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Faculty of Business Economics

Master of Management

Master's thesis

How the congruity of the Gen-Z personality with the social media personality of a restaurant affects the willingness to try a restaurant

Guilherme Rodolfo Silva

Thesis presented in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Management, specialization Data Science

SUPERVISOR :

Prof. dr. Allard VAN RIEL



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www.uhasselt.be

Universiteit Hasselt
Campus Hasselt:
Martelarenlaan 42 | 3500 Hasselt
Campus Diepenbeek:
Agoralaan Gebouw D | 3590 Diepenbeek

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PREFACE

This thesis marks the final step in obtaining the title of Master of Management: Data Science at Hasselt University, in Belgium. The research results presented here are from several months of hard work, and it would not have been possible without the continuous support and genuine interest of my supervisor, Professor Dr. Allard Van Riel.

During the final dissertation creation, I found it important that the final results could aggregate new knowledge for academia and businesses on all sides in the Restaurant sector.

The topic choice, as well as the study proposal, was not done in the standard format as most of the other regular master's theses of Hasselt University. I chose my topic proposal idea and submitted it, which was approved by the master's Dissertation Team in the previous academic year. Although several changes were made from the initial topic, the final result delivered more than I initially planned and expected.

I am thankful for the patience and love of my family, who, even at a long distance, have supported me. Also, I am thankful for every friend and colleague, in Brazil, Belgium, and several other places, who were there for me at this challenging moment, especially Simon. Furthermore, I want to thank myself for all the hard work and never quitting.

SUMMARY

The presented master's thesis analyses how the personality traits of Generation Z influence their willingness to try a restaurant based on its social media presence. Relying on the Self-Congruity Theory and the Brand Personality framework, this dissertation explores whether Gen Z has a higher preference for restaurants whose social media posts align with their self-image.

In the Literature Review, the theories and concepts are presented and discussed, and some key traits of Gen Z are identified: digital-native, individuality, self-learner, realistic, pragmatism, and community-driven. Also, I point out that Gen Z could have a higher alignment with the *Sincerity* dimension of the Brand Personality scale.

An online survey was administered, measuring the respondents' self-image using the Brand Personality framework traits and the traits found in the literature review. In the same survey, a fabricated post evoking the Sincerity Dimension traits and the Gen-Z traits was shown to the respondents, in which they would evaluate their perception of the post. Then, they were asked how likely they would try the restaurant presented in the social media post.

Although the hypothesis developed was not corroborated, several insights were drawn from the research for sectors that would be interested in targeting their marketing to entire generations and for possible future research. The final work presents empirical results of the Generation Z personality self-assessment.

Key words

Generation Z; Self-Congruity; Brand Personality Traits; social media; restaurant preference.

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1. HOW DOES THE CONGRUITY OF GEN Z PERSONALITY WITH THE SOCIAL MEDIA PERSONALITY OF A RESTAURANT AFFECT THE WILLINGNESS TO TRY A RESTAURANT

1.1.Introduction

In this thesis, I study how the personality traits of Gen Z affect their decisions to visit a restaurant based on their perception of its social media account.

The restaurant sector holds vital significance for society due to multiple factors, encompassing not only its cultural dimensions but also its substantial economic impact (Scholliers, 2009). Restaurants have existed for centuries in different configurations. In ancient Rome, over a millennium ago, *caponier* (eating houses) and *Thermopolis* (hot-beverage establishments) were where people could buy affordable meals and warm drinks ready to be consumed (Davis, 1959).

The modern concept of restaurants known today has its roots in Paris, and Brussels had a key role in its diffusion throughout Europe (Scholliers, 2009). Although affected by the cultural influences of society, the modern concept of a restaurant was primarily shaped by the economic forces of the urban areas (Kiefer, 2002).

1.2.Research Motivation

1.2.1. *Business Economic Motivation*

Today, the restaurant sector is a driving force and constitutes a substantial proportion of capitalist economies (Kiefer, 2002), reaching US\$2.52 trillion as a global market size in 2021, forecasted to reach US\$4.43 trillion in 2028 (Statista, 2024). Although growth is

expected for the following years, several global trends may impact on the sector. As an example, due to the COVID-19 outbreak in recent years, the escalation of several geopolitical conflicts, and new business models, such as fast-food chains and web-application delivery options (Uber Eats, Deliveroo, and others), the market share of the on-site food consumption market has declined in Belgium in 2023 (Moller-Nielsen, 2023).

Understanding the factors that affect the sector and creating insights that might apply to those businesses is significant in the context presented. One way to do so is by studying the consumers. In 2021, Generation Z (Gen Z) comprised 30% of the global population and is anticipated to constitute up to 27% of the workforce by 2025, becoming the dominant workforce (Koop, 2021), so understanding this generation's decision process can be decisive for a business.

Generation Z has a deeper connection to the Internet and technology. The constant access to it (and its information exposure) has shaped how they behave and consume, such as in food consumption-related behavior (Kılıç et al., 2021). Gen Z relies heavily on the Internet not only to discover but also to rate and compare destinations of their travels, and social media is a crucial source of information for their decisions, more than 'traditional' sources (Setiawan et al., 2018). This deep link of technology to the generational characteristic of Gen Z is presented by several studies (Setiawan et al., 2018; Bhalla et al., 2021).

Several studies describe this tech-driven generation as being both "Community-oriented," in which cooperation and relationships are crucial as a group (Kılıç et al., 2021), but also as "Individualistic," in which everyone has the right and freedom to choose and express, supporting diversity (Kılıç et al., 2021; Bhalla et al., 2021); not in a dichotomy, but as co-constituting characteristics (Tolstikova et al., 2020).

1.2.2. *Academic Motivation*

Choosing a restaurant has several determinants and uncertainties, and this decision process can also be influenced by social media usage via the smartphone, which coincides with several stages of the process, not only when searching and deciding on a restaurant but also during the experience and the post-experience (Hwang et al., 2021). Generation Z is deeply dependent on technology for the choice of experience goods, such as Tourism and restaurants/food-related experiences, much more than other generations (Setiawan et al., 2018).

The decision to visit a restaurant is not only based on a person's 'physical' needs but also on satisfying other internal needs. Self-image congruity is one of those needs where an individual builds or expresses their own self, approaching themselves to a brand they see as their "own-self-concept," a place/business representing their view of their image (Aaker, 1997). Jeong & Jang (2018) found that the customers' actual and ideal self-image positively affects choosing a restaurant that is like what they are or want to become, creating a fit with the environment and a sense of belonging.

One form to measure the self-congruity of an individual to a brand is via the analytical framework of the "Brand Personality Scale," which could be used across product categories. Aaker (1997) presents five dimensions with their main traits, which could be associated not only with products and brands but also relate to individuals (or groups of individuals), and each of those presented dimensions has its main personality traits. Aaker defines the 'brand personality' as "the set of human characteristics associated with a brand" (Aaker, p.347, 1997).

Considering the self-congruity theory, there are insufficient studies describing the Generation-Z personality in the context of the brand personality framework, a gap that this study aims to fill.

1.3. Problem Statement

So, in trying to understand the personality of the Z-Generation, its relation to social media, and how it can affect the identification with a restaurant business, the purpose of this thesis is to answer the following Research Question:

How does the congruity of the Gen-Z personality with the social media personality of a restaurant affect the willingness to try a restaurant?

As sub-questions to support the development of the central question:

1. How does the congruity of the Gen Z personality with the social media personality of a restaurant on the Sincerity Dimension affect their willingness to try a restaurant?
2. How does the congruity of the Gen Z personality with the social media personality of a restaurant on the Excitement Dimension affect their willingness to try a restaurant?
3. How does the congruity of the Gen Z personality with the social media personality of a restaurant on the Competence Dimension affect their willingness to try a restaurant?
4. How does the congruity of the Gen Z personality with the social media personality of a restaurant on the Sophistication Dimension affect their willingness to try a restaurant?
5. How does the congruity of the Gen Z personality with the social media personality of a restaurant on the Ruggedness Dimension affect their willingness to try a restaurant?

1.4. Contribution

Considering the link of Generation Z with virtual life in social media, often considered one with real life (Tolstikova et al., 2020), this study aims to address the role of the congruency between Gen Z's self-image and brand image on social media. With a better understanding of the gap researched, fully explore how the self-identification of Gen-Z with social media personalities affects their restaurant preferences. In this manner, businesses can correctly adapt their social media communications to the target group.

1.5. Approach

As the research objectives are to develop the arguments and answer the Research Question and Sub-questions, it will be important to take the following steps:

Firstly, I describe the profile of Generation Z and its relation to technology and food. Then, I will present the Self-Congruity Theory and its implications. As the next step, the Brand Personality Framework is discussed in detail. Based on the theories discussed, I develop the hypothesis. Then, I present the collected data and test the hypothesis. Finally, the findings are discussed, and I formulate implications for research and the business sector.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding the profile of a group can be significant for all kinds of businesses when defining their customers, developing their products, targeting campaigns, and so on (Aaker, 1997; Davies et al., 2018; Twenge, 2017). One way to simplify a complex market is to segment according to “generation.” Ryder (1985) defines a “generation” as a group of people born in a similar period with a similar social identity, shaped by the historical events they experience together. The identified generational traits are a generalization of the average in that group (Twenge et al., 2010; Twenge, 2017).

The generational traits vary from generation to generation, due to the period effect of the historical and social contexts they have experienced (Ryder, 1985). This can also be changed within the group over time due to the age effect, as the group gets older and goes through new events (Ryder, 1985; Twenge et al., 2010). Each generation receives a name and is associated with a time frame of the group born within those years, different from one another due to the mortality of the people in those groups, with the passage of time (Ryder, 1985). As Bhalla et al. (2021) noted, the name and/or the years defined for each generation may vary from author to author. Also, an individual born in the overlapping years of two generations might have characteristics from both groups (Ryder, 1985).

2.1. The unique personality traits of Generation Z

Several authors define Gen Z as the group born from the late 90s to the early 10s, and in this study, we will use the definition by Bhalla et al. (2021) and select respondents born between 1995 and 2010.

‘Digital Natives’ is one of the names used for this generation (Bhalla et al., 2021; Mejia & Pinto, 2021; Kiliç et al., 2021; Francis & Hoefel, 2018). This generation is the first that has not seen life without the Internet and is experiencing exponential technological change. Their link with the digital world is so deep that they often interpret virtual and real life as one (Tolstikova et al., 2020), not differentiating between the friends they make online and the ones they make face-to-face (Francis & Hoefel, 2018).

Gen-Z consumers appreciate online communities enabling individuals from diverse economic backgrounds to connect and unite around shared causes and interests (Francis & Hoefel, 2018) and feel more comfortable with virtual networking than previous generations (Bhalla et al., 2021). Their fascination with social media and platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, and Tumblr (and others) has made Generation Z strong advocates of virtual reality (Bhalla et al., 2021) and molded how they behave and experiment in the real world (Twenge, 2017).

The ease of acquiring knowledge through online platforms rather than traditional educational institutions makes them a Generation of “*self-learners*” (Francis & Hoefel, 2018; Kiliç et al., 2021; Twenge, 2017), where they can learn about several subjects. However, this context also shapes how they learn and how they prefer quick and “already digested” content, being less able to focus for an extended period and preferring instant gratification (Twenge, 2017; Francis & Hoefel, 2018; Bhalla et al., 2021). In this sense, they lack an overall sense of long-term consequences. Since they are getting fed much information through the Internet and social media, they will not think deeply about those inputs, generating a short attention span (Twenge, 2017).

Raised by overprotective parents, when compared with previous generations, Gen-Z had increased supervision since parents had also adapted to the growth of technology and transmitted it to their children raised in this context (Twenge, 2021). With this increased care,

this generation is taking longer to reach some adulthood milestones, such as making their own decisions, driving, drinking alcohol, and engaging in their first sexual intercourse (Twenge, 2017).

Raised in a time of high economic tension (such as the Prime Crisis of 2008 and the Covid-19 Crisis), Generation Z tends to be very **realistic** and **pragmatic** (Francis & Hoefel, 2018) and more worried about job stability than the previous generations (Mejia & Pinto, 2021; Twenge, 2017). The high volume and the ability to access information by that group also contribute to building this trait in their profile as a group (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). With realism and pragmatism, they are also less daring and rebellious, showing less of that kind of behavior (like drinking and smoking) than previous generations (Twenge, 2017).

Considering **individuality**, Gen Z's "style" is not about conforming to a single stereotype but exploring the ways in which they can express their individuality and gradually shape their individual identities with their experiences over time (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). For them, the "self" can be a form of experimentation, exploration, and transformation (Francis & Hoefel, 2018).

Generation Z is also **Community-Driven**; even as individualistic and pragmatic individuals (Kiliç et al., 2021), they still idealize and create role models whom some people serve as a source of inspiration, with a sense of connection (even when the relationship is built through virtual platforms) (Bhalla et al., 2021). They constantly receive and consider large volumes of new information from various influential sources (Francis & Hoefel, 2018; Kiliç et al., 2021). At work, they prefer collaborative and team-oriented settings where positive and supportive relationships with colleagues extend beyond the workplace and into social media interactions (Francis & Hoefel, 2018).

The individuals from Z transition among different kinds of groups that they might find identical traces to theirs (Francis & Hoefel, 2018), reinforcing both their individual and

community traits. However, the constant exposure to influential sources on the Internet and social media also exposes them to constant comparison and a need for validation within their groups, more than the previous generation (Twenge, 2017). Gen-Zs believe that defending identity-related causes is important, making them more engaged than previous generations in human rights, racial and ethnic issues, LGBTQ+ rights, and feminism (Francis & Hoefel, 2018; Kiliç et al., 2021; Twenge, 2017).

Francis & Hoefel (2018) state that companies should be aware that Gen Z views consumption as a form of access rather than ownership, that they use consumption to express their own identity, and that they do consider the ethical implications of their consumption choices. Generation Z's presented characteristics are reflected directly in their consumer behavior and food consumption behavior (Kiliç et al., 2021). **Gen Z presents a strong connection to food culture**, in which their eating habits and preferences align closely with food enthusiasts and foodies of other generations (Kiliç et al., 2021). For instance, just like foodies, Gen Z shows interest in sustainable, organic, and locally sourced foods, placing a higher value on green, eco-friendly, and locally produced products, driven by their heightened social and environmental consciousness (Kiliç et al., p. 241, 2021). As “**self-learners**,” they also search and learn about food on the Internet and social media and share their experience and opinions with their virtual **community** through social media (Kiliç et al., p. 241, 2021). Their **individuality** is also reflected in their relation with food, focusing on authenticity and authentic experiences (Francis & Hoefel, 2018; Kiliç et al., 2021), searching for new, different, and diverse types of tastes, spices, and experiences from different ethnicities and nationalities (Kiliç et al., 2021) and experimenting on street food, new restaurants, and recipes with the Internet help (Kiliç et al., 2018 apud. Kiliç et al., 2021).

As mentioned, Gen Z would rather pay a premium to have the possibility to express their individuality (Francis & Hoefel, 2018), and they would even travel to gain unique and

authentic food experiences (Kiliç et al., 2021). These processes of finding and choosing new experiences rely heavily on technology (Setiawan et al., 2018).

2.2. Self-Congruity Theory

The idea that consumers do not thoroughly analyze the products and experiences, but use them as a form of symbolic representation, was an essential step for marketing researchers since its introduction by Sidney Levy at the end of the 1950s (Sirgy, 1982). Several theories were developed to understand why and how consumers consume, such as Self-Congruity Theory from Sirgy (1982).

The author argues that “product cues involving images usually activate a self-schema involving the same image” (Sirgy, 1982, p. 289), which means that an image could cause an identification with the consumer’s self (positively or negatively). Sirgy (p. 289, 1982) gives an example of an image that shows a specific trait, the “high status” (or luxurious), and this trait can trigger the image that a consumer has of itself, either with an “I am a high status” or “I am not a high status.” This self-image process is regulated by (1) how much the individual feels connected to that trait and (2) the personal value attributed to this self-image connection.

So, the "meaning" of a product image is not directly self-contained, but it is interpreted depending on how it aligns with (or reflects) aspects of the consumer's self-image (Sirgy, p. 289, 1982). Those interactions can result in four situations:

Positive self-congruity occurs when there is an alignment between a positive perception of a product image and a *positive belief about one's self-image*.

Positive self-incongruity: when a positive perception of a product image contrasts with a *negative belief about one's self-image*.

Negative self-congruity: when a negative perception of a product image aligns with a *negative belief about one's self-image*.

Negative self-incongruity occurs when a negative perception of a product image contrasts with a *positive belief about one's self-image*.

The author presents that various states of self-image and product-image congruity would have distinct effects on purchase motivation (Sirgy, 1982). Positive self-congruity will generate the highest level of purchase motivation, followed by positive self-incongruity, negative self-congruity, and negative self-incongruity, in that order (Sirgy, 1982). This relationship is driven by the mediating roles of self-esteem and the need for self-consistency (Sirgy, 1982). The author summarizes this relation in Exhibit 1:

EXHIBIT 1

THE EFFECTS OF SELF-ESTEEM AND SELF-CONSISTENCY MOTIVES ON PURCHASE MOTIVATION

Self-image	&	Product image	result in	Self-image/ product-image congruity	Mediating factors		Purchase motivation
					Self-esteem motivation	Self-consistency motivation	
					leading to		
positive		positive		positive self- congruity	approach	approach	approach purchase motivation
negative		positive		positive self- incongruity	approach	avoidance	conflict
negative		negative		negative self- congruity	avoidance	approach	conflict
positive		negative		Negative self- incongruity	avoidance	avoidance	avoidance purchase motivation
(Sirgy, p. 289, 1982)							

(Sirgy, p. 289, 1982)

Sirgy argues that a theoretical framework should be created to hypothesize the moderating effects of specific variables. So, suppose the self-image/product-image congruity theory is applied. In that case, it has been demonstrated that the type of consumer decisions, such as attitude toward the product versus attitude toward the purchase, moderates the impact of self-image/product-image congruity on purchase motivation (Sirgy, 1982). Self-image

congruity is a powerful tool for creating marketing schemes, and combined with other techniques, it could be essential to help restaurants thrive (Jeong & Jang, 2018).

Using Sirgy's work as a reference, Jennifer Aaker discusses brand personality (1997), expanding this idea and suggesting that brands have human-like traits, and consumers are drawn to brands whose personalities match their own self-image (Aaker, 1997). She then creates a framework for this analysis, covering the lack of structure of the brand personality compared to the existing human personality structure (Aaker, 1997).

2.3. Brand Personality Scale

In the paper “Dimensions of brand personality,” a core pillar for this thesis and for several other papers, the author Jennifer Aaker defines the term brand personality as “the set of human characteristics associated with a brand” (Aaker, p.347, 1997). The consumers might relate brands to human characteristics to comprehend the proposal as the business/product (Gilmore, 1919 apud. Aaker, 1997), which could be done by several psychological techniques, making the brand relatable to consumers on a more personal level and for a longer time (Aaker, 1997). In Aaker’s research, she developed a “Brand Personality Scale,” which is a framework to measure the self-congruity of an individual to brands. Her main goal was to create a comprehensive framework outlining the dimensions of brand personality, along with a reliable, valid, and widely applicable scale to measure these dimensions effectively (Aaker, 1997).

The scale presented would be utilized to gain both theoretical and practical insights into the antecedents and consequences of brand personality, with a possibility of empirical testing (Aaker, 1997), with a generic, standard, and universal method (Aaker, 1997 apud Siguaw, 1999; Davies et al., 2018). She explains that this would be a tool to understand how a

brand is perceived and experienced. With this tool, the variables of a brand could be systematically manipulated, and its impact on the brand's personality could be measured. Also, how does the manipulation of the brand's personality dimensions impact the dependent variables in the symbolic use and perception of brands (Aaker, 1997).

Aaker (1997) identifies five core dimensions that brands might have, similar to the “Big Five” human personality trait dimensions. These five core dimensions (also named “Factor”) are a unification of several human traits, being those human traits classified under a higher trait (named “Facet” in her framework):

- 1- **Sincerity:** Brands are perceived as authentic, genuine, and sincere. Some of the traits related to this factor are “down-to-earth,” “honest,” “family-oriented,” and “original.”
- 2- **Excitement:** In this factor, brands are perceived as daring, up-to-date, and spirited, with traits such as “cool,” “imaginative,” and “spirited.”
- 3- **Competence:** Brands in this factor are perceived as reliable, trustworthy, and intelligent, presenting traits as “secure,” “technical,” and “successful.”
- 4- **Sophistication:** Brands in this factor are perceived as high-class, fancy, charming, presenting traits as “glamorous,” “smooth,” and “good-looking.”;
- 5- **Ruggedness:** Brands in this factor are perceived as tough and strong, presenting traits such as “outdoorsy,” “masculine,” and “rugged.”

As presented in Figure 1 below, the brand personality dimensions and their facets (main traits). The rigor of this method was tested in several kinds of research and on brands of all types. It can be used to direct and establish strong brand personality relations with consumers (Siguaw et al., 1999; Davies et al., 2018).

FIGURE 1
BRAND PERSONALITY FRAMEWORK



(Aaker, p.352, 1997)

2.3.1. *The critics*

Although being a robust reference in the area, Aaker's definition of brand personality is interpreted as being too broad for several authors, which is the root of this theory's prominent critics (Geuens et al., 2009; Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003; Davies et al., 2018). The definition developed by Aaker refers to "human characteristics," which considers the human traits of personality but also adds socio-demographic (gender, social class, and age) points to the considered initial psychological traits (such as 'upper-class') (Geuens et al., 2009; Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003).

The critics argue that this causes problems of uncertainty (the practitioners and researchers are not sure of the results of the measured personality) and that it might not be generalizable in cases where a brand-level analysis is necessary and might not be concise in cross-cultural situations (Geuens et al., 2009; Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003). Then, harsh critiques state that the 'Brand Personality Scale' does not measure only brand personality but a mix of it and identity, self-image, and other attributes not linked to personality directly

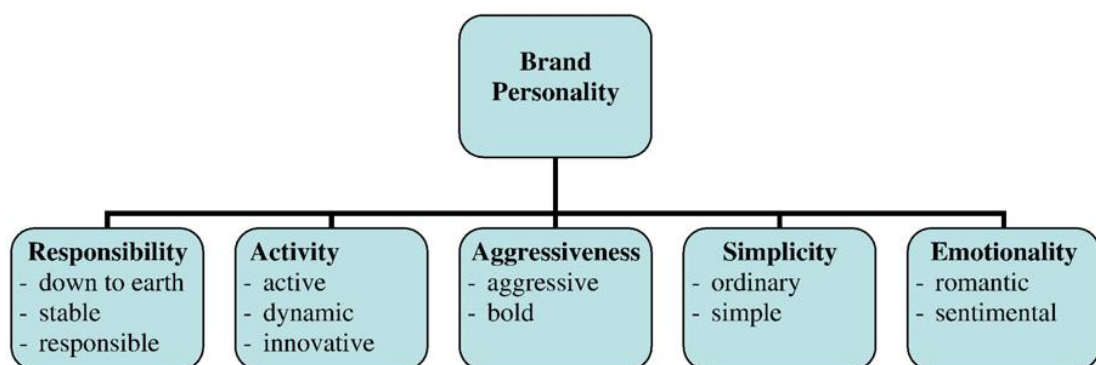
(such as masculine/feminine), and introduces conceptual confusion to the field, due to Aaker's definition broadness (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003; Davies et al., 2018).

Then, several definitions are proposed for constructing a scale that measures the "brand personality," such as the following proposed by Azoulay and Kapferer (p. 153, 2003) as being "the unique set of human personality traits both applicable and relevant to brands." This definition is also used by other authors in the field, who propose new scales that contrapose Aaker's scale (Davies et al., 2018).

In this scenario, diverse new brand personality scales are proposed, such as the one by Geuens et al. (2009), considering only psychological human traits (and not socio-demographic) to address the limitations of the previous model and offer a more practical tool. By not considering the socio-demographic aspects and unifying some of the redundant traits of the original scale, the factors change, and the facets (and traits) are shortened and resumed, generating the new scale:

FIGURE 2

THE NEW BRAND PERSONALITY MEASURE DEVELOPED BY GEUENS



Geuens et al., p. 103, 2009

The author points out that empirical research demonstrated the reliability and validity of the proposed tool, with a design for usage across brand contexts and cultural contexts

(Geuens et al., 2009). This scale was created in Belgium and tested in 9 other countries

(Geuens et al., 2009)

Several other authors have created alternatives to ‘brand personality scales’ either to adapt Aaker’s foundational work to their necessities or to correct methodological mistakes they might have identified in their view (Davies et al., 2018). By analyzing 21 papers from 1997 to 2016 regarding brand personality (including Aaker’s initial work), Davies et al. (2018) pointed out that too many ‘Dimensions’ have been discovered by researchers in the field. Many studies on brand personality did not connect to any theoretical foundation, and only a few based their theoretical framework on human personality traits (Davies et al., 2018). Table 1 summarizes the dimensions found by Davies in the analyzed studies.

TABLE 1

THE DIMENSIONS OF ENTITY BRAND PERSONALITY IN PRIOR WORK

Dimensions (and typical items)	Study reference number																				
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
<i>Sincerity</i> (honest, genuine and cheerful)	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	?	X	X	?	X
<i>Competence</i> (reliable, dependable and efficient)	X		X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X		X	X	X	?	X		X	X	
<i>Excitement</i> (daring, imaginative and up-to-date)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	?	X	X	X	?	X	X	X	X	X
<i>Sophistication</i> (glamorous, charming and romantic)	X	X	X		X	?	X	X		X		?				X	X			X	
<i>Ruggedness</i> (tough, strong and rugged)	X			X	?	?		X						?							
<i>Ruthlessness</i> (controlling and aggressive)					X				X	?		?		X				?			
<i>Thrift</i> (poor, sloppy and low class)		X					X														
<i>Peacefulness</i> (gentle, mild and peaceful)		X	X	X										X							X
<i>Unpleasant</i> (annoying, irritating and outmoded)				X			X						X								
<i>Simplicity</i> (ordinary and simple)					?							X									
<i>Sensitivity</i> (delicate, sensitive and romantic)								?									X				
<i>Conformity</i> (religious, spiritual and traditionalist)										X											
<i>Prestige</i> (reputable and successful)																			X	X	X
<i>Cosmopolitan</i> (international and cosmopolitan)																			X		
<i>Materialism</i> (selfish, materialistic and pretentious)																				X	
<i>Conspicuousness</i> (special and extravagant striking)																					X

Notes: X indicates that the dimension is apparent in the study; ? means that it may be present and a blank indicates that it was not present; Studies: 1 = Aaker (1997); 2 = Aaker et al. (2001); 3 = Aaker et al. (2001); 4 = Smit et al., 2002; 5 = Davies et al. (2004); 6 = Slaughter et al. (2004); 7 = d’Astous and Levesque (2003); 8 = Venable et al. (2005); 9 = Bosnjak et al. (2007); 10 = d’Astous and Boujbel (2007); 11 = Milas and Mlačić (2007); 12 = Geuens et al. (2009); 13 = Chen and Rogers (2006); 14 = Kaplan et al. (2010); 15 = Herbst and Merz (2011); 16 = Das et al. (2012); 17 = Muniz and Marchetti (2012); 18 = Rojas-Méndez et al. (2013a, 2013b); 19 = Rauschnabel et al. (2016); 20 = Sung et al. (2015); and 21 = Willems et al. (2011)

(Davies et al., p.119, 2018).

Even with those many new dimensions being presented, 4 of the 5 dimensions of Aaker appear regularly in the studies, with Ruggedness being the dimension not regularly appearing in the studies (appearing in only 6 of the 21 papers), and Sincerity and Competence being the most relevant (Davies et al., 2018). Some dimensions, although presented with different names, had the same description and same traits used to exemplify the dimension and were then allocated in the original dimension set by Aaker (Davies et al. 2018). Only 8 of the papers analyzed reportedly imported the original dimensions presented by Aaker (Davies et al., 2018).

The complete detailed list of papers analyzed by Davies et al. (2018) is contained in Appendix A. Authors varied in how they defined the concept of brand personality: 12 papers used Aaker's definition or a modified version, and two papers described it as "a mental representation of a store that typically captures an individual's personality," and three used "brand personality is the set of human personality traits that are both applicable to and relevant for a brand," similar to the presented by Azoulay and Kapferer (2003). As mentioned before, the argument presented by Azoulay and Kapferer (2003) to their definition is that Aaker's definition takes points not related to 'human personality traits', Davies counterarguments that "however, this criticism would be more convincing if any dimension of brand personality was dominated by measurement items that are not behavioral traits and none can be argued to be so" (Davies et al., p.120, 2018).

As a result of the literature review performed in this thesis and Aaker's relevancy in the field, her original brand personality scale will be used as a framework.

2.4. Brand Personality Scale for the social media of Restaurants

Brand personality can be used as a point of differentiation for restaurants as a marketing communication technique, and it affects their overall performance, making it more (or less) effective in contrast with the competition (Siguaw et al., 1999). Nevertheless, most restaurants do not use brand personality as a form of brand differentiation (Siguaw et al., 1999).

Several marketing techniques can be used in order to achieve a specific desired profile, as an example, the “personification” (as Ronald McDonald for McDonald's), can be used in form to achieve a higher sincerity factor in its personality; or also the restaurant atmosphere (Siguaw et al., 1999).

Using the personality dimensions (among other techniques), restaurant managers can enhance brand positioning in the market, which is essential in a highly competitive market such as restaurants (Siguaw et al., 1999). The cellphone and its applications, such as social media, can impact the decision of an individual (or group) on choosing a restaurant (Hwang et al., 2021). Hence, this context is important to understand how a restaurant's social media personality affects a consumer's willingness to try it.

2.5. How does Generation Z score on the Personality Scale?

As mentioned in the first part of the Literature Review in the description of Generation Z, the researchers often use the word Individuality. The word is not used in an egoistic form but to stress that these individuals are always searching for new experiences (and not for possession) and are linked to a realistic and pragmatic form of seeing the world. Based on those characteristics' descriptions, I expect to find that Generation Z scores very

high on the “Sincerity” Dimension of Aaker’s Brand Personality Scale in this study. As previously discussed, the Sincerity Dimension gathers traits such as “down-to-earth,” “honest,” “sincere,” “real,” and “original” (Aaker, 1997).

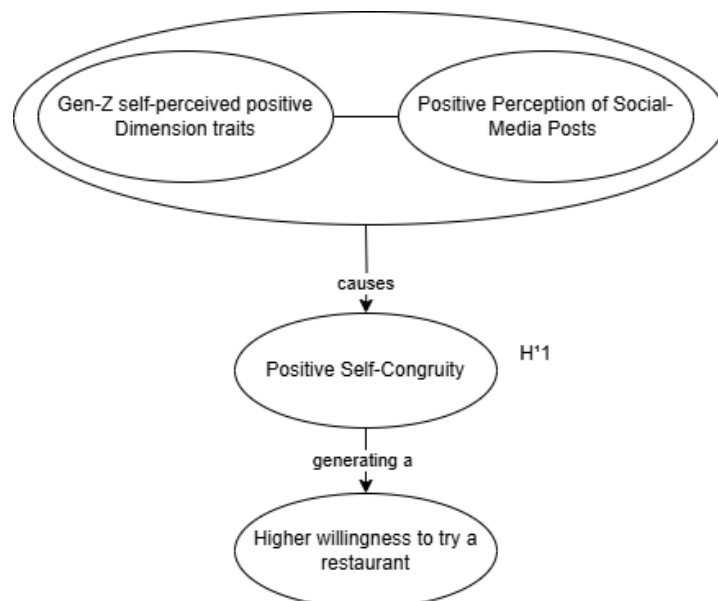
The self-congruity theory is often used to generate knowledge for businesses' strategies and marketing; as aforementioned, consumers tend to prefer products/brands with a “positive self-congruity.” As a following step, based on the confirmation of the first assumption above, and considering the ‘self-congruity theory’ and the propositions of the ‘brand personality scale,’ I intend to test the hypothesis:

H'1 – Generation Z has a higher willingness to try Restaurants that the Social Media Marketing posts present traits of the ‘Sincerity Dimension.’

The following model elucidates how the aforementioned self-perception of the Gen Z traits on the perception of a social media post of a restaurant causes a Positive Self-Congruity, resulting in a higher willingness to try it.

MODEL 1

THE SELF-CONGRUITY WITH A SOCIAL MEDIA POST PROCESS AND ITS EFFECT ON THE WILLINGNESS TO TRY A RESTAURANT



3. RESEARCH DESIGN

The hypothetico-deductive method steps, often used in quantitative research, must be followed in this thesis, using the handbook developed by Sekaran and Bougie (2016) as a guide for this construction. The current chapter of this thesis defines the method and execution of the research, the sampling, the data analysis strategy, and the ethical implications and guidelines followed.

3.1. Method and Execution

The method chosen for this thesis has a deductive reasoning approach. In the previous session, the literature review, the relevant theories and frameworks were presented to support the research development in order to test the hypothesis using a quantitative analysis.

The research data collection method was done via an online survey. The descriptive questionnaire was constructed with only closed-ended questions. The questionnaire is online, self-administered, and performed through Qualtrics Software. The collection of data was performed in April 2025. The mode of data collection was chosen due to the nature of the data that had to be gathered and the advantages of an online survey, such as the speed, facility, and low cost of gathering and processing the data (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The questionnaire can be accessed in its entirety in Appendix B.

The questionnaire's first part measures the respondents' self-identity evaluation regarding the traits of Aaker's framework and the identified personality of Gen-Z. All five framework dimensions were measured, but due to the large number of traits, not all of them were included. The first traits included in the questionnaire are those presented by Aaker (1997) as 'facets'. The respondents were first asked to respond to a 7-point Likert scale,

ranging from “1- Strongly Disagree” to “7- Strongly Agree” to the sentence “I consider myself to be a person who is...” to each of the Aaker traits. Then, the respondents were also requested to respond (on a similar scale) to sentences regarding Gen Z's identified traits: Digital-Natives, individuality, self-learners, realistic, pragmatic, and community-driven. Then, it would be possible to understand Gen-Z better, as pointed out by the Literature Review.

The second part of the questionnaire measures the respondents' perception of a restaurant's social media personality. This part starts with presenting a prefabricated social media post for a restaurant, as shown below.

POST 1

INSTAGRAM PREFABRICATED POST EVOKING SINCERITY DIMENSION



This post was designed to present the traits considered in the Sincerity Dimension of Aaker's scale, trying to convey most of the aforementioned characteristics of Generation Z. The post was designed by Raquel Bacelar, a young but experienced Marketing Designer and Analyst, who has worked for companies and free-lancing designing posts and campaigns in social media for several types of businesses. Then, the respondents were asked to respond to a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from "1- Strongly Disagree" to "7- Strongly Agree" to the sentence "I think that the restaurant of this post is..." to each of the trait's facets.

In the third part, the respondent measures the respondents' willingness to try the restaurant presented in the post. The respondents were asked to select on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from "1- Strongly Disagree" to "7- Strongly Agree" to the sentence "Ignoring factors such as food preferences/restrictions and monetary budget, I would visit this Restaurant because of this post."

In the last part, data regarding the demographics of the respondents were collected, such as the year of birth (selecting from a string of pre-defined birth years for each generation), whether they currently work, the joint family's average income, and gender.

3.2. Sampling Method

The selection for the population starts with the criteria of individuals of any age, but only if they are over 18 years old. Due to the questionnaire language, the respondent must be an English speaker. Due to the data collection mode, they must have access to the Internet via a device, such as a smartphone or a laptop. There are no geographical or nationality criteria for the respondents.

Due to the nature of the data to be collected, a convenience sampling design was performed. This type of design is a nonprobability design type and is a form of choosing the

already available respondents, which is time-efficient and non-costly (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016, p. 248).

The initial sampling size target was defined as 200 respondents in order to achieve sufficient information for the population generalization. In total, 236 respondents started the survey, but only 146 completed it.

3.3. Data analysis execution

The data collected from the respondents was first processed and then analyzed using descriptive statistics to gather general ideas about the population. Then, in order to test the hypothesis, the differences of the averages of the dimensions were compared across different generations on a 95% confidence level. Additionally, in order to broaden the discussion of the results, the tests were presented at a 90% confidence level. The analyses were performed on the SPSS Software.

3.4. Ethical Considerations

This thesis follows the ethical code of the document “European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity” developed by the European Federation of Academies of Sciences and Humanities (All European Academies) (ALLEA, 2017), as recommended by the University of Hasselt (2025a).

The data collection, treatment, and storage follow the “General policy plan on research data management at Hasselt University” as well as the policies and directions regarding data, such as using anonymized and minimized research data (University of

Hasselt, 2025b). The respondents were informed of the general purpose of data collection, treatment, and storage at the beginning of the online survey.

There was no conflict of interest during the development of this thesis. There was no external funding for this research.

4. RESULTS

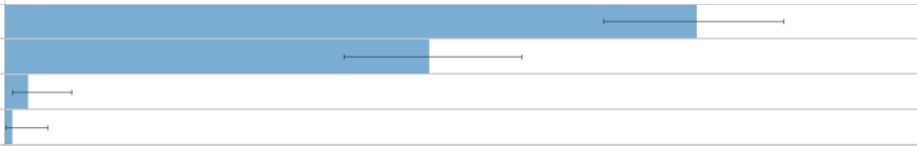
The Results chapter begins with general information about the respondents and the data preparation and cleaning process. Then, the results regarding the respondents' self-identification regarding the traits are presented. Next, I present the results of the respondents' assessment regarding the restaurant's social media posts. The chapter ends with the results of the respondents' willingness to try the restaurant in the post and the hypothesis consideration.

4.1. General results

During data collection, 236 respondents answered the Online Survey on Qualtrics. Firstly, analyzing the online survey completion, 90 out of the initial 236 respondents did not complete the survey in its entirety and did not answer the 'Demographics' section, which is essential information for the research. So those respondents were excluded during the data cleaning phase.

From the remaining 146 respondents, 88 respondents (60,3%) declared to be Generation Z (born between 1995-2010), 54 respondents (37%) declared to be Millennial (born between 1981 to 1994), only three respondents from the Generation X (born between 1965-1980) and one from the Baby Boomer Generation (born between 1946 – 1964). In this case, there was insufficient sample size from Generation X and Generation Boomers to generalize with relevant statistical power and draw insights regarding those real populations. So, the group analysis was performed only on Gen Z and Millennials.

TABLE 2
INITIAL RESPONDENTS' GENERATION

QID8...een:		Count	Percent
1995 - 2010		88	60,3%
1981 - 1994		54	37,0%
1965 - 1980		3	2,1%
1946 - 1964		1	0,7%
Total		146	100,0%

After the exclusion of Generation X and Generation Boomers, the respondents' size decreased to 142, as shown in Table 3, presented below:

TABLE 3
FINAL RESPONDENTS' GENERATION

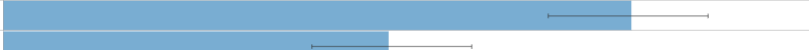
QID8...een:		Count	Percent
1995 - 2010		88	62,0%
1981 - 1994		54	38,0%
Total		142	100,0%

Table 4 presents the results regarding the respondents' gender. For Gen Z, 37 respondents were declared male (42% of Gen-Z respondents) and 51 female respondents (58% of Gen-Z respondents). For the Millennials, there were 39 male respondents (72% of Millennial respondents), 14 female respondents (26% of Millennial respondents), and one person identified as 'Non-binary' (2% of Millennial respondents).

TABLE 4
RESPONDENTS' GENDER

		My year of birth is between:	
		Gen-Z	Millennials
		Count	Count
Respondents' gender identity	Male	37	39
	Female	51	14
	Non-binary / third gender	0	1
	I would rather not respond	0	0

4.2. Generation profile self-identification

In order to identify the differences between the Gen Z and Millennial population regarding their self-identification, a T-test (with a confidence level of 95%) was performed to check if their mean response was different for each of the presented and measured traits.

4.2.1. *Personality Scale traits*

Firstly, considering Aaker's 15 presented traits, the results are contained in Table 5 presented below. There is no statistically significant difference between the means of the two generations in any of Aaker's traits. The traits with higher identification scores (for both generations) were (in descending order): *reliable* (average score of 6.14 for Gen Z and 6.17 for Millennials), *honest* (6.10 for Gen Z and 6.09 for Millennials), *intelligent* (5.58 to Gen Z and 5.87 to Millennials), and *down-to-earth* (5.65 for Gen Z and 5.75 for Millennials).

TABLE 5
GENERATION SELF-ASSESSMENT ON THE BRAND PERSONALITY
FRAMEWORK

	My year of birth is between:			
	1995 - 2010		1981 - 1994	
	Gen Z (A)		Millenials (B)	
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
down-to-earth	5,65	1,09	5,74	1,17
honest	6,10	,84	6,09	,85
wholesome	5,45	1,17	5,70	1,11
cheerful	5,51	1,22	5,57	1,14
daring	4,81	1,43	5,00	1,21
high spirited	5,10	1,35	5,35	1,25
imaginative	5,47	1,25	5,39	1,27
up-to-date	5,39	1,10	5,56	1,08
reliable	6,14	,94	6,17	1,11
intelligent	5,58	,96	5,87	,75
successful	4,69	1,14	5,07	1,13
upper-class	3,63	1,50	4,09	1,53
charming	4,77	1,35	5,06	1,22
outdoorsy	4,59	1,74	4,81	1,54
tough	4,55	1,68	4,91	1,25

Results are based on two-sided tests assuming equal variances. For each significant pair, the key of the smaller category appears in the category with the larger mean.

Significance level for upper case letters (A, B, C): ,05^a

a. Tests are adjusted for all pairwise comparisons within a row of each innermost subtable using the Bonferroni correction.

4.2.2. Identified traits of the Literature Review

On the identified traits of Gen-Z that were identified in the Literature Review (digital-natives, individuality, self-learners, realistic, pragmatic, and community-driven), the comparison of the generations' self-assessment is presented in the following table.

TABLE 6
GENERATIONS' SELF-ASSESSMENT ON THE GEN Z TRAITS GATHERED FROM THE LITERATURE

	My year of birth is between:			
	1995 - 2010		1981 - 1994	
	Gen Z (A)		Millennials (B)	
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
I use the Internet or Mobile Apps every day	6,74	,49	6,74	,68
I cannot remember the last day I did not use the Internet or a Mobile App	5,67	2,01	5,54	2,03
I cannot remember a childhood without the Internet or Mobile Apps	1,95	1,23	1,57	1,13
I have a strong identity/individuality	5,43	1,08	5,61	1,05
I express myself and my opinions in a unique way	5,06	1,24	5,11	1,22
I think that everyone should have their own identity	6,22 B	1,03	5,57	1,31
Usually, I can learn new things without asking other people for help	5,44	1,19	5,44	1,21
I can always rely on the internet to learn new things	5,63	1,33	5,35	1,36
I consider myself a highly realistic person	5,43	1,29	5,56	1,11
I consider myself a very pragmatic person	4,85	1,25	5,48 A	1,26
I always look for facts in my daily life	5,20	1,31	5,50	1,18
I highly appreciate collaborative people	5,98	1,09	5,94	,98
I am a very team-oriented person	5,01	1,57	5,39	1,14
I have many friends I made on the Internet	3,91	2,04	3,67	1,92

Results are based on two-sided tests assuming equal variances. For each significant pair, the key of the smaller category appears in the category with the larger mean.

Significance level for upper case letters (A, B, C): ,05¹

1. Tests are adjusted for all pairwise comparisons within a row of each innermost subtable using the Bonferroni correction.

Of the 14 statements, only 2 had a statistically significant difference between the means of the two generations. On the “individuality” trait, the statement “I think that

everyone should have their own identity,” Generation Z scored higher than Millennials. On the “*pragmatic*” trait, in the statement “I consider myself a very pragmatic person”, the Millennials had a higher score than Generation Z.

The higher score for the statements is regarding the *Digital Native trait*, such as “I use the Internet or Mobile Apps every day” (6,74 for Gen-Z and 6,74 for Millennials) and “I cannot remember the last day I did not use the Internet or a Mobile App” (5.67 for Gen Z and 5.54 for Millennials). Then, the next best scoring is regarding their *Individuality* traits, such as “I have a strong identity/individuality” (5.43 for Gen Z and 6.61 for Millennials), “I uniquely express myself and my opinions” (5.06 for Gen Z and 5.11 for Millennials), and “I think that everyone should have their own identity” (6.22 for Gen Z and 5.57 for Millennials).

4.3. Assessment of the Restaurant’s post by the Generations

In order to identify the differences between the Gen Z and Millennial population regarding their interpretation of the Restaurant post, a T-test (with a confidence level of 95%) was performed to check if their mean response was different for each of the presented and measured traits.

4.3.1. *Assessment of the Restaurant’s post using the traits of the ‘Personality Scale’*

Firstly, considering Aaker's 15 presented traits, the results are contained in Table 7 presented below. For only two personality traits, there was a statistically significant difference between the two populations. On the up-to-date trait (with a Gen-Z score of 4.88

and a Millennial score of 4.33) and the successful trait (score of 4,99 for Gen-Z and 4,28 for Millennials).

TABLE 7

GENERATIONS' ASSESSMENT OF POST USING THE PERSONALITY SCALE				
	My year of birth is between:			
	1995 - 2010		1981 - 1994	
	Gen Z (A)		Millenials (B)	
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
I think that the restaurant in this post is down-to-earth	4,51	1,36	4,31	1,37
I think that the restaurant in this post is honest	4,62	1,18	4,28	1,32
I think that the restaurant in this post is wholesome	4,86	1,37	4,72	1,23
I think that the restaurant in this post is cheerful	4,94	1,27	5,06	1,22
I think that the restaurant in this post is daring	4,10	1,49	4,44	1,74
I think that the restaurant in this post is spirited	4,69	1,32	4,35	1,53
I think that the restaurant in this post is imaginative	4,35	1,69	4,19	1,75
I think that the restaurant in this post is up-to-date	4,88 B	1,38	4,33	1,37
I think that the restaurant in this post is reliable	4,72	1,13	4,44	1,16
I think that the restaurant in this post is intelligent	4,66	1,34	4,22	1,30
I think that the restaurant in this post is successful	4,99 B	1,11	4,28	1,38
I think that the restaurant in this post is upper-class	4,66	1,53	4,22	1,64
I think that the restaurant in this post is charming	5,24	1,14	4,83	1,48
I think that the restaurant in this post is outdoorsy	3,52	1,58	3,39	1,60
I think that the restaurant in this post is tough	2,95	1,37	2,87	1,33

Results are based on two-sided tests assuming equal variances. For each significant pair, the key of the smaller category appears in the category with the larger mean.

Significance level for upper case letters (A, B, C): ,05¹

1. Tests are adjusted for all pairwise comparisons within a row of each innermost subtable using the Bonferroni correction.

4.3.2. Assessment of the Restaurant's post using the traits gathered from the Literature Review

On the identified traits of Gen-Z that were identified in the Literature Review (digital-natives, individuality, self-learners, realistic, pragmatic, and community-driven), the comparison of the generations' assessment of the Restaurant post is presented in Table 8. Only three statements had a statistically relevant difference of means: On the “individuality”

trait, the statement “The communication style of this post is very distinctive” (with Gen Z scoring 4.0 and Millennials scoring 3.3).

On the “Community-Driven” trait, Gen Z scored higher in 2 of the three statements. “I think that this restaurant creates a feeling of community” (with a score of 4,65 for Gen Z and 3,98 for Millennials). “This post gives me a feeling of belonging” (with a score of 4,26 for Gen Z and 3,52 for Millennials).

TABLE 8

ASSESSMENT OF THE RESTAURANT'S POST USING THE TRAITS GATHERED ON THE LITERATURE REVIEW

	My year of birth is between:			
	1995 - 2010		1981 - 1994	
	Gen Z (A)		Millennials (B)	
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
I believe this restaurant would always use the Internet or an App to communicate with potential clients	4,82	1,57	5,22	1,64
The social media of this restaurant communicates perfectly through the internet	4,85	1,41	4,98	1,39
I would not think of any other way for this Restaurant to use an App to communicate with its customers	3,45	1,65	3,20	1,58
I think that the restaurant in this post has a unique style	3,74	1,67	3,35	1,62
I think that the restaurant in this post has a strong identity	4,19	1,67	3,70	1,71
The communication style of this post is very distinctive	4,00 B	1,60	3,30	1,49
I think that the restaurant in this post is very realistic	4,61	1,39	4,24	1,30
I think that the restaurant in this post is definitely factual	4,16	1,39	3,93	1,45
I think that the restaurant in this post is surely pragmatic	4,10	1,39	4,02	1,37
I think that this restaurant creates a feeling of community	4,65 B	1,56	3,98	1,58
This post gives me a feeling of belonging	4,26 B	1,71	3,52	1,71
I feel like this is a very local restaurant	4,69	1,64	4,22	1,68

Results are based on two-sided tests assuming equal variances. For each significant pair, the key of the smaller category appears in the category with the larger mean.

Significance level for upper case letters (A, B, C): ,05¹

1. Tests are adjusted for all pairwise comparisons within a row of each innermost subtable using the Bonferroni correction.

4.4. Willingness to try the restaurant

Regarding the ‘willingness to try’ the Restaurant, there was no verified statistical difference in means between the two populations. The means can be verified in Table 9. Also, the respondents scored very low on the “*I can see my personality in this post*”

TABLE 9

WILLINGNESS TO TRY THE RESTAURANT OF THE POST

	My year of birth is between:			
	1995 - 2010		1981 - 1994	
	Gen Z (A)		Millennials (B)	
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
I would definitely visit this Restaurant	5,10	1,28	4,70	1,62
I would visit this restaurant with my family or friends	5,19	1,28	4,74	1,62
This post makes me want to try this restaurant	4,82	1,73	4,35	1,79
I can see my personality in this post	3,62	1,70	3,17	1,63

Results are based on two-sided tests assuming equal variances. For each significant pair, the key of the smaller category appears in the category with the larger mean.

Significance level for upper case letters (A, B, C): .05^a

a. Tests are adjusted for all pairwise comparisons within a row of each innermost subtable using the Bonferroni correction.

Returning to the Hypothesis formulated on the Literature Review Chapter: **H¹** – “*Generation-Z has a higher willingness to try Restaurants that the Social Media Marketing posts present traits of the ‘Sincerity Dimension’*”. There is not enough information to corroborate the hypothesis, since there is no statistically relevant confirmation that Generation Z is more willing to try a restaurant due to a post evoking the Sincerity Dimension traits compared with the Millennial generation.

4.5.Expanding the findings

Although the hypothesis cannot be corroborated as presented, it opens space for several discussions presented in the next chapters. First, considering this study tries to segment an entire generation, the sample size gathered in the study might not have been enough. As well as the in-group heterogeneity, which might have impacted the final results. In order to provoke future studies in this field and give a more exploratory aspect to this study, the same analyses were re-made. Although there are no statistically significant results at a 5% significance level, it changes partially at a 10% significance level. As presented in Table 10, at a 10% significance level, the groups present an average difference in some of the traits.

Considering the traits of the Brand Personality Scale, the two groups present no average difference at a 5% level for any of the traits. At a 10% significance level, it changes to 3 different averages from the groups. In the Competence dimension, the Millennial respondents had a higher score in the *intelligent* and *successful* traits in comparison to the Gen-Z respondents. In the Sophistication dimension, the Millennial respondents presented a higher average score in the *Upper-Class* trait.

Considering the Gen-Z traits found in the Literature Review, for the *Digital-Native* trait, an additional statement presented a difference of means. In the statement, “*I cannot remember a childhood without the Internet or Mobile Apps*”, Generation Z scored higher than the Millennials.

TABLE 10

**GENERATION SELF-ASSESSMENT ON THE BRAND PERSONALITY FRAMEWORK &
IDENTIFIED TRAITS AT A 10% SIGNIFICANCE LEVEL**

	My year of birth is between:			
	1995 - 2010		1981 - 1994	
	Gen Z (A)		Millennials (B)	
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
down-to-earth	5,65	1,09	5,74	1,17
honest	6,10	,84	6,09	,85
wholesome	5,45	1,17	5,70	1,11
cheerful	5,51	1,22	5,57	1,14
daring	4,81	1,43	5,00	1,21
high spirited	5,10	1,35	5,35	1,25
imaginative	5,47	1,25	5,39	1,27
up-to-date	5,39	1,10	5,56	1,08
reliable	6,14	,94	6,17	1,11
intelligent	5,58	,96	5,87 A	,75
successful	4,69	1,14	5,07 A	1,13
upper-class	3,63	1,50	4,09 A	1,53
charming	4,77	1,35	5,06	1,22
outdoorsy	4,59	1,74	4,81	1,54
tough	4,55	1,68	4,91	1,25
I use the Internet or Mobile Apps every day	6,74	,49	6,74	,68
I cannot remember the last day I did not use the Internet or a Mobile App	5,67	2,01	5,54	2,03
I cannot remember a childhood without the Internet or Mobile Apps	1,95 B	1,23	1,57	1,13
I have a strong identity/individuality	5,43	1,08	5,61	1,05
I express myself and my opinions in a unique way	5,06	1,24	5,11	1,22
I think that everyone should have their own identity	6,22 B	1,03	5,57	1,31
Usually, I can learn new things without asking other people for help	5,44	1,19	5,44	1,21
I can always rely on the internet to learn new things	5,63	1,33	5,35	1,36
I consider myself a highly realistic person	5,43	1,29	5,56	1,11
I consider myself a very pragmatic person	4,85	1,25	5,48 A	1,26
I always look for facts in my daily life	5,20	1,31	5,50	1,18
I highly appreciate collaborative people	5,98	1,09	5,94	,98
I am a very team-oriented person	5,01	1,57	5,39	1,14
I have many friends I made on the Internet	3,91	2,04	3,67	1,92

Results are based on two-sided tests assuming equal variances. For each significant pair, the key of the smaller category appears in the category with the larger mean.

Significance level for upper case letters (A, B, C): 10^{-1}

1. Tests are adjusted for all pairwise comparisons within a row of each innermost subtable using the Bonferroni correction.

Additionally, in the context of a 10% significance level analysis, the willingness to try the restaurant of the post would be higher for Generation Z in comparison to Millennials (as presented in Table 11). Also, the high deviation from the responses shows a high in-group heterogeneity.

TABLE 11

WILLINGNESS TO TRY THE RESTAURANT OF THE POST ON A 10% SIGNIFICANCE LEVEL				
	My year of birth is between:			
	1995 - 2010		1981 - 1994	
	Gen Z (A)		Millenials(B)	
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
I would definitely visit this Restaurant	5,10	1,28	4,70	1,62
I would visit this restaurant with my family or friends	5,19 B	1,28	4,74	1,62
This post makes me want to try this restaurant	4,82	1,73	4,35	1,79
I can see my personality in this post	3,63	1,70	3,17	1,63

Results are based on two-sided tests assuming equal variances. For each significant pair, the key of the smaller category appears in the category with the larger mean.
Significance level for upper case letters (A, B, C): 10^{-1}

1. Tests are adjusted for all pairwise comparisons within a row of each innermost subtable using the Bonferroni correction.

4.6. Generations' self-assessment with gender as a variable

Going one step further, in the analysis, and adding gender as a variable, new insights begin to emerge. Due to the low number of respondents for the “Non-binary/third gender” category, the option was deleted from the analysis, since it wouldn’t be possible to generalize about the group with statistical relevance. The results are shown in Table 12 below.

Millennials, in the Brand Personality Scale trait of *reliable*, the female respondents scored higher than the male respondents. In all of the other traits from the Brand Personality Scale and the additional characteristics found in the literature, males and females scored a similar average in the Millennial generation.

On the other hand, when comparing male and female respondents from Generation Z, several of the traits show a significant difference in average, in which in all of them the male respondents had a higher score than the female respondents.

Considering the Brand Personality Scale, the Gen-Z male respondents scored higher than the Gen-Z females in the dimensions of *Sincerity* (in the trait *wholesome*), *Excitement* (in the traits *daring* and *up-to-date*), *Sophistication* (in the trait *charming*), and *Ruggedness* (in the trait *outdoorsy*). Considering the Gen-Z traits identified in the Literature, the Gen-Z male respondents scored higher in the *self-learner* trait, in the *realistic and pragmatic* traits, and in the *community-driven* trait.

This might be explained by a higher in-group heterogeneity in the Gen-Z group in regard to gender as an additional variable. Implications are discussed in subtopic 5.3 of this thesis.

TABLE 12

GENERATIONS' PERSONALITY SELF-ASSESSMENT WITH GENDER VARIABLE

	My year of birth is between:							
	1995 - 2010 (Gen-Z)				1981 - 1994 (Millennials)			
	Gender identity				Gender identity			
	Male		Female		Male		Female	
	(A)		(B)		(A)		(B)	
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
down-to-earth	5,70	1,02	5,61	1,15	5,72	1,17	5,93	1,14
honest	5,97	,73	6,20	,92	6,10	,64	6,36	,63
wholesome	5,78 B	,98	5,22	1,25	5,72	1,00	5,93	1,00
cheerful	5,78	,98	5,31	1,35	5,59	1,16	5,64	1,08
daring	5,35 B	,98	4,41	1,58	5,03	1,11	5,00	1,52
high spirited	5,41	1,07	4,88	1,49	5,18	1,32	5,86	,95
imaginative	5,24	1,26	5,63	1,23	5,51	1,21	5,29	1,14
up-to-date	5,70 B	,91	5,16	1,17	5,59	,99	5,43	1,34
reliable	6,11	,88	6,16	,99	6,10	,91	6,71 A	,47
intelligent	5,70	,94	5,49	,97	5,82	,72	6,14	,66
successful	4,68	1,13	4,71	1,15	4,97	1,11	5,43	1,16
upper-class	3,92	1,44	3,41	1,51	4,26	1,45	3,86	1,61
charming	5,24 B	1,12	4,43	1,42	5,03	1,18	5,00	1,30
outdoorsy	5,11 B	1,31	4,22	1,92	4,85	1,42	5,00	1,62
tough	4,84	1,44	4,33	1,82	4,92	1,22	4,93	1,38
I use the Internet or Mobile Apps every day	6,73	,51	6,75	,48	6,74	,72	6,71	,61
I cannot remember the last day I did not use the Internet or a Mobile App	5,49	2,10	5,80	1,95	5,59	2,12	5,29	1,86
I cannot remember a childhood without the Internet or Mobile Apps	1,95	1,20	1,96	1,26	1,62	1,07	1,50	1,34
I have a strong identity/individuality	5,62	,92	5,29	1,17	5,49	1,10	5,86	,86
I express myself and my opinions in a unique way	5,32	1,11	4,86	1,31	4,97	1,11	5,36	1,45
I think that everyone should have their own identity	6,32	1,06	6,14	1,02	5,64	1,14	5,71	1,27
Usually, I can learn new things without asking other people for help	5,65	1,11	5,29	1,24	5,49	1,12	5,29	1,49
I can always rely on the internet to learn new things	6,00 B	,97	5,35	1,49	5,54	1,29	4,79	1,48
I consider myself a highly realistic person	5,78 B	1,06	5,18	1,40	5,64	,87	5,64	1,08
I consider myself a very pragmatic person	5,11	1,15	4,67	1,29	5,54	1,12	5,36	1,65
I always look for facts in my daily life	5,54 B	1,14	4,96	1,37	5,41	1,23	5,71	1,07
I highly appreciate collaborative people	6,27 B	,65	5,76	1,29	5,97	,96	5,86	1,10
I am a very team-oriented person	5,35	1,27	4,76	1,73	5,44	1,17	5,29	1,14
I have many friends I made on the Internet	4,41	1,89	3,55	2,08	3,85	1,95	3,29	1,86

Results are based on two-sided tests assuming equal variances. For each significant pair, the key of the smaller category appears in the category with the larger mean.

Significance level for upper case letters (A, B, C): ,05¹

1. Tests are adjusted for all pairwise comparisons within a row of each innermost subtable using the Bonferroni correction.

5. DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the interpretation and discussions of the research's results are presented in each of the subsections.

5.1. Regarding the hypothesis

As previously presented, there is not enough information to confirm that using the *Sincerity Dimension* traits of Aaker's Personality Scale framework can generate the Z generation to have a higher willingness to try a restaurant in comparison with other generations. Firstly, there is no statistically relevant difference between how Gen Z and Millennials see themselves in this dimension (and in any other of Aaker's dimensions). Second, there was no statistically relevant difference between the generations' willingness to try the restaurant presented in the post.

This result might be explained by the fact that it is a relatively small sample size for the study context. Since the study is trying to generalize an entire generation, maybe a bigger sample size could capture generational differences with a higher degree of accuracy.

Additionally, the sampling technique might also be a factor that affected the final results. For example, the sampling technique and execution had no geographic specification, with respondents of several cultures, countries, and, consequently, personalities. In other words, the in-group heterogeneity is quite substantial and might be a determining factor that changes the personality of a generation. Since a generation is defined as a group of people born in a similar period, with similar social identity, and molded by the same historical events (Ryder, 1985), it might also be expected that different cultures and countries create different generations. Also, since the generational traits are the generalization of the average of that

group (Twenge et al., 2010; Twenge, 2017), the average traits of a generation might be different for different countries and cultures. An example of this high in-group heterogeneity problematic is suggested in Table 11, with the considerably high standard deviation for the averages, which in a 10% confidence level analysis context would suggest a different result.

Another possibility is that since generation characteristics change within the group as they go through new events (Ryder, 1985; Twenge et al., 2010), the two groups analyzed in the research might be very similar at the moment, but they will not necessarily stay similar forever. This argument could be tested in future research by applying the same survey in a similar context after some years.

5.2. Generation as a form of segmentation

As affirmed by Siguaw et al. (1999), the brand personality scale can be used as a form of differentiation for restaurants in their marketing. However, that might not be the case for segmenting for an entire generation in this context. The original brand personality scale by Aaker does not seem to explain (or even identify) any differences between the two generations analyzed in the research.

However, some variables identified during the literature review seem to differ between the two generations. Two of the fourteen statements proposed had different averages between the generations. In the **individuality** characteristic, Generation Z scored higher than Millennials, showing a higher appreciation for their identity (and for others to do so). As presented in the Literature Review, Generation Z is more exposed to identity-related causes and believes they are important (Francis & Hoefel, 2018; Kiliç et al., 2021; Twenge, 2017), so the findings support this context.

Nevertheless, in contradiction to the literature review, the Millennials presented a higher score in the **pragmatic** characteristic than Gen Z. A possible explanation is that the events that occurred in the recent past that molded Generation Z to present this pragmatic trait have also affected the Millennials with a higher effect. In other words, since the generation's traits are mutable with time, the Millennials have changed to be more pragmatic.

5.3.Additional variables as moderators

Table 12 results present gender as an additional variable to the analysis of self-assessment of the generational traits. Although for the Millennials the traits seem not to differ in average for male and female respondents, for Generation Z respondents, a statistical difference is observed. This difference in averages regarding gender for Gen Z respondents points that there is a different self-image of males and females of this generation.

This might open a discussion that maybe the segmentation for generations might need additional moderators when using the Brand Personality Scale dimensions. Other than gender, variables such as nationality, culture, income, and other socio-demographic factors might moderate the generation's self-image in this framework.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The restaurant business sector is vast and under constant change in the fast and volatile global context in which we live. So, in order to draw insights into the sector, the research was planned to study the consumers, in this case, Generation Z. Recapping the study so far, I aimed to study how the personality traits of Gen Z affect their decisions to visit a restaurant based on their perception of its social media account.

Understanding the clients and their groups is essential to business success in all fields, so the correct products, services, targeting campaigns (and so on) can be designed correctly (Aaker, 1997; Davies et al., 2018). I focused on simplifying the consumers by segmenting them into “generations” in this study. In summary, a ‘generation’ is a group of people born in the same period, with similar social identity, shaped by historical events they lived through together (Ryder, 1985). They also share similar generational traits, which generalize the average of that group (Twenge et al., 2010; Twenge, 2017).

Consumers do not always rationalize their consumption of products and services, and several theories have been developed to understand the motivations and behaviors of consumers (Sirgy, 1982). One of them, the Self-Congruity Theory, developed by Sirgy (1982), suggests that when a consumer perceives a trait that they consider positive in themselves in a service or product, there is *positive self-congruity*. In consequence of the positive self-congruity, the consumer has an approach purchase motivation for that product or service. So, when a business understands its consumer, they can develop correct strategies evoking their traits.

A couple of decades later, Jennifer Aaker developed the Brand Personality scale, a framework that measures a brand’s identity using traits based on human personality. Aaker

defines the ‘brand personality’ as “the set of human characteristics associated with a brand” (Aaker, p.347, 1997). These human-like traits are grouped into five dimensions: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness (Aaker, 1997). Each of those dimensions comprises several human personality traits. So, using this scale, it would be possible to measure the “image” that the business evokes in the consumers, which is the target public for the business (Aaker, 1997). The restaurant business is not different. Jeong & Jang (2018) present that customers are more likely to select a restaurant that aligns with their actual or ideal self-image.

So, in trying to understand the personality of the Z Generation, its relation to social media, and how it can affect the identification with a restaurant business, the thesis research question was developed: How does the congruity of the Gen-Z personality with the social media personality of a restaurant affect the willingness to try a restaurant?

The first step was a literature review to determine the Gen-Z personality. In the Literature Review, several authors have presented similar characteristics of this generation, in which I selected the most covered by most of them: **Digital natives**: The Z Generation has a deeper relationship with the internet, being more tech-savvy, connected to social media, not making a clear distinction between virtual and real life; **Individuality**: The Z Generation cherish to having its own identity and possibility of self-expression, that everyone should be their self, and prioritizing authenticity and experiencing over possession; **Community Driven**: The Gen Z participates in several communities in which they identify themselves, but not letting it as a limitation of their personality; **Realistic** and **Pragmatic**: Generation Z tends to be more skeptical and practical with their relations spheres, such as work and social life; **Self-Learners**: the easy access to the internet and social media facilitated the possibilities to learn and discover new things, skills and have new experiences.

Then, I related those findings to the Brand Personality scale presented by Aaker and created the hypothesis: **H¹** – *Generation-Z has a higher willingness to try Restaurants that the Social Media Marketing posts present traits of the ‘Sincerity Dimension.’* I expected Gen Z to score higher on the Sincerity Dimension traits. Consequently, I expected to find in Gen-Z a higher desire to try a restaurant in which the post was designed to evoke sincerity traits and the characteristics of Gen Z found in the Literature Review. In contrast, that was not found. In comparison with the Millennials, Gen-Z had a similar group average score in all of the Brand Personality Scale dimensions. Also, the willingness to try for both groups had no significant statistical difference. Additionally, Gen Z and Millennials had similar assessment averages of the restaurant personality of the post, differing in only two traits.

However, based on the traits gathered from the literature review, two characteristics differed between the generations. Regarding *individuality*, Generation Z scored a higher average than the Millennials, showing a stronger identification with this characteristic and its values. On the other hand, Millennials scored higher than Gen-Z on the pragmatic characteristic.

6.1.Theoretical Implications of this Study

As shown in the results of this study, the Brand Personality Scale does not provide a strong enough framework for pointing out entire generation differences and segmenting social-media marketing to those generations. However, it is possible to differentiate generations by finding common traits through scientific research and literature reviews.

Although no statistically relevant information was found using the Brand Personality Scale in this context, the framework still maintains its relevance in several other contexts and studies, with proven relevance.

6.2. Managerial implications of this study

As pointed out in the literature review, segmentation for restaurants' marketing can be done in several forms, including using the dimensions of the Brand Personality Scale, as demonstrated by several studies. Although the study result points out that it is not possible to segment Gen Z using these framework dimensions, it also shows that both Gen Z and Millennials score noticeably high for the traits of the Sincerity Dimension. In this case, showing the Sincerity Dimension traits would not harm the marketing. As shown in several studies in the literature review, these generations appreciate new experiences in the culinary field.

Several theories and strategies exist to create a strong brand in the sector, regardless of the business size. The self-congruity theory remains relevant in the Marketing field and can also give powerful insights into the social-media marketing of the restaurants.

6.3. Study limitations and suggestions for further research

Writing a master's thesis is challenging, and the present one is no exception. Like most scientific research, time management was crucial to the final result of the paperwork. In addition, respondents' availability to answer the online survey was harder in the execution phase than in the planning phase, especially for older respondents. For future research involving entire generations, I would recommend more careful planning and strategy for collecting data from older groups online.

Also, a bigger sample for each generation should be collected for more substantial analytical certainty. Also, it would be interesting to narrow down the generation's research into specific countries and cultures.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

**A complete list of papers analyzed by Davies et al. (2018) in the construction of
Table 1.**

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APPENDIX B

Questionnaire

Part I

On the scales below, ranging from “1- Strongly Disagree” to “7- Strongly Agree”, please select the appropriate option for each of the sentences:

- 1.1. I consider myself to be a person who is down-to-earth
- 1.2. I consider myself to be a person who is honest
- 1.3. I consider myself to be a person who is wholesome
- 1.4. I consider myself to be a person who is cheerful
- 1.5. I consider myself to be a person who is daring
- 1.6. I consider myself to be a person who is spirited
- 1.7. I consider myself to be a person who is imaginative
- 1.8. I consider myself to be a person who is up-to-date
- 1.9. I consider myself to be a person who is reliable
- 1.10. I consider myself to be a person who is intelligent
- 1.11. I consider myself to be a person who is successful
- 1.12. I consider myself to be a person who is upper-class
- 1.13. I consider myself to be a person who is charming
- 1.14. I consider myself to be a person who is outdoorsy
- 1.15. I consider myself to be a person who is tough

*For measuring the **digital native** (deep connection with the internet) characteristic:*

- 1.16. I use the Internet or Mobile Apps every day
- 1.17. I cannot remember the last day I did not use the Internet or a Mobile App

- 1.18. I cannot remember a childhood without the Internet or Mobile Apps

*For measuring the **individuality** characteristic:*

- 1.19. I have a strong identity/individuality
1.20. I express myself and my opinions in a unique way
1.21. I think that everyone should have their own identity

*For measuring the **self-learner** characteristic:*

- 1.22. Usually, I can learn new things without asking other people for help
1.23. I can always rely on the internet to learn new things

*For measuring the **realistic and pragmatic** characteristics:*

- 1.24. I consider myself a highly realistic person
1.25. I consider myself a very pragmatic person
1.26. I always look for facts in my daily life

*For measuring the **Community-driven** characteristic:*

- 1.27. I highly appreciate collaborative people
1.28. I am a very team-oriented person
1.29. I have many friends I made on the Internet

Part II

Please observe the following social media post of a fictional restaurant and think about how that makes you feel. Consider the image, the texts, and the post caption.



Now, on the scales below, ranging from “1- Strongly Disagree” to “7- Strongly agree”, please select the option you think is appropriate for each of the sentences:

- 2.1. I think that the restaurant in this post is down-to-earth
- 2.2. I think that the restaurant in this post is honest
- 2.3. I think that the restaurant in this post is wholesome
- 2.4. I think that the restaurant in this post is cheerful
- 2.5. I think that the restaurant in this post is daring
- 2.6. I think that the restaurant in this post is spirited

- 2.7. I think that the restaurant in this post is imaginative
- 2.8. I think that the restaurant in this post is up-to-date
- 2.9. I think that the restaurant in this post is reliable
- 2.10. I think that the restaurant in this post is intelligent
- 2.11. I think that the restaurant in this post is successful
- 2.12. I think that the restaurant in this post is upper-class
- 2.13. I think that the restaurant in this post is charming
- 2.14. I think that the restaurant in this post is outdoorsy
- 2.15. I think that the restaurant in this post is tough

*For measuring the **digital native** (deep connection with the internet) characteristic:*

- 2.16. I believe this restaurant would always use the Internet or an App to
communicate with potential clients
- 2.17. The social media of this restaurant communicates perfectly through the
internet
- 2.18. I would not think of any other way for this Restaurant to use an App to
communicate with its customers

*For measuring the **individuality** characteristic:*

- 2.19. I think that the restaurant in this post has a unique style
- 2.20. I think that the restaurant in this post has a strong identity
- 2.21. The communication style of this post is very distinctive

*For measuring the **realistic and pragmatic** characteristics:*

- 2.22. I think that the restaurant in this post is very realistic

2.23. I think that the restaurant in this post is definitely factual

2.24. I think that the restaurant in this post is surely pragmatic

*For measuring the **Community-driven** characteristic:*

2.25. I think that this restaurant creates a feeling of community

2.26. This post gives me a feeling of belonging

2.27. I feel like this is a very local restaurant

Part III

Ignoring factors such as food preferences/restrictions and monetary budget, please select the appropriate option for the sentence below:

On the scale below, ranging from “1- Strongly Disagree” to “7- Strongly agree”:

3.1. I would definitely visit this Restaurant

3.2. I would visit this restaurant with my family or friends

3.3. This post makes me want to try this restaurant

3.4. I can see my personality in this post

Part IV

Please select from the options below the appropriate answer for you.

4.1. My year of birth is between:

1995 - 2010

1981 - 1994

1965 - 1980

1946 - 1964

4.2. Do you currently work?

Yes

No

4.3. Are you currently a student?

Yes

No

4.4. What is the average income of your joint family today (people living together)?

(Please consider the minimum salary of the country you are currently living in)

Less than the minimum salary per person monthly

1-2 minimum salaries per person monthly

3-5 minimum salaries per person monthly

Over 5 salaries per person monthly

I would rather not respond

4.5. Your gender identity

Male

Female

Non-binary

I would rather not respond