Social Media Marketing and its effectiveness among Irish SMEs in the hospitality Industry

Name: Nathan Merrigan

Course: MSCIB

Student Number: 16470892

Supervisor: Robert MacDonald

Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

National College of Ireland

Research Students Declaration Form

(Thesis/Author Declaration Form)

Name: Nathan Merrigan

Student Number: 16470892

Degree for which thesis is submitted: MSCIB

Title of Thesis: Social Media Marketing and Its effectiveness among Irish SMEs in the Hospitality Industry

Date: 13/08/2021

Material submitted for award

A.   I declare that this work submitted has been composed by myself.   Yes

B.   I declare that all verbatim extracts contained in the thesis have been distinguished by quotation marks and the sources of information specifically acknowledged.
                                Yes

C.   I agree to my thesis being deposited in the NCI Library online

open access repository NORMA.   Yes

D.   Either *I declare that no material contained in the thesis has been

used in any other submission for an academic award. Yes

Or *I declare that the following material contained in the thesis

formed part of a submission for the award of

_____

(State the award and the awarding body and list the material below)

Contents

Abstract:

The purpose of this research paper is to understand how effective social media marketing is among Irish SMEs in the hospitality industry. There has been a deficit in recent literature when it comes to social media and its application towards the marketing efforts of these pubs, restaurants, and cafes from the Irish hospitality industry. This paper aims at providing an up to date and modernized study to fix this deficit. This study incorporates a thematic analysis methodology through the in-depth analysis of seven Irish SME's. Of the seven Irish SMEs used two of them were cafes, one was a restaurant and the remaining four were pubs. All of these participants were located in the west Dublin region. Both cafes were relatively new only opening in the past two years while the Pubs and the Restaurant were long standing establishments. This allowed for a mixture of data to be collected both from all establishments where social media was used in a variety of different ways for their marketing purposes. This paper will be beneficial to the hospitality industry as it will highlight just how effective social media can be when it comes to the industry's marketing efforts. Not only will it show what platform is preferred by the industry, but it will highlight the various uses of social media marketing for the industry.

Design/Methodology

This research paper incorporated a qualitative approach through the use of in-depth interviews with a total of seven participants in the Irish hospitality industry. These participants were chosen through direct sampling as it was a flexible method to attract the most appropriate participants required for this study. Each participant interviewed was asked twelve distinct questions relevant to the use of social media in their business to help form themes which were identified using a thematic analysis.

Findings:

This paper helped identify the full effectiveness of social media marketing among Irish SMEs in the hospitality industry. Four themes were identified from the data collected through the course of the interviews which also helped prove five separate hypothesis that were created during the development of the main research question of this paper. The findings in this study have assisted in demonstrating where the hospitality industry is now in terms of marketing efforts as well as where it is headed in the future.

Introduction:

This research paper will be used to understand how effective social media marketing is amongst Irish SME's in the hospitality industry. This research is needed as there is a deficit in recent literature with regards to how effective social media marketing is in the hospitality industry in Ireland. These Irish SME's will be seen in the form of Pubs, Restaurants and Cafes. In 2020, Sprout Social conducted a research report on the state of social media after a year of transformation. Sprout Social commissioned The Harris Poll to survey 1000 US consumers and 250 business executives to understand how people and business's use social media and how they planned to use it in the future. The results of the report highlighted how consumer usage of social media had risen by 54% with 34% saying their usage of social media will increase over the next three years. Generation Z and Millennials were the consumers who had the highest surge of social media usage out of the consumers surveyed. The report also uncovered how social media has changed consumer buying habits. It reported 43% of Generation Z and 49% of Millennials purchased products directly from social media platforms (Sprout Social, 2020). This was a valuable source of information as it put into perspective how important social media was during the Covid-19 pandemic.

In terms of business, the report highlighted just how important social media can be in terms of a business's intelligence. It highlighted that 51% of the business's executives surveyed said social media will become the number one important resource for data and consumer insights which will aid in business decisions. Overall, what was clear in this report was that business's need social media in their operations. It was found that 78% of consumers who have a positive experience with a business's social media platform will be much more willing to purchase products and services from that business and that 72% of these consumers will increase their overall spend. The main find from this report is that 77% of consumers will choose a brand with a positive social media experience over a competitor (Sprout Social, 2020). Having a positive social media experience according to this report, will encourage a consumer to choose a business over its competitor. This helps form part of the reasoning for this paper as it shows how effective social media marketing can be. To achieve a positive social media experience, there needs to be engaging and positive content to be viewed. This is where content marketing comes in. Content marketing answers any questions the business's target audience may have about its products and services.

The aim of content marketing is to build a sense of trust between the business and the consumer. Advantages of having good content marketing will give a business's social media marketing efforts greater traction and it will increase its customer experience which in turn will increase customer retention (Riserbato, 2020). The hospitality industry has been hit extremely hard as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. At the beginning of March 2020, the hospitality industry was shut down with only minimal take-away options available to customers. This then changed in June 2020 when the industry slowly started to open up again all be it with limited seating arrangements and various other restrictions. It came to another halt in October 2020, when the industry had to shut down again much to the frustrations of the owners of these establishments and the customers of them.

The industry briefly opened just before December but were forced to shut for two-three weeks after again. The measures used to prevent the spread of Covid-19 in Ireland has caused massive road bumps for the hospitality industry. Establishments who shut their doors in March 2020 may never get to open their doors again, not to mention the number of staff that had to be let go and put on the pandemic unemployment payment (Lock, 2021). As of June 2021, the industry is finally starting to see establishments slowly open up to the public with the hope they will never have to close their doors again. They are in a much more different place then they were back in March 2020. The pandemic has not only made business's in the industry more cautious but has forced them to be more creative with their marketing efforts. Social media is a cheaper form of marketing than more traditional billboard advertising or newspaper advertising and is becoming more popular in today's business world. Social media marketing is needed more than ever in this industry to reach out to a greater target audience and try and encourage more customers in the door. The report discussed earlier from Sprout Social supports this as it reported an increase in social media usage in the US by 54% with 34% saying they will increase their usage over the next three years. Granted the Irish hospitality industry is significantly smaller than that of the US, but the principles remain. Social media usage has increased as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and business's in the industry need an online presence so they can better market themselves to their target customers. This paper aims to understand just how important and effective social media marketing is for the industry and if there is a future for it.

Literature Review:

Understanding key material:

Social media marketing has many benefits to a business, it is a cost reducing form of marketing that allows a business to interact and promote themselves to their ideal target market in a much more accurate manner. Areas such as increasing a business's brand awareness and fostering relationships with its customers are huge pull factors when a business decides to use social media in its marketing operations (Baker, 2020). A business's understanding of how social media marketing can improve its operations is critical in an already heavily competitive environment. Social media marketing is huge in today's world and plays a major role in making life much easier as brands are able to connect with people from all over the world at any time of the day. Social media marketing also allows brands to market their products/services in a more cost-efficient manner as it is cheaper than traditional marketing tools such as billboards or newspaper advertisements. It was reported in 2020 that 3.6 billion people were actively using social media worldwide with a predicted increase to 4.41 billion people in 2025 (Tankovska, 2021). This is an increase of 22.5% and this is only within five years. With such a big increase predicted within five years, brands need to be prepared to adapt their marketing efforts in the future to accommodate an appropriate response. This prediction brings with it the argument that social media marketing is developing into the more dominant form of marketing in both the total costs of using social media marketing and the total market outreach social media marketing can target. With such a large market available to business's, having a social media presence seems to be a necessity.

Using social media marketing will increase a business's online presence as well as more accurately target consumers who are more likely to purchases their products and services. Social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram have now made it easier to suggest and promote information about the products and services business's sell in a more efficient and effective manner. It does this by identifying its ideal customers, the customers who are more likely to purchase the business's products and services. By identifying this target market, social media marketing is then used to suggest or promote these products and services through targeted ads or promotional posts. Anything that will encourage the customer to purchase the business's products and services is used as efficiently as possible to achieve these desired results.

A business's social media presence will act as a branding mechanism where direct communication can occur between the business and the customer (Schoja, 2016). Incorporating popular social media platforms such as Facebook or Instagram is not the be all and end all, however. How a business engages with its target market will ultimately decide how much of an impact it is having in the market. By engaging with customers, a business will form meaningful connections with customers both currently and in the future. Their perception of the business will be one of value and by engaging with their customers, business's will develop a personal relationship with their customers. This will further boost the business's brand both offline and online. Engagement can be measured in the form of likes, comments, and shares etc (McLachlan, 2020).

Engagement is very important in social media marketing as it is a form of communication between the business and the consumer. Understanding how much engagement the business receives through its social media platforms will help it improve areas like growing its social media following, boosting dialogues, and generating leads, all of which will promote engagement with the business (Baker, 2020). If engagement levels start to dip, then the content posted needs to be adjusted to better suit the target audience and better promote the business's products and services. It is also important to identify what kind of posts/content draws the most attention so it can be used in the future. In order to improve engagement, there needs to be some form of analysis as mentioned above in the form of shares, likes and comments etc. An easy way to assess engagement is by judging it on a week-week basis (Chen, 2020). Understanding engagement as a feature of social media marketing will help improve the overall performance of the business. This can be achieved in the form of analytics of whichever social media platform the business uses. Facebook for example, has five metrics which are used to measure engagement. These metrics are people, views, reach, actions and posts. People look at the various demographics that visit a business's Facebook platform, when they visit and how they find that particular platform. Views looks at what sections of the business's Facebook people are looking at and the total number of people viewing it. Reach identifies how many people witnessed and interacted with a business's post and if people hid or reported particular posts as spam. Finally, Actions looks at what actions people did on a business's Facebook platform, essentially how many people clicked through to the business's page.

All these metrics help a business gain a sense of how successful their engagement is with their customers and understanding this engagement as mentioned above will help the business better market its products to its customers ultimately improving its performance (McLachlan, 2020).

Social media marketing has caused traditional marketing strategies to develop and change overtime and a business needs to be aware of this before it incorporates it into its marketing operations. Developing a social media strategy for a business can be a tricky development but following a basic five step approach from (Baker, 2020) will help give an idea how this can be achieved. The first step in this approach is for a business to determine the buyer persona and target audience they aim to market their products and services to. This will help develop the necessary content that will be promoted on a business's social media platforms. Without this, attracting the right customers will be very difficult and it will cause a serious amount of time and money to be lost as a result of its failed marketing efforts. Step two requires a business to identify what social media platform they intend to use to help reach their proposed target market. This can be done on a wide range of social media platforms which can have distinctive ways to share content about the business. Using Facebook and YouTube as examples, Facebook has around 1.79 billion daily users worldwide with its main audience being Generation X and Millennials. Generation X being people born between 1960s-1980s aging from 41-56 years old (Barr, 2020) and Millennials being people born between 1981-1997 aging from 24-40 years old. YouTube has just over 2 billion monthly users worldwide with an audience made up of Millennials and Generation Z. Generation Z being people born between 1997-2015 aging from 6-24 years old (Young, 2021).

As of the start of 2021, it was found that a highest percentage of active global male and female Facebook users were 18.8% being women and 12.8% being men aged 25-34 years old (Tankovska, 2021). YouTube's demographic is highest in men at 56% and women at 44% aged between 15-35 years old (Newberry, 2021). Different social media platforms will have different users, different ways it can be used to impact the business and the awareness of these platforms will be somewhat distinct to one another (Baker, 2020).

Once a business picks its ideal platforms for its social media marketing, it is time to create unique and engaging content. This is very similar to traditional marketing methods such as billboard advertising however the business needs to develop content that stands out above its competitors in an environment that consists of 3.6 billion people in a more modern form of marketing such as social media marketing. Creative and engaging content is needed to bring customers to a business's social media platforms. Using different features that some platforms have can make the content created that little bit more enjoyable. For example, getting influencers to promote a business's content or using Facebook live to provide immediate updates will form some hype around the products or services on offer. This will help make the content created that more creative and engaging. The content that is created then goes to step 4 where these posts are scheduled. This will allow for consistency and will keep a business's customer base informed on a regular basis about products and services updates allow for consistent engagement as well. Finally, to fully develop a social media marketing strategy, there must be some form of analysis to see how everything is performing. This is needed so a business knows whether it is meeting the goals it set out and that its social media platforms are targeting the right audience. This can be done in the form of social media metrics. Like with engagement this can be measures through areas such as shares, likes and comments. This will give a business valuable insights to see how its performing in its given market. Metrics such as how many views a post is getting, how many people are commenting on a post or how many people shared the business's content is used to see how well the business is doing and it will highlight how appropriate its marketing strategy is (Baker, 2020).

Social media marketing will also allow a business to see what their competitors are doing. It will provide the business with access to the tactics their competitors are using to sell their products and services or the marketing campaigns they are creating. This is more of a bonus to social media marketing. By seeing what a competitor is doing is helpful to see as it shows what they are doing right however, just because it works for one business does not mean it will work for another business. An example of this is the location of the business. If the business is located in an area where the majority of its population are transient then social media marketing would be wasted and more traditional billboard advertising would be used. If the business is located in an area where the population is not transient then social media marketing would be used to a greater effect.

It can also show a business what type of strategy a competitor is using which may cause a business to tweak their current strategy to better market their products and provide the business with a competitive advantage (Baker, 2020).

Themes that have been identified from previous research:

Research was conducted to identify themes from previous research findings involving social media marketing being used in SME's. These themes are Facebook is the favourite choice for SME's for social media marketing, the adoption of social media by an SME depends on various factors such as organisational context, affordability, customer focus and technological capability and finally social media marketing improves organisational strategy.

Facebook is the favourite choice of SMEs for social media marketing:

Every journal used for researching themes identified that Facebook was the clear choice of platform among SMEs when it came to social media marketing. It was also worthy to mention that "Facebook proved to edge Twitter in terms of engendering performance benefits among SME users" according to (Odoom, Anning-Dorson and Acheampong, 2017). Facebook and Twitter are two significantly different platforms but from the research used for this literature review, Facebook was clearly a very popular platform when it came to a business's marketing efforts. Why is Facebook so popular among social media marketing? Facebook has an average of 1.79 billion daily active users which makes it one of the biggest social media platforms in the world (Baker, 2020). Facebook reaches around 59% of social media users with over 200 million small business's using its tools for its marketing efforts (Mohsin, 2021). Facebook makes social media marketing easy through its easy-to-use features such as choosing the perfect ad format that works best for a particular business or having access to a market of over 2.7 billion active users every month (Facebook, 2021). According to (Kwok and Yu, 2012), their research on Facebook being involved in the hospitality industry suggested that Facebook users prefer to interact with smaller business owners in the form of personal messages and would be highly motivated to like a business's Facebook page if they posted coupons or discounts (Kwok and Yu, 2012).

This would suggest a higher chance of these customers returning to the business to purchase more of their products and services that are on offer. With such a big market its understandable why SMEs prefer to use Facebook as one of their main social media platforms for their marketing efforts. Not only does it target a huge audience, but it has easy to use features that fully emphasise the marketing efforts made by these business's. Facebook also has a great way to develop a network. Even though Facebook has a big worldwide reach, it also develops local networks among smaller business's. For example, an small local cafe in Clontarf could promote its products through friends and family members of the owner and this network will expand as more and more people start to hear about it.

The adoption of social media marketing is based on various factors such as organisational context, affordability, customer focus and technological capability:

In cases such as (Durkin, McGowan and McKeown, 2013), they found that adoption of social media was based on factors such as organisational context, affordability, customer focus and technological capability. Their research highlighted out of the 8 SMEs interviewed, it was predicted that seven out of the eight interviewed would require support and advice on social media. This was down to the appreciation of social media in the organisation being low and the technological capability of its staff not being of the appropriate standard required for using social media to its fullest potential in the business's marketing efforts. One SME said how they lacked the co-ordination and direction needed for social media. Younger staff were deemed more technological capable on how to use it which gave them a hunch that they needed to get into social media marketing to promote their business to a larger audience.

Technology was a noticeable theme from previous research and was further highlighted from (Eze, Chinedu-Eze and Bello, 2020) who identified technological affordability as a factor which affected the adoption of social media into a business's marketing efforts. They found that a business would do a cost-benefit analysis in line with areas such as growth of business or customer satisfaction to influence the decision of adoption. They also reported that a technology is not worth investing in if it lacks the ability to maximise a business's profits further proving that affordability plays a role in social media adoption for marketing efforts. As discussed above, with a sizable market of 3.6 billion people, it can be argued that business's need some form of a social media presence.

Not only is it a cheaper and more cost conscious form of marketing but it saves on time and effort with market research as it only targets customers that the business wants to sell its products and services with. Companies use social media marketing to have a greater reach and gain a larger target market. Customer focus was found as evidence for the adoption of social media marketing as if business's had high customer satisfaction and healthy customer relationships they would succeed as a business. In research conducted by (Siti-Nabiha, Nordin and Poh, 2021), they found that using social media as a marketing tool led to the development of social customer relationship management or SRM which in turn lead to a better organisational performance. During their interviews, one business said that good customer relations and good customer satisfaction were key areas to the success of their business. Social media allows for instant communication and engagement, this in turn leads to a higher customer satisfaction being achieved much easier as opposed to more tradition marketing tools.

This is known as two-way communication, and it essentially is a way for the business to speak and listen with their target market as well as directly respond to any queries or comments their customers make. This can have two outcomes both positive and negative. The negative outcome is by having very poor two-way communication where the business barely responds to comments or does not listen to its customers, it will be deemed a cold organisation which will cause a disconnect from its customers. The positive outcome from having very good two-way communication is that it will bring in more customer satisfaction as they will feel valued by the business which will retain these customers overtime and as a result the overall performance of the business will improve (Edgecomb, 2017). This can be backed up from research done by (AlSharji, Ahmad and Abu Bakar, 2018). They found that since social media marketing has the potential to improve customer service, reduce costs and increase sales etc, it had been a strategic priority for business's to incorporate social media marketing into its marketing efforts. Social media marketing is an inexpensive form of advertising when compared to traditional advertising which will cost more money and will only be seen by a smaller number of people. When it comes to social media marketing, the cost is nominal, but it allows a business to advertise to people who are more inclined to purchase that particular product on offer (Samuel, 2017). As a result of this SMEs will want to have low-cost forms of marketing and this was found in research conducted by (Beier and Wagner, 2016).

They highlighted that SMEs would use cheap forms of advertising such as social media marketing to align better with their organisational strategy to better improve their marketing efforts.

Social media marketing improves the organisations strategy:

This was the final theme identified in the journals used in this research. In research done by (Eze, Chinedu-Eze and Bello, 2020), they found that the managers of SME's would show an interest in how the use of social media marketing would improve the strategy of the organisation. In one of their interviews one manager of an SME reported that one of their motives to using social media as a marketing tool was based on how easy it would make doing daily activities and completing tasks. Since these social media platforms are continuously evolving, the question asked is what platform offers the best experience for both staff and customers. The platform that offers the best experience will be the one used for that organisations marketing efforts. The greater experience given to customers and staff, the greater performance achieved which will in turn improve the organisations strategy.

Gaps in the literature:

The main gap identified from this research is that although there has been some research into the use of social media marketing in Irish SME's, it appears that more research needs to be carried out to investigate how much of a role social media marketing plays in SMEs in Irelands hospitality industry. Durkin, McGowan and McKeown, (2013) looked at the adoption of social media marketing for SMEs in Ireland but they only focused on eight different SMEs none of which were in the hospitality industry. Studies done on SME's in Ireland have not focused on the hospitality industry in particular how effective social media marketing is amongst it. This research aims to discover just how effect social media marketing is in the Irish hospitality industry. More research is needed, as the Irish Times estimated a 25% growth in business's adopting social media in their marketing activities by 2020.

That was a significant improvement from 2016, when it was stated that less than half of all Irish business's were using social media in their marketing efforts (Irish Times, 2020). This supports the argument that further study is needed to determine the effectiveness of social media marketing among Irish SMEs in the hospitality industry. Among the journals researched, it was identified that Facebook led the charge when it came to the more favourable platform for use in social media marketing. As discussed above, this paper has researched why that is. However, these journals did not pay much attention to more modern and recent social media platforms such as Snapchat and Instagram which were around when these journals were published. This adds a further gap in the literature that has already been published. These platforms are highly regarded and for good reason. Instagram has 1 billion monthly users with an audience built up of millennials while Snapchat has 249 million monthly users with an audience built up of generation Z (Baker, 2020). Tik Tok is a relatively new social media platform, but it already has 689 million monthly users which has an audience built up of generation Z (Mohsin, 2021). These more modern social media platforms have huge potential for social media marketing in the form of influencers, paid advertisements and promotional competitions. As mentioned above there is a lack of research on these platforms playing a role in the Irish hospitality industry which this paper will help find the answers to.

A last gap in the literature identified as a result of this study was in the area of strategy. One of the themes identified from previous research journals was that social media marketing improved an organisations strategy. These journals found evidence that social media marketing improves an organisations strategy, but they did not show evidence if the organisations strategy originally had social media marketing involved from the very start. Marketing strategy essentially determines what market the business will enter, what customers it intends to sell to and how it will sell its products and services. Segmentation, targeting, and positioning are the three pillars of marketing strategy. Marketing segmentation enables a business to comprehend how different a market might be. This enables the business to locate a market for similar goods and services. Following that, the business must determine who its target market is. The business will assess the various markets found through marketing segmentation in order to determine which segment is the best fit for serving and promoting its products and services.

Finally, positioning enables a business to combine its segmentation and targeting efforts in order to put itself in the best possible position to succeed in its target market (Fahy and Jobber, 2015). These three components of marketing strategy assist the business in promoting its products and services to its target audience in the most effective way possible. The three parts that make up marketing strategy, segmenting, targeting, and positioning, were not found in the journals that this paper looked at. Without them, the business will promote itself aimlessly in the wrong market, to the incorrect target demographic, and eventually collapse.

This will be crucial in terms of social media marketing. Even though social media marketing is more affordable than traditional marketing tools like billboard advertising, it is worth looking into whether an Irish SME's original marketing strategy included social media from the start, and whether the Irish SME's interviewed planned to segment, target, and position themselves to better market themselves.

Research Question:

This research paper will look at how effective social media marketing is amongst Irish SME's in the hospitality industry. Essentially, this paper will cover how social media marketing effects the operations of Café's and Pubs in Ireland and if it is a necessary tool to use in a business's operations. The main question asked in this paper is simple. How effective is social media marketing in the hospitality industry in Ireland? As discussed in the literature review, the gap that has been identified in previous studies is that only limited research has been conducted around social media marketing in Irelands SME's and more research is required to fully understand how effective social media marketing is amongst these Café's and Pubs. Conducting a literature review for this study helped frame the research question that this paper sets out to understand. Themes such as Facebook being the clear favourite when it comes to social media marketing or how social media marketing improves an organisations strategy were identified as a result of the literature review. These themes helped develop the some of the preconceived themes for this paper. Since this paper aims to understand how effective social media marketing is amongst Irish SME's in the hospitality industry, it requires several hypothesis to help develop a proper answer. Below are the several hypothesis this paper also aims to answer and understand.

Hypothesis 1: Irish SME's in the hospitality industry developed their marketing strategies to incorporate social media marketing.

Hypothesis 2: Social media marketing is the primary ways these SME's promote their products and services.

Hypothesis 3: Social media marketing is the more effective marketing tool when being used by Irish SME's in the hospitality industry as opposed to traditional marketing efforts.

Hypothesis 4: Irish SME's use internal staff members to conduct their social media marketing efforts instead of outsourcing social media experts.

Hypothesis 5: The future of social media marketing will expand beyond Facebook and Instagram to more modern social media platforms such as Tik Tok.

Methodology:

The marketing element of social media also helped develop the main research question for this paper. As looked at in the literature review of this paper, a gap was seen in the form of research being conducted on social media marketing in Ireland. Research conducted on social media marketing and how effective it is for Irish SME's has not put much emphasis on the hospitality industry and only looked at other industries such as the retail industry or the entertainment industry etc.

The Irish Times predicted an increase of 25% of business's using social media for their marketing activities by 2020 which was a dramatic difference as opposed to 2016 which reported less than 50% of the business's in Ireland using social media for their marketing efforts (Irish Times, 2020). This research paper is important as it will provide an up to date research study about how effective social media marketing is among the hospitality industry in Ireland. This paper is interpretivist in nature, and for that reason a rigorous qualitative approach will be used to help answer the main research question. This methodology section has been broken down into five distinct sections to help understand the nature of picking a qualitative form of analysis. This will assist in positioning the research in the best possible light, allowing themes to be discovered through thematic analysis, as detailed in the paper's findings and analysis section.

Research Philosophy:

This research paper incorporated a qualitative method to understand how effective social media marketing is amongst Irish SME's in the hospitality industry. To achieve this, an understanding of the subject of marketing was required. The reality is that social media has fundamentally changed the nature of marketing, while there are fundamental understandings of marketing practice that carry over into the production and distribution of marketing strategies on social media, new digital horizontal forms of communication have altered the much of the underlying thoughts established in marketing. Traditional marketing practice was developed with the perspective of one message being created for the many within a target audience. Marketing is used by business's to create supply and demand in a few different ways. Marketing helps to build and maintain relationships with customers and the business. Business's do this through market segmentation to create a better relationship between the customers. Segmentation's overall goal is to meet the needs of a business's customers and in return the customers gain a sense of trust. Market research is usually conducted by splitting market segments based on consumer behaviour, psychographics, and demographics. Meeting the needs of the customer is one thing but making sure these needs are delivered comes down to the product team. They ensure these needs are delivered to the customer at the moment of purchase in order to develop a sense of brand loyalty. The more brand loyalty developed, the more confidence the customer gains in purchasing products from that particular business and the less likely they are to buy products from a competitor (Mansoor, 2019).

Social media marketing is a cheaper form of marketing when compared to more traditional methods such as billboard advertising or advertising in newspapers. There are numerous benefits to using social media marketing such as an instant communication channel between the business and the customer and providing valuable insights about the business through creative content that can be measured through engagement levels. Using social media as an instant form of communication between the business and the customer is a valuable asset as it gives customers informative detail about the products and services on offer from the business. Promoting products and services through social media is instant and allows for customers to gain a sense of value for the product before they have even purchased it. It is a great way to develop brand awareness.

With nonstop competition especially in the hospitality industry, business's need a consistent tone of voice via social media to inform and convince customer to purchase their products and services through discount offers or visual content. Providing valuable insights about the business is necessary for a business to view its performance and see how it is doing in the market. Every marketer recognises the need for the right target market and social media marketing allows for this target market to be accessed in a much more accurate manner (Mansoor, 2019). Identifying the right target market for the business is the easy part, but marketing to them is where it can be tricky. Content marketing plays a role here where it used to answer any questions the customers have about the products and services that are on offer. Content posted by the business needs to grip and engage their target audience. As mentioned above, measuring engagement levels through social media metrics such as likes, shares and comments etc will show a business how well it is performing in that particular market. If engagement levels dip then the content needs to change to better grab the attention of the business's target audience. Since social media marketing is a cheaper alternative to more traditional marketing methods, research was then conducted on previous literature on the topic of social media being used in SME's, this allowed for a broader viewpoint on the subject to be gained. A qualitative approach was chosen for this paper as it would allow for a greater in-depth understanding of how social media works in the hospitality industry in Ireland. Where a quantitative approach would require surveys with a lager sample size, this paper aimed to get a smaller number of participants in the hope of getting more in-depth and honest answers through in-depth interviews (Bhandari, 2020).

Research Instrument:

In-depth interviews were conducted among mangers or staff who were involved in the social media marketing of pubs, and cafes in the hospitality industry in Ireland to help answer the main research question of this paper. This was used to gain information about using social media marketing to promote their products and services. Each SME had their own individual viewpoint as in-depth interviews allowed for a greater sense of flow to it and it felt more personal. This personal touch of an in-depth interview would have been inhibited had this paper used a quantitative form of analysis where online surveys or group discussions were used. This would have felt more automated and less likely for greater and more valuable answers to be obtained.

A list of questions was created which were heavily influenced from findings found in the literature review. The questions that were developed were designed to allow for themes to be identified during the course of the interviews. These questioned were sent out to each SME that agreed to take part in these interviews to prepare appropriate answers. This allowed for the best answers possible for this particular research paper (Fahy and Jobber, 2015). As the pandemic made it difficult to perform face-to-face interviews in some cases, Microsoft Teams meetings sufficed nicely and allowed for a safe and free flowing form of interview to take place. To conduct interviews, individual teams were set up followed by a formal email along with the link needed to access each individual interview. A pilot interview was developed to allow for any tweaks to be made during the interview process to allow for a greater flow to each interview. Each interview then started off the same where the interviewer explained the layout of the interview and asked the interviewee if he/she wanted to be called a different name for confidentiality reasons for when their responses would be presented in the analysis and findings section of this paper. After this brief intro, the interviewer would inform the interviewee that the recording was about to start, and the interview took place. Interviews lasted from 20-30 minutes and participants provided great insight as to how effective social media marketing is in the hospitality industry in Ireland. Each interview also allowed for the possibility of a snowball effect, in which if a manager or staff member recommended a different hospitality business with effective social media marketing, they would be requested to participate in the study as well. By setting up individual teams and recording each participants responses, there was less of a need to hastily write out their responses and instead allowed the interviewer to go back and review each participant to help identify any themes that arose during the interviews.

Research Sample:

Since a qualitative form of analysis was being used for this research paper, only a small sample size was required to gain a full sense of how effective social media marketing was amongst cafes, and pubs in Ireland. A direct form of sampling was undertaken for this paper as it was a simple and flexible way of getting the right participants required for interviews (Glen, 2017). To get the most data available during the course of the current pandemic, research was conducted to see how many social media platforms each SME had.

Eligibility for this paper's sample size was determined by having a minimum of two social media platforms, in particular a Facebook and Instagram account. The reasoning behind these two platforms was due to their popularity among business's as they use them in their marketing efforts. More modern platforms such as Tik Tok are in the early stages of being adapted into a business's marketing efforts. The social media platforms of 12-15 of these business's in the hospitality industry received direct messages on their social media platforms asking to be interviewed as well as some brief information related to the interview. If they agreed to take part, a formal email was then sent out to them which detailed the research that was being undertaken followed by any confidentiality issues that may arise as well as a link to get into the Microsoft Teams platform which was used to conduct these interviews. Not all SME's were expected to reply and therefore there was a minimum of 6 SME's required to take part in this study. This was needed to have enough information gathered to better answer the main research paper of this question. Managers or members of staff who were involved in the social media marketing for the SME were the ideal participants to take part in these in-depth interviews. Asking members of staff who are not involved in the social media of the business would be a waste of time and hence why mangers or staff who were involved in the social media of the business were asked to take part in this study. This was to help draw up and identify any themes from these interviews using thematic analysis as well as gain valuable information with regards to how these business incorporate social media marketing into their marketing efforts.

These business's and the participants associated with them can be seen below. They were all located in Dublin.

Name	Discipline	SME	Gender
Shane	Social Media Manager/Barista	The Twirly Gate (Café)	Male
Mark	Owner	The Villager (Pub)	Male
Mirella	Social Media Manager/Barista	The Wiley Fox (Pub)	Female
Julianne	Owner	BaaBaa (Café)	Female
Tim	Social Media Manager/Mixologist	Anti-Social (Pub)	Male
Eoghan	Social Media Manager/Bar Manager	The Beer Market (Pub)	Male
Darryl	Owner	Bel Cibo (Restaurant)	Male

Pilot Interview:

A pilot interview was conducted one week prior to the commencement of the main interviews. This acted as a practice run to allow the interviewer to perfect the way he conducted each interview. As a result of this pilot interview, certain things were tweaked to allow for optimum performance when it came to the main interviews. For example, the questions listed were printed out on a sheet of paper so the interview could take a glance at each question as he conducted each interview. Timing also had to be shortened as the pilot interview lasted much longer than originally predicted. To cut down on the timing issue, the interviewee had to be stopped if they continued on for too long, this helped get each interview down to roughly 20 minutes each. This was an ideal time slot to get the most data available and not bore the participant in each interview. This pilot interview helped set up the foundation for the forthcoming interviews and allowed for the optimum amount of data to be collected.

Data analysis method:

As this paper used a qualitative approach to better answer the main research question, it incorporated a thematic analysis to discuss the findings and analysis section of this paper. Since this paper's overall goal was to find out information about managers or staff members who are involved in the social media side of the business, a thematic analysis worked best for representing the analysis and findings from the interviews that were conducted.

This paper took a deductive approach to the analysis as there were preconceived themes that this researcher expected to find as a result of both working in the hospitality industry and from previous literature researched prior to carrying out interviews. These preconceived themes are, Facebook being the more popular social media platform for an SME's marketing efforts, social media marketing is necessary for the future of the hospitality industry and more modern social media platforms such as Tik Tok will be used more often by these SME's in an attempt to get more customers in the door.

To conduct a thematic analysis for this paper, a six step process will be followed to thoroughly research and identify any themes that arose during the course of the interviews. To start this process, there must be familiarisation with the data that has been collected. This is where Microsoft Teams plays a big role. A deep dive into each interview where audio can be transcribed, and general information and data can be observed will be performed so the data collected was somewhat familiar. The next step requires the data that was collected to be coded. This is where the data and text written up had certain sections or sentences highlighted and assigned a code in order to describe that particular type of content. This is a lengthy process which requires each transcript from each interview to be viewed and everything that jumped out or was considered relevant/interesting will then highlighted and assigned the relevant code. The data collected from coding will allow for sections to be grouped together along with their relevant code. This step highlights any common meanings and gains a compressed overview of each interview. As with preconceived themes as a result of this paper taking a deductive approach towards thematic analysis, there are also preconceived codes. These preconceived codes expected from participants in this paper are "Target Market", "Reach" and "Necessity". The next step allowed for the generation of themes to be created. To do this, each group of codes will be reviewed to identify any patterns and ultimately to start finding themes from these interviews. Since themes are generally broader than codes, it will be common for any groups of codes to be used as one theme. Not only will themes created here but any irrelevant codes will be discarded to make the process of finding themes that little bit easier (Caulfield, 2020).

Examples of this would be codes that do not appear very often in the interviews so a theme could not be drawn up from them. The overall goal here is to develop themes that told the researcher valuable information about the data collected so it is relevant in answering the main research question for this paper. The next step is used to decide how relevant the themes identified actually are and how relevant they are in answering the main research question. The data set will be compared to the themes discovered here to identify if there is anything missing, if there are any other themes that could have been identified, and if any of the themes identified needed to be changed in anyway. Once a final list of themes had been created, it was then time to move on to the second last step of the process. This was where each theme will be given an appropriate name and defined in a clear manner to help show how the data is interpreted. Finally, each theme will be written up and presented in the findings and analysis section of this paper (Caulfield, 2020).

In total there were twelve codes created throughout the course of these interviews. These codes are seen in the table below.

	Codes
1	Ladder
2	Location
3	Reach
4	Hashtag
5	Instagram
6	Facebook
7	Sales Volume
8	Peak Hours
9	Target Market
10	Uncertainty
11	Free Advertising
12	Necessity

Limitations:

There are certain limitations towards using a qualitative approach for this research paper. To start, since Microsoft Teams was used for interviews, a limitation found here is that on the day of the interview for example, teams might not work which will either require a brand new platform to be used for interviews such as Zoom, or a face-to-face interview is required depending on covid-19 restrictions. Teams also required updates every now and then when an interview was about to take place. This was a small limitation but still required instant communication with the participants to ensure the interview would still happen as it would just take a few minutes to set it up. As mentioned above in the research sample of this methodology, there is a predicted outcome that not all SME's asked for interviews would respond or would not want to take part.

This is a timeframe issue as this study had to be completed in a certain time period. It meant at least 12-15 SME's needed to be asked for interview to allow for a predicted 6-8 of them taking part in interviews. Another limitation that occurred during the interview process was when a business agreed to take part but did not have the time to take part in an interview on Microsoft teams. To fix this, the 12 questions which were used during the interview process were emailed out to them where they were asked to write out a response to each question. It may have taken a while to get an email back, but the responses were still appropriate and allowed for themes to be found when compared to other business that took part in this research paper. There are also independent and dependant variables associated with this research paper.

As of the current situation with the pandemic for example, the independent variable is that most SME's in the hospitality industry were closed during the time when interviews were conducted, which meant that the dependant variable was beneficial to this paper as the managers and owners of these establishments had more time on their hands and were more receptive in taking part in this research.

Ethics:

In terms of ethical considerations, for obvious reasons GDPR had to be considered and needed to be respected with regards to how this papers findings were published. To allow for this, a grid was created in the findings and analysis section of this paper with synonyms of the participants interviewed for the sake of their privacy. Each participant also received a formal email before the interview detailing what is involved as well as any confidentiality issues that they may think of. Before each teams interview or face-to-face interview (depending on technological capability), each participant was asked if it is ok for their interview to be recorded. An ethical review form had also been submitted to ensure full ethical compliance was taken and understood throughout this research paper.

In conclusion, a qualitative approach to this methodology provided this research paper with the appropriate and honest answers it needed. A quantitative approach such as a survey in this researchers opinion would have hindered any appropriate responses and ultimately would have made it more difficult to uncover any themes that arose during the course of this research. Overall, the hospitality industry will want to recover from the damage of the current pandemic so having a good social media presence appears to be one of necessity in terms of getting people through the door. That being said as mentioned above there have been a few preconceived themes developed which are expected to match the findings of these interviews. This allowed for a more detailed and more modernised research paper to be created on how effective social media marketing is in the hospitality industry in Ireland.

Analysis and Findings:

In total, there were seven participants who took part in this study. These participants worked in cafes, pubs and restaurants in Irelands hospitality industry. Interviews were conducted on Microsoft Teams and participants were asked twelve distinct questions each to allow for a broader understanding of social media marketing in the hospitality industry and for the creation of themes to be identified to help answer the main research question of this paper. This paper incorporates a thematic analysis to help understand and identify themes that were found when conducting these interviews. The data collected from the seven participants was transcribed to gain a sense of familiarisation. Each interview was reviewed to record valuable information that helped form the foundation for the thematic analysis. Coding then took place which was a lengthy process but ultimately helped answer the main research question of this paper by allowing the development of themes to be identified.

Ladder and Location:

The first question of the interview asked people about their previous experience of the hospitality industry. This was to get the ball rolling and gain a sense of where every participant started off in the hospitality industry. The code that was assigned to this question was "Ladder" as most of the participants began as either lounge staff or kitchen porters and worked their way up the ladder towards senior staff members or higher levels of management. The next code identified was the word "Location". In terms of these venues ability to market to their ideal target market, the dependency of location played a vital role.

Darryl from Bel Cibo had three venues spread out across Dublin and their ability to market themselves to their target market varied depending on the location of the business. For example, one of his locations was in Smithfield where his prime customers are what is known as a transient population. Essentially, at the Smithfield location, tourists are his main customers so his marketing efforts would be wasted on social media trying to get these customers in. The Smithfield location is located among other tourist hotspots such as the Jameson distillery. Instead of using social media for this location, he opted for a more traditional method of marketing in the form of street advertising. This was a more costly form of advertising but was much more effective when it came to getting customers through the door. As opposed to one of his other locations in City West. Here he has an ideal location with a beautiful backdrop for people to look out on as they are enjoying their food. This population lives in apartments around the location. This is where social media marketing works best for him. The population is not transient here, so an online presence gains a lot of interaction. Mark from the Villager pub also said it "varies from site to site" as well as the target market you intend to sell to. Marks 22 year in the hospitality industry gave valuable insight into the way he conducted marketing efforts throughout the locations he owned before The Villager. Local engagement was very common before social media marketing and he would sponsor local Rugby, GAA and Football teams as part of his marketing efforts. He talked about how word of mouth was extremely popular before social media and now social media has given word of mouth a digital format for the likes of 20-30 years old.

Reach and Hashtag:

A code that was popular among all seven participants was "Reach". Social media is a cheap form of advertising but when it comes to targeting the ideal customers for your business, targeted ads and paid advertisements are vital for attracting that ideal customer. Shane from The Twirly Gate Café talked about how important social media is "especially from a start-up companies point of view". Not only is the product you are selling important but "If people don't know about it, then you won't be able to sell your product". Reach is a huge part of social media and without it, you are not able to market your products to your ideal target market. When it came to discussing target market in the interviews, the code "Hashtag" was brought up a few times.

Julianne from BaaBaa cafe discussed the importance of word of mouth just on a digital scale but raised an interesting point when it came to hashtags. "Hashtags can also target certain areas allowing us to better reach our target market".

This was an interesting point as not only does your content need to be visual and gripping to your ideal customers, but by using a simple hashtag, it will increase the reach of that post to an entirely new customer base. Eoghan from The Beer Market also highlighted the importance of a hashtag "a hashtag of a location for example or a specific brand of coffee or beer depending on the industry will appear on the ideal customer that specific business wants to target".

Instagram and Facebook:

The obvious social media platforms became codes as well I.e., "Instagram" and "Facebook". Surprisingly, Facebook appeared to be a dead form of social media among all the participants that took part in this study. Facebook represented a social media that contained informational content while Instagram was all about the visual content and the prosses of how a coffee or cocktail is made. Tim from Anti-Social mentioned how Instagram allows for "content to be fleshed out" as opposed to Facebook where you need to read a paragraph to understand the information. In the interview with Tim, he talked about how Instagram was used a lot by Anti-Socials customers as a way to book tables. This prompted Tim to say how Instagram need to develop a feature like what OpenTable does as an easy way to book tables. This was an interesting concept that should definitely be developed in the future.

Sales Volume and Peak Hours:

Engagement is a vital part of social media as it allows you to see how well a particular post is doing. It essentially shows a business how well it is performing in its particular market. A code was highlighted here in the form of "Sales Volume". When asked about how engagement is measured or how did they deem a post on their social media platforms to be a success, the term sales volume was repeated. Mirella from The Wiley Fox Pub talked about how she uses Instagram insights as a way to measure success on post but the ultimate way of determining success was sales volume. "If a post drives people into the business and increases their sales volume, then that post can be deemed a success".

Posts that contained lots of visuals were her most popular posts. Content such as a nice looking cocktail, a great looking dish or a good looking picture of the staff surrounded by the atmosphere of the pub were the type of posts she used to get people in the door. Darryl from Bel Cibo also viewed sales volume as a great way to determine the success of a post however, he mentioned how you need to be careful who you are advertising too. "In the world we live in, we need to be careful what we say and do particular in an online presence". Content used to promote a business not only needs to be visual, but it cannot offend people. Offensive posts will put the business in a bad light and will drive customers away. Scheduling posts had sort of a 50/50 appreciation to it. Either a business just posted at random times, or they scheduled their posts. As a result of this the code "Peak Hours" was seen. Peak hours varied from business to business but in simple terms they are the times of day where a business peaks in its particular trade.

Shane from The Twirly Gate café said he put up posts at random times but highlight how this was due to the cafes product offering. At the time of interviewing Shane, The Twirly Gate had only just set up shop and their full food menu had not been created just yet. Shane went on to discuss how this will change once the food comes in. He raised important notes about peak hours in respect of a café. He mentioned the idea about when he will schedule posts for the cafe it will be at peak hours such as 8 o clock. He talked about how the first thing people do in the morning is check their phone and in particular their social media. If the first thing they say is a nice looking coffee with a fresh croissant, chances are they will be more inclined to head to the cafe before going to work. Darryl from Bel Cibo originally did the social media by himself but would tend to miss key dates such as mother's day or easter bank holiday posts due to him being an owner and focusing on other things around the business. This forced him to invest in a social media manager who in his opinion are necessary so the business can stay on top of current events and keep the social media platforms of the business fresh and interesting. Eoghan from The Beer Market discussed how he does schedule his posts but was very hesitant about posting more than 2-3 times a day at peak hours. The reasoning for not posting too much in one day is simply not to annoy people with constant posts. He said, "If you are posting too much you will tend to annoy people". Julianne highlighted the importance of scheduling posts as it makes a difference in her sales.

Around holidays such as mother's day, she would promote mother's day hampers in advance leaving a link to buy it or leaving a swipe up option on her Instagram. Not only does this bring people to her cafe but it encourages people to go to her online shop and purchase products from there too.

Target Market, Uncertainty, Free Advertising and Necessity:

Different social media platforms have various different features that gives them the edge over competitors. From conducting interviews among seven participants, Facebook seems to be mainly used for informative posts where Instagram is used for visual content. Tik Tok on the other hand is a relatively new social media platform taking over the internet by storm. When asking each participant if they would use Tik Tok in their future marketing efforts, it was met with scepticism. The code "target market" and "uncertainty" was assigned here. Tik Tok seems to have a huge reach with a younger audience according to Julianne from BaaBaa cafe. As a result of this she would consider using Tik Tok to reach that younger audience in the hope of getting them into her cafe. Uncertainty was seen from Darryl of Bel Cibo. He brought up older social media platforms such as Myspace and Bebo and where they were today. As a result of this uncertainty, he was not sure about developing a Tik Tok account for his business. Mark from The Villager Pub also mentioned how the adoption of Tik Tok into a business's marketing efforts was a generational thing. He further went on to say, "any business that operates late at night should have it due to the current generation that Is using it". The last two codes seen throughout the course of the interviews were "Free Advertising" and "Necessity". When asked about if social media is important for the hospitality industry, necessity was repeated. "Not only is it a necessity but its what's keeping it going" according to Shane from The Twirly Gate. Julianne from BaaBaa brought up how it is vital to have some sort of an online presence otherwise the customers you intend to market to will simply go elsewhere. Eoghan from The Beer Market further added to the necessity of having a social media presence as "people wouldn't see your venue if not for social media".

Mark from The Villager Pub added how it is a free form of advertising as opposed to the more traditional and more costly billboard or radio advertising etc. "Not only does social media allow for better reach, but you can target a specific age group in a specific time frame". Tim raised a good point about shoutouts on social media. Shoutouts are a feature of social media that is also free advertising, and it helps further spread the presence of the business while also creating a community among the business.

Below are the themes created from the codes identified in the interviews.

The use of social media marketing depends on the location of the business:

As identified above, depending on the location of the café, pub or restaurant, the location of the business will ultimately decide how you will market your products and services. If the location is in a transient location such as Darryl from Bel Cibo, then it will be pointless using social media for his marketing efforts. More traditional marketing efforts on billboards work more effectively in this case. As Darryl also mentioned about his location in City West, this location had a much better location with a population that was not transient. This is where his marketing efforts on social media would be much more effective than more traditional methods. Mark from The Villager also split his marketing efforts depending on location. In some cases, he used more traditional methods by engaging in local sports clubs and sponsoring team jerseys as a way of advertising. In other cases, he focused on the demographic around the location. If it were mainly filled with people in their 20s and 40s then he would put much more effort into his social media platforms for the pub in an attempt to get more people through the door.

Social media plays an important role in getting customers through the door:

The code "Reach" helped draw up this theme. Shane from The Twirly gate talked about the importance of reach on social media and how that reach is very important especially to a start-up coffee shop. Shane talked about how if you do not have a social media presence, then put simply people will not be able to view your business and that is a loss of a customer. Julianne from BaaBaa talked about how important word of mouth was back in the day when she first started out with her business. She went into further detail about how word of mouth is still very much important for keeping a business going but it has now been given a digital presence in the form of social media.

The expectation to measure how successful a post was from either engagement from customers in the form of likes, share or comments. The majority of the seven participants interviewed valued sales volume as an appropriate way to measure the success of a post. Darryl from Bel Cibo talked about how a post was deemed successful in his eyes in the form of how many people enter his business a day or two after a post is put up. This corresponds to what Mirella said, "a post would be deemed a success if the pub gets busy, it's really seen in the sales". Julianne from BaaBaa café also said, "visual and engaging posts will get people interested and they will eventually make the trip into your business". This further proves how important social media is at getting people through the door.

Instagram is the most popular social media platform for a business's marketing efforts:

Surprisingly, a lot of participants said Facebook is practically dead now and it is very rarely used in a business's marketing efforts. Instagram was the clear favourite among all the social medias talked about which matches one of the preconceived themes of this paper. Tim from Anti-Social talked about how important Instagram is especially for pubs and cafes. Instagram is used to "flesh out your content" and he went on to describe how it is all about visuals. "If you can make something visually stunning regardless of what's inside of it, you will be able to sell it". Mirella from The Wiley Fox provided a reason for the popularity of Instagram as a business's main source of social media marketing when she discussed building relationships with their customers. She went on to say, "building relationships with customers is a huge deal when it comes to marketing as it will encourage them to come back and say hi to us". Instagram seems to have more of a personal touch to it as a social media platform as opposed to Facebook which feels more robotic and automated.

Social media is important for the future of the hospitality industry:

All participants agreed that social media is important for the future of the hospitality industry. Julianne from BaaBaa said "Yes I believe social media plays a vital role for the hospitality industry. For instance, Facebook and Instagram have millions of daily users. Once you understand the many ways of engaging with your customers this will inevitably boast revenue". Shane from The Twirly Gate not only said how social media was important for the future of the hospitality industry but "it's the only thing keeping it going".

Having an online presence is a necessity in today's business world as if people cannot see what you are doing then you will not be able to survive as a business. Shane brought up how he had discovered numerous new venues all over Ireland as a direct result from looking at social media posts. Mirella brought up how social media gives you access to a huge target market and how through various features of social media, you are able to market your products in a better and more affordable way as opposed to traditional marketing methods. Tim from Anti-Social brought up how much advertising on social media plays a vital role in getting yourself known around where the business is located. He talked about how shoutouts on social media not only costs nothing but is a great way to network with other business's and create a brand new community that engages and spreads the presence of the business. He also highlighted how advertising or partnering with a local Irish business on social media is extremely good PR which will bring in more customers as a result.

The adoption of Tik Tok as a business's marketing efforts will be used in the future:

Very few participants in this study had a Tik Tok account but they acknowledged how popular it is among the younger generation and they showed interest in adopting the platform for their marketing efforts. Mark from The Villager highlighted the importance of using new platforms to appeal to the demographic around his business and any business that operates late should use it as a way to market their products and services. Mirella also touched on the importance of matching the demographics of the business, she said "the 20-25 years are the internet, and we have to be there to get them".

The content she procedures for the business's Instagram account would translate perfectly to Tik Tok so she confirmed she would use it in the future. Julianne also said this when she discussed how she grew up in the presence of social media and understood the importance of capturing her target demographic and would adapt to new platforms and keep up with change to improve her marketing efforts. Shane from The Twirly gate also said he would use Tik Tok in the cafe, but he also brought up how he would like to incorporate YouTube into their marketing efforts. Essentially, he would make a short series known as the "day in the life" series where you see the day in the life of a barista or the day in the life of a chef. This is an interesting idea that will definitely capture the audience's attention further improving their marketing efforts.

There were preconceived codes and preconceived themes developed prior to conducting a thematic analysis. These preconceived codes were "Target Market", "Reach" and Necessity", all three of these preconceived codes were found during the course of this thematic analysis. The preconceived themes created were Facebook being the more popular social media platform for a business's marketing efforts, social media marketing is necessary for the future of the hospitality industry and more modern social media platforms such as Tik Tok will be used more often by these SME's in an attempt to get more customers in the door. Two of the preconceived themes here were found during the course of this thematic analysis and surprisingly Instagram was the more popular social media platform among business's which disagrees with one of the preconceived themes.

Discussion:

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, a 2013 study by the Barclays Bank Ireland discovered that the hospitality industry in Ireland accepted that social media was a useful way to get customers in the door, but it was also viewed it as a marketing tool it could do without. At the time, Barclays found that out of the 129 hospitality and leisure operators in Ireland, up to one third of them reported social media being responsible for one quarter of their overall sales. However, only 60% of these business's only saw very limited engagement with their customers on their social media platforms. 1 in 10 operators in the industry claimed they do not actively use social media for their marketing efforts, nor do they have any intention on using it in the future for the sole purpose of not seeing any return on investment in terms of customers coming in the doors. The study highlighted fears over how long social media platforms would take to operate effectively, it highlighted the risks of negative publicity and the outcome of that negative publicity, these factors contributed to these operators not using social media for their marketing efforts (Slattery, 2013). As this study was conducted in 2013, part of the reason for this paper is for a more modernised study to understand how effective social media marketing is in the hospitality industry in Ireland. As the hospitality industry was hit very hard as a result from the Covid-19 pandemic, the industry is in an entirely new place today than it was back in 2013. Social media is ubiquitous and having a presence online makes business sense as a way to help get customers through the door.

The pandemic has definitely caused business's in the industry to take a step back and re-evaluate how they market themselves to their consumers. Eoghan from The Beer Market said, "the pandemic has caused our marketing efforts to change to try and increase our overall reach".

Mirella from The Wiley Fox identified how before the pandemic there was very little effort put into the social media of the pub, but as a result of the lockdown and the revenue lost from the pub being shut for so long, they needed to rethink their marketing strategy.

Interpretations:

Before a thematic analysis was conducted, there were several hypothesis created to help strengthen add to the main research question of this paper. The hypothesis below has been compared to the data collected during the analysis section of this paper.

Hypothesis 1: Irish SME's in the hospitality industry developed their marketing strategies to incorporate social media marketing:

Throughout the course of the interviews, all participants said that their marketing strategies all incorporated social media to better market their products and services. Therefore, this hypothesis is accepted.

Hypothesis 2: Social media marketing is the primary ways these SME's promote their products and services:

Apart from Darryl and Mark who performed their marketing efforts depending on the location of their business, social media marketing was the primary way that the participants promoted their products and services and therefore this hypothesis is accepted.

Hypothesis 3: Social media marketing is the more effective marketing tool when being used by Irish SME's in the hospitality industry as opposed to traditional marketing efforts:

This depended on the location of the business but overall, social media was the more effective marketing tool when being used by the participants of this study and therefore this hypothesis is accepted.

Hypothesis 4: Irish SME's use internal staff members to conduct their social media marketing efforts instead of outsourcing social media experts:

Only Darryl from Bel Cibo invested in a social media manager for his business to keep up to date with important events. In cases such as Mirella and Shane who are both social media managers, however they also work as mixologists or baristas in the business which counts as internal staff members. This hypothesis is also accepted.

Hypothesis 5: The future of social media marketing will expand beyond Facebook and Instagram to more modern social media platforms such as Tik Tok:

All participants acknowledged the importance of Tik Tok and how it is used by the younger generation. As all the participants wanted that type of customer base in their business, most of the participants have planned to incorporate Tik Tok into their marketing efforts. Darryl is the only participant who is uncertain on the future of the social media platform and is hesitant to use it for his future marketing efforts as Tik Tok could go in the same direction as Bebo and Myspace. This hypothesis is also accepted.

During the findings section of this paper there were also some unexpected outcomes. To start, Facebook being seen as a dead social media platform was a big shock. This came as a shock as during the literature review, it was clear that Facebook lead the charge as the favourite social media platform when it came to a business's marketing efforts. Facebook has such a big audience with an average of 1.79 billion daily active users which makes it one of the biggest social media platforms in the world. With an audience that large, one of the preconceived themes for this research paper was that Facebook was going to be the clear favourite among SME's in the hospitality industry when it came to their marketing efforts. Surprisingly, Instagram was the favourite and seems to be getting more and more popular in terms of a business's marketing efforts. From the research carried out, Instagram's popularity among SME's in the hospitality industry is a result of how the content posted can be more visually appealing than that of Facebook. Where Instagram draws customers in with visually stunning content, Facebook appears to solely being used as a way to inform customers about information related to the business. The reasoning for this could be down to the owners of these establishments. They have identified how visual content has very high appeal with

customers and are very considerate when they post content. These posts are not seen as being present but are from some form of strategy that best targets their ideal customers.

Another unexpected outcome was the actual adoption of social media for a business's marketing. Originally, the assumption was every business should have a presence online to have a greater reach in the aim of getting customers through the door. As a result, from this research this assumption is false, and the adoption of social media was taken depending on the location of the business. This was unexpected but made sense when discussed during the interview. If the population around the business is transient then it would be a waste of money trying to target this population of various social media platforms. More traditional marketing methods worked out better here according to business owners and managers interviewed during this study. If the business is in a location where the population is not transient, a business marketing efforts are best met in the form of social media. Demographics also played a role here, but the outcome remains the same, the location of the business will determine if social media will be used in its marketing efforts.

There were both positives and negatives found within the data of this research paper. The positives were that social media is a hugely important marketing tool that is highly effective when it comes to getting people through the door of an establishment. Social medias reach and the demographic who use it are the ideal customers for the business's interviewed in this study and having it as a marketing tool simply makes business sense. As stated in the analysis, if there is no online presence for the business, how are potential customers expected to find it. The adoption of new social media platforms such as Tik Toks being used for a business's marketing efforts is also another positive found from the data. It not only shows that social media clearly is a great way to market to new customers, but it shows just how well the hospitality industry is at adapting to changes in marketing by using these new platforms. The more reach a business can have the more customers will ultimately end up coming into the business. The negatives seen in the data was just how different each platform can be.

Different social media platforms have different features and various ways to help market the business which can be a reason as to why Instagram was the clear favourite platform to use for a business's marketing efforts. As stated above it was a shock that Facebook appeared to be a dead social media platform and heading down the same direction as the likes of Bebo or Myspace.

This just comes to show however, how uncertain social media can be and even though Instagram is very popular at the moment, who knows where it is going to be in the next ten years. Another negative seen was just how the content posted on social media may look appealing in one sense but could be awful when a customer comes in to try it. Tim from Anti-Social brought up how "if you make a cocktail red and give it a nice fluffy top, it will sell". This is the negative side of social media, and how content posted and be fabricated and made to look a certain way when in reality it is a completely different thing. The idea of making a cocktail or a food dish visually appealing in the aim of getting customers in the door is a great way to marketing to people. However, if the finished product does not deliver what the post promised then it feels like false advertising that can be damaging to a business and force a promising customer to never venture into the establishment ever again.

Implications:

The findings of other studies diverged themselves from the findings found from this research. In the literature reviewed prior to conducting a thematic analysis, there were three common themes discovered. These themes were that Facebook was the clear favourite tool for a business's marketing operations, The adoption of social media marketing was down to a few factors such as organisational context, technological capability and customer focus and the final theme was Social media improved an organisations strategy. The findings found in this study diverged and the themes were that Instagram was the clear favourite for a business's marketing operations, The adoption of social media was down to the location of the business and there was no common theme found that said it improved an organisations strategy. The journals used in the literature review who conducted their research had some similarities to the way research was conducted in this paper. The majority of the journals used a qualitative approach, but some used both qualitative and quantitative and only one of these journals looked at Ireland for their study while the rest focused on other countries. This paper conducts a more up to date and more modern take on how effective social media actually is for the hospitality industry in Ireland.

It contributes to the broader topic of the hospitality industry in terms of how effective its marketing efforts are. Since the Covid-19 pandemic, the industry has been met with countless lockdowns resulting in numerous amounts of staff jobless and huge revenues lost. Social media marketing has helped drastically with getting the reach of these business's elevated and has help many new customers buy products off them. The work conducted for this research has helped highlight just how effective social media is for the hospitality industry in Ireland.

Conclusion:

After conducting the research for this paper, the conclusion is social media marketing is an effective marketing tool for the hospitality industry. The effectiveness of social media and what it can accomplish for the industry has been determined in this paper. Whether the use of social media attracts newer customers through overall reach, promotes the business in a cheaper form of marketing as opposed to more traditional options, or simply provides quick up to date information related to the business, it is clear that social media greatly impacts the overall performance of the business. Social media marketing is a huge part of the hospitality industry and since the Covid-19 pandemic hit, it has become one of the main reasons some business's are still trading. The pandemic forced numerous lockdowns and many employees lost their jobs forcing these business's in the industry to report a huge loss in revenue. Social media has allowed for some of these business's to spread the word about what they are doing, whether it be take away drinks, food or simply informing their customers where the business is going in the future. Without social media marketing, these business's would not have been able to continue trading for those who stayed open and having that presence online allowed for an entirely new customer base to connect with them. This paper helped identify what business's use as the more popular social media platform (Instagram) and what is becoming of platforms that were originally deemed to be a highly popular platform (Facebook). It has provided the reason for using social media marketing as a way to market the business, that being the location of a business. It highlighted the reasoning as to why the location of a business makes a difference in its marketing efforts as well. It also has shown that the industry itself is adapting.

Not only has the pandemic caused many business's in the industry to rethink how they market themselves to customers, but they are keeping up with the demographics that they are targeting by incorporating or at least thinking about using brand new social media platforms such as Tik Tok. Social media is a huge part of our daily lives. From the moment we wake up in the morning until the minute we go to sleep, social media is always active. Not only is social media a huge part of the hospitality industry but its only going to get bigger and bigger in terms of marketing. Business's from all over the world are starting to incorporate social media into their marketing strategies and even hiring people who studied social media to train up their staff. There is a huge demand for social media in today's business world, that demand will only increase as time goes on. The effectiveness of social media in the hospitality industry has been highlighted throughout this research paper also proving the five hypothesis that were originally created from the development of the main research question. Since social media is always increasing and individuals can be contacted from all over the world 24 hours a day, seven days a week, one can only assume that social media marketing will eventually replace more traditional marketing methods.

Limitations:

The limitations with regards to this study were listed in the methodology section of this research paper but just to recap those points. Microsoft teams would sometimes require updates and there needed to be constant communication required with the interviewees to ensure the interviews would still take place. Occasionally, the Wi-Fi signal on either side would drop so there needed to be more communication with the interviewees about that hiccup. In some cases, people who agreed to take part had very little time, so they had to email their responses through email. This was time consuming, but their answers were still appropriate for this study. Finally, as there was a timeframe for this paper, it meant interviews had to be done at a certain time to make sure the paper was complete and therefore 12-15 SME's were asked with the anticipation that a minimum of 6 participants would take part.

Recommendations:

This research paper had a certain timeframe so anyone who agreed to take part was interviewed. The only participants that this researcher could find were those who worked or owned pubs, cafes and restaurants.

As this paper is about the hospitality industry, a recommendation would be trying to get more nightclubs and hotels to take part in the study. Another recommendation was the instrument used for interviews. Microsoft teams was great and allowed for appropriate responses, however, the more traditional face-to-face interviews is more appealing as you are physically in the presence of the person you are interviewing. This was down to Covid-19 restrictions so face-to-face interviews were simply not possible. Looking at the hospitality industry in other countries would also be another recommendation, as it would allow you to see how other countries do their social media marketing and you would be able to compare the results to see what works and what does not work for them. A final recommendation would be looking at the customers of the hospitality industry. After all these are the bread and butter that keep the industry moving so it would be very interesting to see their take on if social media is effective at getting them to come into an establishment.

Bibliography:

AlSharji, A., Ahmad, S. and Abu Bakar, A., 2018. Understanding social media adoption in SMEs. Journal of Entrepreneurship in Emerging Economies, [online] 10(2), pp.302-328. Available at: <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/JEEE-08-2017-0058/full/html#sec011>.

Baker, K., 2020. Social Media Marketing: The Ultimate Guide. [online] Blog.hubspot.com. Available at: <https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/social-media-marketing> [Accessed 19 April 2021].

Barr, S., 2020. From millennials to baby boomers: Which generation are you from?. [online] The Independent. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/generation-definitions-what-am-i-millennial-generation-x-y-z-baby-boomers-golden-age-young-old-a8679741.html> [Accessed 29 April 2021].

Beier, M. and Wagner, K., 2016. SOCIAL MEDIA ADOPTION: BARRIERS TO THE STRATEGIC USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN SMES. AIS Electronic Library, [online] 6(15). Available at: <https://aisel.aisnet.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1094&context=ecis2016_rp> [Accessed 21 April 2021].

Bhandari, P., 2020. What is Qualitative Research? | Methods & Examples. [online] Scribbr. Available at: <https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/qualitative-research/> [Accessed 8 June 2021].

Caulfield, J., 2020. How to Do Thematic Analysis | A Step-by-Step Guide & Examples. [online] Scribbr. Available at: <https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/thematic-analysis/> [Accessed 8 June 2021].

Chen, J., 2020. What Is Social Media Engagement & Why Should I Care?. [online] Sprout Social. Available at: <https://sproutsocial.com/insights/social-media-engagement/> [Accessed 26 April 2021].

Durkin, M., McGowan, P. and McKeown, N., 2013. Exploring social media adoption in small to medium-sized enterprises in Ireland. Emerald Insight, [online] 20(4). Available at: <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/JSBED-08-2012-

0094/full/html?mobileUi=0&fullSc=1&mbSc=1&fullSc=1&fullSc=1&fullSc=1> [Accessed 21 April 2021].

Edgecomb, C., 2017. Social Media Marketing: The Importance of a Two-Way Conversation. [online] Impactplus.com. Available at: <https://www.impactplus.com/blog/social-media-marketing-the-importance-of-a-two-way-conversation#:~:text=A%20two%2Dconversation%20is%20a,product%20or%20service%2C%20but%20helping.> [Accessed 31 May 2021].

Eze, S., Chinedu-Eze, V. and Bello, A., 2020. Some antecedent factors that shape SMEs adoption of social media marketing applications: a hybrid approach. Journal of Science and Technology Policy Management, [online] 12(1), pp.41-61. Available at: <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/JSTPM-06-2019-0063/full/html>.

Facebook for Business. 2021. Marketing on Facebook. [online] Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/business/marketing/facebook> [Accessed 21 April 2021].

Fahy, J. and Jobber, D., 2015. Foundations Of Marketing. 5th ed. Berkshire: Mc Graw Hill Education, pp. 100, 118, 128, 131.

Glen, S., 2017. Direct Sampling. [online] Statistics How To. Available at: <https://www.statisticshowto.com/direct-sampling/> [Accessed 28 June 2021].

Kwok, L. and Yu, B., 2012. Spreading Social Media Messages on Facebook. Cornell Hospitality Quarterly, [online] 54(1), pp.84-94. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/258130306_Spreading_Social_Media_Messages_on_Facebook_An_Analysis_of_Restaurant_Business-to-Consumer_Communications>.

Lock, S., 2021. COVID-19: daily restaurant dining decline Ireland 2021 | Statista. [online] Statista. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1105125/coronavirus-restaurant-visitation-impact-ireland/> [Accessed 15 June 2021].

Mansoor, H., 2019. Why Is Marketing Important? 9 Reasons Why You Really Do Need It. [online] Business 2 Community. Available at: <https://www.business2community.com/marketing/why-is-marketing-important-9-reasons-why-you-really-do-need-it-02186221> [Accessed 4 June 2021].

McLachlan, S., 2020. How to Increase Social Media Engagement: A Guide for Marketers. [online] Social Media Marketing & Management Dashboard. Available at: <https://blog.hootsuite.com/social-media-engagement/> [Accessed 19 April 2021].

Mohsin, M., 2021. 10 Facebook Statistics You Need to Know in 2021 [New Datama]. [online] Oberlo.ca. Available at: <https://www.oberlo.ca/blog/facebook-statistics> [Accessed 21 April 2021].

Mohsin, M., 2021. 10 TikTok Statistics You Need to Know in 2021 [March data]. [online] Ie.oberlo.com. Available at: <https://ie.oberlo.com/blog/tiktok-statistics> [Accessed 21 April 2021].

Newberry, C., 2021. 25 YouTube Statistics that May Surprise You: 2021 Edition. [online] Social Media Marketing & Management Dashboard. Available at: <https://blog.hootsuite.com/youtube-stats-marketers/> [Accessed 14 June 2021].

Odoom, R., Anning-Dorson, T. and Acheampong, G., 2017. Antecedents of social media usage and performance benefits in small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Journal of Enterprise Information Management, [online] 30(3), pp.383-399. Available at: <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/JEIM-04-2016-0088/full/html>.

Riserbato, R., 2020. 7 Benefits Of Consistent, High-Quality Content Marketing. [online] Blog.hubspot.com. Available at: <https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/benefits-high-quality-content-consistency-brand#:~:text=Content%20marketing%20is%20important%20because,content%20from%20their%20favorite%20brands.> [Accessed 5th May 2021].

Samuel, K., 2017. Council Post: Cost-Effective Versus Low-Value Ways To Advertise Through Social Media. [online] Forbes. Available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesagencycouncil/2017/05/22/cost-effective-versus-low-value-ways-to-advertise-through-social-media/> [Accessed 24 April 2021].

Schoja, V., 2016. Why Should Companies Invest in Social Media Marketing? Parameters and Means for Performance Measurement. [ebook] Hamburg: Anchor Academic Publishing, p.46. Available at: <https://eds.b.ebscohost.com/eds/ebookviewer/ebook/bmxlYmtfXzE0MTI0OTNfX0FO0?sid

=c50a2004-b6a7-48f1-a0e8-6fe1e5236555@sessionmgr101&vid=4&format=EB&rid=5> [Accessed 19 April 2021].

Siti-Nabiha, A., Nordin, N. and Poh, B., 2021. Social media usage in business decision-making: the case of Malaysian small hospitality organisations. Asia-Pacific Journal of Business Administration, [online] Available at: <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/APJBA-08-2020-0276/full/html>.

Slattery, L., 2013. Hospitality sector in a flap over social media. [online] The Irish Times. Available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/business/transport-and-tourism/hospitality-sector-in-a-flap-over-social-media-1.1313623> [Accessed 10 June 2021].

Sprout Social. 2020. The State of Social Media: After a Year of Transformation, Executives Are All-In on Social. [online] Available at: <https://sproutsocial.com/insights/data/social-media-future-of-business-intelligence/> [Accessed 5 May 2021].

Tankovska, H., 2021. Facebook: users by age and gender | Statista. [online] Statista. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/376128/facebook-global-user-age-distribution/> [Accessed 14 June 2021].

Tankovska, H., 2021. Number of social network users worldwide from 2017 to 2025. [online] Statista. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/278414/number-of-worldwide-social-network-users/> [Accessed 19 April 2021].

The Irish Times. 2020. Number of business's using social media rises almost 25%. [online] Available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/sponsored/number-of-business's-using-social-media-rises-almost-25https://www.irishtimes.com/sponsored/number-of-business's-using-social-media-rises-almost-25-1.4135863-1.4135863> [Accessed 25 April 2021].

Young, H., 2021. How Millennials and Gen Z Are Different - The 360 Blog. [online] The 360 Blog from Salesforce. Available at: <https://www.salesforce.com/blog/how-millennials-and-gen-z-are-different/> [Accessed 29 April 2021].

Appendix:

Below are the twelve distinct questions used in the in-depth interviews for this research paper.

1. Can you tell me about your previous experience in the hospitality industry?
2. In terms of your marketing efforts, how do you attract customers to your business?
3. Does social media play an important role in getting customers in the door? If so, why do you think this is?
4. Was social media originally part of your marketing strategy? If so why and if not, what made you start using it?
5. What social media platforms do you use for your marketing efforts? And what kind of content do you post?
6. Do you set goal when you post on your social media platforms? If so, do you reach them and what are these goals?
7. Do you schedule your posts for a certain time/day to gain maximum reach? Does it matter?
8. How do you measure engagement/success from your social media content? What platform is the most popular?
9. Do you invest in social media marketing in terms of paid advertisements? If so, does it help bring in more customers and if no, would you consider investing in it?
10. What do you see are the strengths and weaknesses of your social media platforms?
11. How does social media marketing fir into your future goals and objectives? Would you consider expanding your social media presence in the future to include platforms such as Tik Tok?
12. Do you believe social media marketing is important for the hospitality industry? If so, why?