

## Moderating Influence of Socio-Demographic Factors on the Relationship between Social Media Applications and Guests' Choice of Fine Dining Restaurants

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**Abstract:** The main purpose of this research was to determine the moderating influence of social demographic factors on guests' choice of fine dining restaurants. A mixed-method (concurrent nested) was used to do the survey. Simple random sampling technique was used to select the study units while convenient sampling technique was used to pick the respondents. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 22 to generate descriptive statistics, inferential statistics, and regression analysis. The study established that social demographic significantly influences guests' choice of fine dining restaurants. Also revealed, was that the composite of social demographic factors is another independent variable and not a moderating variable. The study findings encourage Managers and owners of fine dining restaurants to include infrastructure that enables guests to use social media applications. This study contributes to the understanding of theories of consumer behavior in the perspective of fine dining restaurants. Also provided is knowledge for sharing with stakeholders and for policy developments.

**Keywords:** Fine dining, Social Demographic Factors, Moderating Variable, Consumer Behaviour, Stakeholders, Policy Developments

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### Introduction

The researcher conceptualized various social-demographic factors that indirectly affect the choice of fine dining restaurants. The specific factors considered included gender, age, level of education, nature of the occupation, and monthly earnings. The previous works of Armstrong and Kotler (2014) on buyer behaviour have incorporated demographics or personal factors that influence the decision-making process. The study came up with a model that categorized four characteristics that included cultural, social, personal, and psychological factors. The cultural characteristics include peoples' culture, sub-culture groupings, and social decision-making factors include reference groups, family, roles and social status. Personal factor included age, occupation, life cycle, economic, lifestyle, personality and self-concept, while the psychological factors include motivation, perception, learning, beliefs and attitude. According to Needles and Thompson (2013), social media applications have the potential to influence all levels of Lavidge and Steiner's traditional Hierarchy of Effects model, from awareness to purchase phase across different social groupings. The Hierarchy of Effects model presents six stages that a customer goes through from first becoming aware of the product to make the purchase.

Despite the increase in user benefits of social media applications, more than half the world's population remains offline (Mhlanga & Tichaawa, 2015). According to Faizan (2016), social media applications have changed many aspects of operations in service industries. Research confirms the role of social media especially social media as a new socialization agents influencing young adults' consumer behavior (Liang, 2013, Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2014). So-

cial media applications can be defined as a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of User-Generated Content (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p 61). These include the marketing strategies and policies for engaging consumers (Pantelidis, 2010). However, fine dining restaurants still lag behind on using social media applications as compared to other types of restaurants. This may be being due to their formality on operations, methods of reservations, and high levels of customer privacy.

The global market outlook on the restaurant industry is estimated to be over 3 trillion dollars, with the largest market being America, followed by Europe, Asia and Africa in that order (NRA, 2019). However, restaurant trends differ on dining needs, consumer behaviour, and technology differ from country to country. In Australia, restaurants are perceived as essential to tourists' overall satisfaction with a destination (Sparks et al., 2015). Also, a study by Sparks, Bowen and Klag (2013) indicates that over 60 percent of respondents interviewed considered restaurants as necessary when selecting a holiday destination, spending between \$20 to \$50 per adult on dinner.

Restaurants' characteristics also influence the consumers' choices (Leung, 2013). Among these characteristics are a menu-offering variety of dishes, attractive decor, local food products etc. According to Akbar and Alaudeen (2012), consumers evaluate factors such as surroundings, customer turnover, location, price, quality of food, quality of service, and type of food in choosing a restaurant. Confirming this, (Kafel & Sikora, 2013) found seven factors that cause consumers to choose a restaurant: food quality in the top rank, followed by cleanliness, service, value, menu variety, convenience, and atmosphere. Six key motivations for eating out were listed (Sparks et al., (2015), among them is holidaying, health, experience, social reasons, while relaxation emerged as the most important reason for dining. Another factor identified was a gender difference in choosing to eat out while on holiday, where women were more likely to indulge in dining experience than men (Fortis, 2015).

Different types of restaurants exist worldwide (National Restaurant Association, 2019). The restaurant's decor and how guests are expected to dress determine how casual or upscale an eatery is. In addition, table service versus counter service and the attentiveness of the servers are also indicators. For example, fine dining has high-end decor, formal dress, full table service, and attentive servers. In contrast, casual restaurants have a relaxed atmosphere, casual dress, full table service, counter service, or less formal servers.

According to Ryu, Lee, and Gon (2012), service providers are striving for customer satisfaction because of its impact on their performance and profits. On the other hand, Shabbir (2015) concurs that entrepreneurs use social media as a marketing tool because through this tool they can build quickly a network of supporters, which is vital for business growth. Conversely, customers in fine dining restaurants are striving for new memorable experiences that would make them come back for another visit or share their experiences with a friend (TripAdvisor, 2020). An exploratory study was conducted (Yaris & Aykol, 2021), that examined the impact of social media use on consumers' restaurant choices and extracted four factors. Findings from this study showed that three social media use factors (searching for services, social interactions, and searching for products) influenced individuals' restaurant choices on the trip (more) and at home. Thus, recommending the restaurants to share the ambiance, foods, and menus on social platforms.

According to Jihwan (2015) on tourists' behavioral intentions, showed that social media applications have the most impact over other forms of media followed by film, mobile phones, television, magazine, book, newspaper, and brochures in that order. Restaurant reviews in food magazines were rated the least influential among the five types of printed materials with only 31.1 percent of respondents expressing an influence on their selection process. Print media were found to exert a stronger effect on the selection of a restaurant on women than men. Studies comparing social media applications with other forms of media (Dipietro et al., 2012), mainly focused on restaurants within hotels but limited exists about fine dining restaurants.

## Methodology

The study used self-administered printed questionnaires and an interview schedule to collect data. To investigate the moderating effect of socio-demographic factors, two regression models were used. Moderation influence is usually significant if the interaction between the moderating variable and independent variable is significant. Two regression models were therefore used to analyze the data.

## Results and Discussions

### Results

The specific factors considered included gender, age, level of education, nature of the occupation, and monthly earnings. Below, is a summary of the key findings as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Socio-Demographic Factors**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Male	194	59.6
Female	131	40.4
<b>Age Distribution</b>		
Between 20 and 30 years	44	13.7
Between 31 and 40 years	114	35.2
Between 41 and 50 years	104	31.9
Between 51 and 60 years	51	15.6
61 years and above	12	3.6
<b>Level of Education</b>		
Primary School Certificate	0	0.0
O-Level/A-Level certificate/KCSE	12	3.6
College Certificate/Diploma	123	37.8
Undergraduate	110	33.9
Postgraduate	80	24.8
<b>Nature of occupation</b>		
Self-employed	118	36.2
Permanent	167	51.5
On contract	30	9.1
Casual	5	1.6
Student	5	1.6
<b>Monthly Earning</b>		
Not more than 100,000	69	21.2
Not more than 200,000	59	18.2
Not more than 300,000	71	21.8
Not more than 400,000	49	15.0
More than 400,000	77	23.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>325</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 1 shows that out of the total number of guests who participated in the study, male respondents accounted for 60% while females accounted for 40%. In age distribution, five (5) different strata were constructed, ranging from the youngest to the oldest. It can be seen that the majority of the respondents (35%) were aged between 31 and 40 years old, closely followed by those aged between 41 and 50 years old (32%). The lowest proportion was observed on those aged above 60 years old accounting for 4%. The study findings are confirmed in Lennon et al (2012) as cited in Pew Internet; Eleftheris and Barbara (2017) that, more than eight in every ten internet users are aged between 18-29 years. On use social networking sites, the study further showed that in every ten users seven of them are aged between 30-49 years

while half or less than half of the users are aged between 50-64 years and beyond. Thus, suggesting a relationship between higher age and decreasing ICTs use.

Similarly, five (5) strata were used to assess the level of education of guests. As shown in Table 1, the majority of the respondents (38%), had attained College Certificate or Diploma training level, followed by those who had attained undergraduate education (34%). The smallest proportion (4%) was observed on those who had attained Ordinary (O)-Level/Advanced (A)-Level certificate/Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE). It is also worth noting that none of the guests had a primary school certificate as their highest level of education. This was an indication that, generally, most guests are well informed and could effectively use various social media applications.

As another socio-demographic factor, the researcher perceived the nature of occupation to have a significant effect on the choice of fine dining restaurants. In this case, five (5) categories, which included self-employed, permanently employed, on contract, casual employees, and students were established (as shown in Table 1). In these categories, the majority of the respondents (52%) were permanently employed, casual employees and students each accounted for the least proportion at (5%).

Economic crusaders postulate that as income grows, consumers tend to increase their purchasing or spending behavior. The consumption schedule defines the difference between income and consumption. That is, an increase in the consumption of major purchases and non-essential goods is triggered by an increase in monthly earnings. Responses on monthly earnings showed that most respondents (24%) stated that they earn more than kshs 400,000.00, while the lowest proportion (15%) were individuals who earned below kshs 100,000.00. However, it can be noted that small margins existed between different earning categories.

## Discussions

### Regression Modelling

The first regression model was obtained when the interaction term is excluded in modeling, while the other model was obtained when the interaction term is included in modeling. These two linear regression models (without interaction and with interaction) were represented as follows:

- $DR = \beta_0 + \beta_1 SMA + \beta_2 SDF + \epsilon \dots \dots \dots (i)$
- $DR = \beta_0 + \beta_1 SMA + \beta_2 SDF + \beta_3(SMA*SDF) + \epsilon \dots \dots \dots (ii)$

Where;

- DR = Choice of Fine Dining Restaurant (Dependent variable)
- SMA = Social Media Applications (Independent variable)
- SDF = Socio-Demographic Factors (Moderating variable)
- SMA\*SDF = Interaction between SMA and SDF
- $\beta_0$  = Constant (intercept of the model)
- $\beta_1$  = Regression coefficient for SMA
- $\beta_2$  = Regression coefficient for SDF
- $\beta_3$  = Regression coefficient for the interaction term
- $\epsilon$  = Error term

For moderation effect of socio-demographic factors, the tested hypothesis was expressed as follows

**H<sub>0</sub>:** Socio-demographic factors do not have a moderating influence on the relationship between social media applications and the guests' choice of fine dining restaurants in Kenya

Output for Model (i) was as shown in Table 2

**Table 2: Moderating Influence of Socio-Demographic Factors without Interaction**

<b>Model Summary</b>					
R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Std. Error	F Change	Sig.
.692	.4782	.4501	2.0381	24.957	.000
<b>ANOVA</b>					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F-statistic	Sig.
Regression	43.175	2	21.588	24.957	.000
Residual	262.817	304	.865		
Total	305.992	306			
<b>Regression Coefficients</b>					
	Beta	Std. Error	t-statistics	Sig.	
(Constant)	.053	.673	0.079	.096	
SMA	6.522	1.263	5.156	.001	
SDF	3.021	.768	3.932	.001	

Dependent Variable: Choice of Fine Dining Restaurant  
Predictors: (Constant), Social Media Applications, Socio-Demographic Factors

Table 2 summarizes regression analysis for the moderating influence of socio-demographic factors when the interaction term is not included in the model. This model is, thus, multiple regression of the choice of fine dining restaurants on social media applications and socio-demographic factors. From the model summary part, it can be seen that the two predictor variables (SMA and SDF) explain up to 47.82% of the total variations in the choice of fine dining restaurants. This is shown by the value of  $R^2 = 0.4782$ . This explained variation was found to be significant since the p-value was found to be less than 0.05 (p-value = 0.000 < 0.05). The obtained multiple regression model was found to correctly fit the data. In the ANOVA section, the regression model of choice of fine dining restaurant on social media applications and socio-demographic factors was found to correctly fit the data. This is true since the corresponding model significance value was found to be 0.000, which was less than 0.05.

Further, in the regression coefficients, the corresponding p-values for SMA and SDF were both found to be less than 0.05. This was an indication that, in this multiple regression model, these predictor variables have significant influences (p-values = 0.001 < 0.05). A look at the respective beta values of the predictor variables reveals that both social media applications and socio-demographic factors have positive influences with  $\beta_1 = 6.522$  (SE = 1.263) and  $\beta_2 = 3.021$  (SE = 0.768). This finding shows that the decision to choose a particular fine dining restaurant is significantly influenced by the usability of various social media applications and socio-demographic factors and consequently, the multiple regression model without interaction was expressed as follows

- **DR = 0.053 + 6.522 SMA + 3.021 SDF**..... (iii)

Even though Model (iii) explains how SMA and SDF influence the decision of a guest to choose a particular fine dining restaurant, it does not, however, explain the moderating effect of socio-demographic factors. This can only be done by examining whether the interaction between social media applications and socio-demographic factors has a significant influence or not. The significance of the moderating effect was investigated by including an interaction term in the multiple regression analysis. A new regression model, which took the form of Model (ii), was, thus, obtained as summarized in Table 3.

**Table 3: Moderating Influence of Socio-Demographic Factors with Interaction**

<b>Model Summary</b>					
R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Std. Error	F Change	Sig.
.693	.4806	.4510	3.8311	20.125	.005
<b>ANOVA</b>					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F-statistic	Sig.
Regression	50.835	3	16.945	20.125	.005
Residual	255.157	303	.842		
Total	305.992	306			
<b>Regression Coefficients</b>					
	Beta	Std. Error	t-statistics	Sig.	
(Constant)	0.044	0.662	0.066	.075	
SMA	5.780	1.256	4.602	.001	
SDF	2.712	0.910	2.980	.002	
Interaction	0.641	0.450	1.425	.075	

Dependent Variable: Dining Destination Choice  
Predictors: (Constant), Social Media Applications, Socio-Demographic Factors, Interaction

In the regression coefficients section, it can be seen that all three predictors had positive regression coefficients. However, the corresponding p-values indicate that only SMA and SDF have a significant positive influence on the choice of a fine dining restaurant. This is indicated by the respective p-values of 0.001 and 0.002 respectively, while that of the interaction term was observed to be 0.075. Despite this mixed significance of the effects, the multiple regression model was expressed as follows

- **DR = 0.044 + 5.78 SMA + 2.712 SDF + 0.641 (SMA\*SDF) .....** (iv)

Table 3 summarizes the multiple regression model when the interaction term is included in the model. That is, for this model, the presumed independent variables were social media applications, socio-demographic factors, and interaction terms. It can be seen in the model summary section that these three predictor variables explain up to 48.06% of the total variations in the decision to choose a particular fine dining restaurant. This was shown by the value of  $R^2 = 0.4806$ . This explained variation was significant since the corresponding p-value was 0.005, which was less than 0.05. Statistics in the ANOVA section show that this multiple regression model correctly fit the collected data. This was shown by a large F-Ratio (= 20.125) and the corresponding p-value = 0.005. That is, the ANOVA results indicate that the model was significant at a 5% level of significance ( $0.005 < 0.05$ ).

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- **DR = 0.044 + 5.78 SMA + 2.712 SDF + 0.641 (SMA\*SDF) .....** (iv)

Testing the hypothesis about the moderating effect of socio-demographic factors on the relationship between social media applications and choice of fine dining restaurant involved examining significance of the interaction term. That is, a variable has a significant moderating influence if the interaction term in the second model is significant. Nevertheless, this decision can be backed up by examining the change of significance before and after moderation using the corresponding p-values. For a variable to have a significant moderating effect, it must have a significant influence in both models before and after the inclusion of the interaction term.

Moreover, a significant moderation effect is depicted by an increase in explained variation after moderation. Using these three conditions and the results in Table 2 and Table 3, it can be seen that the interaction term is not significant at 5%, evidence of lack of moderation effect. This observation is also supported by the p-values of predictor variables, which are almost the same even after the inclusion of the interaction term. It can further be seen that even though the explained variation is significant in both models, the increase is, however, very minimal. These observations do not satisfy the conditions for significant moderation effect. The fact that SDF is significant in both models shows that the variable presents itself as an independent variable but not a moderating variable. Based on these results and deductions, the null hypothesis  $H_{02}$  was not rejected.

## Conclusions

The study endeavored to assess the moderating influence of socio-demographic factors on the relationship between social media applications and the choice of fine dining restaurants by guests in Kenya. The summary also revealed that socio-demographic factors, as another variable, present themselves as an independent variable, not as a moderating variable. Hence, the null hypothesis  $H_0$  was not rejected. Study findings inform all stakeholders of fine dining restaurants in addressing guests' needs based on these factors as well as putting infrastructure that enhances dining experiences and satisfaction

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