yakiniku Buffet Consumption

The findings on dining behavior suggest that respondents had prior experience with more than one Japanese yakiniku buffet restaurant brand, indicating exposure to multiple alternatives. Menu variety was reported as a major reason for choosing the buffet format. Dining decisions were more commonly described as situational than pre-planned. Most respondents reported dining at Japanese yakiniku buffet restaurants approximately two to three times per month, with a higher concentration on weekends and during the period 13:01–16:00. Respondents frequently made dining decisions independently and commonly dined with a partner or close associates. Social media was identified as the primary source of restaurant information, accounting for 65.71% of responses. The most accepted spending range per visit was THB 400–499.

4.4 Perceived Social Media Marketing

The overall score for social media marketing perceived was highest ($M = 4.677$, $SD = 0.404$). The highest means ($M = 4.691$, $SD = 0.424$) were recorded in trend-related appeal, followed by electronic word of mouth ($M = 4.675$, $SD = 0.432$), interaction ($M = 4.673$, $SD = 0.430$), and entertainment ($M = 4.669$, $SD = 0.413$). Overall, the means among all four dimensions were positively rated by the respondents, but they only differed marginally. The results are shown in detail in Table 5.

Table 5. Perceived Social Media Marketing

(n = 385)		
Dimension	Mean	S.D.
Entertainment	4.669	0.413
Interaction	4.673	0.430
Trend-related appeal	4.691	0.424
Electronic word of mouth	4.675	0.432
Overall	4.677	0.404

4.5 Service Decision

High score for overall service decision ($M = 4.724$, $SD = 0.407$). Intention to review or recommend had the highest mean score ($M = 4.753$, $SD = 0.432$). Evaluation of alternatives and certainty in selecting the service (mean = 4.745, $SD = 0.436$) were equally rated high, followed by information search prior to deciding (the mean of evaluation = 4.699; $SD = 0.459$). Desire to use the service had a mean ($M = 4.675$, $SD = 0.469$) lower than that of other beliefs but also at the highest interpretive level. Further results can be found in Table 6.

Table 6. Service Decision

(n = 385)		
Dimension	Mean	S.D.
Desire to use the service	4.675	0.469
Information search before deciding	4.699	0.459
Evaluation of alternatives	4.745	0.436
Certainty in choosing the service	4.745	0.436
Intention to review or recommend	4.753	0.432
Overall	4.724	0.407



4.6 Hypothesis Tests

For H1, age produced a significant overall difference in service decision, $F(6, 378) = 2.209$, $p = 0.042$. The homogeneity-of-variance assumption was satisfied, as indicated by the non-significant Levene's test ($p = 0.411$). Tukey's post hoc comparison identified a significant difference between respondents aged 36–40 years and those aged 56–59 years (mean difference = 0.514, $p = 0.028$). The remaining demographic and dining-behavior variables did not produce significant differences in service decision. H1 was partially supported because only age produced a statistically significant overall difference, whereas the remaining personal and dining-behavior characteristics did not.

For H2, consumer perception was analyzed as a continuous predictor rather than converted into categorical groups. The simple linear regression model was statistically significant, $F(1, 383) = 1,252.512$, $p < 0.001$, and explained 76.6% of the variance in service decision ($R^2 = 0.766$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.765$). Consumer perception had a significant positive association with service decision ($B = 0.964$, $SE = 0.027$, $\beta = 0.875$, $t = 35.391$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.911, 1.018]). H2 was therefore supported by the sample surveyed (Table 7).

Table 7. Regression of Consumer Perception on Service Decision

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p	95% CI
Consumer perception	0.964	0.027	0.875	35.391	<0.001	[0.911, 1.018]

Note: $R^2 = 0.766$; adjusted $R^2 = 0.765$; $F(1, 383) = 1,252.512$, $p < 0.001$.

For H3 and its sub-hypotheses, the four perceived social media marketing dimensions were entered simultaneously into a multiple regression model. The overall model was statistically significant, $F(4, 380) = 449.900$, $p < 0.001$, explaining 82.6% of the variance in service decision ($R^2 = 0.826$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.824$). Electronic word of mouth retained the largest independent positive association with service decision ($B = 0.407$, $\beta = 0.432$, $p < 0.001$), followed by trend-related appeal ($B = 0.341$, $\beta = 0.355$, $p < 0.001$) and entertainment ($B = 0.200$, $\beta = 0.203$, $p < 0.001$). The interaction did not retain a significant independent association after controlling for the other dimensions ($B = -0.041$, $\beta = -0.043$, $p = 0.496$), as shown in Table 8. Accordingly, H3a, H3c, and H3d were supported, whereas H3b was not supported. The overall H3 model was statistically significant.

Table 8. Multiple Regression of Social Media Marketing Dimensions on Service Decision

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p	95% CI	VIF
Entertainment	0.200	0.049	0.203	4.071	<0.001	[0.103, 0.297]	5.43
Interaction	-0.041	0.060	-0.043	-0.681	0.496	[-0.159, 0.077]	8.83
Trend-related appeal	0.341	0.059	0.355	5.757	<0.001	[0.225, 0.458]	8.30
Electronic word of mouth	0.407	0.052	0.432	7.880	<0.001	[0.305, 0.508]	6.55

Note: $R^2 = 0.826$; adjusted $R^2 = 0.824$; $F(4, 380) = 449.900$, $p < 0.001$.

Table 9. Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Key evidence	Decision
H1.	Age was significant, $F(6, 378) = 2.209$, $p = 0.042$; all other demographic and dining-behavior comparisons were non-significant.	Partially supported
H2.	$\beta = 0.875$, $p < 0.001$	Supported
H3.	$F(4, 380) = 449.900$, $p < 0.001$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.824$	Supported
H3a Entertainment	$\beta = 0.203$, $p < 0.001$	Supported
H3b Interaction	$\beta = -0.043$, $p = 0.496$	Not supported
H3c Trend-related appeal	$\beta = 0.355$, $p < 0.001$	Supported
H3d Electronic word of mouth	$\beta = 0.432$, $p < 0.001$	Supported



Variance inflation factors ranged from 5.43 to 8.83, indicating substantial shared variance among the four dimensions. Consequently, the relative coefficients should be interpreted cautiously and should not be treated as evidence of distinct causal effects (Table 9).

5. Discussion of Results

The regression results indicate that perceived social media marketing was strongly associated with service decision, suggesting that consumers may use social media as a decision environment in which communication cues and peer-generated information support service evaluation and uncertainty reduction. The result corresponds with social media marketing research in which entertainment, interaction, and word-of-mouth activities have been associated with consumer responses and value-related evaluations (Kim & Ko, 2012; Yadav & Rahman, 2017). The same pattern is also aligned with information adoption logic, which proposes that consumers incorporate information into decision-making when such information is evaluated as credible and useful (Sussman & Siegal, 2003). A persuasion-processing perspective further suggests that consumers in information-rich environments may rely on both message quality and credibility cues when evaluating alternatives, reinforcing the role of social media as a decision-support context rather than a one-way promotional channel (Bhattacharjee & Sanford, 2006).

When the four dimensions of social media marketing were analyzed simultaneously, electronic word of mouth retained the strongest independent association with service decision, followed by trend-related appeal and entertainment. Interaction was not significantly associated with service decision after controlling for the other dimensions. However, its nonsignificant coefficient may indicate that substantial variance was shared with the other social media marketing dimensions, as reflected in the high VIF values. The strong association between electronic word of mouth and service decision is consistent with restaurant studies showing that consumers use reviews and experience-based information when evaluating alternatives (Kang & Namkung, 2019; Park *et al.*, 2021). Nevertheless, this relationship should be interpreted cautiously because credibility and perceived usefulness were not

The significant overall relationship between perceived social media marketing and service decision is also consistent with evidence that digital marketing capabilities can strengthen customer engagement through relevant and continuous interactions (Sukhawattanakun, 2026). In the present context, social media content may help digitally active consumers obtain restaurant information, compare alternatives, and maintain engagement with restaurant brands. Nevertheless, the present findings represent associations within the surveyed sample and should not be interpreted as evidence of causal effects.

Entertainment and trend-related appeal also retained significant positive associations with service decision. Evidence from the fast-food context similarly indicates that social media marketing features can influence purchase decisions through brand trust and related consumer evaluations (Hanaysha, 2022). Trend-related content may also signal social relevance and popularity in digitally mediated service settings (Kim & Ko, 2012; Seo & Park, 2018; Yüksel & Akar, 2021). For restaurant operators, entertaining and trend-related content may attract consumer attention, but it is more likely to support decision-making when it presents credible information that reflects the actual dining experience. These results indicate that social media content contributes to the information consumers consider when evaluating restaurant alternatives (Bhattacharjee & Sanford, 2006; Beig & Khan, 2018).

Consumer perception was positively associated with service decision, and service quality had the highest mean among the perception dimensions. This finding suggests that consumers' decisions were related to their evaluations of expected service performance rather than to communication exposure alone. Previous restaurant research has similarly connected food quality, service quality, and the physical environment with perceived value, satisfaction, behavioral intentions, and electronic word of mouth (Ryu *et al.*, 2008; Ryu *et al.*, 2012; Uslu, 2020). Favorable restaurant experiences may also encourage positive electronic word of mouth, linking service delivery with subsequent online communication (Jeong & Jang, 2011). Social media communication should therefore accurately represent actual service quality rather than attempt to compensate for inconsistent service delivery (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988; Ryu *et al.*, 2012).

Few of the personal characteristics and previous dining habits differentiated service decision outcomes. There was an overall significant difference with respect to age, the only demographic characteristic associated with it (aged



36–40 vs aged 56–59 years). The limited demographic differences may indicate that consumers recruited from the online community used broadly similar information-evaluation processes. Therefore, the usefulness and credibility of information may be more influential in their decisions than individual demographic characteristics (Sussman & Siegal, 2003). However, this interpretation remains tentative because information adoption and credibility were not directly measured in this study.

6. Implications and Recommendations

6.1 Theoretical and Managerial Implications

The principal theoretical contribution lies in positioning social media marketing in restaurant services as a decision-support environment rather than merely a promotional channel. The results show that service decision was more strongly associated with consumer perception and selected social media marketing dimensions than with most demographic or prior dining behavior traits. Among the predictors, electronic word of mouth, trend-related appeal, and entertainment maintained significant independent associations with service decision, whereas interaction did not. The observed pattern suggests that peer-generated, socially relevant content may be more directly associated with restaurant evaluation than visible responsiveness alone. The findings are consistent with theoretical perspectives emphasizing the roles of information evaluation and social media communication in consumer decision-making, although the present model did not directly examine credibility, information adoption, or uncertainty reduction (Sussman & Siegal, 2003; Bhattacharjee & Sanford, 2006; Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Hajli, 2015; Erkan & Evans, 2016).

These findings lead to various managerial implications. While restaurant operators should engage with their most The findings offer several managerial implications. Restaurant operators should provide prompt and accurate responses on social media, although interaction should be viewed as an essential service practice rather than the strongest independent predictor of service decision. Consumers may evaluate restaurant alternatives before visiting by consulting information about menus, prices, promotions, and service conditions (Kim & Ko, 2012; Hajli, 2015). Restaurant operators should respond to electronic word of mouth promptly, accurately, and transparently. Customers may be encouraged to provide voluntary and authentic reviews, while restaurant-generated communication should accurately reflect menus, prices, promotions, and actual service conditions (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Erkan & Evans, 2016; Kang & Namkung, 2019; Park *et al.*, 2021; Sutanto *et al.*, 2022).

Although entertainment and trend-related appeal remain useful in attracting attention and reinforcing social relevance, their contribution is likely to be strongest when supported by credible service information (Kim & Ko, 2012; Seo & Park, 2018; Hanaysha, 2022; Yüksel & Akar, 2021). Because consumer perception was strongly associated with service decision, social media strategy should be aligned with operational quality in food, service, atmosphere, value delivery, and customer communication (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988; Jeong & Jang, 2011; Ryu *et al.*, 2012; Uslu, 2020). These implications also extend emerging evidence from Thailand indicating that consumer decision outcomes are closely linked to evaluative marketing perceptions across different consumption contexts (Supapon & Sukhawattanakun, 2023).

Restaurant operators should complement social media communication with customer-centered and responsive marketing practices. Although derived from Thai industrial businesses, prior evidence indicates that customer centricity supports agile marketing competency and organizational responsiveness (Sukhawattanakun & Supapon, 2024). Yakiniku buffet operators may therefore analyze customer reviews, inquiries, and social media feedback to refine their communication and respond to changing consumer expectations.

6.2 Limitations and Future Research Recommendations

The findings also need to be interpreted with several limitations in mind. First, the convenience sampling used from a Facebook buffet community would have selected for a digitally active consumer group likely over-sampling their representation and thus reduced generalizability to non-digital consumers. Future work could bolster external validity with sampling strategies and multi-channel participant recruitment. Second, the use of cross-sectional and self-report data limited the ability to isolate relationships at a single time point, preventing causal



inference and temporal ordering. Longitudinal designs and objective behavioral measures of platform activity (such as reservations or repeat visits) in future research would provide more robust evidence.

Moreover, the measure was of service-decision and included both pre-use (i.e., intentions) and post-use evaluation or recommendation tendencies. We argue that this broad operationalization may partly account for its lack of empirical distinction with consumer perception and eWOM. Suggestions for future studies include the separation of pre-use service decisions from post-use behavioral responses, in addition to validating these constructs independently.

An additional limitation concerns the measurement results. The HTMT values indicated inadequate discriminant validity among the primary constructs, and Harman's single-factor test indicated that common method variance may pose a problem. The heavy clustering of responses at the high end of the scale and similar invariant response patterns may also have resulted in inflated observed correlations. In addition, other plausible mediators (i.e., credibility, usefulness of information, trust and risk reduction) were discussed but not directly tested. Further research should measure these variables directly and use mediation analysis or structural equation modeling to explore whether they mediate the associations (Sussman & Siegal, 2003; Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Erkan & Evans, 2016). Research on Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, and other service contexts would further help assess whether the importance of different dimensions of social media marketing varies across platforms and service categories.

7. Conclusion

Significant associations were identified between perceived social media marketing and service decision among digitally active, working-age consumers of Japanese yakiniku buffet restaurants. When the four social media marketing dimensions were analyzed simultaneously, electronic word of mouth had the strongest independent association with service decision, followed by trend-related appeal and entertainment. Interaction was not significantly associated with service decision after controlling for the other dimensions. The results suggest that customer reviews, current restaurant information, and entertaining content may be more closely associated with service decision than interaction alone within the surveyed sample.

Consumer perception was also positively associated with service decision, whereas few demographic and dining-behavior characteristics produced significant differences. However, the high HTMT values, potential common method variance, restricted response range, and substantial overlap among the predictor variables require cautious interpretation. The cross-sectional design also precludes causal conclusions. Therefore, the findings should be generalized only to digitally active consumers recruited from the buffet-focused Facebook community and not to all working-age consumers in Thailand. Restaurant operators may use these findings to enhance the relevance and credibility of online information while ensuring that digital communication aligns with actual service delivery.

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Author Contributions

Veeraphol Junum: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Visualization, Writing – Original Draft, and Writing – Review & Editing. Kanyarat Sukhawattanakun: Conceptualization, Methodology, Validation, Supervision, Project Administration, Funding Acquisition, and Writing – Review & Editing. Supannika Supapon: Methodology, Validation, Supervision, and Writing – Review & Editing. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Declaration of AI Use

The authors used ChatGPT (OpenAI) and Grammarly to assist with English-language editing, structural revision, clarity, concision, and consistency of expression. ChatGPT was also used to support statistical checking and the examination of consistency among the reported results, tables, and interpretations. All statistical analyses were conducted using the original dataset and verified by the authors. The authors critically reviewed and substantially revised all AI-assisted outputs and take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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