

# ***How Social Media Changed Catering Industry during the Pandemic***

**Chengzhen Shi<sup>1,a,\*</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>*University of Totonto, Mississagua, Canada, L5L 1C6*

*a. Kaydenshi28@gmail.com*

*\*corresponding author*

**Abstract:** The catering industry is facing threats during the pandemic as widespread virus reduces the number of patrons in restaurants. The catering industry is within the crosshairs of the infection of COVID-19 and the mitigation steps taken to control its spread. The purpose of this research is to find out the possible business model changes for restaurants' survival during the pandemic. Nowadays, social media is one of the new marketing tools for the catering industry, but it is underutilized when it was compared to other industries. This research aims to find out the marketing strategies that can be carried out on social media by the restaurant during the pandemic, and also, it investigates how the conditions of COVID-19 affect the elements of social media marketing campaigns. This is because during the lockdown period, restaurants were merely operating through food deliveries and during post COVID-19, the activities of food deliveries continued. The data are collected through a quantitative survey, i.e. distributing questionnaires to the customers of company Tenton. This research provides a systematic analysis of business model changes that occurred due to COVID-19 dining restrictions. Researchers can use this information as a guide for further analysis on a specific theme introduced herein, this paper may help restaurants develop efficient marketing strategies by utilizing social media.

**Keywords:** Social Media, New Marketing Tools, COVID-19. Catering Industry, Food Deliveries

## **1. Introduction**

In many countries, the Corona crisis seems to be almost over. Everyday life returns to normal. The shops are open and people can meet people from several households again. But the crisis has also left its mark. Many businesses are still a long way from the economic level they were at before the crisis. Of course, the catering industry is particularly affected. This industry had to adapt in a very short time to the tremendous changes that came with the crisis [1]. Many restaurants have overcome this challenge and are now operating more robustly than before the crisis. This paper mainly discusses the possible business model changes for restaurants' survival during the pandemic, and provides a systematic analysis of business model changes that occurred due to COVID-19 dining restrictions, Researchers can use this information as a guide for further analysis on a specific theme introduced herein, and this paper may help restaurants develop efficient marketing strategies by utilizing social media.

## 2. Utilization of Social Media as New Marketing Tools in Catering Industry during the Pandemic

Due to the pandemic and the resulting exit restrictions, the restaurateurs had no walk-in customers. If the customers no longer find the restaurant by chance and the guests only have the opportunity to order online, the internet presence is the decisive point for most customers. The restaurant operators therefore had to build on their online presence. But in most cases this was moderate to non-existent.

The catering industry has had to adapt to numerous changes in recent months [2]. Many measures had to be implemented to protect staff and guests, including constant disinfection and rearranging the seating, as well as maintaining the minimum distance and wearing masks [3]. Post COVID-19, still, made the hospitality industry probably change in the long term. Even if the industry were to stabilize quickly after the crisis, expect more flexible business models in the future. Here, too, digitization will continue to play a major role, from the company's own website and online reservation systems to the menu and voucher management. Digitized processes are becoming increasingly established in the catering trade and have become almost indispensable, as they make many things easier and faster [4].

Due to the advancing digitization, advertising and communication from companies are increasingly shifting to the online world. The global corona pandemic accelerated this development again - those who are not present online risk losing potential customers. The use of online marketing and social media also offers the opportunity for the catering industry to interact with guests and present themselves to the outside world.

The corona pandemic has shown how important it is for companies and especially for the catering industry to be digitally positioned. In times of closed guest rooms and strict contact restrictions, digital communication was the only way to stay in touch with guests and generate sales through takeaway orders. Nowadays a Google account and a profile on common social media sites are extremely important. Customers who search for a restaurant on the Internet will always choose the restaurants with the best ratings or the most attractive profile.

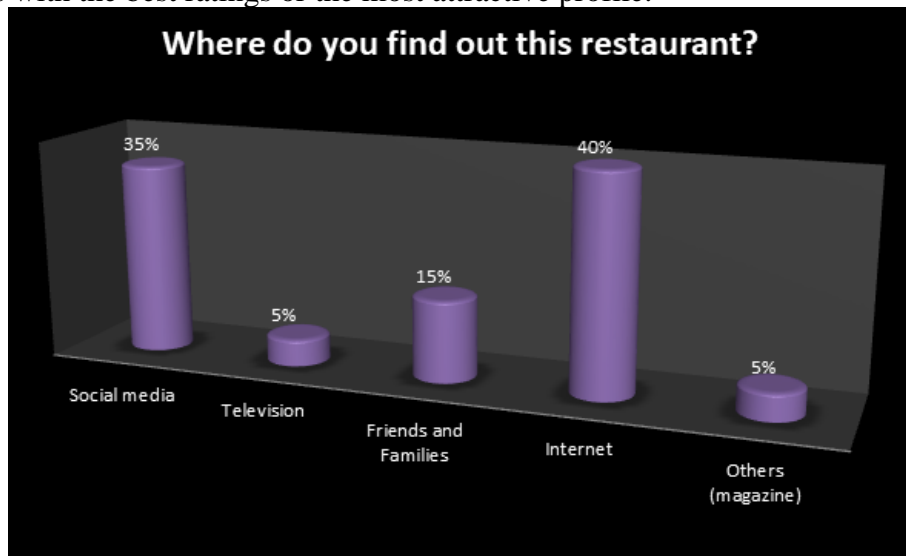


Figure 1: The sources the respondents find out the restaurant from.

There is study showed that consumers make sure that restaurants don't have bad online reviews [5]. There are also some of them who are refraining from going to a restaurant altogether if there was no website to view the menu. It can be clearly seen that the online presence has a strong

influence on the success of a catering business. This is especially important in times of the pandemic, when people only order their food or pick it up.

Social platforms and wave's solution helps the restaurant to achieve a better online presence by actively encouraging customers to rate the restaurant. The positive ratings end up on Google and the negative ratings or criticism is forwarded directly to the restaurant in accordance with data protection regulations.

From the results of the questionnaire (Figure 1), 35% of the respondents state that they find out the restaurant from social media, while 40% of them find out the restaurant from internet. Only 5% of the respondents find out the restaurant from television and others (magazine). From the result, this indicates the importance of digital marketing and the use of internet and social media of the consumers in consuming food.

### **3. Expansion and Focus on Take-out Delivery as Well as Innovative Practices**

Due to the exit restrictions and the ban on contact, restaurants could not go about their daily business. Of course, the decision to offer its own food for pick-up and delivery on the fly is obvious. Establishing the pick-up service was relatively easy to implement. Preparing the dishes and then waiting for the customer to pick them up while paying attention to distance rules was easy for most restaurants to implement [6, 7].

But when it came to delivery, things got more complicated. Many of the smaller catering establishments do not have the financial means to maintain their own drivers and delivery vehicles at the same time. They are therefore dependent on the help of third parties. Companies that offer their own drivers and vehicles in exchange for a percentage of meal delivery have been in high demand during the pandemic, filling precisely that gap [8]. They allowed the restaurants to generate at least some revenue during the lockdown.

The customers who got used to this service from the respective restaurants during the crisis will continue to use it after the crisis. As a result, many restaurants have built up a new line of business that they can use even after the pandemic to increase their sales. From the above section, it mentioned that COVID-19, even in the post-COVID-19 period, it will still demand a lot from the catering industry in recent years. In this model, which is a not completely new model, shows how onsite and offsite gastronomy work side by side [9]. On-site gastronomy stands for the experience in the restaurant as a space that, in the interplay of enjoyment on site, the atmosphere, the social and societal components of eating out and the service, makes up the experience of the gastronomy visit. Offsite gastronomy stands for consumption outside of the gastronomy business, where the food experience is ostensibly decisive (i.e. take away, delivery, ghost kitchens, etc).

One thing is certain that Corona has hyper-accelerated off-site gastronomy. With the relocation of life into one's own four walls, take away and delivery have grown rapidly in the last year and have also become practicable for many. Even after the pandemic, people will increasingly eat at home instead of where the food is prepared. Sales will therefore continue to shift towards offsite, as can be seen from the estimates of the experts, among other things. Anyone who has invested in the last few months or is now investing can still make up the ground.

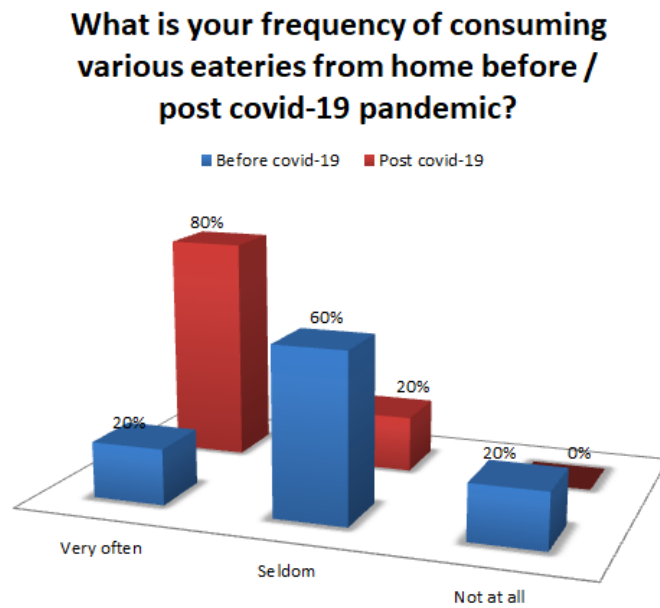


Figure 2: Frequency of the respondents consuming various eateries from home before/post-COVID-19.

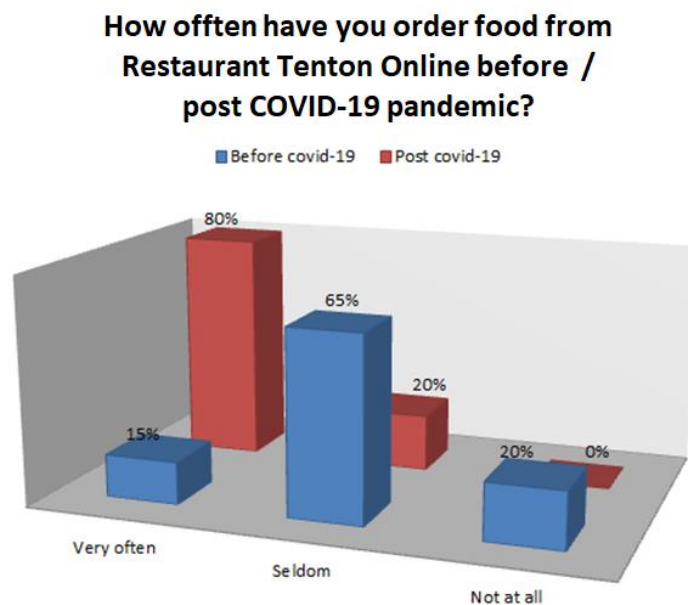


Figure 3: Frequency of respondents to order food from Restaurant Tenton Online before/post COVID-19.

From the results of the questionnaire (Figure 2), 60% of the respondents state that they seldom consume eateries from home before the pandemic while 80% of the respondents indicated that they consumed eateries from home very often after the pandemic. Similarly, 65% of the respondents state that they seldom order food from restaurant Tenton while before the pandemic while 80% of the respondents indicated that they order online from restaurant Tenton very often after the

pandemic (Figure 3). Both of the results provide significant evidence on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic to the consumer behaviour on consuming food.

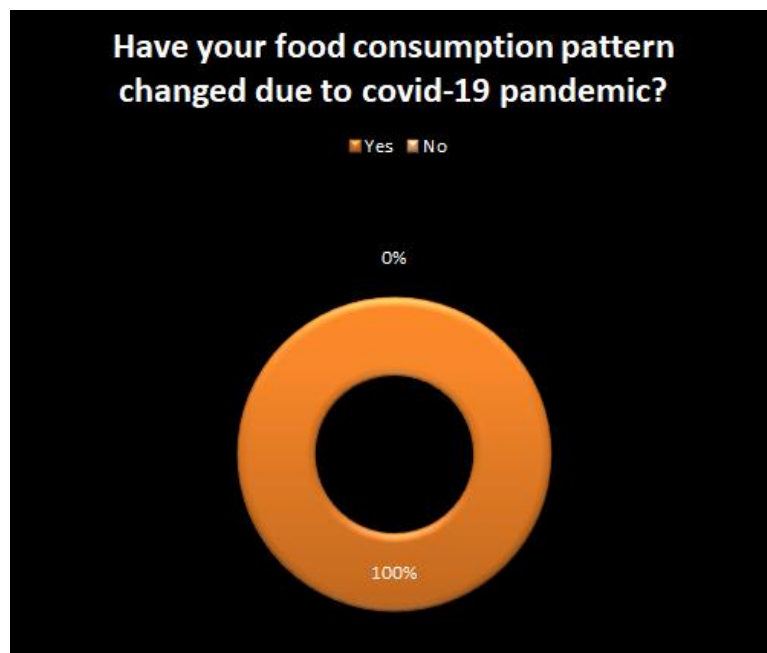


Figure 4: Food consumption patterns of respondents as affected by COVID-19.

From Figure 4, the result of questionnaire, again, 100% of the respondents provide evidence that their food consumption changed as impacted by the pandemic.

From shifting the restaurant to delivery, there is a new dimension of logistics and enabling in the offsite segment [10,11]. There are many aspects including the logistics, the platform used for delivery, and there is a complete external infrastructure required, to deal with online offers, delivery, payment, offer and etc. Independence from delivery services will become a huge issue. Especially for those catering establishments that approach the matter with high quality standards and customer loyalty, so that their own food, including as food-to-complete, reaches the customer almost ready to serve, just as it was intended.

In return, on-site gastronomy will benefit from people's longing for experiences. As soon as it is again easily possible to go to their favourite restaurant, local pub or café as a second living room, people will do so. In their desire for "back to normal" they sometimes really crave it. However, it can also be assumed that plans will have to be rescheduled on site. Depending on the hygiene concept that will then take effect, we will experience changes in the seating alone. The topic of distance is here to stay - with an impact on sales [12]. With a more generous guest-per-square-meter rule, one must inevitably assume lower sales per square meter. This can perhaps partly be offset by the price. Good on-site service and the special feature of on-site gastronomy must then also take effect and must not just be a concept idea.

From the results of the questionnaire (Figure 5), it appears that more than half of the respondents are satisfied with the speed of the delivery of the food and the ease of payment (Figure 6).

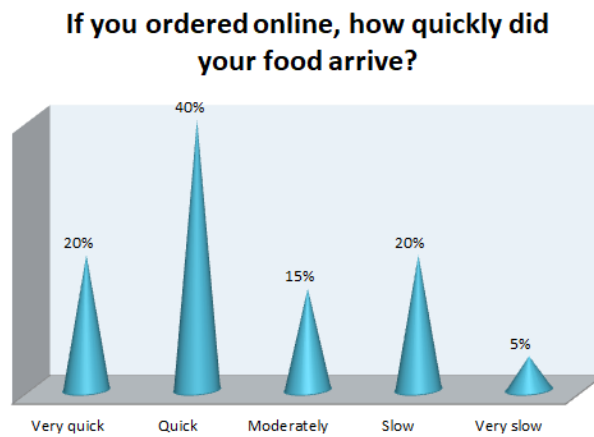


Figure 5: The speed of the arrival of food.

**Is the payment method and check out system convenience for you while ordering?**

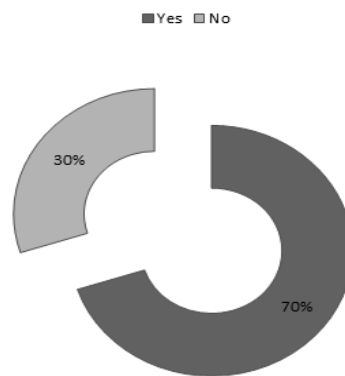


Figure 6: Ease of convenience of payment method and check out system.

**If you ordered online, did the food appear and taste fresh when it arrived?**

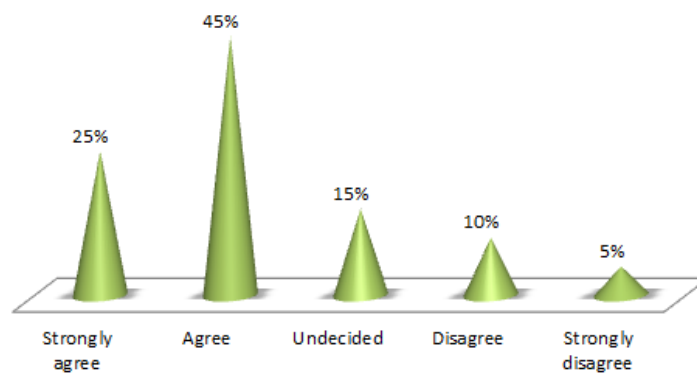


Figure 7: Appearance, taste and freshness of food.

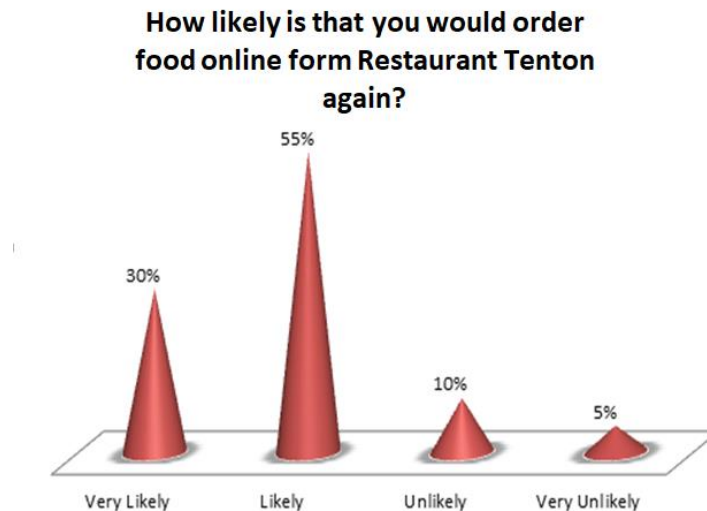


Figure 8: Likeliness of repeat order.

From the results of the questionnaire (Figure 7), there are 70% of the respondents who are satisfied with the taste, appearance and freshness of the food. Also, 75% of them specified their will of repeat purchase on restaurant X. From here it is shown that there is some link between the satisfaction of payment method, taste, appearance and freshness as well as speed of delivery. Those who are satisfied from the aspects of delivery speed, appearance of food and ease of payment are likely to come back for repeat purchase, and it is assumed that they would recommend to their friends by word of mouth or online rating with positive feedback with their repeat purchase desire (Figure 8).

#### 4. Marketing Strategies on Social Media

Online marketing has offered lots of opportunities to the catering industry. Anyone looking for information about restaurants, pubs and cafés these days usually start their researches on the Internet. This offers some advantages over classic media sources. The information and photos provided enable the guest to get a first impression of the location and the food on offer. Furthermore, they can see all current contact details and reviews of the quality and service of the restaurant at a glance. This makes it easier for him to decide when choosing a restaurant. In times of advancing digitization, it has become almost inevitable for restaurateurs to be present online. If the restaurant does not have a website or social media presence, it is at risk of losing potential guests. It is therefore worth investing in a sustainable internet presence.

A company's own website is initially time-consuming and costly, but it makes it possible to publish all relevant data about the restaurant under one Internet address. She is wholly owned by the company. This allows the restaurant to independently control what information can be found there. Furthermore, changes can be made and published at any time. In this way, seasonal menus can be easily added and made visible to guests [13]. Another advantage is that websites can be found via relevant search engines such as Google. These are often the first port of call for guests looking for restaurants. The following applies: the better the placement of the website in the search engines for relevant search terms, the more visitors and thus potential guests are reached.

The presence in social networks is becoming more and more relevant for the hospitality industry. Social media networks such as Facebook or Instagram are free and above all offer the advantage of fast, direct communication with their users. This allows for a direct exchange with the guests. Restaurateurs can also consciously obtain feedback and optimize their restaurant offering and



concept accordingly [14]. Social media in the hospitality industry also enables a specific image to be built by providing up-to-date company data, attractive photos and on-going promotions. Regular status updates, storytelling, and interactive features like polls allow restaurants to attract new social media users and encourage them to visit.

Especially during the pandemic, it became clear that good communication with customers can be crucial [15]. Restaurants often had difficulties because their customers were not informed that from now on delivery would also be possible. The same applies to the reopening of businesses. If no one is informed about this, it will be difficult to catch up on the lost sales. Therefore, a channel through which restaurateurs can communicate with their customers is of great importance. There are different possibilities for this.

Digitization can be a crucial aspect when it comes to achieving higher sales during the crisis. Urgently try to keep in touch with the restaurant's guests. Whether by phone or social media, try to stay in touch with potential customers and make them understand that the restaurant's existence depends on the incoming orders [16]. The restaurant should therefore also attach great importance to positive word-of-mouth propaganda and online reviews. These aspects are now more important than ever. In addition, the restaurant should pay attention to an active sale of vouchers, because this can increase the restaurant's income as well as pickups and deliveries. Vouchers for restaurants are a great gift option; after all there will be life after the crisis.

Collecting email addresses is an option. This works, for example, via social platforms guest WLAN, where customers can register with their email. Campaigns with the desired information can then be sent to these addresses, provided the customers have previously ticked the marketing option [17].

Another option is communication via social media. This option also has some advantages. It is not necessary to collect customer data and the restaurant can reach "normal" guests as well as potential guests who may not have been in the catering industry before, but have already taken a look at the social media page [18]. The restaurant should make sure that the profile is kept up to date, with information, posts and, ideally, pictures.

Many restaurants have greatly improved communication with their guests during the Corona crisis. A large number of restaurants and cafés now have a profile on the usual social media, which they can use to inform their customers.

## 5. Conclusion

It is increasingly recognized that the Corona crisis has left a lasting impression on this industry. Many restaurants even had to shut down operations entirely. But the restaurants that have survived this crisis are emerging from the pandemic stronger. These restaurants have adapted and responded appropriately to the circumstances [19]. The restaurants have established new lines of business and avenues of communication. However, one thing is very clear: the corona pandemic has pushed digitization extremely forward. Many people have recognized the potential behind the possibilities of the digital world. Restaurateurs who have delved into this extensively during the crisis now have an edge they can use to set themselves apart from the competition.

## Acknowledgements

First of all I would like to thank Professor. Shi Zhang from UCLA and Professor. Wu from Sichuan University for their guidance and help. My Professors were helping to me understand how social media affects the society, the different aspects that I need to consider for marketing strategies. What the professors taught me made me think better about How Social Media Changed Catering Industry during the Pandemic.



## References

- [1] Lee S & Ham S (2021). *Food service industry in the era of COVID-19: trends and research implications*. *Nutr Res Pract*. 15 (Suppl 1):S22-S31. <https://doi.org/10.4162%2Fnrp.2021.15.S1.S22>
- [2] Norris, C.L., Taylor Jr, S., & Taylor, D.C. (2021). *Pivot! How the restaurant industry adapted during COVID-19 restrictions*. *International Hospitality Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IHR-09-2020-0052>
- [3] OECD (2020). "OECD Policy Responses to Coronavirus (COVID-19): Food Supply Chains and COVID-19: Impacts and Policy Lessons". <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/food-supply-chains-and-covid-19-impacts-and-policy-lessons-71b57aea/>
- [4] Canavan Dixler, H. (2020), "Restaurants permanently pivot to fast-casual, to-go, and market formats because of COVID-19—eater" <https://www.eater.com/2020/5/8/21252278/restaurants-make-permanent-pivots-to-markets-takeout-fast-casual-because-of-covid-19-pandemic>
- [5] Ali MA, Ting DH, Ahmad-Ur-Rahman M, Ali S, Shear F, Mazhar M (2021). *Effect of Online Reviews and Crowd Cues on Restaurant Choice of Customer: Moderating Role of Gender and Perceived Crowding*. *Front Psychol*. <https://doi.org/10.3389%2Ffpsyg.2021.780863>
- [6] Sprayregen, M.(2020), "3 restaurant owners discuss how they're coping with the COVID-19 crisis" <https://www.forbes.com/sites/mollysprayregen/2020/04/09/three-restaurant-owners-discuss-how-theyre-coping-through-the-covid-19-crisis/#2333ba696856>
- [7] Turrow-Paul, E. (2020), *How Restaurants Are Innovating during the COVID-19 Pandemic* <https://www.forbes.com/sites/eveturowpaul/2020/03/22/how-restaurants-innovating-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/#47541cca2c2b>
- [8] Elliott, F.(2020), *Petty Cash Returns to Life with at-Home Taco Kits and \$1 Delivery Margaritas*, *Eater LA* <https://la.eater.com/2020/4/29/21240589/morning-briefing-restaurant-news-los-angeles-petty-cash-one-dollar-margaritas-delivery>
- [9] Glazer, F.(2020), *How Restaurants Are Catering to Families, Kids during Coronavirus*, *Nation's Restaurant News* <https://www.nrn.com/coronavirus/how-restaurant-chains-are-catering-families-kids-during-coronavirus-pandemic>
- [10] Kelso, A.(2020a), *Restaurants Will Lose Business Because of the Coronavirus, But They're Stepping Up To Help Anyway* <https://www.forbes.com/sites/aliciakelso/2020/03/17/restaurants-will-lose-business-because-of-the-coronavirus-but-theyre-stepping-up-to-help-anyway/#42ed116215f5>
- [11] Kelso, A.(2020b), *Some Restaurants are Transforming into Markets to Survive the Coronavirus Crisis* <https://www.forbes.com/sites/aliciakelso/2020/03/23/some-restaurants-are-transforming-into-markets-to-survive-the-coronavirus-crisis/#27b44aa5583c>
- [12] AHLA (2020), *COVID-19's Impact on the Hospitality Industry*, *American Hotel and Lodging Association* <https://www.ahla.com/COVID-19s-impact-hotel-industry>
- [13] Kravitz Hoeffner, M.(2020), *New York City Restaurants Are Adjusting Menus, Adding Quarantine Meals* <https://www.forbes.com/sites/melissakravitz/2020/03/17/new-york-city-restaurants-coronavirus-covid-quarantine-pandemic/#743bd8823564>
- [14] Louise, J.Q.(2020), *A Few Ways Boston Restaurants Are Giving Back*, *Forbes* <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jqlouise/2020/03/31/a-few-ways-boston-restaurants-are-giving-back/>
- [15] Pershan, C.(2020), *How Fine Dining Restaurants Are Responding to Coronavirus*, *Eater* <https://www.eater.com/2020/3/13/21178890/fine-dining-restaurants-react-coronavirus-COVID-19-takeout>
- [16] Ruggless, R.(2020), *How Wingstop Is Growing Sales during the Pandemic*, *Nation's Restaurant News* <https://www.nrn.com/fast-casual/how-wingstop-growing-sales-during-pandemic>
- [17] Khare, Amit & Alkonda, Mr. (2021). *Impact Of COVID-19 On The Social Media Marketing Campaigns By Stand-Alone Fine-Dine Restaurants In Pune City*. *International Journal of Future Generation Communication and Networking*. 14. 1739-1751.
- [18] Cimmino, Giovanbattista (2020). "Four Ways Restaurants Can Use Social Media To Survive An Emergency". *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesagencycouncil/2020/04/29/four-ways-restaurants-can-use-social-media-to-survive-an-emergency/?sh=1e57a87b1156>.
- [19] Westfall, C.(2020), *Restaurant Owners Innovate to Survive as Country Reopens during Coronavirus*, *Forbes* <https://www.forbes.com/sites/chriswestfall/2020/05/15/restaurant-owners-innovate-to-survive-as-country-reopens-during-coronavirus/>.