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Algorithmic Premiumization in the Food and Beverage Industry: How Social Media Recommendation Systems Influence Consumer Perceptions of Premium Quality in Trendy Food and Beverage Products

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ABSTRACT

This study examined how algorithmically curated social media content influences consumer perceptions of premium quality within the food and beverage (F&B) industry. Anchored on the Usage, Attitude, and Image (UAI) framework alongside Machine Heuristic Theory, Algorithmic Imaginary, Heuristic-Systematic Model, and Regulatory Focus Theory, the study investigated how algorithmic exposure, visual aesthetics, popularity cues, and engagement metrics shape perceptions of desirability, value, and inferred premium quality. The study employed a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design utilizing a researcher-developed survey questionnaire distributed through online and limited face-to-face methods. A total of 265 valid respondents aged 18 years old and above from Mindanao State University – Iligan Institute of Technology and selected areas within Iligan City participated in the study. Data were analyzed using frequency distribution, percentage, weighted mean, and standard deviation through Jamovi statistical software. Findings revealed that respondents were highly exposed to algorithmically curated food and beverage content across TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. Visual presentation, popularity metrics, repeated exposure, and engagement indicators significantly influenced perceptions of premium quality, desirability, and value. Results further suggested that consumers increasingly relied on heuristic cues such as aesthetics, virality, and social validation rather than solely on traditional indicators such as price or objective quality. The study concludes that social media recommendation systems significantly shape consumer perceptions of premium quality within contemporary digital food environments. Algorithmic visibility functions not only as a content distribution mechanism but also as an implicit signal of credibility, desirability, and exclusivity. The findings contribute to emerging literature on algorithmic consumer behavior and provide localized insights into digital consumer perception within the Philippine food and beverage context.

INTRODUCTION

The rise of social media platforms has significantly transformed how consumers discover, evaluate, and perceive products within the food and beverage (F&B) industry. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube utilize recommendation algorithms that curate content based on user engagement patterns, influencing not only product visibility but also perceptions of quality and value. Traditionally, consumer decision-making has relied on the price-quality heuristic, where higher prices are associated with superior quality (Narwal & Nayak, 2020). In food products such as tiramisu desserts and boba beverages, premium pricing is often linked to superior ingredients, authenticity, or craftsmanship. However, recent developments in digital marketing suggest that algorithmic exposure may increasingly shape perceptions of quality independent of price. Social media algorithms amplify highly engaging and visually appealing content, potentially creating impressions of premium quality through repeated exposure rather than objective product characteristics. This phenomenon, referred to as algorithmic premiumization, describes how recommendation systems elevate perceptions of

product quality through visibility, engagement metrics, and aesthetic presentation rather than traditional indicators of value. In the food and beverage industry, this effect is particularly relevant because food content is highly visual and easily shared across digital platforms. Despite the growing influence of social media algorithms on consumer behavior, existing research has primarily focused on industries such as tourism, e-commerce, and digital media, with limited attention given to food and beverage products. This study therefore investigates how exposure to algorithmically curated social media content affects consumers' perceptions of premium quality in food products, specifically tiramisu desserts and boba tea beverages.

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to determine how algorithmically curated social media content influences consumers' perceptions of premium quality in food and beverage products.

Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the demographic profile of the respondents

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in terms of age, sex assigned at birth, occupation, and allowance or income range?

2. What is the frequency and extent of social media platform usage among respondents in relation to exposure to food and beverage-related content?

3. How do algorithmic recommendations influence respondents' perceptions of premium quality, desirability, and perceived value of food and beverage products?

4. To what extent do visual aesthetics, popularity metrics, and engagement cues influence consumer perceptions of premium quality?

5. Does algorithmic exposure weaken traditional price-quality perceptions?

Objectives of the Study

The study aimed to determine how algorithmically curated social media content influences consumers' perceptions of premium quality in food and beverage products.

Specifically, the study aimed to:

1. Identify the demographic profile of the respondents.
2. Determine the frequency and extent of social media exposure to food and beverage-related content.
3. Examine how algorithmic recommendations influence perceived premium quality, desirability, and value.
4. Assess the influence of visual aesthetics, popularity metrics, and engagement cues on consumer perception.
5. Analyze whether algorithmic exposure weakens traditional price-quality relationships.

Hypothesis of the Study

Null Hypothesis (H0)

H01: Algorithmic curation has no significant relationship with consumers' perceived premium quality of food and beverage products.

H02: Exposure to algorithmically curated food and beverage content does not significantly influence consumers' perceived value, desirability, and quality perception.

H03: There is no significant relationship between algorithmic exposure and consumers' reliance on heuristic cues such as aesthetics, popularity, and engagement metrics.

H04: Algorithmic exposure does not significantly weaken the relationship between price and perceived product quality.

H05: Social media-driven food and beverage content does not significantly influence respondents' perceptions of lifestyle, social status, and identity associated with premium food and beverage products.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1)

H11: Algorithmic curation significantly influences consumers' perceived premium quality of food and beverage products.

H12: Exposure to algorithmically curated food and beverage content significantly affects consumers' perceived value, desirability, and quality perception.

H13: Consumers exposed to algorithmically curated content rely significantly more on heuristic cues such as aesthetics, popularity, and engagement metrics.

H14: Algorithmic exposure significantly weakens the relationship between price and perceived product quality.

H15: Social media-driven food and beverage content significantly influences respondents' perceptions of lifestyle, social status, and identity associated with premium food and beverage products

Significance of the Study

The study contributes to literature concerning algorithmic consumer behavior, digital marketing, and food and beverage consumer perception. The findings may provide insights for food and beverage businesses, marketers, researchers, and consumers regarding how social media algorithms shape perceptions of value, desirability, and premium quality.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

The study focused on how algorithmically curated social media content influences perceptions of premium quality in food and beverage products among respondents aged 18 years old and above within Mindanao State University Iligan Institute of Technology and selected areas in Iligan City. The study employed a quantitative research design using a structured survey questionnaire distributed through online and limited physical methods. The findings are limited by the use of stratified convenience sampling and self-reported responses, which may affect generalizability and introduce response bias.

Definition of Terms

Algorithmic Curation - Refers to the process by which social media platforms organize, prioritize, and recommend content to users based on engagement patterns, behavioral data, and machine-learning systems. In this study, it refers to how platforms expose users to food and beverage-related content.

Algorithmic Exposure - Refers to the extent to which respondents encounter food and beverage-related content recommended by social media algorithms through platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube.

Algorithmic Premiumization - Refers to the process in which repeated algorithmic exposure, visual presentation, and engagement signals increase consumers' perceptions of a product as premium, desirable, or high-quality regardless of objective product differences.

Algorithmic Imaginary - A concept introduced by Bucher (2018) referring to users' mental assumptions and beliefs regarding how algorithms operate and prioritize content.

Heuristic Processing - Refers to quick decision-making based on mental shortcuts or surface-level cues such as popularity, visual aesthetics, and engagement metrics rather than detailed evaluation.

Premium Quality Perception / Inferred Premium

Quality - Refers to consumers' perception that a food or beverage product possesses superior quality, desirability, exclusivity, or value compared to ordinary alternatives.

Price-Quality Heuristic - Refers to the traditional consumer assumption that higher-priced products are generally of higher quality.

Objective Quality Signals - Refers to measurable or tangible indicators of product quality such as ingredients, preparation methods, certifications, packaging, and product composition.

Popularity Metrics - Refers to social media engagement indicators such as likes, shares, comments, views, and reposts that may influence consumers' perceptions of credibility and desirability.

Aesthetic Presentation - Refers to the visual appearance and stylistic presentation of food and beverage products within digital content, including plating, color composition, editing, and visual appeal.

Social Media Recommendation System - Refers to the algorithmic mechanism used by digital platforms to personalize and recommend content based on user behavior, interactions, and engagement history.

Consumer Perception - Refers to the process through which consumers interpret, evaluate, and form judgments regarding products, brands, and content encountered online.

Food and Beverage (F&B) Content - Refers to digital content related to food and beverage products, including photos, videos, reviews, advertisements, and promotional materials shared on social media platforms.

Working Students - Refers to respondents who simultaneously pursue academic studies while engaging in part-time or full-time employment.

Social Media Engagement - Refers to user interaction with online content through actions such as liking, sharing, commenting, viewing, saving, and reposting content.

ATT - Refers to attitude assessment questions within the research instrument.

USA - Refers to usage assessment questions within the research instrument.

IMA - Refers to the image assessment questions within the research instrument.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The food and beverage industry is growing rapidly especially in the Philippines, reshaping the market with new trends and innovations. Social media and algorithmic curation lie parallel to this movement by personalizing content for users, emphasizing posts that users interact with more. According to Onome-Irikefe, K. (2025), algorithms keep adjusting the content you see based on your behavior, which makes you interact more and, as a result, buy more. This narrative affects how trending products such as Tiramisu and general food and beverage are perceived by consumers when it comes to quality and premiumization. With this, there is a need to cross-examine different aspects of related studies that revolve

around the keywords: social media and algorithms, purchase-driving activities, and AI integration to provide further nuance as to why there is a need to supplement existing information with this study.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored from Dr. Ned Roberto's (1996) published study which introduced the concept of UAI (Usage, Image, Data) study. This framework will help provide the UAI data necessary to shape the study to accommodate and uncover customer's perceived quality when it comes to algorithmic curation. Furthermore, This study utilizes First, Machine Heuristic Theory (Sundar, 2020) suggests that individuals often rely on machine-generated cues as indicators of credibility and authority. In social media contexts, users may assume that algorithmically recommended products are trustworthy or superior. Second, Algorithmic Imaginary Theory (Bucher, 2018) explains how users construct mental models about how algorithms operate. Consumers may believe that algorithms prioritize the best or most relevant products, which can influence perceptions of quality. Third, the Heuristic-Systematic Model (Chaiken, 1980) proposes that individuals process information through either systematic analysis or heuristic shortcuts. Because social media content is fast-paced and visually oriented, consumers may rely more heavily on heuristic cues such as aesthetic presentation and popularity metrics. Finally, Regulatory Focus Theory (Higgins, 1997) suggests that consumers' motivational orientation influences their decision-making. Promotion-focused individuals may be more susceptible to visually appealing and highly promoted content. Together, these theories explain how algorithmically curated food and beverage content may shape perceptions of premium quality through visibility, engagement, and aesthetic presentation.

Empirical Literature

Existing studies consistently demonstrate that social media algorithms shape consumer engagement, trust, and perceived product value through visual amplification, recommendation systems, and engagement-driven visibility (Jessi & Chandran, 2024; Zhang & Zhou, 2025; Rilinger, 2024; Zhao, 2025). Research further suggests that visually appealing and highly engaged food content increases perceived desirability and purchase intention, particularly among younger consumers exposed to short-form social media content (Luo *et al.*, 2024; Kızılgeçi, 2025; Beyaz Coşkun, 2026). Traditional studies emphasize the role of price as a signal of quality (Narwal & Nayak, 2020). However, recent literature indicates that algorithmic exposure, engagement metrics, and visual presentation increasingly influence perceptions of value independent of objective quality indicators. Studies concerning AI-generated recommendations and personalized content also indicate that algorithmic systems increase perceived relevance, trustworthiness, and purchase intention among consumers (Wang *et al.*, 2025).

Conceptual Framework

The proposed conceptual framework suggests that Algorithmic Curation, Price Level, and Objective Quality Signals serve as the independent variables of the study. Meanwhile, Heuristic Processing and Algorithmic Imaginary function as mediating mechanisms that influence consumer interpretation and judgment. The dependent variable is Inferred Premium Quality. The framework proposes that algorithmic curation influences heuristic cues such as aesthetics and popularity, which subsequently shape perceptions of premium quality. Under conditions of high algorithmic exposure, traditional indicators such as price and objective quality signals may become less influential in consumer judgment.

Independent Variables

- Algorithmic Curation
- Price Level
- Objective Quality Signals

Mediating Mechanisms

1. Heuristic Processing

2. Algorithmic Imaginary

Dependent Variable

- Inferred Premium Quality
- Proposed Relationship

Algorithmic curation influences heuristic cues, including aesthetics and popularity, which subsequently shape perceived premium quality. As algorithmic exposure increases, traditional indicators such as price and objective quality signals may weaken in influence

Research Paradigm

The research paradigm recognizes several moderating cognitive factors that may influence how consumers interpret algorithmically curated food and beverage content across digital platforms.

Moderating / Cognitive Factors

- Popularity perception
- Aesthetic presentation
- Algorithmic credibility perception

Conceptually, the model proposes that:

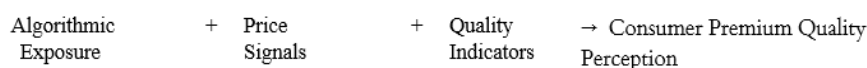


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study

Algorithmic exposure may also moderate the relationship between price and perceived quality. The framework further proposes that algorithmic exposure amplifies heuristic cues such as visual aesthetics, popularity metrics, and engagement indicators, thereby strengthening perceptions of desirability and premium quality.

Research Gap

Despite growing literature on social media algorithms and consumer behavior, limited studies have examined algorithmic premiumization within the food and beverage industry, particularly within Philippine consumer contexts. Existing research also provides limited discussion regarding how algorithmic exposure reshapes traditional price-quality relationships.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employs a quantitative research design to evaluate consumer behavioral patterns, attitudes, and approaches toward algorithmic curation in food and beverage (F&B)-related social media content. A structured questionnaire utilizing a 5-point Likert scale serves as the primary data collection instrument. The questionnaire is divided into specific sections aligned with the research questions. The questionnaire items were not directly adopted from a single standardized instrument; rather, they were developed and adapted based on established theories and empirical studies, including the

Heuristic–Systematic Model (Chaiken, 1980), If...Then: Algorithmic Power and Politics (Bucher, 2018), Machine Heuristics (Sundar, 2020), and Perceived Value Theory (Zeithaml, 1988). Supporting empirical studies on social media engagement and visual perception (Zhao *et al.*, 2018; Zhang & Zhou, 2014) were likewise utilized to guide item construction. The items were contextualized to fit food and beverage consumption within social media environments.

Research Locale and Respondents

The study was conducted within Mindanao State University – Iligan Institute of Technology and selected areas within Iligan City. A total of 265 respondents aged 18 years old and above participated in the study, primarily composed of students and working students exposed to food and beverage-related social media content.

Population and Sampling

Population - The population of this study consisted primarily of college students aged 18 years old and above from Mindanao State University – Iligan Institute of Technology, alongside a smaller number of respondents from the general population within Iligan City. The respondents were selected based on their exposure to social media platforms and their familiarity with food and beverage-related online content. The majority of respondents were students and working students who

frequently engaged with algorithmically curated content on platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. Recent institutional reports indicate that Mindanao State University – Iligan Institute of Technology has an estimated student population ranging from approximately 10,000 to 13,000 students, with recent enrollment estimates reaching around 12,829 students. This population was considered appropriate for examining perceptions and behavioral responses toward algorithmically promoted food and beverage products within a digitally active academic environment.

Sampling Technique - This study utilized a stratified convenience sampling method. Respondents were initially grouped according to demographic and socioeconomic categories such as age, occupation, and allowance or income range to ensure representation across different purchasing capacities and consumer backgrounds. Following stratification, respondents were selected through convenience sampling based on accessibility, availability, and willingness to participate. The use of convenience sampling was considered appropriate due to practical constraints such as limited time, accessibility of respondents, and the exploratory nature of the study. The research primarily focused on accessible respondents within the researchers' social and academic networks, particularly within the MSU-IIT community and nearby areas in Iligan City. Data collection was conducted through both online and physical survey distribution methods. The majority of responses were collected through Google Forms disseminated via Facebook posts, Messenger group chats, and student organizations including the Junior Entrepreneurship Marketing Society (JEMS) and the College of Economics, Business, and Accountancy (CEBA). Additional respondents were gathered through limited face-to-face physical survey distribution. To encourage participation and improve response rates, respondents who completed the survey were given the opportunity to participate in a BorealisDeli raffle promotion. Participation remained voluntary, and informed consent was secured prior to survey completion.

Sample Size - The study obtained a total of 312 initial responses from both online and physical survey distributions. However, responses from participants aged 17 years old and below were excluded from the final dataset due to the study's requirement limiting participation to individuals aged 18 years old and above for ethical consent and response maturity purposes. After data cleaning and validation, a total of 265 valid respondents were retained for analysis. Among these, approximately 240 valid responses were collected through online survey forms, while 16 valid responses were gathered through physical survey questionnaires. The final sample size of 265 respondents was deemed sufficient for the quantitative analysis employed in the study, particularly in evaluating consumer attitudes, perceptions, awareness, and behavioral responses toward algorithmic curation within food and beverage-related social media environments.

Research Respondents

The respondents of the study consisted of 265 individuals aged 18 years old and above, primarily composed of college students from Mindanao State University – Iligan Institute of Technology and selected residents from Iligan City. The respondents were chosen based on their accessibility, social media usage, and exposure to food and beverage-related online content. The demographic profile of respondents showed that the majority belonged to the younger adult age group, with 19-year-old respondents comprising the largest proportion at 35.1%, followed by respondents aged 20 years old at 19.2%. The study also found that female respondents represented a larger proportion of participants at 58.9%, while male respondents accounted for 41.1%. In terms of occupation, the majority of respondents were identified as part-time employed working students, accounting for 72.8% of the total sample. Regular students comprised 19.2%, while smaller portions of respondents identified as self-employed, employed, or unemployed. This demographic composition reflects the prevalence of working students within the MSU-IIT environment and highlights the relevance of economic considerations in food and beverage purchasing behavior. Regarding allowance and income levels, most respondents reported having relatively limited purchasing budgets. Approximately 50.9% of respondents reported receiving below PHP 1,000 monthly allowance or income, while 29.1% belonged to the PHP 1,000–1,500 range. These findings suggest that the respondent pool largely consisted of budget-conscious consumers who remain highly exposed to social media-driven food trends and algorithmically curated content. All respondents were required to meet the inclusion criteria of being at least 18 years old, active social media users, and individuals exposed to food and beverage-related digital content. Participation in the study remained voluntary, and all respondents were informed regarding confidentiality, informed consent, and the academic purpose of the study in compliance with Republic Act No. 10173.

Research Instruments

The primary research instrument utilized in this study was a structured survey questionnaire designed to quantitatively assess consumer perceptions, attitudes, behavioral tendencies, and responses toward algorithmically curated food and beverage-related social media content. The questionnaire employed a 5-point Likert scale format to measure the degree of agreement or disagreement of respondents with each statement presented in the survey, and a total of 52 questions that are based on the related literatures used for the studies basis. The questionnaire was administered through both online and physical survey forms. The online questionnaire was distributed primarily through Google Forms, while printed survey sheets were utilized for limited face-to-face data collection. The instrument was designed to be answerable within approximately six to seven minutes

to encourage respondent participation and completion. The survey questionnaire was researcher-made and developed through the adaptation and contextualization of concepts, constructs, and variables derived from established theories and related empirical studies. The formulation of questionnaire items was guided by the following theoretical foundations and related literature:

- UAI (Usage, Attitude, and Image) Framework by Dr. Ned Roberto (1996);
- Machine Heuristic Theory (Sundar, 2020);
- Algorithmic Imaginary Theory (Bucher, 2018);
- Heuristic–Systematic Model (Chaiken, 1980);
- Perceived Value Theory (Zeithaml, 1988);
- Related studies concerning social media engagement, algorithmic exposure, visual perception, and consumer behavior.

The questionnaire was contextualized specifically for food and beverage-related digital environments and focused on algorithmic recommendation systems commonly encountered on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. The survey instrument consisted of several sections aligned with the objectives and statement of the problem of the study:

Part I – Demographic Profile

This section gathered the demographic characteristics of the respondents, including:

- Age;
- Gender / Sex assigned at birth;
- Occupation;

- Allowance or income range.

Part II – Social Media Usage and Exposure

This section measured the frequency and extent of respondents' usage of social media platforms and their exposure to food and beverage-related content. It included questions related to:

- Frequency of platform usage;
- Exposure to trending food and beverage content;
- Interaction with recommended posts, reels, shorts, and videos.

Part III – Algorithmic Influence and Perceived Premium Quality

This section assessed how algorithmically curated content influences respondents' perceptions regarding:

- Product desirability;
- Perceived premium quality;
- Trustworthiness;
- Popularity;
- Willingness to purchase or pay premium prices.

Part IV – Image Perception and Heuristic Processing

This section measured the influence of:

- Visual aesthetics;
- Engagement metrics;
- Popularity cues;
- Lifestyle associations;
- Social status perceptions;
- Algorithmic credibility.

Table 1: Interpretation of the 5-Point Likert Scale

Scale	Verbal Interpretation
5	Strongly Agree
4	Agree
3	Neutral
2	Disagree
1	Strongly Disagree

To ensure ethical compliance and informed participation, the survey introduction included a consent statement informing respondents regarding:

- The academic purpose of the study;
- Voluntary participation;
- Confidentiality of responses;
- Compliance with Republic Act No. 10173 or the Data Privacy Act of 2012;
- The right to withdraw participation at any time.

Additionally, the survey contained a raffle incentive mechanism sponsored through BorealisDeli to encourage participation and improve response rates. Respondents who completed the questionnaire were voluntarily entered into a raffle draw for cash and item prizes. However, participation in the raffle remained separate from the respondents' survey answers, and no personally identifiable information was disclosed in the research findings.

Data Gathering Procedure

Data were gathered through online and limited face-to-face survey distribution using Google Forms and printed questionnaires. Survey links were disseminated through academic networks, student organizations, and social media platforms. Participation remained voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents in compliance with Republic Act No. 10173 or the Data Privacy Act of 2012.

Validation of Instrument

To ensure the validity and appropriateness of the research instrument, the survey questionnaire underwent a content validation process prior to its official distribution. The questionnaire items were carefully developed and adapted from established theories, related literature, and empirical studies concerning algorithmic curation, consumer behavior, heuristic processing, perceived value, and social

media engagement.

The construction of the questionnaire was guided by the following theoretical and conceptual foundations:

- UAI (Usage, Attitude, and Image) Framework by Dr. Ned Roberto (1996);

- Machine Heuristic Theory (Sundar, 2020);
- Algorithmic Imaginary Theory (Bucher, 2018);
- Heuristic–Systematic Model (Chaiken, 1980);
- Perceived Value Theory (Zeithaml, 1988);
- Related studies on algorithmic recommendations, social media engagement, visual perception, and consumer purchasing behavior.

The instrument was designed to align directly with the study's statement of the problem, objectives, conceptual framework, and identified research variables. The questionnaire items were contextualized specifically for food and beverage-related social media environments to ensure relevance to the target respondents and research locale. Prior to the official data gathering process, the questionnaire was reviewed by the research adviser and subject instructor to evaluate:

- Clarity of instructions and item wording;
- Relevance of questions to the objectives of the study;
- Logical organization and structure of questionnaire sections;

- Appropriateness of the Likert-scale statements;
- Consistency between the research variables and questionnaire items.

Suggestions and recommendations provided during the review process were incorporated by the researchers to improve the comprehensibility, organization, and overall quality of the instrument. A preliminary checking and

informal pilot observation were also conducted among selected individuals similar to the target respondents to identify unclear wording, ambiguous statements, or technical issues within the survey form. Minor revisions were subsequently made to improve readability and respondent understanding. The final questionnaire was deemed appropriate and sufficiently valid for gathering quantitative data related to consumers' perceptions, attitudes, and behavioral responses toward algorithmically curated food and beverage-related content on social media platforms. Furthermore, ethical validity was observed by including an informed consent statement and confidentiality assurance in compliance with Republic Act No. 10173 or the Data Privacy Act of 2012. Participation remained voluntary, and respondents were informed that all collected data would be used strictly for academic research purposes only.

Statistical Treatment of Data

The collected data were analyzed using Jamovi statistical software. Frequency distribution and percentage were utilized to summarize demographic data, while weighted mean and standard deviation were employed to interpret respondents' perceptions and attitudes

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of age, sex assigned at birth, occupation, and allowance or income range.

Table and Figures

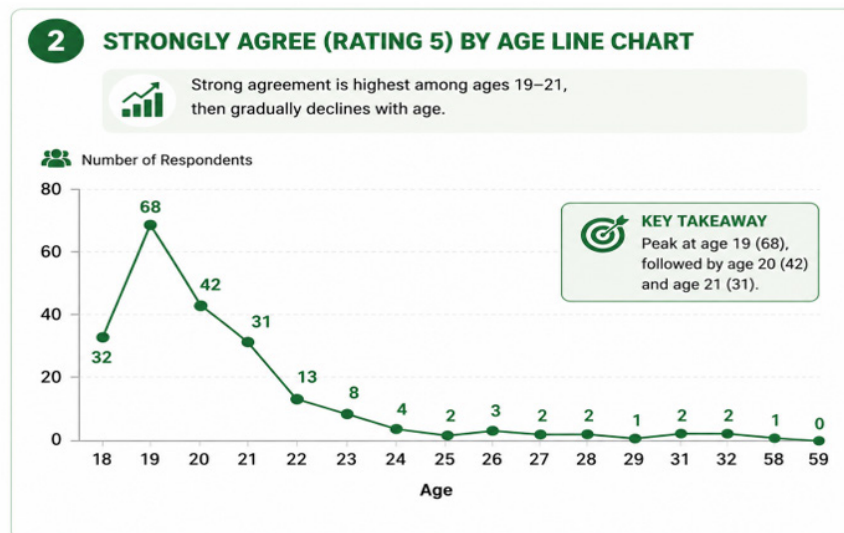


Figure 2: Age of Respondents

Figure 1 presents the distribution of respondents according to age. The findings revealed that the majority of respondents were 19 years old, comprising 35.1% of the total respondents, followed by respondents aged 20 years old at 19.2%. Respondents aged 18 and 21 each accounted for 14.0% of the total sample. Smaller

proportions were observed among respondents aged 22 years old and above. These findings indicate that the study largely consisted of younger adult consumers who are highly active on social media platforms and are frequently exposed to algorithmically curated food and beverage-related content.

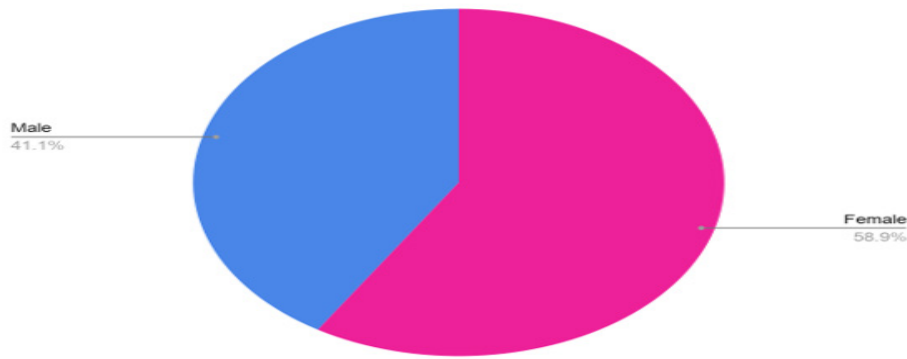


Figure 2: Sex Assigned at Birth

Figure 2 presents the distribution of respondents according to sex assigned at birth. Results showed that female respondents accounted for the majority of the sample at 58.9%, while male respondents comprised 41.1%. The findings suggest that female respondents

were more represented in the study population, which may reflect higher engagement levels with visually driven food and beverage content on social media platforms.

Occupation of Respondents

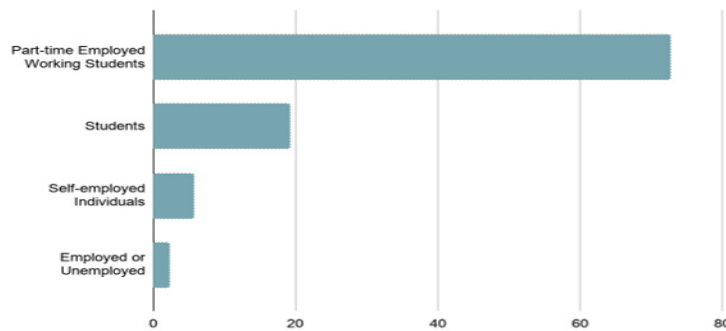


Figure 3 presents the occupational distribution of respondents. The majority of respondents were identified as part-time employed working students, accounting for 72.8% of the respondents. Students comprised 19.2%, while self-employed individuals represented 5.7%. Only

a small percentage identified as employed or unemployed. This demographic composition reflects the prevalence of working students within the MSU-IIT environment and highlights the economic realities influencing food and beverage purchasing decisions among respondents

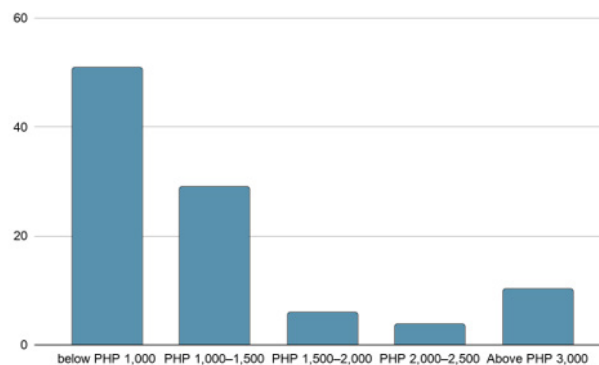


Figure 4: Allowance or Income Range

Figure 4 presents the respondents' allowance or income distribution. The findings showed that 50.9% of respondents reported having below PHP 1,000 allowance or income, while 29.1% belonged to the PHP 1,000–1,500 range. Smaller proportions belonged to higher allowance and income categories. The results indicate that the majority of respondents were budget-conscious consumers despite frequent exposure to premium-looking food and beverage content online.

Presentation of Data per Research Problem

Problem 1

What is the demographic profile of the respondents in

terms of age, sex assigned at birth, and allowance or income? The demographic findings revealed that the majority of respondents were young adults aged 18–21 years old, predominantly female, and largely composed of working students with relatively limited purchasing budgets. These findings suggest that the respondent pool represented digitally active consumers frequently exposed to algorithmically curated social media content.

Problem 2

What is the frequency and extent of social media platform use among student consumers in relation to their exposure to premium food and beverage content?

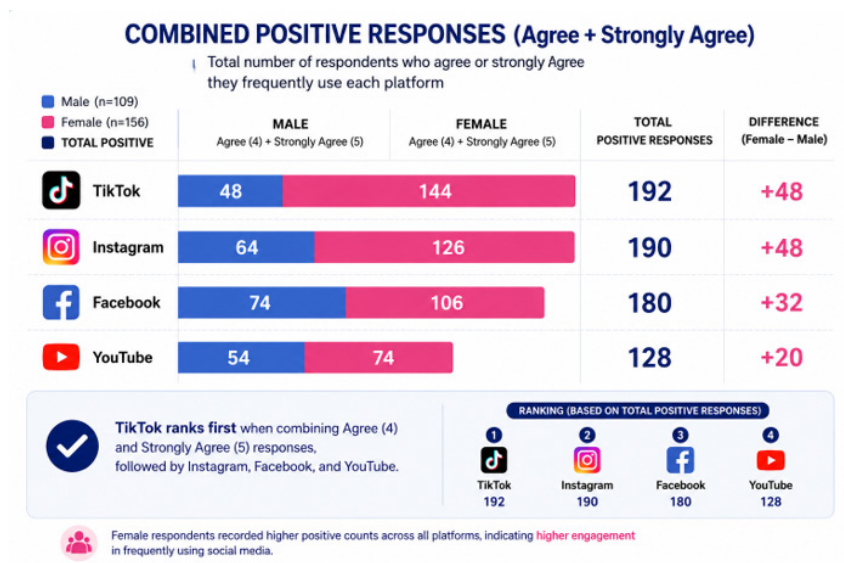


Figure 5: Combined Positive Responses

The findings revealed that respondents frequently utilized social media platforms such as TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. Respondents reported regular exposure to visually appealing food and beverage-related content appearing on their social media feeds. Algorithmically recommended posts, trending videos, influencer promotions, and highly engaged content were frequently encountered by respondents. Many respondents indicated that repeated exposure to trending food and beverage products increased curiosity, desirability, and

awareness toward such products. These findings support existing literature suggesting that algorithmic systems reinforce consumer exposure through engagement-driven amplification mechanisms.

Problem 3

How do algorithmic recommendations shape students' attitudes, perceived value, desirability, and quality perceptions toward premium food and beverage products?

Contingency of respondents believing that frequently shown products are worth trying

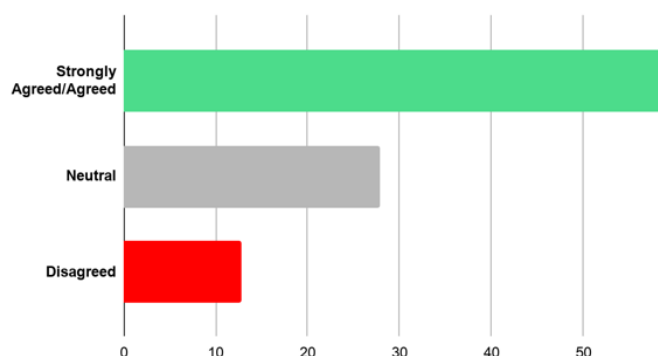


Figure 6: Contingency of respondents believing that frequently shown products are worth trying

Respondents' Evaluation of Product Quality Through Visually Rich Stimuli

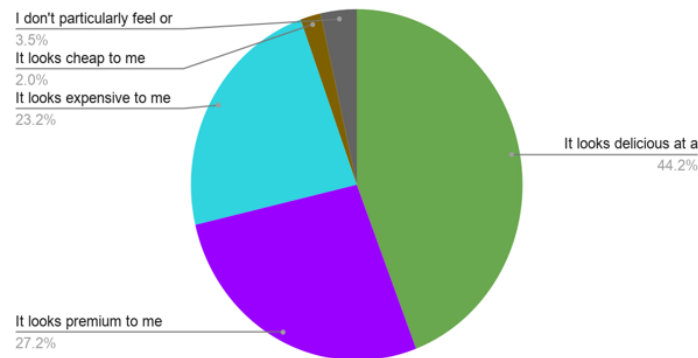


Figure 7: Respondents' Evaluation of Product Quality Through Visually Rich Stimuli

The findings indicated that respondents generally agreed that social media algorithms influence their perceptions regarding premium quality, desirability, and value of food and beverage products.

Respondents reported that:

- Frequently recommended products appeared more trustworthy and desirable.
- Aesthetic presentation influenced perceptions of premium quality.
- Viral and highly engaged content increased perceived popularity and value.
- Influencer endorsements strengthened interest and willingness to try products.
- Repeated algorithmic exposure increased familiarity and perceived credibility.

The weighted mean scores indicated agreement across most perception-related variables, suggesting that algorithmic curation significantly contributes to shaping consumer judgments regarding food and beverage quality. The findings further suggest that respondents relied heavily on heuristic cues such as visual aesthetics, popularity metrics, and engagement indicators rather than objective quality indicators alone.

Analysis of Findings

The findings of the study demonstrate that algorithmically curated social media environments significantly influence consumer perceptions and attitudes toward food and beverage products. The demographic composition of the respondents indicates that younger consumers, particularly college students and working students, are highly exposed to social media-driven food trends. Their frequent use of platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube increases their exposure to visually appealing and engagement-amplified content. The study found that algorithmic recommendations shape perceptions of premium quality through repeated exposure, popularity reinforcement, and aesthetic presentation. Respondents associated frequently recommended products with higher desirability, trend relevance, and perceived social value. These findings align with Machine Heuristic Theory

(Sundar, 2020), which suggests that consumers perceive machine-curated recommendations as credible and authoritative. Similarly, the Heuristic-Systematic Model (Chaiken, 1980) explains why respondents relied heavily on heuristic cues such as aesthetics, popularity metrics, and influencer endorsement when evaluating products.

The results also support the concept of Algorithmic Imaginary (Bucher, 2018), wherein consumers develop subconscious assumptions that algorithmically amplified products are superior or more premium. Furthermore, the findings suggest that algorithmic exposure may weaken traditional price-quality relationships. Despite many respondents belonging to lower income brackets, visually appealing and highly popularized products were still perceived as premium regardless of objective quality indicators. Overall, the findings indicate that algorithmic premiumization is becoming increasingly relevant within contemporary food and beverage consumer behavior.

Interpretation of Results

The results of the study imply that social media algorithms play a substantial role in shaping consumer perceptions within the food and beverage industry. Repeated exposure to algorithmically curated food content contributes to the formation of perceived premium quality through visual appeal, popularity signals, influencer validation, and engagement-based amplification. Consumers no longer rely solely on traditional indicators such as price, ingredients, or objective quality measures. Instead, algorithmic visibility itself functions as a heuristic signal suggesting desirability, trend relevance, and premium value. The findings further imply that digital platforms increasingly influence food purchasing attitudes among younger consumers, particularly within highly connected academic environments such as MSU-IIT. This suggests that businesses operating within the food and beverage sector may benefit from strategically utilizing visually optimized and engagement-driven social media marketing approaches. However, the findings also imply potential risks associated with algorithmic amplification, including overreliance on aesthetics, misleading representations of

quality, and the normalization of popularity as a substitute for objective product evaluation.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how algorithmically curated social media content influences consumer perceptions of premium quality within the food and beverage industry among 265 respondents aged 18 years old and above. Findings revealed that respondents, primarily younger consumers and working students, were highly exposed to food and beverage-related content on TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. Visual aesthetics, engagement metrics, popularity signals, influencer endorsements, and repeated exposure significantly shaped perceptions of desirability, credibility, and premium quality. The findings further suggested that algorithmic exposure contributes to algorithmic premiumization, wherein products are perceived as premium because of visibility amplification and social validation rather than objective product attributes alone. Traditional price–quality relationships also appeared less influential within algorithmically driven digital environments.

Recommendation

The study recommends that food and beverage businesses utilize visually engaging and strategically optimized social media content to improve consumer engagement and perceived value. Consumers should develop greater awareness regarding algorithmic influence on purchasing behavior, while future researchers should further examine algorithmic exposure using broader demographic groups, experimental research designs, and additional variables such as willingness to pay, impulse purchasing, and long-term consumer trust.

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