Generating Competitiveness through Trending Marketing Strategies, Case of Gen Z Consumers in the Restaurant Industry

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Abstract

Implementing marketing strategies is crucial for hospitality organisations to reach their target markets and improve their performance and competitive advantage. Hence, this study examines the impact of various trending marketing strategies on the restaurant industry's competitiveness among Gen Z consumers. Using the asset-process-performance (APP) framework, this research involves six measured constructs: service robots, social media, online advertisements, website experiences, brand love and competitiveness. The samples of 301 survey questionnaires were collected from Gen Z consumers in the restaurant industry. Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was used to conduct the data analysis of this study, and based on the findings, service robots, social media, online advertisements, website experiences, and brand love demonstrated a significant impact on the restaurant industry's competitiveness among Gen Z consumers. Further, the research provides practical implications by better understanding Gen Z consumers, implementing appropriate marketing strategies accordingly, and impacting practice in the restaurant industry.

Keywords: *Marketing; Service Robots; Competitiveness; Social Media; Online Advertising; Brand Love*

Introduction

In the increasingly complex and evolving business environment, companies worldwide struggle to strengthen their competitive advantage (Hwang et al., 2019). The presence or absence of a competitive advantage can ultimately determine whether a company succeeds or fails compared to its competitors (Singh et al., 2019; Singh et al., 2021). In today's competitive scenario, marketing strategies significantly impact organisational performance and shape the level of interactions with customers (Dixit et al., 2021; Poisson, 2018). Marketing strategies have emerged as a crucial tool for businesses to collect and obtain consumer information and assist customers in decision-making (Kurnia & Rifani, 2020; Saura et al., 2017).

Malaysia's tourism and hospitality industry is the third-largest contributor to its service sector, accounting for 6% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Naharul, 2021). As a significant part of the hospitality industry, the restaurant industry has an enormous impact on Malaysia's economic growth

(Rashid et al., 2019). Rashid et al. (2019) claimed that the restaurant industry in Malaysia had experienced tremendous change with the establishment of various types of restaurants over the past few years. They indicated that more Malaysians (64%) dine out at least once daily. Department of Statistics Malaysia (2022) reported that the food and beverage sector climbed by 11.7% annually, reaching RM 82.8 billion from 2015 to 2017 (Mahidin, 2019). Thus, the restaurant industry contributes to Malaysia's economic growth.

Researchers (Su et al., 2019) indicated that the new generation would make up 32% of the world's 7.7 billion people in 2019 and will rule the consumer market, and they need to be more noticed in research in recent years. According to Dolot (2018), the newest generation is known as Gen Z, and they have traits. They are born and nurtured in a different setting than older generations, such as Generation X and the Millennial Generation. For a variety of reasons, Generation Z is an intriguing group to observe as they spend more money, as well as technology savvy and heavily engage in digital technology such as social media, service robots, etc. (Bravo et al., 2020; Dimitriou & Abouelgheit, 2019; Haddouche & Salomone, 2018; Turner, 2015).

Therefore, this study focuses on Generation Z consumers and how the variety of marketing strategies affects these consumers and increases restaurant competitiveness. It is essential to satisfy customer needs by implementing appropriate marketing strategies to help businesses be more competitive.

Rational of the Study

In today's business world, digital marketing considerably boosts a company's performance and competitive advantage (Momaya, 2020; Panchal & Krishnamoorthy, 2019; Sonar et al., 2020; Yasmin et al., 2015; Yeshitila et al., 2020). Firm digital marketing strategies, along with a rise in brand loyalty, aim to raise consumer brand awareness (Jain et al., 2020), decrease marketing expenses, boost consumer visits to the brand page, and improve search rankings across a variety of search engines (Kaushik, 2016). Therefore, it is crucial to identify the impact of marketing methods on firm competitiveness to stay competitive in the business, especially among younger consumers.

According to past academics, numerous studies have examined the firms' marketing strategies and the significance of branding and advertising for being competitive, successful, and goal-oriented (Alonso et al., 2021; Mohammed et al., 2014; Tessitore et al., 2021). However, the previous research offers limited studies on the impact of combined marketing strategies (including new marketing approaches and digital marketing methods) on the competitiveness of the restaurant industry. Furthermore, Gen Z poses a significant challenge to destination marketers (Liu et al., 2022; Priporas et al., 2017) as the youngest and largest consumer demographic (Liu et al., 2022). Although Gen Z and millennials have many similarities, Gen Z has its distinct features in terms of consumer behaviour (Liu et al., 2022). However, there needs to be more research on Gen Z customers' perceptions of the competitiveness of the restaurant industry (Singh et al., 2022). Additionally, there need to be more studies on how Generation Z feels about robots (Romero & Lado, 2021). There needs to be more recent research on service robot-related topics as new trends in the service industry (Guan et al., 2021; Ho et al., 2020). However, academic research in tourism and hospitality still needs to be scattered, poorly defined, and needs empirical study (Borghi & Mariani, 2021).

Moreover, earlier studies studied the importance of brand love on consumer satisfaction and loyalty (Drennan et al., 2015) and how brand love can influence the customer's intention to revisit a restaurant (Shen et al., 2021). However, brand love is a comparatively new concept in marketing theories that leads to a deep emotional association between brands and consumers (Bozbay et al., 2018). Hence, brand love has yet to be widely studied in the hospitality industry, especially the impact of brand love on restaurant industry competitiveness.

Based on the discussion above, the current study fills in the gaps in previous studies. It investigates the impact of online marketing strategies, service robots and brand love on restaurants' competitiveness among generation Z consumers. This will also assist in gaining customers' trust and building relationships with customers. The study also provides new insights into marketing strategies in the restaurant industry's competitiveness among generation Z consumers.

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

Consumption Habits of Generation Z

Generation Z individuals were born after 1995 (Cilliers, 2017). The youngest generation, known as Generation Z, was born and educated in very different circumstances than other generations. Although Generation Z individuals have just recently entered the workforce, they already have opinions and personalities (Dolot, 2018). For various reasons, Generation Z is an intriguing group to observe. First, despite being a desirable market segment for hospitality businesses due to their potential and propensity to spend more money (Dimitriou & Abouelgheit, 2019), Gen Z has not received much consumer-focused research in the industry (Bravo et al., 2019; Haddouche & Salomone, 2018). Second, members of Generation Z are technology savvy and heavily engage in social media (Turner, 2015), making them potential consumers of robot diffusion. In addition, the younger generation's views regarding robotics will influence future robot design (Kervenoael et al., 2020), making Generation Z customers an exciting demographic to research. Finally, gen Z has habits influencing its purchasing behaviour (Renaldo et al., 2020). Gen-Z shares the same characteristics in Malaysia as they grow up with the internet and digital technology throughout their lives (Mohammed, 2018). Generation Z is technologically proficient and more likely to accept innovative services (Bravo et al., 2019).

Underpinning Model: Assets-Process-Performance (APP) Framework

The APP framework involves a firm's assets, process and performance, which can boost businesses' competitiveness. A company's competitiveness is determined by its "assets and processes," where assets are developed or created, and processes are things that transform assets to produce economic profits or achieve a gain (Singh et al., 2022). Performance is gain or value that results from the interaction of assets and processes, and in this situation, the enterprises have acquired competitiveness or a competitive edge (Banwet et al., 2003; Momaya, 2019). Examples of items referred to as a company's assets include technology, human resources, firm culture, infrastructure and other resources. Besides, example items referred to as a company's processes include technological processes (systems, IT, innovation, etc.), strategic management processes (flexibility, competitive strategy, competency, etc.), marketing processes (marketing, managing relationships, etc.), operational processes (design, quality, manufacturing, etc.). Moreover, examples of items referred to as a company's performance include new product development, customer satisfaction, value creation, product range, variety, efficiency, profitability and productivity. Figure 2.1 below shows more examples of categories under the APP framework.

Main category	Subcategory
Assets	• Human resources • Firm structure and culture • Technology • Resource Based View (RBV)
Processes	**Strategic management processes** • Competency • Competitive strategy • Flexibility & adaptability **HR processes** • Design and deploy talents **Technological processes** • Innovation • Systems • IT **Operational processes** • Manufacturing • Design • Quality **Marketing processes** • Marketing • Managing relationships • Persuading power
Performance (Financial and non-financial)	• Productivity • Finance • Market share, differentiation, customer satisfaction • Profitability, Cost, price • Variety, product range, new product development • Efficiency, Value creation

Competitiveness

Competitiveness can have a different meaning depending on whether it refers to individual companies, groupings of enterprises, or economic sectors (Peneder & Rammer, 2018). An individual's competitiveness refers to his or her ability to survive in the market. An industry's competitiveness is the same as the industry's strengths and weaknesses (Peneder & Rammer, 2018). Besides, competitiveness is a concept that compares a company's performance and ability, sub-sector, or country in selling and supplying various goods and services to the market (Iskandar & Tukiran, 2022). Several studies have researched competitiveness in the tourism industry (Cronjé & Plessis, 2020; Goffi et al., 2018; Kumar & Dhir, 2020; Rodríguez-Díaz & Pulido-Fernández, 2019). Competitiveness is an important aspect when considering the development and promotion of a destination (Cronjé & Plessis, 2020), culture (Kumar & Dhir, 2020), and sustainability is associated with tourism destination competitiveness (Goffi et al., 2018; Rodríguez-Díaz & Pulido-Fernández, 2019). Gupta et al. (2020) investigated that brand value may contribute to brand competitiveness indirectly through marketing orientation and, consequently, strategic orientation. Furthermore, hotel management-focused activities contribute significantly to a hotel's success and will result in successful business performance (Atef & Eissa, 2021). Hospitality organisations will

benefit from successful business performance in achieving competitive advantages in local, regional, and global markets (Atef & Eissa, 2021).

Marketing Strategies that Impact on Restaurant Industry's Competitiveness

The following section discusses five factors that are crucial among gen Z consumers and impact the restaurant industry's competitiveness.

Service Robot

The phrase "service robots" refers to actual devices with AI technology built in them that may communicate with one another and influence the dynamics of customer service experiences (Xiao & Kumar, 2019). Robots are utilised in various industries, such as domestic settings, the hospitality business, and healthcare, transforming how consumers live their daily lives (Fan et al., 2016; Green et al., 2016). Currently, many service businesses are eager to include service robots in their service delivery process. Just after the pandemic, customers also strongly desire to use service robots (Zhong et al., 2022). As a result, robots are replacing humans in restaurants like Spyce and Haidilao (a well-known catering company in China) to take orders and serve guests (Wang et al., 2022). Previous studies by Park (2020) observed that the shape of service robots is essential in influencing visitors' perceptions of robots in deciding consumption outcomes such as pleasant service encounter rating and revisit intention (Lu et al., 2021). According to Romero and Lado (2021), they are suggested that adopting service robots leads to higher booking intentions when service robots are deployed during the pandemic. Service robots have been used as a crucial marketing tool to attract customers, reduce labour costs, and streamline services (Ivanov & Webster, 2019). Previous research by Guan et al. (2021) found that the service competence of robots significantly affects customers' behavioural intentions. Besides, service robots also create a competitive advantage for the service industry players.

Furthermore, service robots provide a competitive advantage to competitors in the service industry who proactively adapt to changing environments by differentiating themselves through unique technology (Teece, 2007). According to earlier studies, businesses may also gain a competitive edge by developing socially intelligent robots to enhance positive and meaningful customer experiences (Fusté-Forné & Jamal, 2021). Furthermore, Seyitoğlu et al. (2021) state that restaurant robots generally attract youthful clients. Consequently, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Service robots positively affect the restaurant industry's competitiveness among generation Z consumers.

Social Media

DiPietro et al. (2012) defined social media as internet apps that enable users to share their perspectives, ideas, insights, and experiences. Kwok and Yu (2012) mentioned that social media is becoming a significant factor in consumer decision-making, playing a role in awareness-raising, information sharing, opinion, attitude building, purchasing, and post-purchase experience evaluation. Needles and Thompson (2013) found mixed results in terms of how they use social media and how it affects business operations; they also discovered that many restaurant owners lack clearly defined social media goals, both in terms of the reason behind their social media activities and the audience for their messages. DiPietro et al. (2012) indicated that 37% of organisations use social media to engage with customers, 43% offer customer support on social media networks, and 41% say they use social media to solicit client feedback referring to Business in Social Media. Hanaysha (2016) exposed that adopting social media as a tool for the marketing communication will allow businesses to improve daily consumer loyalty and enrich customer communications. According to previous literature, social media has benefited restaurants in building relationships with customers and reaching the right target demographic (Needles et al., 2013; Sathe & Randhave, 2018). Besides, previous studies also indicate that social media marketing

can assist a restaurant in increasing its occupancy rate (DiPietro et al., 2012; Lepkowska-White & Parsons, 2019). Not only that, various scholars indicate that social media can also benefit a company in becoming more competitive (Bång & Hell, 2015; Buratti et al., 2018). Research done by Singh et al. (2022) indicates that social media significantly affects competitiveness and is crucial to enhancing the overall impact of digital marketing on the competitiveness of restaurants. Wang and Kim (2017) mentioned that the most significant influence on competitiveness comes from social media, which impacts the success of businesses and firms' solid performance. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Social media has a positive relationship with the restaurant industry's competitiveness among generation Z consumers.

Website Experience

According to Brügger (2009), a "website" is understood to be an entity based on the usage of protocols and markup languages that has its roots in the World Wide Web in the broadest sense instead of another document "clusters" on the Internet. Different quality dimensions, such as perceived usefulness, usability, hedonic quality, and visual appeal, can be used to characterise a website, and these website qualities influence the interactive experience (Mahlke, 2002). Singh et al. (2022) indicated that websites could improve their search engine visibility, and website experience has a negligible impact on restaurants' ability to compete with one another and deliver top-notch experiences (Singh et al., 2022). To identify areas for improvement in restaurants' web accessibility based on the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), the previous study by Park and Ha (2022) looked at various restaurant segments to motivate owners of the underperforming segments to revisit their websites and implement the necessary changes. The findings indicated that there are some areas restaurants should work on to make their websites more accessible while still giving users enough information (Park & Ha, 2022).

Singh et al. (2022) stated that a website provides the consumer with essential information crucial for boosting sales and establishes a link between the company's products and services and its customers. In addition, according to earlier studies by Leitch (2018), a relationship created through a website helps gain a competitive advantage. A restaurant's website may generate more leads, improve pre- and post-service quality, establish trust, serve as a two-way communication tool, and provide a competitive advantage (Amey et al., 2020; Leitch, 2018). Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Website experience has a positive relationship with the restaurant industry's competitiveness among generation Z consumers.

Online Advertisements

Online advertising is a type of marketing that uses the Internet and the World Wide Web to spread targeted advertising designed to bring in, maintain, and expand a consumer base (Katke, 2007). Because of wide exposure, online advertising has a greater impact on consumers' minds than other marketing strategies (Katke, 2007). Online marketing creates a lasting and cost-effective relationship with consumers by allowing them to learn about the products and services anywhere and whenever they choose, with the intention of making a purchase or repeat purchase (Mishra & Mahalik, 2017; Jawa & Chaichi, 2015). According to Haque et al. (2011) research on the Malaysian restaurant industry, internet advertisement has the greatest influence on consumers, followed by commercial advertisement, and print advertisement has the lowest impact. Franchises and restaurant chains have benefited from using both offline and online advertisements to market and promote their products for many years (Hsu et al., 2020; Jackson et al., 2004).

Additionally, internet advertisements can assist businesses in gaining a competitive advantage by allowing them to better understand their customers, offer value to their services, expand their network, and boost sales through marketing campaigns (Huseynov & Yıldırım, 2016; Saß, 2012). According to Singh et al. (2022), online advertisements significantly increased the competitiveness of the restaurant business. Anusha (2016) emphasised that internet advertisements give a business the opportunity to raise brand awareness as a successful means of advertising items and distributing important information. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Online advertisement has a positive relationship with the restaurant industry's competitiveness among generation Z consumers.

Brand Love

'Brand love' refers to a satisfied consumer's emotional attachment towards a brand (Bagozzi et al., 2017; Karjaluoto et al., 2016; Pillay, 2021). Brand love is derived from positive feelings and experiences with a brand, which develop positive attitudes towards that brand (Huang, 2017; Pillay, 2021; Taute et al., 2017). Therefore, having a positive attitude towards a brand helps consumers to form long-term relationships with it and increases the likelihood that consumers will discuss the brand (Karjaluoto et al., 2016; Pillay, 2021; Taute et al., 2017). Various scholars indicate that higher involvement and more positive brand connections are the positive outcomes of brand love, which can predict continuation, affective brand commitment, and willingness to pay a premium price (Salem et al., 2019; Albert & Merunka, 2013; Salem & Chaichi, 2018; Palusuk et al., 2019).

The previous study of luxury restaurants indicates that consumers' love is stronger for brands that provide more desirable products and services than companies that provide more utilitarian value (Kiatkawsin & Sutherland, 2020). A previous study by Sarianti and Violyta (2022) indicated that brand authenticity, hedonic value and customer satisfaction all have a significant impact on brand love among Generation Z. Furthermore, brand love is regarded as the first factor of brand quality and has a positive impact on loyalty (Nyamekye et al., 2021). Hence, a restaurant's brand loyalty depends on strong bonding relationship traits such as love and passion (Nyamekye et al., 2021). As a result, with customers, brand loyalty may be effectively used as a competitive growth tool (Paul & Iuliana, 2018). Brand love results from positive feelings and interactions with a product or service that foster favourable views toward that brand (Huang, 2017; Taute et al., 2017). Positivity toward a brand promotes consumers to form enduring relationships with it and raises the possibility that they will recommend it to others (Karjaluoto et al., 2016; Taute et al., 2017). Previous research has shown that brand-loyal customers will use eWOM to spread the word about their companies (Ismail & Melewar, 2015; Karjaluoto et al., 2016). Consumers in Generation Z prefer to learn about brands through eWOM as they believe this information to be true and accurate (Pillay, 2021). Generation Z consumers are more likely to adore a company when they have access to real information and believe it to be genuine (Pillay, 2021).

Additionally, research by Drennan et al. (2015) and Yang (2010) indicates that brands that inspire intense affection from their customers are also more likely to maintain a competitive advantage over rival brands. Furthermore, a customer's loyalty to a brand creates an ongoing relationship with it, which increases the likelihood that it will gain a competitive advantage over other businesses (Yang, 2010). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5: Brand Love has a positive relationship with the restaurant industry's competitiveness among generation Z consumers.
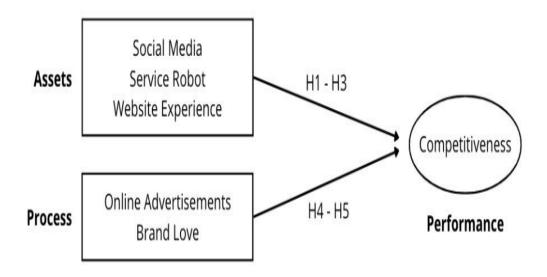
Conceptual Framework Development

Figure 2.2: Conceptual Framework for the Present Research

Source: Authors

As shown in Figure 2.2, the conceptual framework developed is used in this research to examine the factors influencing the restaurant industry's competitiveness among generation Z consumers. It consists of five independent variables (i.e., service robot, social media, website experience, online advertisements, and brand love) and competitiveness as the dependent variable. This study uses a novel APP framework to understand the competitiveness induced using various digital marketing dimensions (Momaya, 2019; Subramanian et al., 2014). The factors are classified into the APP framework for examining competitiveness (Figure 2.2). A restaurant's competitiveness is determined by its "assets and processes," where assets are developed or created, and processes transform assets to produce economic profits or achieve a gain (Singh et al., 2022). Performance is gain or value that results from the interaction of assets and processes, and in this situation, the restaurant has a competitive edge or acquired competitiveness (Banwet et al., 2003; Momaya, 2019). Therefore, it is important to understand the role of assets and processes of marketing strategies in this research that can lead to restaurant competitiveness. Besides, based on the APP framework, social media, service robots and website experiences are classified assets of the restaurant industry. Online advertisement and brand love classify as processes. Last but not least, competitiveness is classified as performance. Hence, the present study proposes hypothetical relationships between each independent variable and dependent variable are explained in the following sections. The relationships between the seven independent and dependent variables will be discussed with five hypotheses from H_1 to H_5, which were explained earlier in the research.

H1: Service robots have a significant impact on the restaurant industry's competitiveness among generation Z consumers.

H2: Social media has a significant impact on the restaurant industry's competitiveness among generation Z consumers.

H3: Website experience has a significant impact on the restaurant industry's competitiveness among generation Z consumers.

H4: Online advertisement has a significant impact on the restaurant industry's competitiveness among generation Z consumers.

H5: Brand Love has a significant impact on the restaurant industry's competitiveness among generation Z consumers.

Research Methodology

Research Design

In this study, a descriptive quantitative research design was used to evaluate the effects of various marketing strategies on restaurant industry competitiveness among generation Z consumers. Quantitative research includes a range of methodologies concerned with using statistical or numerical data to systematically examine social issues (Watson, 2015). To collect data, survey research was used. Survey research allows for a range of approaches for recruiting individuals, collecting data, and utilising various instrumentation methods (Ponto, 2015). The current research setting of the current research s was Klang Valley, Malaysia. It is a highly urbanised area at the centre of the Malaysian Peninsular, with a total population of more than 7.2 million people (Chan et al., 2020; World Population Review, 2022). Furthermore, Klang Valley provides the best representative population of interest that is recognised as the most advanced region in terms of economy and society, densely inhabited area and is made up of people from various ethnic groups, varied levels of education, and income distribution (Omar et al., 2016).

The sample size was determined by using the G-Power priori analysis method, which involves four elements to generate the sample size. The present study had a total of 5 predictor variables, an effect size of medium = 0.3, and a power value of 0.95 were used in this study to improve the outcome and increase validity. Furthermore, according to G-Power, the minimum sample size in this study needs to generate a sample size of 115 to achieve the power value. The sampling technique used in this study was a non-probability judgment sampling method. It was commonly known as selective/subjective sampling (Afaq et al., 2020). Judgmental sampling is where the researcher uses judgment to select the target audience that can provide the best information appropriate for the study (Sharma et al., 2019). In this study, the respondents were identified as those Generation Z who had experienced service robots in restaurants.

Instrumentation Design

The instrument for collecting data was a survey questionnaire, which was completed with five sections and 29 questions. The first section of the survey contained questions about the respondent's demographic profile. The second section of the survey included 19 questions measuring the degree of participants' experiences with using service robots (3 items), social media marketing (4 items), website experience (4 items), online advertisement (4 items), and brand love (4 items) towards the restaurant chosen by the respondents. The third section of the survey involved 5 items on restaurant industry competitiveness. The fourth section of the survey was an open-ended question asking about the other marketing strategies that will influence the restaurant industry's competitiveness. The last section of the survey was a summary and conclusion of the survey. Besides, all the respondents were asked to mark their perception on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) for the second and third sections of the survey.

Respondents were asked to evaluate their opinion on using service robots towards their chosen restaurant industry's competitiveness on three items (Kervenoael et al., 2020). An example question is, "In my opinion, it is easier to interact with robots than humans in a service environment". Social media were measured using a 5-point Likert scale to measure the consumers' attitude towards social media (Khan & Jan, 2019). For instance, "The social media advertisements for this restaurant's brand are

frequently seen. Website experiences were measured using a 5-point Likert scale to measure the effectiveness of the restaurant's website (Elling et al., 2007). For example, "The information on the restaurant's website is of little use to me". Online advertisements were measured using a 5-point Likert scale to measure the effect of online advertisements towards the consumer's decision-making (Sama, 2019). For example, "Advertisements help me to know about new products" .Brand Love was measured using a 5-point Likert scale to measure the degree of brand love towards the restaurant that the respondent chose (Kim et al., 2021). For example, "I love this restaurant brand". For measuring the variable competitiveness, five items developed by Perramon et al. (2014) are used to measure factors influencing the competitiveness of firms. Example of the question "The image of the restaurant is better than other similar restaurants". In addition, Table 1 below shows the reliability of the instruments taken from previous literature. Regarding the instruments, some changes were made, as shown in Table 3.2, to fit this study's needs. For social media, website experiences and brand love, it changed to relate more to restaurants, as the original items are general questions. For competitiveness, the original items were adapted to the consumer's perspective, as the original items were from the manager's perspective. All the questionnaires were listed in a table, as shown in Appendix.

Table 1: Reliability of the developed Instruments Taken from Previous Literature

Variables	Authors	Scale	Alpha
Service Robot (SR)	Kervenoael et al., 2020	5-point Likert Scale, 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)	0.876
Social Media (SM)	Khan and Jan 2019	5-point Likert Scale, 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)	0.91
Website Experience (WE)	Elling et al., 2007	5-point Likert Scale, 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)	0.72
Online Advertisements (OA)	Sama, 2019	5-point Likert Scale, 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)	0.85
Brand Love (BL)	Kim et al., 2021	5-point Likert Scale, 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)	0.915
Competitiveness (COMP)	Perramon et al., 2014	5-point Likert Scale, 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)	0.843

Data Cleaning

Before analysing the data, data cleaning was crucial by examining the missing data, suspicious response patterns and outliers. For the suspicious response pattern, the straight-lining issue was identified when those respondents provided a consistent response for all the items, and it was identified when the standard deviation (SD) equal to 0 (Kim et al., 2018). The responses with SD=0 required to be deleted or removed as a straight-lining had been found. Additionally, an outlier was a test that marked the same response for a large percentage of the questions but was notably different from the other test (Sekaran & Bougie, 2019). Those nominal and ordinal items were tested on the minimum and maximum in the frequency tables to examine the outliers. Furthermore, those normal and ratios were examined for outliers using boxplots and stem-and-leaf plots. When an extreme case exists in this case, which is typically denoted by the symbol * in the box plots and the identified respondent should be eliminated (Sekaran & Bougie, 2019). In addition, the symbol * indicates any data point that was greater than 1.5 interquartile ranges (IQR) above the third quartile (3.0) or below the first quartile (1.0). (Sekaran & Bougie, 2019).

Demographic Profiles

This phase was crucial as it provided information about the respondents that could be used to ascertain whether the sample was representative of the research. Information about respondents includes their gender, educational background, and the type of marketing tools that influenced their choice to visit a restaurant, the restaurant they visited, and the experienced with their service robots before.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability is a test to determine how consistently a measuring variable captures the concept that it is designed to assess (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). According to the rule of thumb for interpreting Cronbach's Alpha, the more closely the reliability coefficient approaches 1.0, the better the outcome and the more consistently the scale's items are rated internally. The standard cutoff for Cronbach's Alpha values is greater than 0.7 (Downing, 2004).

Validity was a test for an instrument's validity that examined how it was created and how it tested the specific notion it was meant to evaluate (Bajpai & Bajpai, 2014; Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

Content validity was a test which contained a sufficient and representative set of variables measuring the idea prior to data collection (Bajpai & Bajpai, 2014). A panel of expert judges and previous literature were used to evaluate the instrument's content validity (Burns & Grove, 1993; Kidder & Judd, 1986). To make sure the target respondents could understand the questionnaire, a pilot test was carried out in this study. The purpose of a pilot test, also known as a pilot study, is normally to generate initial data for quantitative analysis (Tan, 2016). It lowers the frequency of questionnaire errors and gives the opportunity to evaluate the questionnaire's quality (Tan, 2016). The reliability of each variable in this study was examined using SPSS based on the results of the respondents' pilot test. Each Cronbach alpha met the rule of thumb of 0.7, indicating a good level and allowing the research to continue and be distributed to the target respondent. Table 2 shows the Cronbach alpha's result for each variable which demonstrates adequate reliability.

Table 2: Reliability's Result of Each Variable

Variables	Cronbach Alpha Value
Service Robot	0.725
Social Media	0.907
Website Experience	0.847
Online Advertisement	0.728
Brand Love	0.904
Competitiveness	0.863

Notes: Overall Cronbach Alpha = 0.931

Data analysis and Findings

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic traits (since the respondents were Gen z consumers) are broken into two divisions only (gender and education level), as shown in Table 3. As an outcome, among the 301 valid respondents, the sample has 68.1% female and 31.9% male. All the valid respondents are largely from universities and are part of Generation Z. Most respondents are undergraduate students (68.1%), followed by Pre-U (15.6%) and the least postgraduate Gen Z (3.7%).

Table 3: Profile of Respondents

Demographic Characteristics	Total	
	N=301	%
Gender		
Male	96	31.9
Female	205	68.1
Level of study		
High school level	4	1.3
Foundation Studies	34	11.3
Pre-U (A-Levels, AUSMAT, MUFY, etc)	47	15.6
Undergraduate (Diploma & Bachelor's Degree)	205	68.1
Postgraduate	11	3.7

Hypothesis Testing

In this study, each of the assumptions for utilising Pearson's correlation to examine the relationship between the independent variables (service robot, social media, website experience, online advertisements, brand love) and dependent variables (competitiveness) have been validated. The interval level of each independent and dependent variable was measured using a 5-point Likert scale. According to early analysis, each independent variable and dependent variable have a linear relationship, every variable is normally distributed, as determined by the Skewness and Kurtosis test (falling within the range of ± 1), and there are no outliers. The results of Pearson's correlation for each of the five hypotheses H_1 to H_5 are listed in Table 4.

Table 4: Pearson Correlations for Main Study Variables

Hypothesis	n	Sig. (1-tailed)	Correlation Coefficient	Testing Result
H₁: Service robots have a positive relationship with the restaurant industry's competitiveness among generation Z consumers.	301	<.001	.348	Accepted
H₂: Social media has a positive relationship with the restaurant industry's competitiveness among generation Z consumers.	301	<.001	.503	Accepted
H₃: Website experience has a positive relationship with the restaurant industry's competitiveness among generation Z consumers.	301	<.001	.559	Accepted
H₄: Online advertisement has a positive relationship with the restaurant industry's competitiveness among generation Z consumers.	301	<.001	.473	Accepted
H₅: Brand Love has a positive relationship with the restaurant industry's competitiveness among generation Z consumers.	301	<.001	.753	Accepted

Hypothesis 1

The correlation between service robots and competitiveness had a low positive relationship of $r(300) = 0.348$, $p < .01$, with service robots representing 12.1% of the variation in competitiveness (Appendix CA). As an outcome, the alternative hypothesis is accepted; there is a statistically significant relationship between service robots and competitiveness.

Hypothesis 2

The correlation between social media and competitiveness had a moderate positive relationship of $r(300) = 0.503$, $p < .01$, with social media representing 25.3% of the variation in competitiveness (Appendix CA). As an outcome, the alternative hypothesis is accepted; there is a statistically significant relationship between social media and competitiveness.

Hypothesis 3

The correlation between website experiences and competitiveness had a moderate positive relationship of $r(300) = 0.559$, $p < .01$, with website experiences representing 31.2% of the variation in competitiveness (Appendix CA). As an outcome, the alternative hypothesis is accepted; there is a statistically significant relationship between website experiences and competitiveness.

Hypothesis 4

The correlation between online advertisement and competitiveness had a moderate positive relationship of $r(300) = 0.473$, $p < .01$, with online advertisement representing 22.4% of the variation in competitiveness (Appendix CA). As an outcome, the alternative hypothesis is accepted; there is a statistically significant relationship between online advertisement and competitiveness.

Hypothesis 5

The correlation between brand love and competitiveness had a high positive relationship of $r(300) = 0.753$, $p < .01$, with brand love representing 56.7% of the variation in competitiveness (Appendix CA). As an outcome, the alternative hypothesis is accepted; there is a statistically significant relationship between brand love and competitiveness.

Discussion of the Findings

Referring to the five hypotheses' results, the objective to examine the impact of marketing strategies on the restaurant industry's competitiveness among Gen Z consumers of this research has been answered. The following is the discussion of the results.

H_1: Based on the result of the Pearson correlation test, H_1 was accepted as there is a significant relationship between service robots and the restaurant industry's competitiveness among Gen Z consumers. This finding is consistent with studies in the literature. The literature by Cha (2020) also states that a competitive advantage can be gained by differentiating through novel and innovative technologies. Moreover, automated services can improve competitiveness in the market (Ivanov & Webster, 2017). Various previous research also indicated that restaurants are turning their employees to robots to increase competitiveness among their competitors (Blanche et al., 2020; Ivanov & Webster, 2019b). This can be supported by the research from Seyitoğlu et al. (2021); consumers would like to go to a restaurant in which robots serve as they find service robots interesting and would be curious to experience them. Besides, the finding from Seyitoğlu et al. (2021) also indicates that using robots would be a good advertisement and would affect the restaurant's brand image positively, especially since new things are used well by today's social media networks. As a result, it would provide a competitive advantage. With all those mentioned above, the fact that technological developments are already changing

existing business models, regardless of the COVID-19 pandemic, also ensures that robots are seen as a factor that can reduce costs in the hospitality industry (Fusté-Forné, 2021; Seyitoğlu et al., 2021). Besides, the pandemic has affected people's acceptance of robots and high-tech services to minimise physical contact (Zheng et al., 2020). This can also be supported by the research done by Seyitoğlu et al. (2021); service robots would be advantageous to build the confidence of patrons as they would provide contactless service.

H_2: Based on the result of the Pearson correlation test, H_2 was accepted as there is a significant relationship between social media and the restaurant industry's competitiveness among Gen Z consumers. The findings are in line with previous studies. Our results support the finding of Singh et al. (2022) that social media has a significant relationship towards the restaurant industry's competitiveness. Patient's (2017) study also received similar results that there exists a positive correlation between social media marketing and competitiveness. The study further provides evidence that social media has the potential to reach a wider audience and communicate about the brand. The result of social media use has resulted in rapid popularity and given 24×7 access to information. Social media has the highest impact on competitiveness (Wang & Kim, 2017). Further, Wang and Kim (2017) suggest that social media influence and usage impact a strong consumer relationships and firm performance.

H_3: Based on the result of the Pearson correlation, H_3 was accepted as there is a significant relationship between online advertisement and the restaurant industry's competitiveness among Gen Z consumers. The findings are in line with previous studies. The literature also states that online advertisements have a significant impact on the competitiveness of restaurants (Singh et al., 2022). The study by Singh et al. (2022) also suggests that online advertisements targeted at prospective consumers with correct information will increase reach and competence. Anusha (2016) highlighted that online advertisements offer a firm the ability to increase its brand awareness as an effective way of promoting the products and providing necessary information. It also suggests that online advertisements are easy to target the consumer. The findings are also validated by Lim and Lau (2011), who argue that consumers in today's world are exposed to numerous advertisements in various forms, such as banner ads, pop-ads, etc.

H_4: Based on the result of the Pearson correlation test, H_4 was accepted as there is a significant relationship between website experiences and the restaurant industry's competitiveness among Gen Z consumers. Kalia et al. (2014) revealed similar results that there is a significant relationship between website experience and competitiveness. It usually influences the buying decision of the consumers and creates a perception about the service offered by the brand (Kalia et al., 2014). Singh et al. (2022) observed that the majority of consumers research the restaurant before going out for dining, and half of them visit the restaurants' websites. Various literature also agrees that using a website helps to gain a competitive advantage as a website offers key information to the consumer that is important for driving sales, and it creates a connection between company products/services and the consumers (Khraim, 2015; Leitch, 2018; Salehi et al., 2012).

H_5: Based on the result of the Pearson correlation test, H_5 was accepted as there is a significant relationship between brand love and the restaurant industry's competitiveness among Gen Z consumers. This was also in line with previous literature. In particular, the findings by Shen et al. (2021) agree that brand love positively influences consumer intention to revisit, and brand love can help casual dining restaurants to build long-term customer relationships and gain profits. Besides, Shen et al. (2015) also mentioned that a restaurant needs to stand out from its competitors by making people feel it is a brand they love. Kang (2018) indicates that consumers are willing to recommend their beloved brand to other people and defend it from others' critiques. Not only that, but passionate feelings also derived from desired value achievement are likely to strengthen consumers' intention to share information about their beloved brands and engage in advocacy (Albert et al., 2013; Wiedmann et al., 2009), which consequently improves organisational competitiveness among competitors.

Implications of Findings

Theoretical Contribution

From a theoretical perspective, the current study fills a gap in the literature by including brand love and service robots as the new marketing strategies that impact the restaurant industry's competitiveness. Although scholars have tested the effects of brand love and service robots, they have not investigated their effects on the restaurant industry's competitiveness among Gen Z consumers (Guan et al., 2021; Shen et al., 2021). However, the results of this study showed that brand love and service robots have a significant positive relationship towards the restaurant industry's competitiveness. This empirically explains why satisfying customers and making them fall in love with the brand is critical to restaurant success, which also increases the competitiveness of the restaurant industry. In addition, this research contributes to the APP framework, which emphasises the assets and processes will eventually help to increase the firm's performance as well as a competitive advantage. Previous literature models adapted the APP framework but did not include brand love and service, which can be crucial for forging superior customer-brand interactions (Singh et al., 2022). All the proposed constructs in this study had a significantly positive relationship with the restaurant industry's competitiveness which confirms the indulgence of the APP framework and its application in various scenarios.

Practical Contribution

This study's findings provide important practitioners implications for marketing and branding practices by proposing a framework for competitiveness through marketing strategies. To develop a successful restaurant digital marketing strategy, managers should take into consideration several important factors, which this study lists. First and foremost, managers are encouraged to implement service robots to invite consumers to visit the restaurant. Managers can first concentrate on the design of the servicescape and the layout, usability, and aesthetic features of robotic facilities (Guan et al., 2021). This is due to the good function of servicescape, which can play an important role in the restaurant by helping consumers to deliver their needs. Second, restaurants' social media can be created and utilised to promote the brand by creating more interactive content for posts and videos regarding the latest information or happenings in the restaurant. This might help the restaurant to build engaging content and increase brand awareness among its consumers.

Thirdly, the restaurant can invest in online advertisements to promote its brand, such as pop-up ads when watching YouTube and playing games. This is because pop-up ads have changed in today's world, as they not only appear when you are immersed in games but also pop-ups when you are searching for a product or service (Abbasi et al., 2021). Fourth, managers/ marketers can focus on the design and content of the restaurant's website to improve the consumers' website experience. Marketers should always provide the latest details and add the ordering steps for guidance on their online menu. Adding the ordering steps is an attentive way of giving a positive first impression to the restaurant.

Finally, managers/ marketers and staff should be aware of the value of building brand love among customers. They should always check the quality of the ingredients to ensure all of them are still of good quality when serving. Consumers are more likely to develop brand love with a restaurant that brings memorable dining experiences and achieves their satisfaction. According to Shen et al. (2021), customers can simply transfer to other brands if their dining experiences are ruined by subpar cuisine and unsatisfactory service. The service staff at restaurants is an essential component of creating brand loyalty in customers. For example, the staff can offer high-quality service or personalise service, which makes consumers feel that they are important. Post-service quality also should be focused on as another aspect by managers, as any issues with delivery, refunds, and food or service quality must be resolved immediately.

Limitations and Recommendations

The current study is based on some recent trends in digital marketing strategies, which are based on the most studied variables in the consumer context. The recommendation to future researchers is to include other emerging factors, such as Tik Tok to investigate the influence of marketing strategies on restaurant competitiveness. As Tik Tok has emerged as one of the most popular social media platforms for Generation Z (Dao, 2022), therefore, it is recommended that future researchers investigate how Tik Tok influences the competitiveness of a restaurant. This can be supported according to the open-ended question in our survey of this study; one of the respondents recommended Tik Tok as another factor that influences the competitiveness of restaurants.

Conclusion

This study is an extensive study on the developing effectiveness of marketing strategies which is crucial to the restaurant industry's competitiveness. In this study, the perception of Gen Z consumers in Malaysia was examined to understand the significance of various marketing strategies and their impact on restaurant competitiveness. The analysis was performed by using the APP framework. The result of this study presented that service robots, social media, online advertisement, website experiences, and brand love had statistically significant positive associations towards the restaurant industry's competitiveness among generation Z consumers. As a result, restaurants ought to focus more on the factors that will make them more competitive. Additionally, this will help to forge connections and win over clients' trust. Moreover, the current study extended the knowledge of the effectiveness of marketing strategies by providing both theoretical and practical implications.

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Appendix:

Questionnaire (Measurement scales)

Section A: Demographic	
Gender	1: Male 2: Female
Level of Study	1: High School Studies 2: Foundation Studies 3: Pre-U (A-Levels, AUSMAT, MUFY, etc) 4: Undergraduate (Diploma & Bachelor's Degree) 5: Postgraduate (Master's Degree)
Section B: Marketing Strategies	
Service Robot **SR1:** In my opinion, I feel comfortable interacting with robots in a service environment. **SR2:** In my opinion, I feel more comfortable interacting with robots than humans in a service environment. **SR3:** In my opinion, it is easier to interact with robots than humans in a service environment.	Five-point Likert scale
Social Media **SM1:** The social media advertisements for this restaurant's brand are frequently seen. **SM2:** The level of social media advertisements for this restaurant meets my expectations. **SM3:** The social media advertisements for this restaurant are very attractive. **SM4:** The social media advertisements for this restaurant brand perform well in comparison to those of other restaurants. **SM5:** This restaurant's brand offers extensive advertisement on social media. **SM6:** The social media advertisements for the brand of this restaurant can be easily remembered.	Five-point Likert scale
Website Experience **WE1:** I find the restaurant's website easy to use. **WE2:** I consider the restaurant's website user-friendly. **WE3:** The information on the restaurant's website is of little use to me. **WE4:** The restaurant's website offers information that I find useful.	Five-point Likert scale

Online Advertisement **OA1:** Advertisements help me to know about new products. **OA2:** I give due attention to the advertisements before I buy the products. **OA3:** I look for the advertisement before I buy the products. **OA4:** I regularly watch, read or/and listen to the advertisement to make myself updated about the products/brands.	Five-point Likert scale
Brand Love **BL1:** This restaurant brand is totally awesome. **BL2:** I love this restaurant brand. **BL3:** I am passionate about this restaurant brand. **BL4:** I am very attached to this restaurant brand.	Five-point Likert scale
Section C: Competitiveness	
Competitiveness **CMOP1:** The image of the restaurant is better than other similar restaurants. **COMP2:** I am more satisfied coming to this restaurant rather than going to similar restaurants. **COMP3:** The employee service delivery in this restaurant is better than in other similar restaurants. **COMP4:** This restaurant cares about maintaining good quality for the customer in times of Crisis. **COMP5:** The price of this restaurant is affordable or better than similar restaurants.	Five-point Likert scale
Section D: Open-Ended Question	
What are the other marketing strategies that will influence the restaurant industry's competitiveness? (Apart from what has been stated: etc. Service Robot, social media, Website Experience, Online Advertisement, Brand Love)	Open-Ended Question