EXPLORING CUSTOMERS' ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOURS TOWARDS USING MOBILE MARKETING BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER VISITING RESTAURANTS IN SAUDI ARABIA

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary tourism has seen the adoption of mobile applications to discover and market attractions such as restaurants and hotels, yet few academic studies focus on customer attitudes and behaviours towards the usage of mobile marketing for restaurants in non-western cultures, like Saudi Arabia. The Saudi Arabian Government's announcement that its borders are opening to international tourists marks a significant opportunity for the hospitality businesses. This study provides insight into customers' attitudes and behaviours towards using mobile marketing channels when deciding on restaurants. Qualitative research using semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten Saudi customers who frequently utilised their smartphones to decide on restaurants. Thematic analysis identified positive attitudes towards using mobile marketing for restaurants which considered factors like usefulness, ease of use, time and money savings, while misleading information and massive advertising resulted in negative attitudes. Furthermore, the research highlights customers' main mobile marketing activities before, during, and after their visits to restaurants. This research provides the initial findings identifying opportunities for businesses as a result of the adoption of these technologies.

KEYWORDS: mobile marketing, customers' attitudes, customers' behaviours, restaurants, Saudi Arabia

PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

Fundamentally, mobile marketing is both a communication tool and marketing process as it is performed through mobile phones, including mobile web, SMS messages, social media, and various mobile applications. This research seeks to investigate the attitudes and behaviours of Saudi Arabian customers towards mobile marketing for restaurants.

METHODOLOGY

Given the study's aim of examining in-depth the feelings and emotions of consumers towards an experience, a qualitative methodology was employed. The study sample chosen consisted of ten Saudi Arabian consumers who both owned a smartphone and used it to make restaurant selection decisions in Saudi Arabia. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect the primary data. The researcher adopted a thematic analysis approach and used NVivo version 12 to manage the text transcribed from the interviews and to code the data.

FINDINGS

The findings show that Saudi customers have both positive and negative attitudes towards mobile marketing for restaurants in Saudi Arabia. Saving time and saving money emerged as the two main factors that Saudi customers considered when selecting restaurants using mobile marketing channels. Prior to visiting restaurants, customers may conduct a variety of mobile marketing activities including searching

for information about restaurant locations and working hours, seeking photos of meals and restaurant décor, creating lists of restaurants, reading customer reviews, and searching for restaurants on social media influencers' accounts. Customers' main mobile marketing activities when visiting restaurants involved looking for information before ordering and posting pictures on social media. Finally, the findings indicated that customers' mobile marketing activities after visiting restaurants included posting reviews on a public platform, sharing the experience with close friends, and contacting the restaurants' management.

CONCLUSION

The main objective of this study was to investigate customers' attitudes towards restaurants' mobile marketing channels in Saudi Arabia. Additionally, this study identified the usefulness of mobile marketing for customers when selecting restaurants in the country. Furthermore, this current research offers insights into the mobile marketing interactions that customers engaged in before, during, and after their visits to the selected restaurants. It has contributed significantly to the understanding of customers' attitudes and behaviours towards a restaurants' mobile marketing channels, which will help restaurant managers in Saudi Arabia and other destinations to improve their marketing performance, thereby increase the number of customers choosing their restaurants for a dining experience.

CONTRIBUTION/PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this research will contribute to the current literature on customers' attitudes and behaviours towards the use of mobile marketing. Particularly, it will contribute to the current knowledge on customers' attitudes and behaviours towards the use of mobile marketing in any global markets where dine-in restaurants and mobile marketing channels exist with a focus on the Saudi Arabian market. The practical contribution of this research will help marketers to design appropriate mobile marketing campaigns that will attract targeted consumers. The understanding of customers' attitudes and behaviours towards the use of mobile marketing will help marketers in the tourism and hospitality industry in Saudi Arabia to improve their marketing performance, which will reflect positively on the industry.

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