

INSTAGRAMMING FOOD BY LEBANESE USERS
UNDER “LEBANONEATS” HASHTAG

A Thesis

Presented to

The faculty of Media of Arts in Media Studies/ Advertising

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In partial fulfillment

Of the requirements for the Master’s degree

by

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Abstract

“Social media is about sociology and psychology more than technology” said Brian Solis (March 14, 2012), Digital Analyst and Anthropologist, Best-Selling Author, Keynote Speaker, Human Being. This quote could be the best label to describe how people have perceived social media since day one. This thesis tackled the gratifications an Instagram user gets upon posting food images. It explains the reasons behind this immense trend of people sharing their food with friends, family, and even strangers following their social media accounts.

For this purpose a literature review covered few researches done before in order to answer this topic by highlighting the main points mentioned in other studies and focusing on the uploaders themselves to check what they found as results in order to challenge another angle. This thesis examines the gratifications a Lebanese user on Instagram gets when sharing food images with others such as building a self-image through food photos, becoming an influencer, and unleashing the inner photographer in him as part of promoting his talents .

The uses and gratifications theory was applicable to the subject because this theory is the most common among others allowing us to analyze the content such as image, caption, and the use of hashtags. Qualitative and quantitative research approaches were applied to achieve the study objectives by conducting three interviews with famous Lebanese food bloggers who represent the Lebanese population in addition to an online questionnaire with 170 respondents. Data were collected, analyzed and interpreted into findings answering the research questions and hypothesis.

Instagramming food by Lebanese users

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1.Introduction

Social media has been of major interest to researchers, marketers, and students. Social media shifted the idea of distance making connections easier than we can imagine. Nowadays, a huge number of online users are active on social media where they view, read, seek, share, and communicate ideas that pops up in their minds (Vicen and Cavus, 2010, Papoola, 2014).

Few years ago, after the huge impact that Facebook did since its launch in 2004, Instagram was introduced and very quickly gained popularity as a new medium. Instagram is an application used to share photos and videos with friends by capturing the life moments using different type of filters with the concept of hashtags and captions. Since its launch in October 2010, it attracted more than 150 million active users, with an average of 55 million photos uploaded per day, and more than 16 billion photos shared online (Instagram, 2013).

According to statistics done in August 2017 by NapoleonCat.com, a complete suite of social media marketing tools for any brand big and small that gives depth analytics on social media to track effectiveness of all campaigns, 1.3 million Lebanese online users are on Instagram aged 13 years and above and it is also interesting to note that about 85% of Instagram users in Lebanon access the app every day.

Much research was done on Instagram to understand the application and its importance in influencing online users through the sharing of pictures (Naaman, Boase, and Lai 2010; Ellison and others 2007). Researchers Ellison et. al. (2007) noticed that users even upload a big number of food photos on their personal social media accounts. This surge in posting

photographs prompts the questioning of the reason behind the posting of such photos. But the question remains what's the message behind such photos?

Food is one of the essential needs that should be satisfied, and it is a reflection of social and cultural values (Neely, Walton, & Stephens, 2014). In fact, food is not only considered as a principle element of wellbeing and health (McBride, 2011), but it is also an important social mover. This pushed researchers (Neely, Walton, & Stephens, 2014; Roper & La Niece, 2009) to start studying the way food is communicated by users and particularly what food-related messages they choose to present to one another.

The study by Chu and Kim (2011) indicated that when customers want to choose a restaurant, they consider a wide range of factors. Non-surprisingly, this range includes online reviews and user-generated photos. Therefore, since customers trust each other's reviews more than what the company claims about itself in marketing campaigns, online users are powerful enough to influence others and maintain a coherent restaurant brand image (Chu and Kim, 2011).

The trend of sharing food pictures is wide spread among Lebanese online users and it pushed them to create and use different hashtags when posting their food images. The main aim of this research is determining the reasons behind the prominence of food images on this application, in addition to understanding the behavior of online users and the way they perceive and influence others by posting food images.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Lebanese people are well known for their frequent gatherings and their hospitality. They are still attached to their traditions and family gatherings during weekends especially on Sundays.

Unlike European countries, in Lebanon there aren't many public places to spend time, and if found they are not well developed and constructed. For this reason Lebanese people especially the young spend most of their times in restaurants to celebrate an occasion or simply to get together.

People became attracted to restaurants because of the food they present, the ambiance, and the whole experience. With social media, it became easier for restaurants to promote themselves and send their messages directly to the public. Social media is a two way communication which means that when a restaurant posts an ad they expect interaction from the audience. Therefore, online users become marketers themselves not to one brand but for each and every existing brand.

When accessing Instagram application on the 5th of May, 2018 the hashtag #food showed that more than 272.747,948 food images were uploaded on Instagram under using this specific hashtag not to mention the ones uploaded with no hashtag or using other type of hashtags like #foodporn #foodlb #Instafood #foodie. Moreover, when Instagram launched their story feature on August 2016, they gave online users the means to share instant opinion, on spot images, and live videos. This trend inspired food lovers to become food bloggers with the sharing of food images online and influencing their followers after becoming idols in the food and beverage industry.

However, this huge number of food photos shared on Instagram whether as a post or a story is not generated by bloggers only. This research attempts to determine the reasons behind the popularity food images among the Lebanese online community on Instagram and the gratifications they get when doing so.

This study differs than the previous researches done because it focuses on the gratification a Lebanese user gets when posting food images on Instagram; it looks at the main

satisfactions that drive people to want to share with others through food images. Previous studies examined psychological, personal and affectional effects caused by this trend on users' behavior but none of them considered the gratifications that specifically a Lebanese Instagram user may get from posting food pictures.

The main problem is that online users are fascinated with this trend and they are becoming so addicted to Instagram. When checking the photos on this platform we can directly notice the huge number of food images taken by many users and shared randomly online. Food images were shared on social media by marketers to promote a certain item and to trigger people to visit a restaurant and try them out; but in fact the majority of food images shared are by normal users who are not marketers nor bloggers (Instagram, 2015).

1.3. Purpose of the Study

Based on the annual local consumer review questionnaire done in 2014 by BrightLocal, experts in online citation and search rankings 88% of consumers trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations before making their decisions. In the food industry, people become more active by sharing their full experience with others and that experience could be positive or negative. People tend to trust normal customers more than brand ads or bloggers especially since most food bloggers are becoming advocates to these brands after a certain type of collaboration and payment contracts. Due to this trend worldwide, several applications were created to focus only on users' feedback and reviews after a restaurant visit like Zomato and Bitfood.

Through the lens of the uses and gratifications theory, the researcher will be able to tackle a new challenge and explore the gratifications obtained when a Lebanese online users upload food images on Instagram.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter presents the existing body of academic knowledge on food and Instagram. It first starts by showing how Instagram has been utilized by its users as a self-presentation tool and how individuals often consider brands in shaping their online identity. The chapter then explains how individuals perceive themselves and others on social media and how they use this platform to engage with others.

2.1. Self-Presentation on Instagram

Using its features, Instagram users are continuously driven to express themselves with a wide range of the available content sharing tools such as uploading photos, status, filters, live videos, boomerang, etc (Instagram, 2015). It has gained a considerable popularity for the central role it plays in building brands online identity and maintaining social capital through building an interactive relationship among its users (Chang and Chuang, 2011).

Typically, users are motivated to share content on social media since they see this as a way to build up their reputation online, enjoy the excitement of posting and figuring out their friends' reaction, achieve online recognition, and strengthen the social bonds with fellow friends (Kim, 2016). An article "Motivations for Sharing Experiences through Social Media" was published in 2014 by Munar and Jacobsen in *Tourism Management* it revealed that sharing content on social networking sites is viewed as a valuable tool for expressing people's sociability level.

It is of no surprise that with the advancement in mobile technology, capturing high quality photos in restaurants and instantly sharing the dining experience has become easier than ever (Lo et al., 2011). In this regard, innovative mobile applications such as Instagram facilitated the enhancement and manipulation of photos taken in order for users to upload more visually appealing images that are attractive (Kim and Tussyadiah, 2013). This brings it down

to the strategic self-presentation phenomenon that is, to a large extent, mediated by technology (Hancock and Toma, 2009). By definition, strategic self-presentation is the process of managing ones impression through altering aspects of the self in order to share a positive image and generate a desirable impression on others (Goffman, 1959). The extent to which users engage in strategic self-presentation is shaped to a large degree by their personality trait (Bareket-Bojmelet al., 2016; Marshall et al., 2015). According to a study done by Wickel in 2015 about the relation between narcissism and the excessive online presentation 55% of a total of 93 female college participants mentioned that they consider narcissism is common due to the highest number of photos uploaded on social media especially selfies. 73.5% of the participants said that they usually check their social media accounts more than 5 times per day. 90.2 % of the participants mentioned that they usually post photos on social media in order to get likes. Wickel discovered that users that engage in excessive online self-presentation, for instance, are thought to be extroverts or narcissist.

2.2 Food Communication on Social Media

There is no denying that social media has a huge impact on businesses and it raised brand awareness and exposure for many restaurants so it was a major factor for their growth (Tina P. Singh, Jan 2017). In Lebanon, Instagram is playing a role in reaching a large number of audience through foodies and user generated food photos shared by online users. The top Lebanese Instagram foodies based on their number of followers and engagement are:

- 1- No Garlic no Onion
- 2- Lebanoneats
- 3- Taste and flavors
- 4- Fuck the diet

5- Jane au chocolat

6- Pol Samuel

7- yummy Lebanon

8- Nonstop cravings

Christopher Holmberg, John E Chaplin, Thomas Hillman, and Christina Maria Berg from University of Gothenburg conducted an explorative study in January 2016 to understand the way adolescents communicate food on social media especially on the top photo sharing application “Instagram”. The researchers chose the content analysis approach to analyze Instagram images uploaded by youth.

Choosing the audience was based on a popular hashtag mainly used by youth, which is #14år (“14 years”) on Instagram. Adolescents shared a large number of images using this hashtag and it showed that 85% of the visuals represented food. The researchers categorized and organized the food images based on their type. 67.7% represented food high in calories but low in nutrients; and half of these images were clearly showing the food brands names. 21.8% were close ups on fruits and vegetables in the style of a cookbook. The collection of these images showed that the food brands marketing campaigns had a huge influence on youth because the photos show that they were trying to make the plate look like an ad. The researcher ended his research by finding that user generated photos uploaded by online users are a tool to know if a marketing campaign was successful or not and sharing food photos by normal users have more powerful effects on the audience because they contain personal recommendations so others will feel more comfortable to check peers’ comments and reviews rather than what a company claims about their products. This raised many questions regarding the type of food all brands are advertising and promoting. Moreover, the study highlighted the big number of

food images shared among youth on Instagram thereby showing that these may have a bigger effect than other forms of commercial advertising.

The researchers found two main ways food had been highlighted and presented on Instagram; one that focuses on the aesthetic style and the second on food being a part of a lifestyle or a situation. The majority of adolescents show the visual in a perfect ambiance as if it were captured to be used in an advertisement. Others, want to reflect their lifestyle by choosing the type of food they are posting as well as what type of occasion they are attending.

Yuheng Hu, Lydia Manikonda, and Subbarao Kambhampati (2013) from the Department of Computer Science at Arizona State University were also interested studying food images uploaded on social media especially on Instagram and in examining the photo content from a technical perspective.

The researchers used qualitative and quantitative approaches to generate their choice of Instagram users, they first got IDs of 37 unique users who appeared on Instagram's public timeline, which displays the most popular accounts at the time; it showed that mainly the accounts belonged to celebrities and that was why they appeared on the top. To continue the process they chose the IDs of their followers and friends and then merged the two lists to form one unified list that contained 95,343 unique users. In order to build a small representative sample they had to eliminate a number of users so they excluded organizations, brands, or spammers; and chose accounts that had at least of 30 friends, 30 followers, and had posted at least 60 photos. The number of users found was 13,951 out of which they randomly selected 50 users since they were performing manual coding of their photos, which is not feasible over large number of users.

Based on that they were able to identify:

- Eight popular photo categories:
 1. Friends
 2. Foods
 3. Selfies
 4. Activities
 5. Captioned photos
 6. Fashion
 7. Gadgets
 8. Pets

- Five distinct types of Instagram users in terms of their posted photos:
 1. Selfie-lovers
 2. People posting quotes and captions
 3. People posting food images
 4. Photos with friends
 5. Post for themselves

This research proved that the number of followers any user has is independent of his/her shared photos on Instagram through statistical significance tests done (Hu, Wang, and Kambhampati 2013). The results from this study show that many teenagers use Instagram to share food photos, and they were portrayed in different but mostly aesthetic ways. The majority of the shots represented food as props or elements to make the picture more appealing which indicates great attention and care in the presentation which could represent the user image online. Moreover, the food marketing through social media mainly featured fast food and mainly targeted the younger generation. The researcher concluded by saying that food presented on social media becomes part of the uploader identity.

2.3 Food Personality

Ginsberg (2015) studied shaping the personalities of the top food brands on Instagram and focused on marketers using this tool to market products in a very cost efficient manner. She studied the top five leading brands: McDonald's, Taco Bell, Shredz, Ben & Jerry's, and Oreo. The brands were ranked in this order due to the number of followers and hashtags used among users and consumers—for example, the number of times #TacoBell is used on Instagram. As for the methodology, the author used a quantitative approach because it shows few specifications and the frequency of these photos. Six phases were tackled by the researcher using the thematic analysis suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). First 11 elements were used in order to analyze the images: product, person and product, people and product, humor and product, world events, recipes, campaign with no products, user-generated, regram (repost for Instagram) from celebrity, lifestyle, and video. Using a content definitions code, which is a system used for brevity or secrecy of communication, in which arbitrarily chosen words, letters, or symbols are assigned definite meanings, made it easier to code each and every photo. After that, they collected and organized the findings on a coding sheet. The researcher divided the posts into two groups: The first group included products and campaigns and was considered as a promotional strategy group. The second group included elements of humor like jokes, events happening in the world, recipes, or any type of user generated content as mark of brands' personalities. In order to explain more the personalities and create this link the researcher applied Aaker's (1997) five dimensions of: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness, while highlighting the differences and the resemblance among these brands. Following the path of Braun and Clark, Ginsberg set out to discover the themes and the content used by these brands to promote their products in a positive and attractive way by making consumers more interactive, and shaping human's personalities without changing the identity.

The researcher found that when a brand creates a certain personality, people who share the same personality will become loyal customers.

2.4 Food Images and their Psychological Effects

Another study on food images focused more on the psychological effects and how online users are attracted and influenced by what they see online including food advertisements or friends' posts. Online users sharing food information and visuals with other users and mention the best places to visit and even what to order. Based on exploratory research findings, Novia Dwi Resti (2013) showed that the sharing of food photographs was directly related to personality traits, self-concept, and how users perceive what is published on social media. Resti's main aim was to examine the effect of restaurant attractiveness, personality, self-concepts, self-control, and perception for dining out. This study used a qualitative approach with a sample size of 12 participants who had already claimed that they liked to share food picture on social media and a quantitative approach with 102 users of the online networking located in Indonesia who were invited to fill a questionnaire.

Resti (2013) found that restaurant attractiveness, and self-concept have a huge impact on consumers' minds and they can directly influence users through their advertisements and the way they communicate a message especially when they personalized a restaurant or a plate to connect with the right target audience.

According to a 2016 study done by Clouds Online, Instagram has over 400 million monthly active users in the world. More than 950,000 users are active accounts from Lebanon. It is interesting to note that around 40 billion photos had been shared on Instagram until April, 2016 and 85% of these Lebanese users access their Instagram accounts on a daily basis.

2.5 Food Habits in Lebanon

In the past few years, Lebanon has experienced a nutritional transition in food choices especially among adolescents. According to a study done by Najat Yahia, Alice Achkar, Abbas Abdallah, and Sandra Rizk in 2008 at the Lebanese American University in Beirut teenagers shifted from eating Mediterranean diet to the fast food. The researchers conducted a questionnaire of 220 students aged between 20 and 25 and were chosen randomly from the Lebanese American University campus during the fall 2006 semester and it included questions about their eating, drinking habits. This study showed that 64.7% of the participants were of normal weight however the rest were obese. The purpose of this study was to examine the prevalence of overweight and obesity among the young generation and it marked that obesity was common among male more than female especially those who ate two to three meals per day mostly fast food. The study nonetheless found that female students maintained a healthier diet strategy influenced by idols in the fashion world. Yet even such a strategy meant that the females may be at risk of developing eating disorders.

2.6 Online Word of Mouth in Lebanon

Chukri Akhras, (December, 2016) Professor of Management information systems Lebanese International University in Lebanon, studied the relation between online word of mouth and the purchasing choices. The researcher found that teenagers share their experiences online with their followers whether they were negative or positive. In order to prove that word of mouth can impact others' perspectives and considerations the researcher distributed questionnaires to 60 graduate students constituting the sample size. 85% of the respondents mentioned that their purchasing decision is usually based on online word of mouth and recommendations on social media however 15% will not be affected. In addition, 100% of the respondents admitted that online word of mouth will be the most effective marketing form in the future.

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The major objective of this study done by Chukri Akhras is to find if the online word of mouth can affect others' behavior positively or negatively, and the results showed that online users are often affected by others' and they would love to taste, buy, or try the same positive experience that any other person passed through.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

The importance of this research can be seen both on a theoretical and practical level. Practically, it gives online users a new tool to satisfy their needs by posting food images on Instagram and share them with their followers. While theoretically, it adds to the existing body of knowledge other important gratifications an online user is getting when uploading food pictures online.

3.1 Uses and Gratification Theory

With social media, the world is more connected especially since social media allows users to interact and communicate with thousands, and perhaps billions of individuals with demographic, geographic, and psychographic differences from all over the world (Williams, Crittenden, Keo, & McCarty, 2012).

Katz, and Blumler pioneered the Uses and Gratification Theory in 1974 and they explored how and based on which motives recipients use the media and what are the gratifications obtained from it. While some theories like the hypodermic needle theory highlight that the audience is passive and can be easily manipulated, the uses and gratification theory considers the audience as active and they are the ones who use the media for their own needs (Griffin, 2012: 368).

According to Elihu Katz (1970), the Uses and Gratifications theory explains how individuals, groups, and society use the media. The main objective in developing this theory is first to explain how people use media to satisfy their needs and second, to discover underlying motives for individuals' media use. The third objective is to identify the positive and the negative consequences of individual media use by describing people as active users.

Katz and Blumler pointed out five assumptions of the theory. First of all, the audience is active, second, the initiative in linking need gratification to a specific medium choice rests with the audience member. Third, the audience have several resources to satisfy their needs one of them is the media, forth, individuals are aware of their media use and interests, fifth the audience are the ones who judge the content of the media.

According to Katz (1974), the uses and gratification theory can be divided into 4 categories related to 4 groups of human needs:

- The escapism or the tension release is when people use the media to escape from their reality to another virtual world.
- Personal relationship refers to building connections with the outside world, as well as through family and friends.
- Personal identity is reached sometimes by using the media to fulfill type of needs related to self-respect and self-confidence by promoting image and status.
- Surveillance which is related to acquiring information helping the thinking and understanding process. People use media to add more information to their knowledge and skills.

The uses and gratification theory considers the audience as important and goal oriented and by using the media they are fulfilling a certain need which differs between one individual and another. The audience is in full control of the media while they have several ways to satisfy their needs so people are not taken as victims of the media.

Blumler and Katz believed that some people may choose to consume media texts as a source of personal identity. The consumer could choose to watch or read something that helps to reinforce self-values and behavior. For example some people may choose to watch Coronation Street (a television programme based on real life) because they need reassurance

that they are living the correct way. Online self-presentation refers to the process of sharing content like photos, status, and videos with the motive of influencing the impression formed by the people around the individual. Psychologists have argued that self- presentation is important for an individual's well-being since it addresses their fundamental need to continuously obtain positive reactions and leave positive impressions on others (Goffman, 1959).

This study will focus on two concepts which are the personal relationship and the personal identity to measure if Lebanese online users are using food images on Instagram to share certain messages such as building an image or reputation among others users.

3.2. Research Questions and Hypotheses

This study aims to investigate why online users are posting food images on Instagram and what are the gratifications obtained from that. Therefore, the researcher proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: Online users upload food images on Instagram to satisfy their personal identity needs.

H2: By posting food images on Instagram, online users are trying to socialize with other online users.

H3: Online users who upload food images on Instagram try to influence others' behavior.

Posting food images on Instagram raised a big question mark about the user's behavior in relation to the types of food shared. Therefore, the researcher claimed the following research questions.

RQ1: Do food images uploaded on Instagram help online users to promote themselves?

Instagramming food by Lebanese users

RQ2: What are the gratifications an online user gets when sharing food images with others on Instagram?

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate with clear justifications the rationale behind developing the research methodology by utilizing the Research Onion strategy. Metaphorically, according to the research onion process that was developed by Saunders et al. in 2007, in order to get to the heart of the onion, several layers have to be taken into consideration. As such, this chapter takes the reader into a step-by-step guide of the research philosophy and approach adopted by the researcher along with the strategy and research method used to gather the data. Ultimately, this chapter will form the basis for the choices of statistical techniques that will be used to analyze the data.

4.1. Research Methods

The aim of this study is to determine the gratifications that online users get when they upload food photos on Instagram as well as discovering the messages a user is trying to send through food images. Therefore, in order to provide a greater understanding for the research problem in question, a mixed approach which is a combination of qualitative and quantitative will be adopted.

The qualitative research will be used to interview three well known foodies in Lebanon with the highest number of followers and likers so that we can get more data about their experience.

4.2. Qualitative research approach

A qualitative method will help the researcher prove the significance of the hypotheses and research questions mentioned previously. Qualitative research was defined by Zikmund (2000) as “stories, visual portrayals, meaningful characterizations, interpretations, and other expressive descriptions.” In the same context, Thompson and walker (1998) explained that qualitative research “answers the questions concerning what is happening how something can be explained or how certain phenomenon are perceived.”

Qualitative research is mainly based on beliefs and experiences rather than numbers; it may be representative by name, symbol or a number code. A qualitative research is used by researcher when they are aiming to understand reasons, opinion, and/or motivations by diving deeper into the problem. Collecting data in a qualitative approach vary using unstructured or semi-structured procedures. In order to proceed with this method, the researcher has to choose a small sample using one or more data collection techniques such as observation, interview, ethnography, narrative, etc.

In this study, the researcher will conduct interviews to collect the data needed.

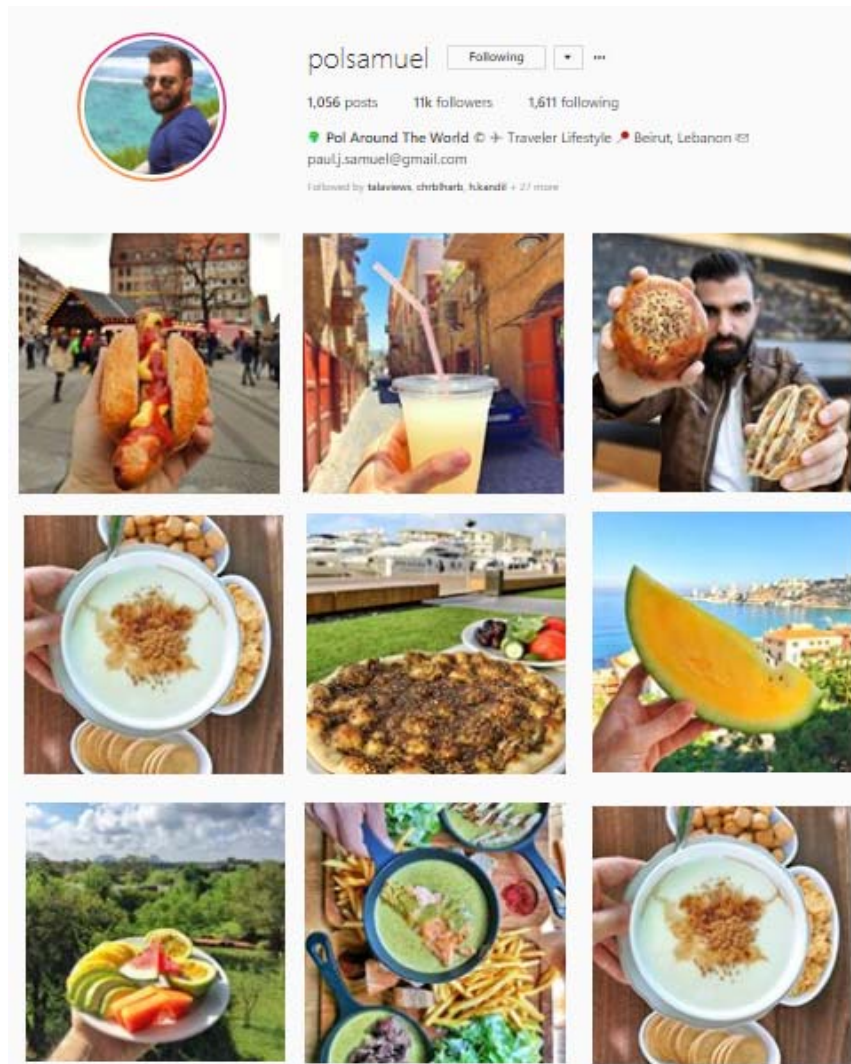
Sample

The researcher chose three Lebanese food bloggers among others because they are always active on Instagram with a high number of followers and likers. Moreover, each food blogger has their own way of post posting food images on their accounts style. Interviewing food bloggers will add to this study more data about the difference between a food blogger who always post about food and any regular instagrammer who upload several type of photos for instance selfies, food, and others.

Interviews

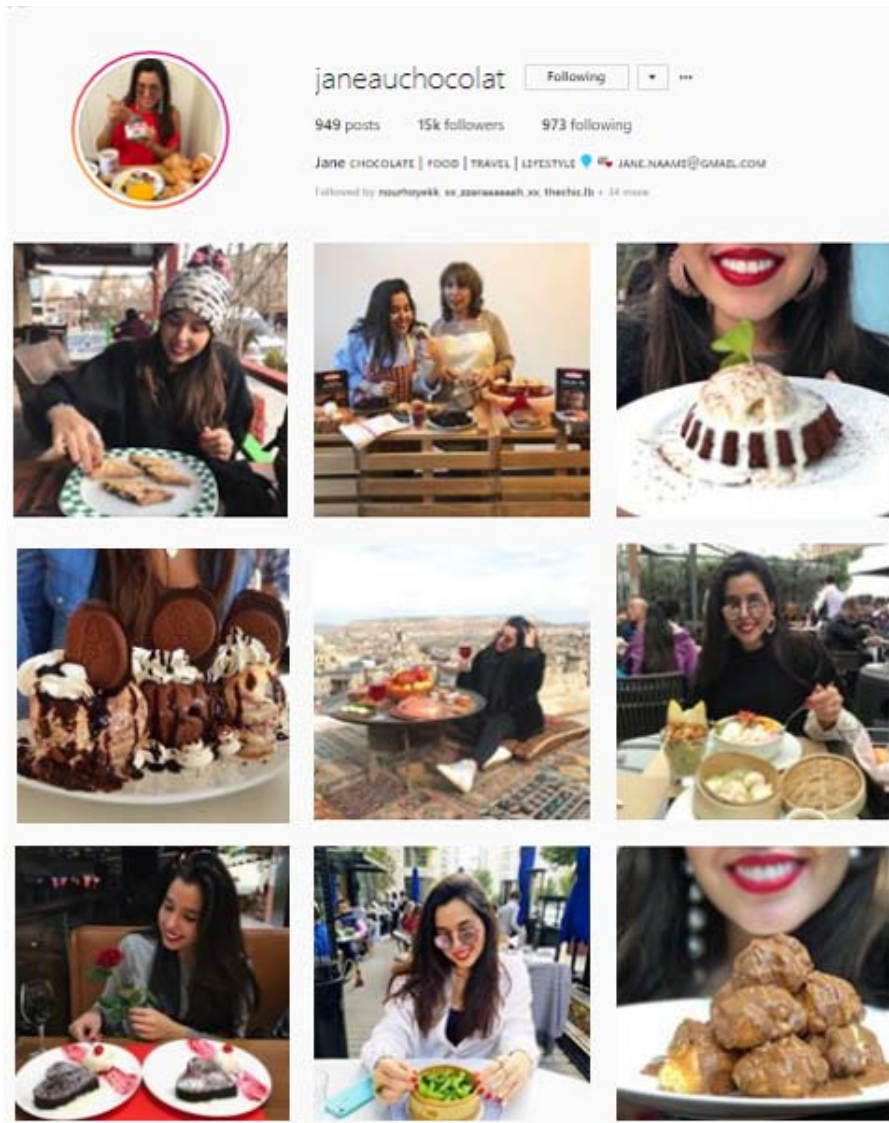
The researcher conducted an interview with Mr. Pol Samuel on the 1st of March, 2018 at 6:30 PM at BarTartine Dbayeh, to know more about his experience and personal opinion regarding the trend of posting food images on Instagram. Mr. Pol Samuel is a Lebanese foodie that evaluates his culinary experience in his blog on Instagram under his personal name where he also offers suggestions and professional images to help users discover new places in Lebanon and around the world living a unique experience in different remarkable locations. The information collected in this interview could be beneficial to the topic researched.

Figure 1 Pol Samuel Instagram account



The second interview was done with Jane Naami the owner of blog “Jane au chocolat”, this interview was held at Roadster Diner Jal El Dib on the 3rd of March, 2018 at 8:00PM. Jane is one of the most active food bloggers on Instagram and she normally shares different types of food especially all sweets and chocolate. Jane shares lot of food images on her page and it would interesting to know how she perceives chocolate versus other types of food.

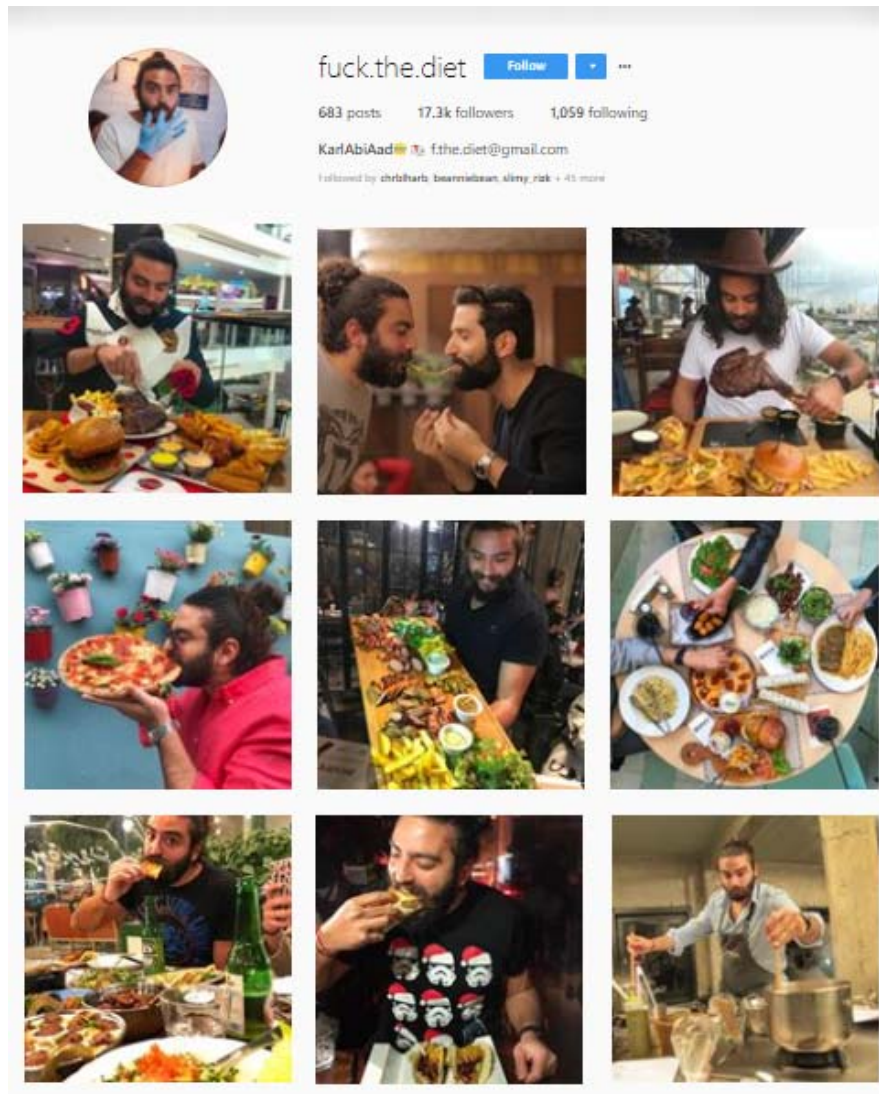
Figure 2 Jane au chocolat Instagram account



The third interview was conducted with Karl Abi Aad, the owner of “Fuckthediet” Instagram page at Dunkin Donuts Jeita on the 5th of March at 7:00PM.

. The name of this instagram account says it all “fuck the diet”, in which Karl shares his personal thoughts and the reasons behind this online food page especially that almost all the food images shared on his wall are junk food, and plates with high calories.

Figure 3 Fuck the Diet Instagram account



Three food bloggers, yet three different styles. Each one of the foodies have their own way of sharing their messages online and their posts are different. Each one of them has something to share with users, and has a certain way to persuade others.

The reason behind interviewing Pol Samuel is to understand how certain, regular individuals can be real influencers on social media more than others and could persuade actively others' perception and decisions by only posting an objective opinion or an artistic image on Instagram. Therefore, influential food bloggers are the trend predictors and trend setters and they have an influence beyond their own experience estimated.

The three interviews were conducted in a semi-structured way, which means that the researcher has previously planned a list of open questions ahead (Appendix 1 and 2) with the opportunity for the interviewer to ask additional questions depending on a particular responses.

4.3. Quantitative Research Approach

This descriptive study will be conducted using quantitative research method collected through a questionnaire of structured questions, since the data collected in this method will help accomplish the research objectives and aid in exploring, describing and examining relationships among the variables in order to generate a result that can be generalized (Saunders et al., 2012).

The quantitative research method was chosen to be the best fit for this study since its purpose is to describe and explain the existing relationship between the dependent (uploading food images on Instagram) and independent variables (personal needs and social interaction needs). Therefore, through the use of numerical analysis of data collected from questionnaire the research hypothesis can be tested. Additionally, this method enables the researcher to collect data from large sample in relatively small period of time and analyze them through statistical methods which makes it possible to have scientifically proven results that would test the hypotheses (Saunders et al., 2012).

4.4. Data Collection Strategy

4.4.1 Sampling Strategy

Due to the available time and budget constraint and since it is impractical to come up with a perfect sample representing the whole population using the different forms of probability sampling, the population defined will be represented using non-probability sampling design (Saunders et al., 2012). The population of this research is limited to the Lebanese people living in Lebanon who have an Instagram account and ideally have posted food images. Being

socially connected on Instagram is an important factor in determining the population of this research, as the study is linked to the digitally communicated information among users that only Instagram account holders will be able to understand, relate to and add their contribution by answering the questionnaire the researcher has pre-specified the criteria listed above like being Lebanese, having an Instagram account, and have posted food images, for respondents before asking them to fill out the questionnaire. In practice, this method ensures that all respondents meet the demographic criteria the researcher is interested in, which in this case is the cultural dimension.

Additionally, there isn't any available source list through which the population could be completely identified and selected in order to ideally represent it, therefore, non-probability quota sampling is best suited for this study (Saunders et al., 2012). Following this sampling strategy, the researcher was able to collect a total of 170 valid respondents.

4.4.2 Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire is designed with reference to the available literature surrounding Instagram and food in prior research conducted that examines these variables. It is divided into two main sections. The first section aims to collect information regarding the perception of online users towards food images on Instagram. The second section aims to collect information regarding respondents' willingness to share user generated posts on Instagram and the reasons behind that.

4.4.3 Data Collection Process

The questionnaire was developed using "SurveyMonkey" given that this online website enables the researcher to create a well-structured online questionnaire with the added value of clearly visualizing findings at any point during the data collection process. Additionally, SurveyMonkey is very flexible and user friendly website that helps the researcher to create,

edit, and remove any question at any time in addition to choosing the type of answers accordingly. Since the population defined for this study is limited to Lebanese individuals having an Instagram account, this implies that they have internet access and can be reached using online platforms. For this reason, a questionnaire link was shared as a status on Facebook starting from February 26 till March 10 because on Facebook we can share the link, tag others, and can be posted several times however if we need to share it on Instagram we have no choice other than posting it in the bio link where it cannot be easily seen and noticed; in addition it was shared as well on WhatsApp broadcasts where the target sample can be easily reached for one week.

4.4.4 Data Analysis

The quantitative data collected through the online questionnaire was interpreted using “SurveyMonkey” itself that enables statistical analyses required to test the hypotheses. Given that the researcher is not an expert in undertaking statistical calculations manually and in order to eliminate any possibility of mathematical errors, this website was considered as the most appropriate fit for conducting accurate and reliable analysis. This site help the researcher view the results of the questionnaire where it shows a summary view of the data, browse individual responses, create custom charts, use filters to focus on specific data views and segments, and easily export the results in multiple formats. It also provides the basic statistics to see the minimum, maximum, mean, median, and standard deviation for a question.

4.4.5 Ethical Consideration

In order to ensure that the questionnaire does not violate any ethical considerations, the researcher made sure that the practices meet the ethical standards outlined by Notre Dame University. Prior to conducting the questionnaire, the researcher submitted a test form and was approved to continue with the collection of data needed. As such, participant in the online questionnaire were required to read and approve the consent form which had detailed

information about the purpose of the study and the importance of participants' insight and input. Participants were also made aware that their participations is voluntary and the information they share will be kept completely anonymous in order to ensure the confidentiality of respondents.

4.5. Questionnaire

This section details the statistical techniques used to analyze the data gathered from the online questionnaire and explains the rationale for choosing the specific techniques. Also, it provides numerical justification for confirming/rejecting the hypothesis.

4.6. Missing Data

Although some researchers support the fact that missing values can be replaced by the mean value of that specific question, for this study, respondents with missing values were deleted in order to ensure a more accurate and reliable data analysis given that the questions are highly related to one another and data obtained from an uncompleted questionnaire cannot be interpreted. To clarify this, for example, if a respondent mentioned that he/she does not have an Instagram account or doesn't upload food images on Instagram then all his/her other responses are of little value as they cannot be considered for analysis because the main reason behind this questionnaire is to know more about users who upload food images on Instagram. Following this rule 30 questionnaire were eliminated from the total of 200 and 170 questionnaire were left valid for the study.

This study also adopted a questionnaire (Appendix 3). The questionnaire is mainly divided into two sections: first the demographics part to know more about our participants, and second section in which we can know more details about their Instagram usage and food related images. A total of 170 questionnaire were collected and kept for the study after eliminating 30 questionnaire since they don't post food images on Instagram.

Based on the data collected, the age of the respondents ranged between 20 and 28. All the respondents are Lebanese living in Lebanon between Mount Lebanon and Beirut. The majority of the respondents were single, Lebanese males who had completed a bachelor degree, are employed and earning more than 11000\$/year.

4.7. Data Analysis

In the data analysis process, descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentage were used for demographic data. In the second section, all questions had multiple choices, some the participant can choose only one answer, and others can tick more than one box. One open ended question was included in section two to give participants the chance to share their opinion about this topic that might help the researcher when analyzing the data.

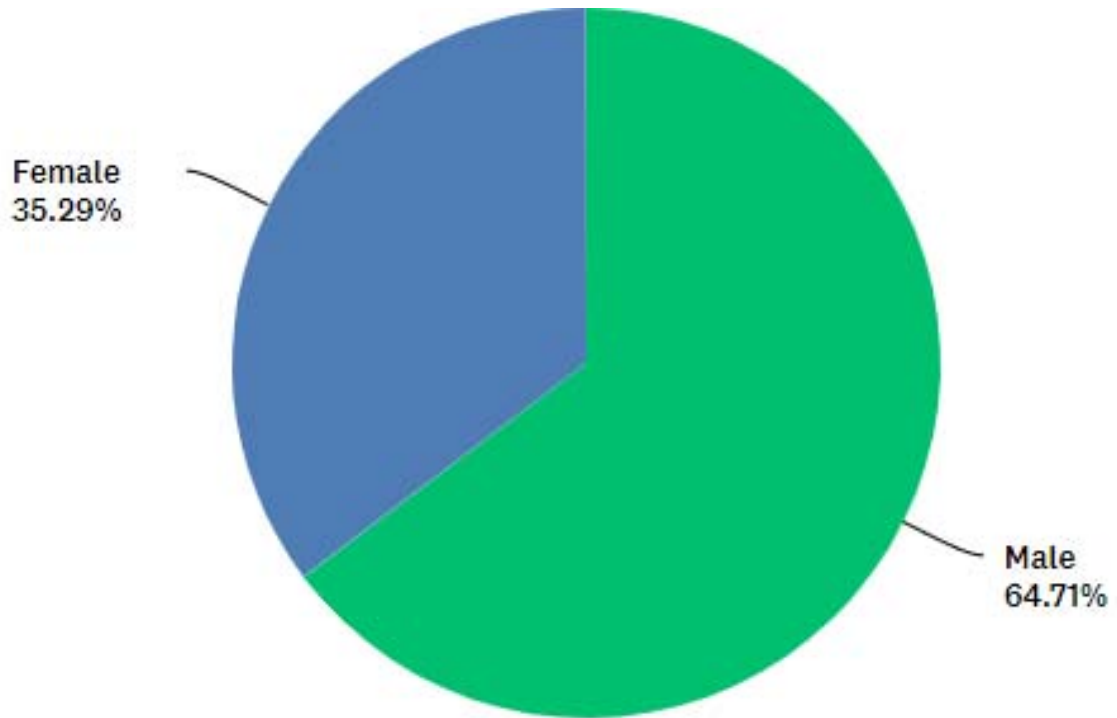
Question 1: Gender

Among 170 participants, 98 were males while 72 were females.

This shows that the sample consisted of more males than females.

Figure 4 Gender

Instagramming food by Lebanese users

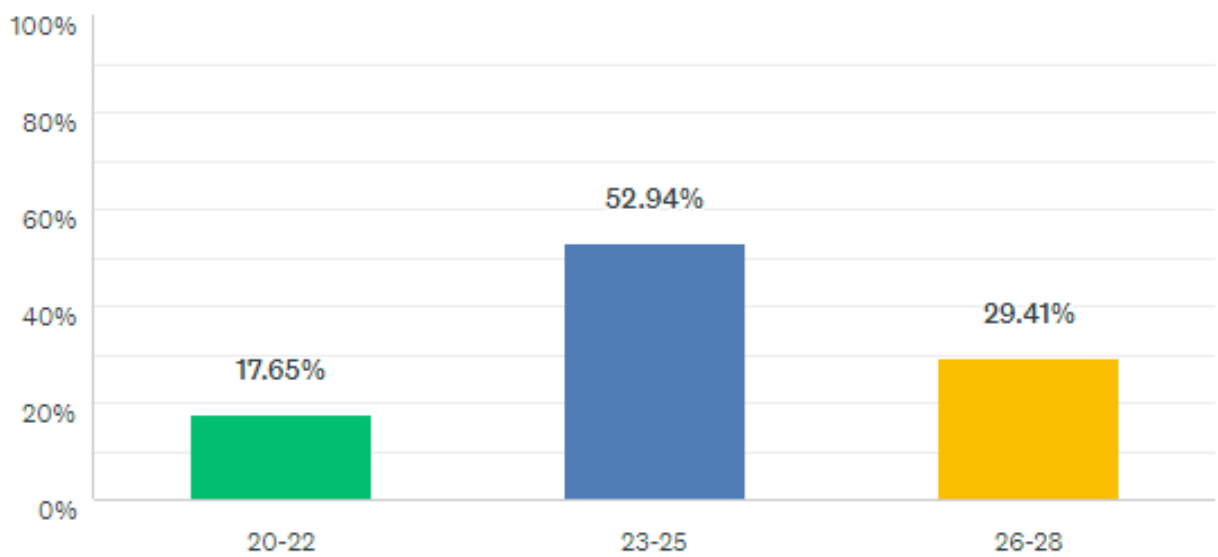


ANSWER CHOICES		RESPONSES		
▼	Male (1)	64.71%		
▼	Female (2)	35.29%		
TOTAL				
BASIC STATISTICS				
Minimum	Maximum	Median	Mean	Standard Deviation
1.00	2.00	1.00	1.35	0.48

Question 2: Age:

Participants were young and their age was ranged between 20 and 28 years old.

Figure 5 Age

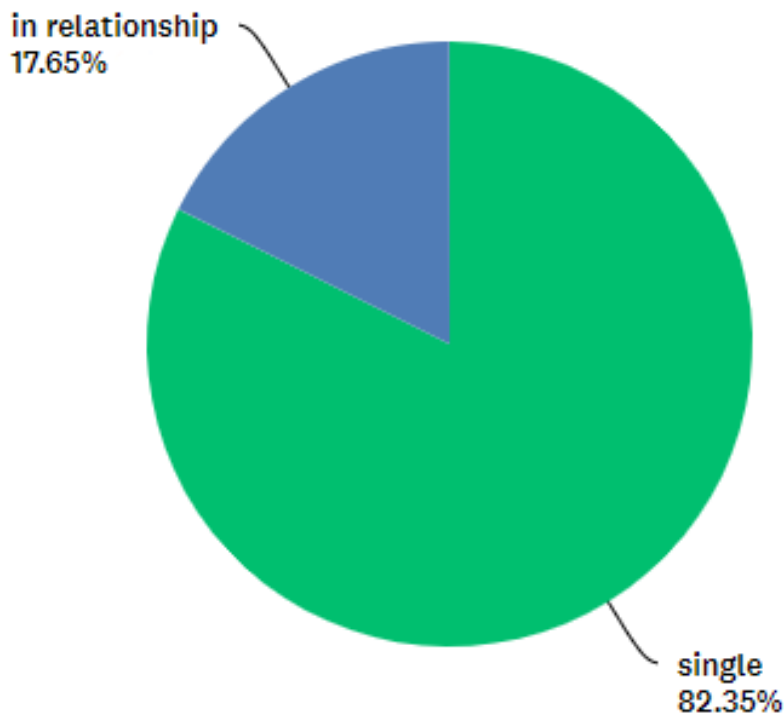


ANSWER CHOICES		RESPONSES		
▼ 20-22 (2)		17.65%		
▼ 23-25 (3)		52.94%		
▼ 26-28 (4)		29.41%		
TOTAL				
BASIC STATISTICS				
Minimum 2.00	Maximum 4.00	Median 3.00	Mean 3.12	Standard Deviation 0.68

Question 3: Social status:

82.35% of the participants are single, while 17.65% are in a relationship. None of them is divorced or married.

Figure 6 Social Status

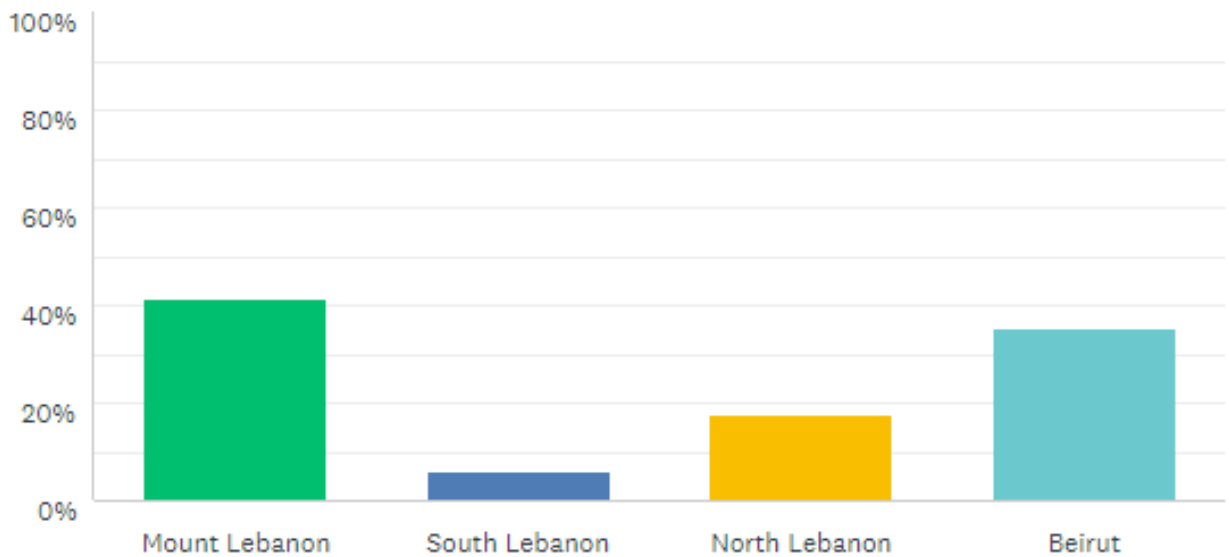


ANSWER CHOICES		RESPONSES		
▼ single (1)		82.35%		
▼ in relationship (3)		17.65%		
TOTAL				
BASIC STATISTICS				
Minimum 1.00	Maximum 3.00	Median 1.00	Mean 1.35	Standard Deviation 0.76

Question 4: Residency:

Respondents are living in different areas in Lebanon but the majority were living in Mount Lebanon (41.18%) and Beirut (35.29%). The rest were distributed between South Lebanon (5.88%) and North Lebanon (17.65%).

Figure 7 Residency

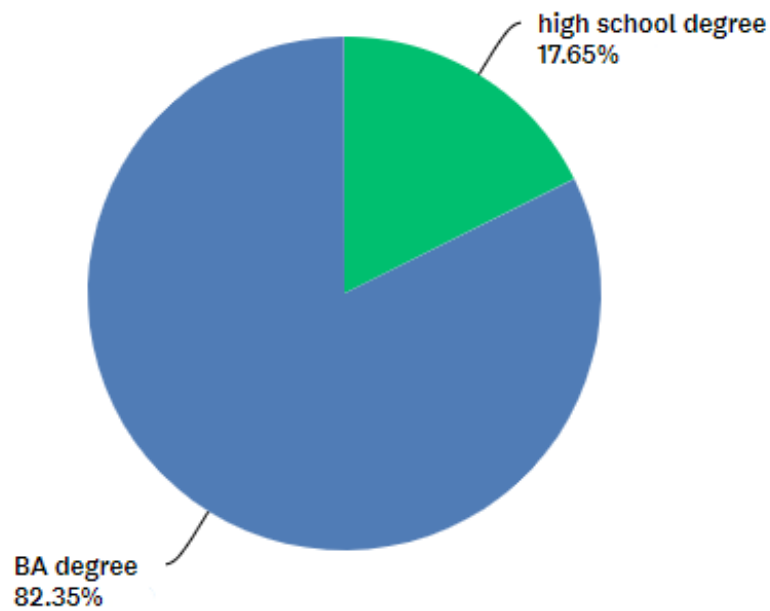


ANSWER CHOICES		RESPONSES		
▼ Mount Lebanon (1)		41.18%		
▼ South Lebanon (2)		5.88%		
▼ North Lebanon (3)		17.65%		
▼ Beirut (4)		35.29%		
TOTAL				
BASIC STATISTICS				
Minimum 1.00	Maximum 4.00	Median 3.00	Mean 2.47	Standard Deviation 1.33

Question 5: Education:

Regarding the education level, none of the respondents had a basic education level or a Master degree, however the majority earned a BA degree (82.35%) and the rest (17.65%) got a high school degree.

Figure 8 Educational Level

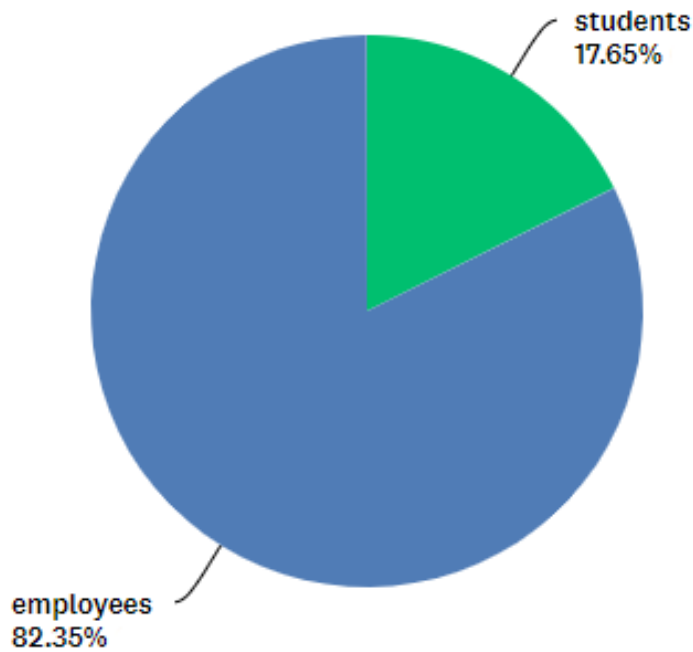


ANSWER CHOICES		RESPONSES		
▼ high school degree (2)		17.65%		
▼ BA degree (3)		82.35%		
TOTAL				
BASIC STATISTICS				
Minimum 2.00	Maximum 3.00	Median 3.00	Mean 2.82	Standard Deviation 0.38

Question 6: Occupation:

As for participants' occupations, 17.65% of the total participants were students and the rest (82.35%) were employees.

Figure 9 Occupation



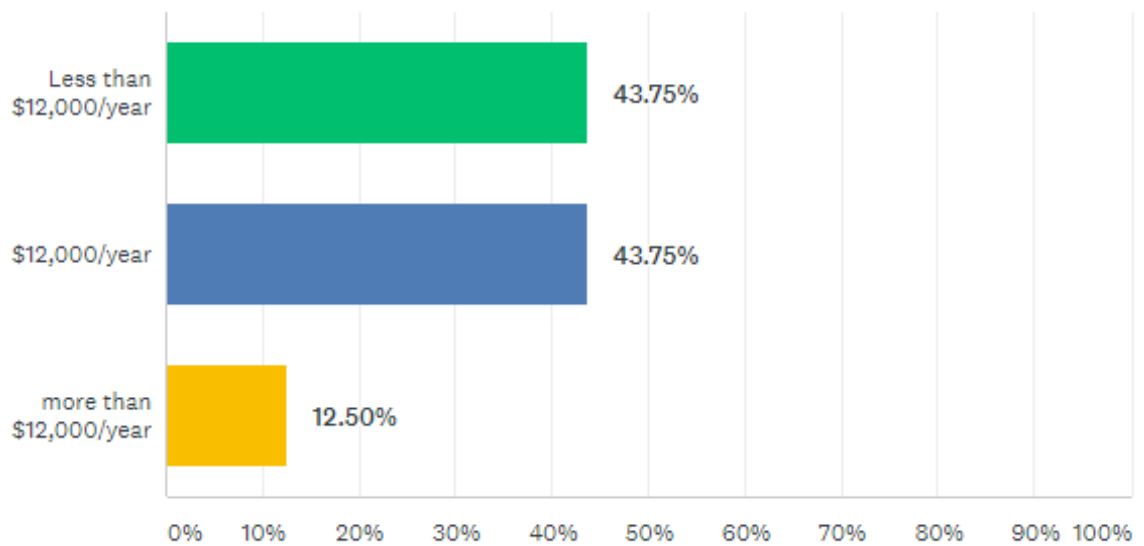
ANSWER CHOICES		RESPONSES		
▼ students (1)		17.65%		
▼ employees (2)		82.35%		
TOTAL				
BASIC STATISTICS				
Minimum	Maximum	Median	Mean	Standard Deviation
1.00	2.00	2.00	1.82	0.38

Question 7: Income per year:

As per the income per year, 12.50% earn more than \$12,000 per year, however the rest was divided between less than \$12,000/year and the exact amount.

43.75% are getting less than \$12,000/year and another 43.75% are earning \$12,000/year.

Figure 10 Income per year

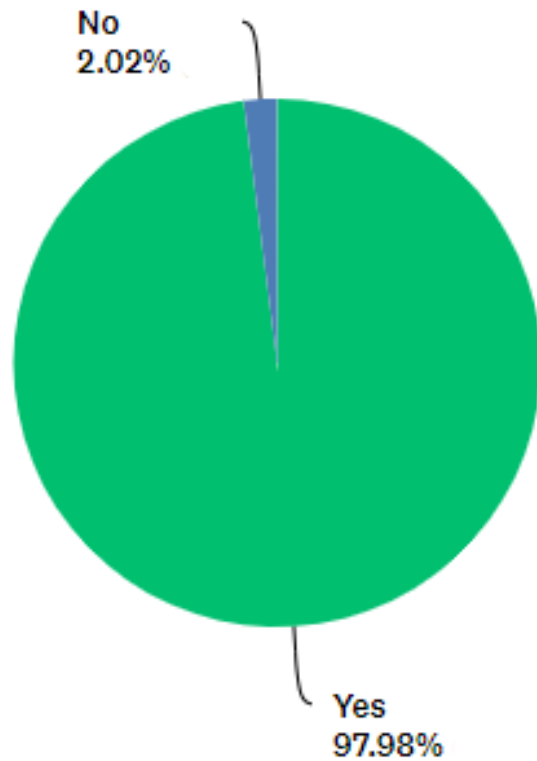


ANSWER CHOICES		RESPONSES
▼ Less than \$12,000/year (1)		43.75%
▼ \$12,000/year (2)		43.75%
▼ more than \$12,000/year (3)		12.50%
TOTAL		
BASIC STATISTICS		
Minimum	Maximum	Median
1.00	3.00	2.00
		Mean
		1.69
		Standard Deviation
		0.68

Question 8: Are you active on your Instagram account?

97.98% of the respondents are active on Instagram, however 2.02% aren't.

Figure 11 Activeness level

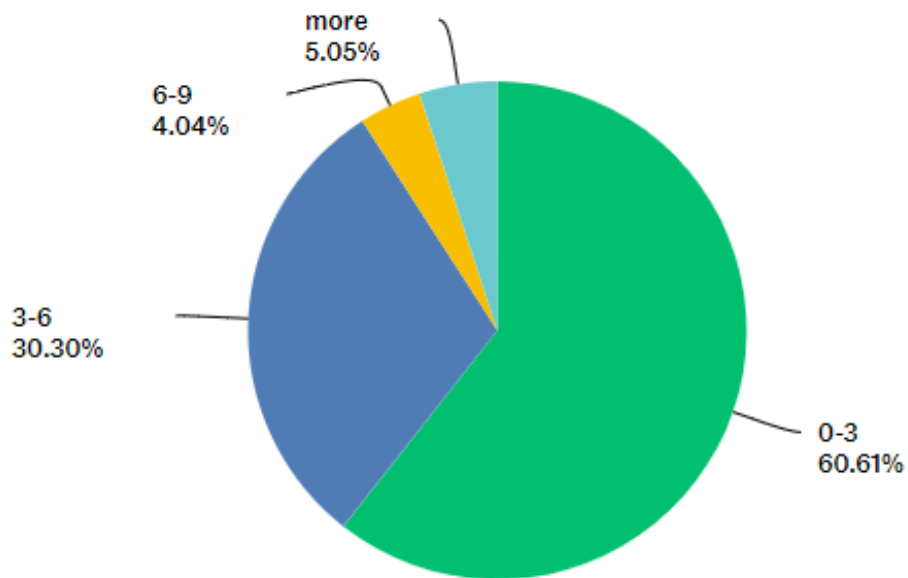


ANSWER CHOICES		RESPONSES		
Yes (1)		97.98%		
No (2)		2.02%		
TOTAL				
BASIC STATISTICS				
Minimum	Maximum	Median	Mean	Standard Deviation
1.00	2.00	1.00	1.02	0.14

Question 9: How many hours do you spend during the day using Instagram?

The majority of respondents (60.61%) spend up to 3 hours per day using Instagram. 30.30% of the total respondents check their Instagram account between 3 to 6 hours per day. 4.04% of the participants spend 6 to 9 hours on Instagram during the day, and the rest (5.05%) are active on Instagram more than 9 hours per day.

Figure 12 Hours spent per day on Instagram



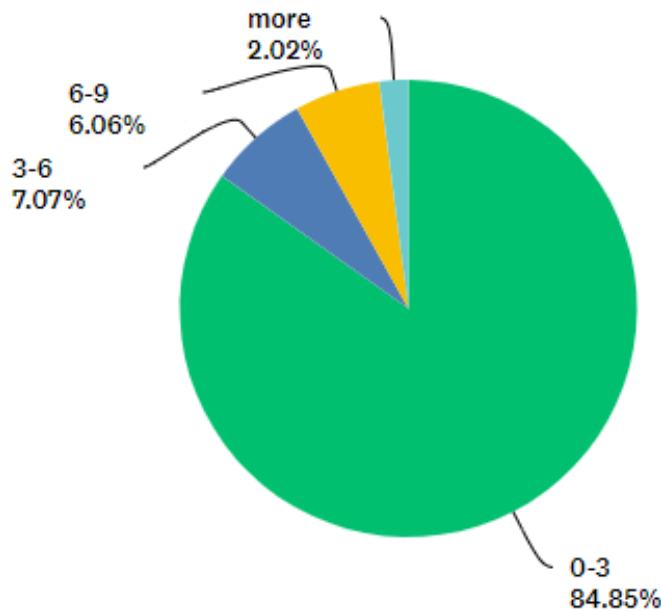
Instagramming food by Lebanese users

ANSWER CHOICES		▼	RESPONSES		
▼	0-3 (1)		60.61%		
▼	3-6 (2)		30.30%		
▼	6-9 (3)		4.04%		
▼	more (4)		5.05%		
TOTAL					
BASIC STATISTICS					
Minimum	Maximum	Median	Mean	Standard Deviation	
1.00	4.00	1.00	1.54	0.80	

Question 10: How many pictures do you post during a week on your Instagram account?

The majority (84.85%) of the respondents mentioned that they usually upload up to 3 posts per week on Instagram. 7.07% of the total respondents upload between 3 to 6 pictures on Instagram, 6.06% spend between 6 to 9 posts per week. The rest (2.02%) mentioned that they do upload more than 9 posts per week

Figure 13 Frequency of the pictures posted per week on Instagram

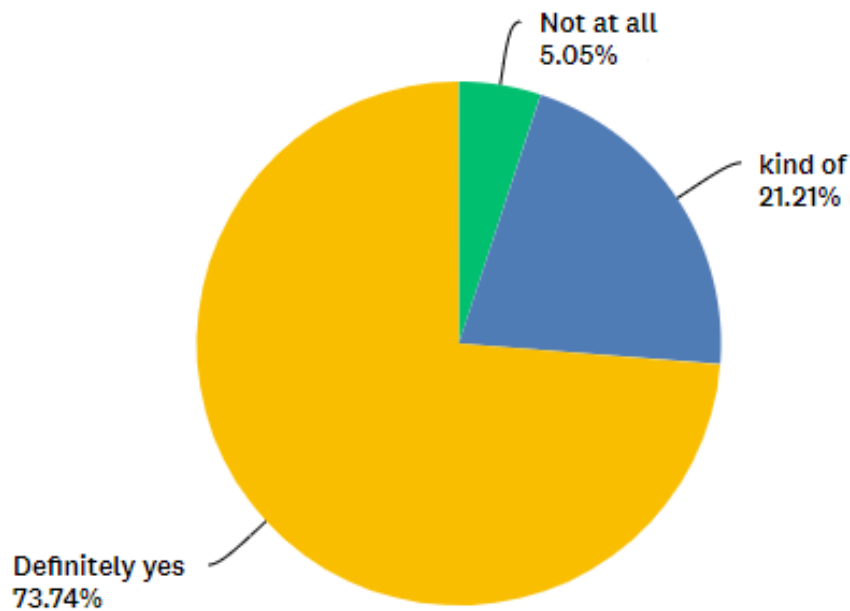


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES			
0-3 (1)	84.85%			
3-6 (2)	7.07%			
6-9 (3)	6.06%			
more (4)	2.02%			
TOTAL				
BASIC STATISTICS				
Minimum 1.00	Maximum 4.00	Median 1.00	Mean 1.25	Standard Deviation 0.66

Question 11: Are you a food lover?

73.74% of the respondents said that they are definitely food lovers, however only 5.05% mentioned that they aren't at all. 21.21% of the total respondents said that they are kind of a food lover.

Figure 14 Percentage of food lovers

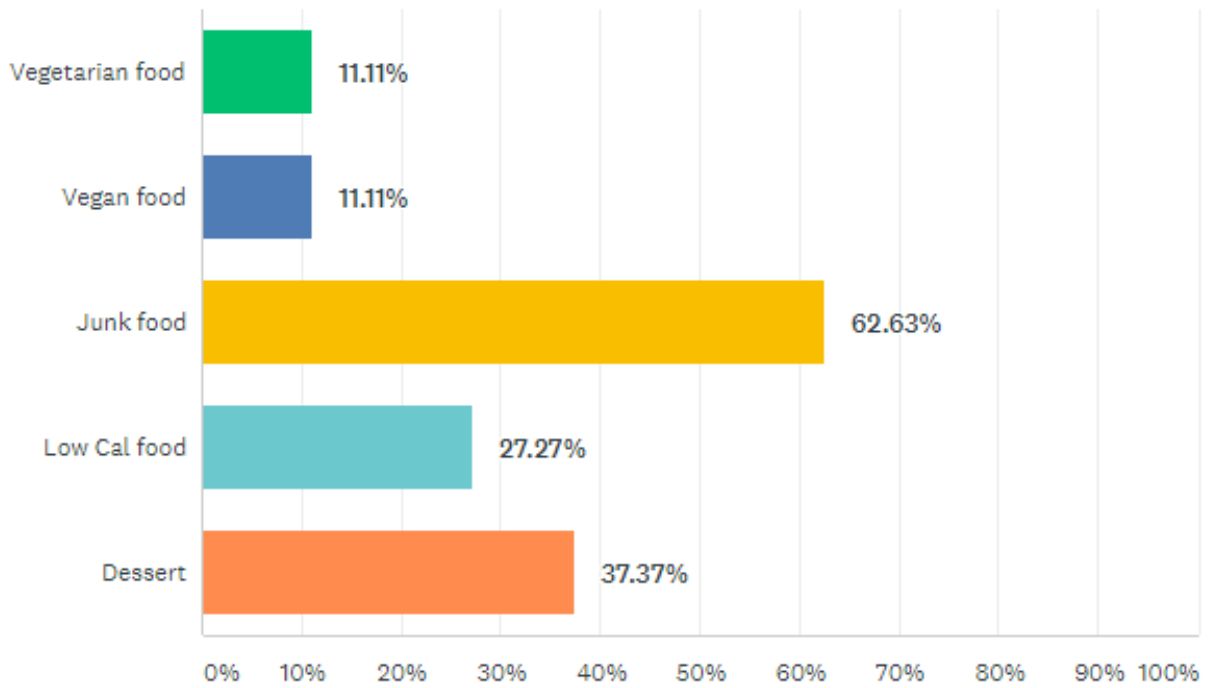


ANSWER CHOICES		RESPONSES		
▼ Not at all (1)		5.05%		
▼ kind of (2)		21.21%		
▼ Definitely yes (3)		73.74%		
TOTAL				
BASIC STATISTICS				
Minimum 1.00	Maximum 3.00	Median 3.00	Mean 2.69	Standard Deviation 0.56

Question 12: What type of food is your favorite?

As the chart shows, 62.63% of the respondents prefer junk food over other types of food. 27.27% of the total respondents are more into low calories food. The rest (22.22%) was divided equally between respondents who love vegetarian food and others who prefer vegan food.

Figure 15 Food Preference

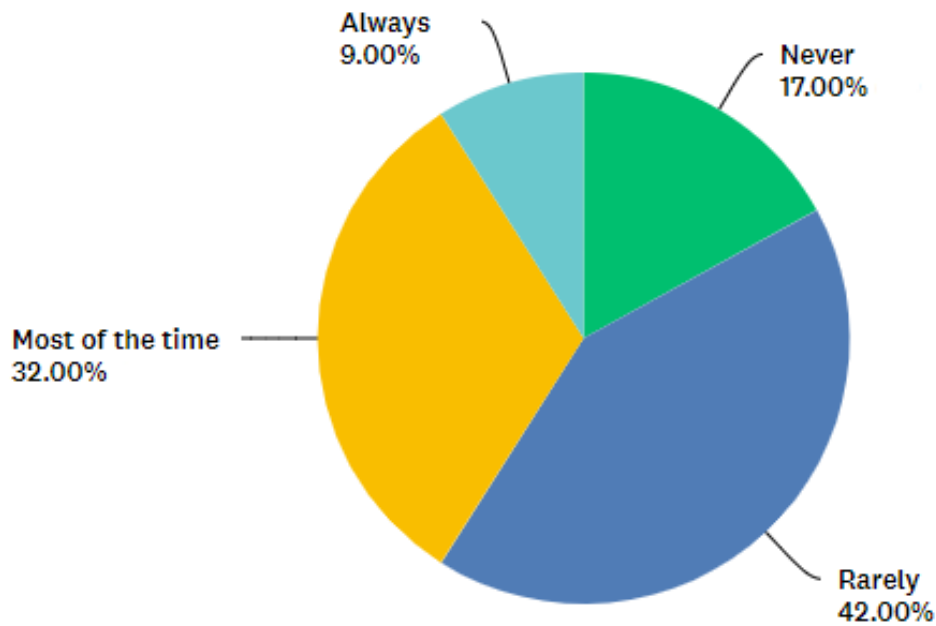


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES			
▼ Vegetarian food (1)	11.11%			
▼ Vegan food (2)	11.11%			
▼ Junk food (3)	62.63%			
▼ Low Cal food (4)	27.27%			
▼ Dessert (5)	37.37%			
Total Respondents: 99				
BASIC STATISTICS				
Minimum	Maximum	Median	Mean	Standard Deviation
1.00	5.00	3.00	3.46	1.16

Question 13: Do you take a picture of your food before eating?

42% of the respondents said that rarely do they take pictures of their food before eating, however 32% mentioned that most of the time they take shots. 17% of the total respondents never take pictures of food before eating, while 9% always do so.

Figure 16 Distribution of the sample by food picturing



ANSWER CHOICES		RESPONSES		
Never (1)		17.00%		
Rarely (2)		42.00%		
Most of the time (3)		32.00%		
Always (4)		9.00%		
TOTAL				
BASIC STATISTICS				
Minimum	Maximum	Median	Mean	Standard Deviation
1.00	4.00	2.00	2.33	0.86

Question 14: Give me two reasons why do you love capturing food before eating?

In this open ended question, 64% answered that the way the food is presented in some restaurants pushes the customer to take photos especially when it looks new and super catchy. Sometimes the meal is aesthetically appealing and worth sharing on Instagram triggering friends to send a direct message and ask them more details about their experience.

86% said that they are used to share their daily stories with their friends as if it is an addiction for this reason they usually share their food experience and what they eat during the day and what they avoid. Sharing everything on social media helps the person become an influencer among their followers.

47% mentioned that they are fit even if they consume food high in calories and that way they love to tease others who are following a certain diet and can't enjoy the food they love.

71% said that they always try to taste new items and new restaurants. They would love to be the first by sharing such food images on social media while showing the full experience in order to be leaders in discovering new things, places, and yummy food.

32% claimed that capturing food and sharing it on social media makes the food more delicious and appealing. They feel that after posting food shots on Instagram, the full experience gets better.

54% said that Instagram is mainly about user generated photos and mostly food images. Following the trend is something essential and being part of the society is very important. By doing so you will be more accepted by your entourage and you will grab everyone's attention as well.

89% stated that they have an inner talent which is photography even if they don't work in the Radio TV field. They are taking benefits from this visual trendy application "Instagram"

to post artistic visuals as a platform where they can freely get more followers and reflect their creative mind in pictures.

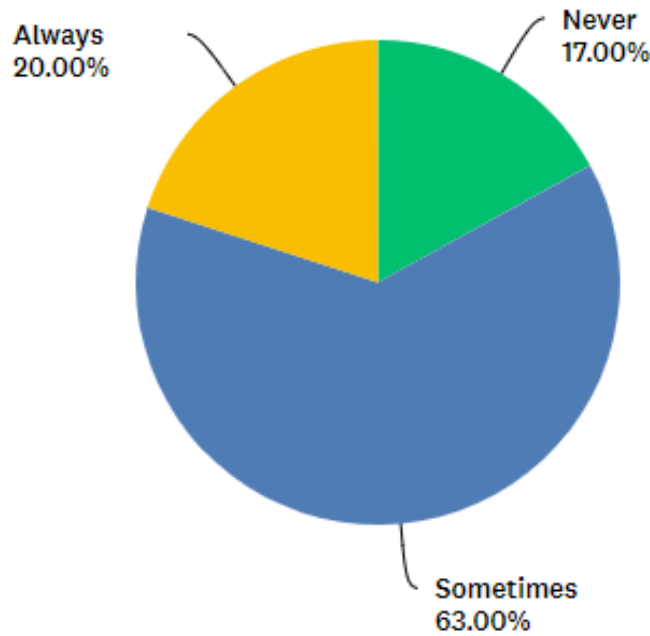
26% said that they would love to share food images on Instagram especially stories to promote a certain place they enjoy visiting. In addition, posting stories and images on Instagram give an idea about that person as an outgoing person, sociable, and has always plans to do.

62% stated that they love to share stories and images on Instagram but not any type of food image. They usually prefer to post certain types of food like sushi, fine dining, and special trendy items to create a certain image about them.

Question 15: Have you ever went to a place to try a meal after seeing it on someone's Instagram account?

The majority (63%) said that sometimes they are influenced by other's Instagram food images and they would like to try a place based on nice pictures. 20% of the respondents said that they always like to try places after seeing it on someone else's account, while 17% never did that.

Figure 17 Distribution of the sample based on their encouragement to try a meal after seeing it on someone's Instagram account

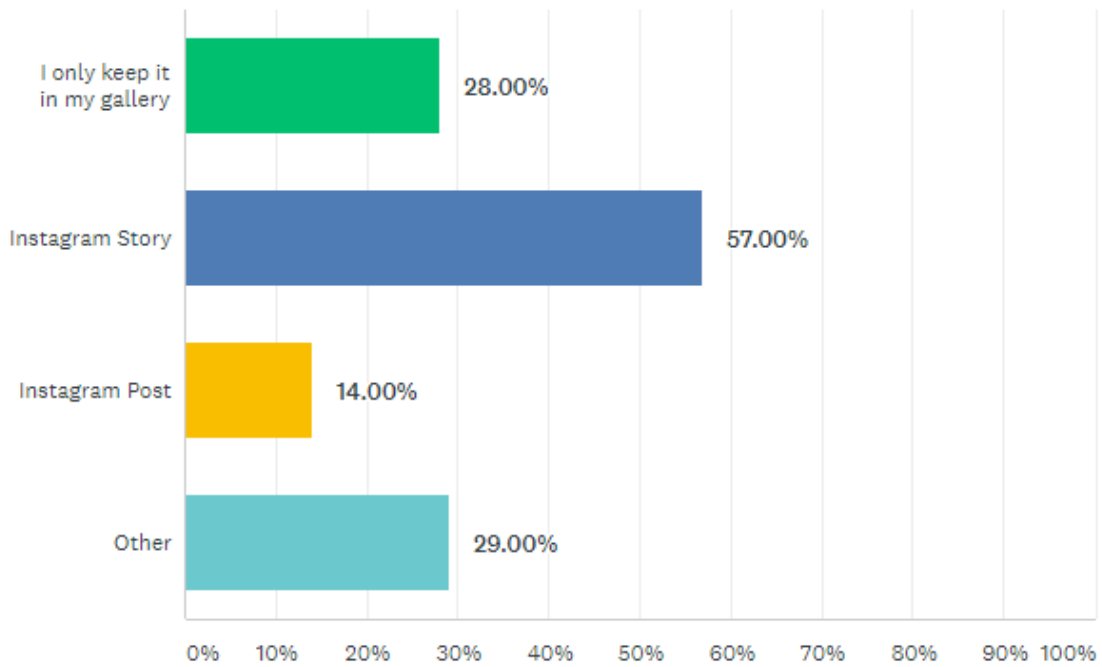


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES			
▼ Never (1)	17.00%			
▼ Sometimes (2)	63.00%			
▼ Always (3)	20.00%			
TOTAL				
BASIC STATISTICS				
Minimum 1.00	Maximum 3.00	Median 2.00	Mean 2.03	Standard Deviation 0.61

Question 16: Where do you usually share your food images?

57% of the respondents said that they usually post food images on their Instagram stories where they last for only 24 hours. 14% of the total respondents upload food images as a post on their Instagram account. 28% after capturing a food image they prefer to keep it in their gallery without sharing on social media, while the rest (29%) upload their pictures on other platforms.

Figure 18 Food images' sharing location



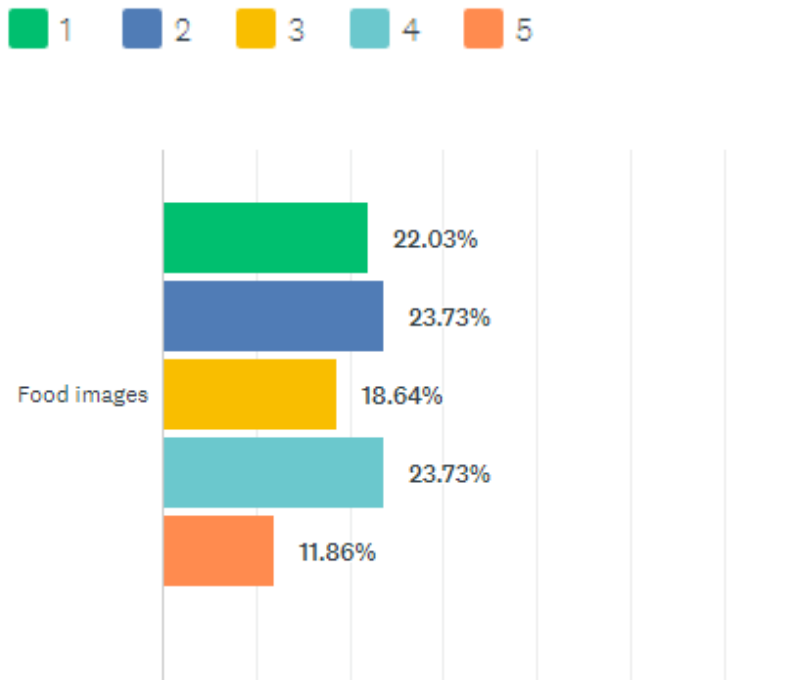
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES			
▼ I only keep it in my gallery (1)	28.00%			
▼ Instagram Story (2)	57.00%			
▼ Instagram Post (3)	14.00%			
▼ Other (4)	29.00%			
Total Respondents: 100				
BASIC STATISTICS				
Minimum	Maximum	Median	Mean	Standard Deviation
1.00	4.00	2.00	2.34	1.06

Question 17: Most of my Instagram stories are:

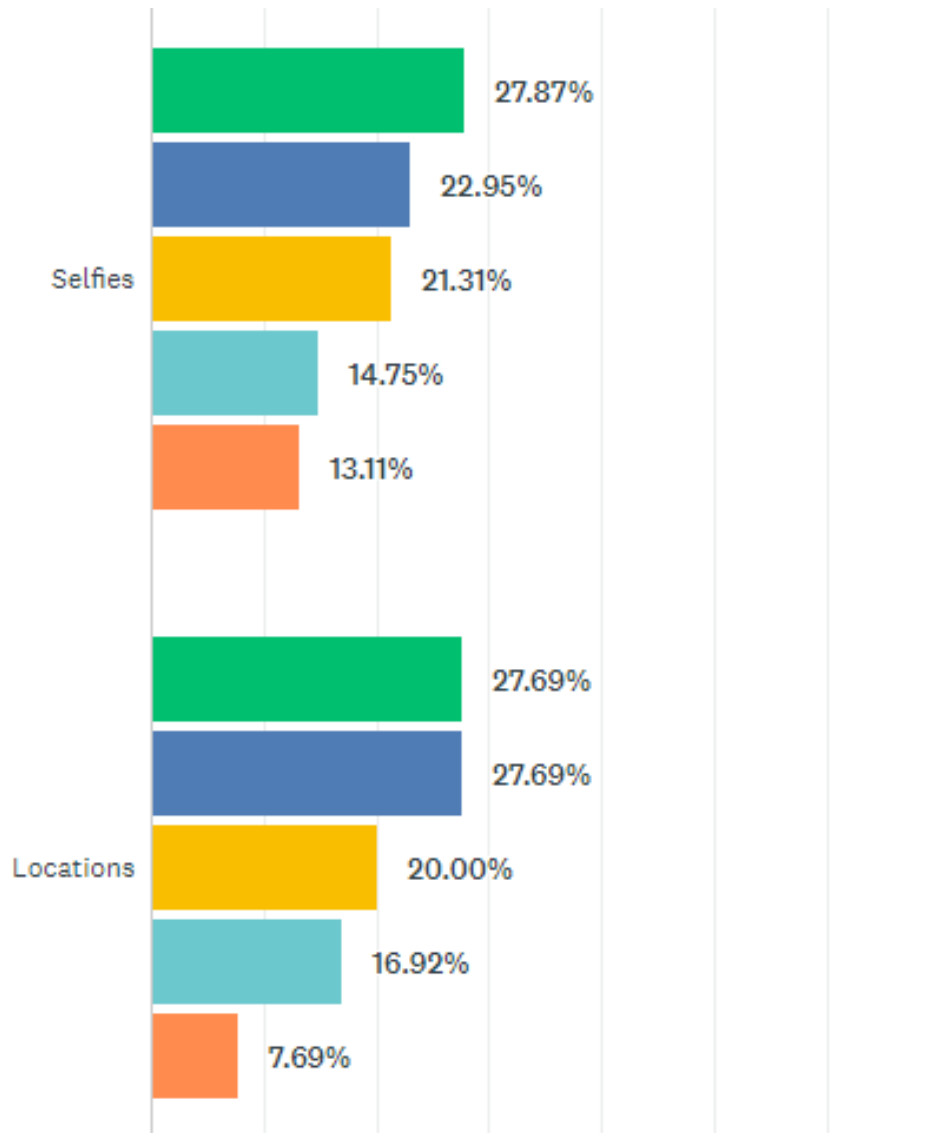
For this question, the researcher used a ranking type for the descriptive analysis. The statements measured on a five point, with “1” = the highest number of stories and “5” = the least number of stories. Moreover, the mean values for each item were calculated and the results were as follows.

Instagramming food by Lebanese users

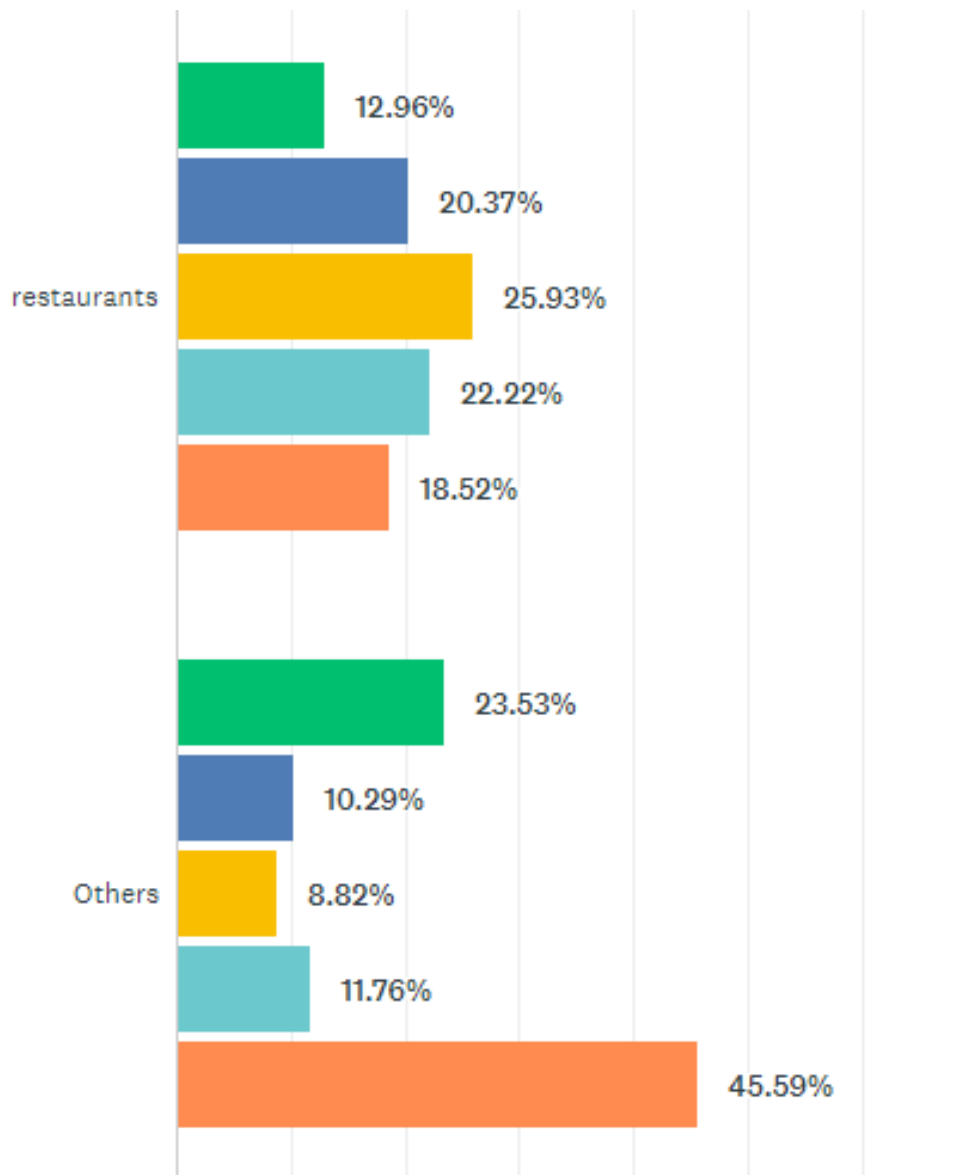
Figure 19 Distribution of the sample based on kinds of Instagram stories



Instagramming food by Lebanese users



Instagramming food by Lebanese users



The highest number of stories (27.87%) on Instagram are mainly selfies, followed by stories showing different locations (27.69%). Restaurants comes in the third rank with 25.93%, while food was ranked fourth with 23.73% of the total stories on Instagram. However, 45.59% used number 5 for other type of stories.

Instagramming food by Lebanese users

	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL	SCORE
Food images	22.03% 13	23.73% 14	18.64% 11	23.73% 14	11.86% 7	59	3.20
Selfies	27.87% 17	22.95% 14	21.31% 13	14.75% 9	13.11% 8	61	3.38
Locations	27.69% 18	27.69% 18	20.00% 13	16.92% 11	7.69% 5	65	3.51
restaurants	12.96% 7	20.37% 11	25.93% 14	22.22% 12	18.52% 10	54	2.87
Others	23.53% 16	10.29% 7	8.82% 6	11.76% 8	45.59% 31	68	2.54

BASIC STATISTICS ?						
	MINIMUM	MAXIMUM	MEDIAN	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION	
Food images	1.00	5.00	3.00	2.80	1.34	
Selfies	1.00	5.00	2.00	2.62	1.37	
Locations	1.00	5.00	2.00	2.49	1.27	
restaurants	1.00	5.00	3.00	3.13	1.29	
Others	1.00	5.00	4.00	3.46	1.67	

Chapter 5: Findings and Discussion

This chapter aims to build upon the qualitative and quantitative results obtained from chapter 4 in order to provide an in-depth analysis of the findings through linking them to existing theories and relevant literature. Doing so, the researcher will be able to provide a reasonable justification of the proposed framework and the discussion of the findings.

5.1 Interviews

The three bloggers interviewed for this research had the same opinion when it comes to searching for food online and they said that they love to see food images especially when it shows a great shot of food. The three of them agreed that they are influenced by other bloggers as well and if they loved someone's other experience in a certain place they definitely add it to their list. It is interesting to note that the three bloggers, Pol, Jane, and Karl are not available on Instagram to generate income behind posting images but each has a major and position at work but still they consider it as a huge part of their lifestyle.

5.1.1 Interview with Pol Samuel

Before starting the interview, Pol wanted to clarify the real meaning of a foodie and how some changed its whole concept for the sake of getting online engagement. According to Pol, a food blogger is an individual who knows what's trending in the market, says clearly and objectively what's tasty and what's not. He should always be active in all events, parties, and openings; a food blogger should simply love food and knows how to communicate it.

Unfortunately a huge number of bloggers are considering themselves influencers when they don't know how to portray food, how to promote a restaurant in an organic way, and most of all they are looking for incentives to share. Instagram gave the chance to any person to make his personal account a business one which means he can promote and boost his page and posts, and Pol mentioned that most of them have fake followers and likers.

Few years ago, Pol started sharing food images on Instagram with a special twist that made him unique compared to others especially because he always posts a food item along with comments on his latest explorations, opinions, and advice. He shares his experiences and recommendations in respect of restaurants in his motherland Lebanon as well as overseas. He publishes posts showing the location with its food specialty.

Pol kept his blog under its name because he is reflecting his lifestyle in all its aspects and to avoid being limited with one type of blogs like food, travel, historical posts. Pol visits several times a week different restaurants in Lebanon with his family or friends and he likes to discover new tastes, new services and new concepts and promote them to Lebanese even though sometimes the experience goes extremely bad.

Pol loves artistic shots and he loves photography as well. He created a free concept to follow when portraying food on Instagram which is reflecting the location where he is taking the picture. For example, when being in Ehden, Lebanon, the first thing we think about is Sahlab at Al Miden so when capturing his sahlab he makes sure to show in the background Ehden. When he traveled to Sirilanka, he noticed that this country is well known for its fruits and unique yellowish watermelon so he made sure to take such pictures and share them with their followers.

Due to his classy and well-constructed Instagram account, many restaurants send him an invitation to try their new items, new branches, and recent menus so that he can share a post or a story on his account as a type of promotion. Pol is a graphic designer working in a well-established company in Lebanon and he is maintaining other freelance projects; this help us understand his artistic shots and creative mind in those pictures.

Pol never thought about being famous, not even getting incentives from his account but after few months his Instagram profile went viral and many Lebanese and other persons from

different nationalities started following him especially because he travels a lot and he usually share his experience from all around the world.

5.1.2 Interview with Jane Naami

Moving from sharing experiences with food images, Jane Naami became famous with her shots showing her stunning smile with mainly sweets and chocolate. Jane chose this name from the beginning because she wanted to reflect her love to sweets especially chocolate and for being as sweet as chocolate is.

Jane started her blog with only posting dessert items but with time she found that she really loves food and she spent most of her time at different restaurants in Lebanon so why not sharing other types of food as well. Jane is a very active user on Instagram and her lovely shots helped her to become a famous food blogger in Lebanon. Many restaurants are inviting her to try their latest items and become part of their business family.

The main critics she gives when visiting a restaurant is about the taste and the whole experience. In her opinion, mistakes happen but not each and every time for this reason she gives a chance to a restaurant where she had a bad experience but not more than twice.

It all started when I loved an experience in a restaurant and wanted to share it with my friends starting with its presentation, tasty food, and the whole experience. Being a food blogger helps me push further a new restaurant that has all potentials to be rated as class A but doesn't have enough exposure when giant restaurants are dominating the market, and it feels good to be a reason that a new restaurant become well known among its audience.

Jane usually posts images on her Instagram account on a daily basis, and she takes benefit from instastory as well to spread the word. Her posts are generating a huge number of interaction and real new followers, this triggered restaurants to keep her on their top of list bloggers to contact her each and every time they would like to introduce a new item or branch.

5.1.3 Interview with Karl Abi Aad

Another style of food blogging was mainly formed by Karl Abi Aad the owner of Fuck the Diet Instagram account. Karl is a regular guy who loves food and everything tasty. He is the type of guys who goes 5 or 6 times to eat fast food and he loves it! Karl believes that life is too short to spend it dieting and skipping yummy food. He wasn't planning to become a food blogger however he was just reflecting online his lifestyle and what he really loves. In his opinion, his page is a reflection of his style, daily stories, and who he is.

Karl is followed by hundreds of food bloggers who love to dig in and get messy when craving food. Once an online user enters Karl's profile they can directly notice that it really reflects its name due to the food high in calories available in almost every image.

When asked about people who are against this type of lifestyle and they are following a certain healthy and diet style, he was clear enough to say that he respects that but they are losing the yummiest food ever. Karl is always trying to maintain a healthy weight without spending time on dieting and salads however he love sports as well.

Karl similar to some famous food bloggers, has the chance to attend almost every meet up, new branch, and new items to try them first and share his experience on his own page. He loves to be objective when sharing his opinion, however some companies are using him as an ambassador to their brands like recently clipp.

Karl usually prefer not to show us what's around however he would love to highlight food as much as possible especially when there is something special and mouthwatering. In his opinion, when an online user checks his page they really wants to know what's new in the F&B industry and which place to visit so he prefers to be up-to-date and never miss an opportunity.

He is a heavy Instagram user and he feels like Instagram is his mirror in front of others and he's always active to post and check everyone's question or message.

Based on the interviews, food bloggers have their own strategies and ways of sharing food on Instagram with their followers. Each tries to differentiate their blog by focusing on a certain type of food in order to reflect their personality and grab people who have the same characteristics to follow them. Not all food bloggers are influencers but some of them have potentials. Most of the times, users on Instagram are interested to follow food bloggers to know more about others' experiences in some new places before trying them for the first time. Such blogs can be a reference for a large number of foodies and can give some directions on where to go, what to order, and what to expect.

In his interview, Pol highlighted that he belongs to the group of people who love to share food with a theme which means that every image that includes food should represent something like the culture of the place for example. However, Jane said that she prefers to upload most of the times images that include sweets and chocolates because it is mostly what she loves. But Karl always prefer to share every type of food high in calories and yummy following the famous quote "Life is too short for a diet".

5.2 Analysis

The questionnaire revealed that most of the respondents were male aged between 23 and 25, holding a BA degree and employed. According to the questionnaire, the majority said that they always take pictures of their food to upload them as stories or posts on Instagram.

Among 170 respondents, 70% follow at least two food bloggers on Instagram and they often check their posts and comments, while 38% of them agreed that they are good influencers by sharing interesting content, and 22% strongly agreed that food bloggers play a huge role when choosing a restaurant.

The questionnaire also showed the many gratifications that the respondents obtained from posting food images on Instagram. The gratifications ranged from having a message to send to simply following the trend of doing what everybody else was doing.

According to the questionnaire, the respondents upload food pictures on Instagram for several reasons like following the trend as everyone is doing it, grabbing attention by making an impact out of this like teasing their followers, being marketers for a restaurant by sharing their experiences online, and revealing the photographer inside them. The majority said that their Instagram profiles represent their image so they always work on enhancing this image in front of other followers so they choose what to share and what to not such as when sharing sushi images most of the time that means that they are sophisticated and they belong to an upper society class.

Each one of them included two reasons behind uploading food images on Instagram and the 80% of the respondents had a certain message to send when sharing such food images. Sending a hidden message behind an image can be conscious or unconscious but in both cases the message will be received and decoded by the receiver.

H1: Online users upload food images on Instagram to satisfy their personal identity needs.

As mentioned in the questionnaire, each user mentioned two reasons behind posting food images on Instagram so 38% answers mentioned that users love photography and they found that food pictures are appealing to eat and can be very creative so they can make a whole career out of it. In addition, 61% of the respondents mentioned that they are taking advantage of food images online to build a certain image and reputation they want. Hence, as mentioned in the previous section, there was a significant correlation between both variables and the hypothesis was accepted. This hypothesis corresponds to the gratification of personal identity suggested by Katz 1974 because she found that people are using the media to build self-confidence and

self-concept. This self-concept is built through the way self is presented as well as the positive reputation each user is trying to create among others. Moreover, it corresponds to a research studied by Kim (2016) about self-presentation on Instagram where online users are depending on it to create a certain image for themselves by sharing photos online and wait their friends' reactions and compliments.

H2: By posting food images on Instagram, online users are trying to socialize with other online users.

Based on the quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire, the majority of the respondents mentioned that they always have a reason behind posting a food image on Instagram. Whether it was a story or a normal post they try following the trend to always be accepted in the society, promoting a certain restaurant, describing a full food experience, be the first to visit a place and to taste their food and make a buzz out of it on social media, etc. There was a significant correlation between both variables and the hypothesis was accepted. This hypothesis corresponds to the gratification of personal relationship and building connections with others suggested by Katz (1974). It agrees with a previous study done by Ginsberg (2015) about brands personalities and those who share the same personality become part of one group.

In addition, as mentioned in the previous section a regression analysis was done to evaluate the significance of the hypothesis.

This hypothesis was answered by 61% of respondents who mentioned in the questionnaire that they usually upload food images on Instagram to promote a certain image about themselves with their followers.

According to the questionnaire shared with 170 respondents online, when uploading food images on Instagram users have the chance to interact with other and share new places and

experiences to try. In addition, by sharing food photos users are creating an online image for themselves as well as they are using this platform as a tool to promote their photography skills among their followers.

Finally, we can conclude that people sharing food images on Instagram have a certain agenda behind each picture and almost every online user is becoming a heavy user on Instagram sharing every single details about their lives starting with what they eat, wear, drink, and visit and this trend reached its peak with one of the latest feature “the story section”.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Conclusion

The originality of this research lies in researching the Lebanese food instagramer and the gratifications that he/she gets from posting food images. While social media is growing in Lebanon and worldwide, the majority of online users are trying to get benefit from this tool to make the best out of it. Even though customers share these attractive pictures because of a selfish motive driven by their tendency to create and maintain their online “Self-image”, but they are proving that most of the users are active and not passive users – thereby complying with the major tenant of the uses and gratifications theory which posits that users actively engage with the media.

This study highlighted the fact that food is becoming a social trend that people enjoy, share and talk about. Instagram is used mainly as one of the top picture related application where online users share their best shots they have to get more followers and lovers. This fact changed how some restaurants created their concepts when studying all the online campaigns in this industry one can obviously notice that the majority of the restaurants are working on an instagrammable items and experience to trigger people to visit their places and capture these moments.

Lebanese online users tend to be influenced by normal people rather than marketers because they know that marketers promote food and restaurants differently than how its actual look. This idea helped food bloggers to increase faster and pushed people to follow them on Instagram to know the latest trends and what they found interesting in a certain experience or a new food item.

The resulting outcome is a win-win situation. On one hand, online users are taking advantage of this unique experience in a restaurant so that they can share on their profiles;

while on the other hand with a positive spread of restaurant publicity by customers, restaurant traffic is increased and marketing targets are fulfilled. This brings it down to the fact that customer satisfaction with the service is of the utmost importance for the success of any business. In the end, from a marketing perspective, a picture taken by a customer at an upscale restaurant and shared on social media is not only worth thousands of words but also tens and maybe hundreds of new customers.

6.2 Limitations of this research

As it's the case with every research, several limitations are associated with this study which can set the stage for future inspection areas in order to fully explain the phenomenon of word-of-mouth spread in the shape of visually appealing images on social media. Below are the listed limitations identified in this research:

The research was limited to examining the sharing habits of customer on Instagram only, therefore, the results obtained can only be restricted to Instagram and cannot be implied to other social media platforms as users engage in each one for different purposes.

Since the findings from the questionnaire are limited to food images under Lebanoneats hashtag, it cannot be generalized across other types of experiences found under other hashtags.

The scope of research was limited to examining only the food image, however, these might not be the only factors which have an effect on customers' perception of what makes a picture taken in a restaurant worth sharing on Instagram. Additionally, apart from the online-self presentation motive, other elements can drive customers to post brand-related photos which are worth investigating.

The scope of the research was limited to Lebanese customers living mainly in Beirut and Mount Lebanon, therefore, findings cannot be generalized throughout Lebanon as there

are noticeable variations in lifestyles and perception of individuals living in different cities even in the same country.

6.3 Recommendations for the future research

The limitations presented by this study create new opportunities for future research in the same subject area in order to contribute to the existing literature and aid in establishing a complete view towards the specified phenomenon.

In this regard, for future research, it is worth examining all the factors in a restaurant that influence customers to take a lot of pictures. This piece of information can add to the existing framework by pointing out the experience a customer can have in restaurants that make pictures worth taking. Second, it is worth examining all factors that influence customers to believe that the photos they have taken are also worth sharing with their friends on Instagram whether as a normal post or a story. On a parallel level, future studies can also investigate all the motives that drive customers to share pictures as this will give marketing managers another insight into customers' behavior and how they can elevate these motivations to ensure positive spread of e-WOM. Also, since customers belonging to different age groups and from different educational background possess a diverse set of beliefs towards what seems to be appealing to them, and what other messages they try to share with their online community.

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Appendix 1

The questions of the interview with Mr. Pol Samuel the Lebanese food blogger are as following:

- 1) What is your blog about? How did you start? And why you didn't create a new name for this blog?
- 2) What pushed you to choose the food and beverage industry?
- 3) How many times do you visit a restaurant to try a new experience?
- 4) Do you follow other food bloggers?
- 5) Why do you capture food with a view or theme?
- 6) Do you think people are following you to know more about your experience after seeing your food images or just because you upload artistic shots?
- 7) What are the factors that trigger you to visit a new restaurant or a place?
- 8) Do you love a certain food category?
- 9) Are you objective when sharing your opinion or you turn subjective because you receive lot of invitations?
- 10) It happened that you visited a restaurant to try a meal you saw on other online pages?
- 11) How frequently do you update the materials on your blog?
- 12) You have good photography skills?
- 13) In your opinion, Lebanese online users are influenced by food bloggers?
- 15) Do you think that food bloggers have the potentials to grow a business or not?

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16) Your blog is becoming popular recently and lots of people are using your advices and recommendation did you consider yourself an influencer? Do you think that all food bloggers are influencers?

Appendix 2

You can find below the questions of the interview with Ms. Jane:

- 1) What is your blog about? How did you start? Why did you choose “chocolat” as a name of your blog?
- 2) What pushed you to choose the food and beverage industry?
- 3) How many times do you post food related images on Instagram?
- 4) Are you a heavy Instagram user?
- 5) Do you try to send a certain message behind each visual?
- 6) Are you looking for popularity or do you want to become an influencer in the food industry?
- 7) What are the top factors that push you to capture food images in a restaurant?
- 8) Besides chocolate, what’s your favorite food category?
- 9) Why did you choose Instagram rather than any other social media platforms?
- 10) Do you think that a small disappointment can ruin a full experience?

Appendix 3

Here are the main questions asked to Mr. Karl Abi Aad:

- 1) What is your blog about? How did you start?
- 2) By saying “fuck the diet”, aren’t you abusing or harming a certain group of people?
- 3) Are you a heavy Instagram user?
- 4) What pushed you to choose the food and beverage industry? Aren’t you promoting unhealthy food?
- 5) Is it true that food pictures increase your appetite?
- 6) What is the main reason behind your food Instagram account?
- 7) Do you think a full experience at a restaurant matters or only the taste?
- 8) How many times do you eat junk food per week?
- 9) Do you think every food blogger can influence others’ opinion?
- 10) Do you put efforts to find new food and be the first to share them online?

Appendix 4

Your opinion matters. Kindly take some time (approximately 5 to 8 minutes) to complete this questionnaire. It is all about sharing food images on Instagram among the Lebanese users, aren't you one of those? Please note that this questionnaire is completely confidential.

1. Gender

- Male
- Female

2. Age:

- 20-22
- 23-25
- 26-28
- 29-31
- above

3. Social status:

- Single
- Married
- In a relationship
- Divorced

4. Residency:

- Mount Lebanon
- South Lebanon
- North Lebanon
- Beirut

5. Education:

- Basic Education
- High School Degree
- BA Degree
- MA degree

6. Occupations:

- Students
- Employees
- Unemployed

7. Income per year:

- Less than \$12,000/ year
- \$12,000 /per year
- More than \$12,000/year

8. Do you have an Instagram account?

- Yes
- No

9. How many hours do you spend during the day using Instagram?

- 0-3
- 3-6
- 6-9
- More

10. How many pictures do you post during a week on you Instagram account?

- 0-3
- 3-6
- 6-9

- More

11. Are you a food lover?

- Not at all
- Kind of
- Definitely yes

12. What type of food is your favorite? (you can choose more than one answer)

- Vegetarian food
- Vegan food
- Junk food
- Low cal food
- Dessert

13. Do you take pictures of your food before eating?

- Never
- Rarely
- Most of the time
- Always

14. Give me two reasons why do you love capturing food before starting?

15. Have you ever went to a place to try a meal after seeing it on someone's Instagram account?

- Never
- Sometimes
- Always

16. Where do you usually share your food images? (you can pick more than one answer)

- I only keep it in my gallery
- Instagram story

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- Instagram post
- Other

17. Most of my Instagram stories are: (you have to rank them from 1 as highest number of stories belong to this category to 5 as the lowest number of my stories belong to this category)

- Food images
- Selfies
- Locations
- Restaurants
- Others

Thank you for your time!