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Analysis of Hungarian fine dining restaurants' marketing activities

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Declaration of thesis authenticity

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Table of Contents

Analysis of Hungarian Fine Dining restaurants' marketing activities

Introduction:

The topic of my thesis is about the marketing strategy of Hungarian fine dining restaurants. From the countries of the post-Soviet Eastern bloc, Hungary is in a unique place when it comes to fine dining. Relative to its size it has many internationally highly regarded fine dining restaurants, with seven one Michelin star and two, two Michelin star restaurants. Studying these restaurants' marketing activities, gives us a better understanding in how they operate in a competitive, niche market, which can be a valuable case study for marketing in these specialized sectors. The sector has a small market size and for that reason relies heavily on high spending tourist visits. These restaurants must attract both local, and international customers to survive. Analyzing the marketing activities' differences in attracting the two different target groups can give us valuable insights in hospitality, tourism, and international marketing contexts. Branding and positioning are key tools for fine dining restaurants, in terms of differentiating themselves from the others. Understanding how these restaurants build their brand, and position themselves, can offer lessons in strategic brand management. In this era of marketing, fine dining restaurants must rely on digital marketing tools more than ever. This topic allows me to investigate how fine dining restaurants use these new tools, in their operation, like social media, and influencer marketing to attract new guests. Hungarian cuisine has deep connections and roots in Hungarian culture. Hungarian fine dining restaurants often market these traditions in an upscale, modern way. This can provide insights into how the restaurants use cultural heritage, to gain advantage over their competitors, in their marketing strategies. As I have mentioned, the Hungarian fine dining sector is highly competitive. There are a lot of good restaurants to choose from, and guests generally have high expectations. Studying the marketing strategies of these restaurants can provide us with valuable knowledge, in how they keep themselves profitable, and how they can convey themselves as exclusive, while also being accessible. As I have researched this topic, I have not found studies, where the

relationship of fine dining and marketing were exclusively studied, leaving me to believe, that this topic is not researched enough.

Aims:

A1: To analyze the current marketing activities utilized by Hungarian fine dining restaurants.

A2: To analyze the role, use and impact of digital marketing on online platforms and social media for Hungarian fine dining restaurants.

A3: To analyze marketing strategic differences, in how Hungarian fine dining restaurants attract both local guests and international tourists.

Research questions:

Q1: What are the key marketing activities utilized by Hungarian fine dining restaurants?

Q2: How do Hungarian fine dining restaurants utilize digital marketing tools like social media, and influencer marketing to reach and engage their target audience?

Q3: What activities do Hungarian fine dining restaurants use to appeal to both local guests and international tourists?

The ten most important literature I plan to use are:

Rita et. al., A sentiment analysis of Michelin-starred restaurants

Sahin et. al., A research on customer experiences and perceptions for Michelin starred restaurants

Harrington, R. J. et. al., Fine-dining restaurant selection: direct and moderating effects of customer attributes

Kivela, J., & Crotts, J. C., Tourism and gastronomy: Gastronomy's influence on how tourists experience a destination

Singer J., Arora R., Cognitive and affective service marketing strategies for fine dining restaurant managers

Pattanachai K., The impact of social media on fine dining choice decision

Salem I. et al., Linking consumer characteristics to word-of-mouth-related behaviors and referral intentions in restaurants

Ivanenko V. et. al., Menu analysis as an effective marketing tool for increasing the restaurant establishments' profitability

Hsu S.-H., et al., Constructing a consumption model of fine dining from the perspective of behavioral economics

Budapest Business Journal, Fine restaurants 2023

Research plan:

Research objective: In my research I aim to obtain a better understanding of what activities these restaurants use to reach their target audience, and also what attracts guests to these restaurants.

Research design: In this study, I will use a mixed-method approach, combining qualitative, and quantitative research methods to gain a deeper understanding on marketing managers marketing activities, and important factors that influence guests on deciding between restaurants.

Qualitative research will be conducted by interviews with marketing directors and managers of fine dining restaurants.

Quantitative research will involve a questionnaire made for guests of fine dining restaurants.

Sampling frame: Two groups

1.: Marketing managers, directors, professionals, who work in Hungarian fine dining restaurants.

2.: Guests, who have dined at least once at a Hungarian fine dining restaurant.

Sampling techniques: 1. For marketing managers:

Sampling method: Non-probability judgmental sampling. It is usually used in qualitative research. I will use my knowledge to select a sample that is most useful for the research.

Inclusion criteria:

1.: Marketing managers of Hungarian fine dining restaurants, that are listed on fine dining restaurant guides. (e.g.: Michelin guide, Dining guide)

2.: Marketing managers of Hungarian fine dining restaurants, that have been open for more than 2 years

3.: Marketing managers of Hungarian fine dining restaurants that have been involved in making marketing decisions for at least six months.

For guests:

Sampling method: Non-probability convenience sampling. Demographic characters such as age, gender, income will be recorded in order to perform comparative analysis between different groups.

Inclusion criteria: 1. Responders who understand the concept of fine dining restaurants.

2. Responders who are at least 18 years old at the time of completing the questionnaire.

Sample acquisition: Marketing managers: Fine dining restaurants will be contacted by email or phone. I also plan to visit some of the restaurants in person, to establish a good connection.

Guests: The questionnaire will be distributed both online and offline. In a Facebook group with more than 12 thousand members called Hungarian Fine Dining the questionnaire will be posted. I will also fill out questionnaires with guests in front of fine dining restaurants. I will also inquire if it is possible that for example one of the restaurants include the questionnaire with the booking confirmation to their guests.

Qualitative data collection: Method: Semi-structured, in-depth interviews.

Format: The interviews will be conducted in person, or in an online call, depending on the interviewee. It will be recorded on an audio recorder, and later transcribed by me.

Quantitative data collection: Method: Self-administered questionnaires, distributed both online and offline.

Format: Google forms, single and multiple-choice questions, with descriptive options.

Short overview of chapters' contents:

1.Introduction: This chapter introduces the topic, and the background of the Hungarian fine dining fine dining sectors' unique position. It also includes the research problem, aims, and research questions as well as professional importance of the study. It also introduces the most important participants in the sector through comparative analyses.

2.Literature review: This chapter collects and summarizes all studies relevant to the topic of fine dining restaurant marketing. It includes information on fine dining restaurant guests' preferences to the effects of a restaurant receiving a Michelin star for example.

3.Research plan/methodology: This chapter explains how the research was conducted, including what methods were used for data sampling and data collection. It details the qualitative and quantitative research processes, and the reasons behind them are discussed.

4.Analysis of qualitative research: The interviews with the marketing managers of Hungarian fine dining restaurants are transcribed, and they are compared with each other. The analysis searches for collective marketing strategies, challenges, and keys for success in the Hungarian fine dining sector.

5.Analysis of quantitative research: The data from the questionnaires are collected and analyzed. It is then used to examine how guests perceive different marketing efforts of restaurants, how successful they are, and what are key factors that influence their decision making in terms of choosing between restaurants.

6.Discussion: The findings from the interviews and the questionnaires are compared and cross examined. It then discusses the implications of the findings for the Hungarian fine dining industry.

7.Conclusion: The last chapter summarizes the key insights and findings of the research, and with conclusions, offers recommendations for Hungarian fine dining restaurants to improve their marketing strategies. It also mentions limitations of the study and suggests areas of research in the future.

Literature review:

Michelin stars carry a signal of high-level service, professionalism and exclusivity. Findings reveal that the search of uniqueness, and curiosity is what drives guests to these restaurants. In terms of satisfaction, food quality is what matters to guest the most, and if they are satisfied with it, their appreciation for aspects like service, atmosphere and decoration increases. Repeat visits are crucial to fine dining restaurants financially. The aspects that encourage guests to return the most are the ones evoking emotions, like interacting with the chef, kitchen tours, and personalized service. Restauranteurs cannot forget about price performance and food quality, because if they are lacking, guests are unlikely to visit again, even if the other aspects like service or atmosphere are good. (Sahin, 2021.) Among fine dining restauranteurs, there is a term called Michelin curse. In simple terms, after a restaurant gets a star, the expectation of guests, and the demand for tables go up, pushing out the regulars, and steering the restaurant off of their original concept, to meet these new expectations. A study written in 2022 looked at how ratings change for fine dining restaurants, after they receive a star, on the popular review website, Tripadvisor. This study uses the novel approach, analyzing reviews before and after receiving the star. The study showed that guests expectations are higher, and because of that, they can be less satisfied with the food, service and ambience, leading to negative reviews. From a managerial perspective, restaurant staff should always strive to improve almost all aspects of their food and services, for example culinary artistry such as plating when it comes to food, and personalized service, can be the small details that lead to good reviews. It is also important to mention that guests are less sensitive of price increases, after a restaurant gains a star. (Rita et. al. 2022.) Michelin stars also boost social and emotional values, like status and enjoyment. These factors are harder to measure than others, but they are critical in having the guests view their visit as a luxury experience. In this sense,

having a Michelin star can be a powerful marketing tool, that can only be obtained by good food and service, and not by any marketing activity. Guests who are more involved in gastronomy, than others are more sensitive to Michelin star recognition and the study shows, that they may spend more because of this reason. For increasing revenue, these individuals should receive top priority and special attention, by staff. This study also proves previous findings that I have quoted in the scope of price sensitivity. It shows that guests who visit Michelin star restaurants are not sensitive to high prices, because they already expect them. (Bang et. al. 2022.) When choosing a fine dining restaurant, different things affect what people decide. In the article, "Constructing a consumption model of fine dining from the perspective of behavioural economics" (Hsu et al. 2018.) researchers created a customer behavior model asking guests about their priorities in fine dining. For example, the kind of meals offered and how they are served is important as well as cleanliness and enjoyment. Yet there is no clear way that can be used to assess why certain people choose a specific restaurant while others do not. To bridge this gap, a study involving one hundred fifty participants who had experienced fine dining at least once was carried out. The research suggested that a consumer economic behavior model can be developed by utilizing the descriptive and axiomatic principles of mental accounting. In forming the model, linear and logistic regressions were used for determining relationships and measuring the effects of every determinant on customer conduct, where out of all the determinants, food quality turned out to be more determinant than quantity of services. According to the author family participation and motivation in eating out was notably important. When it came to selecting a fine dining establishment, the likelihood of customers doing so depended on safe ingredients, proper cooking practices and creation of new menus in a positive sense. Creating an effective consumer behavior model is critical to restaurateurs for several reasons. Initially, it aids them in recognizing exactly what affects customers choosing one restaurant over another. Second, it grants them a full comprehension of desires from their clients. Finally leading to positioning and managing upscale restaurants for those who wish to experience dining at the highest level. The menu of all restaurants is a key component to their success. A well-constructed menu in today's world is not just the responsibility of the chef, but of the marketing team as well. The article "Menu analysis as an effective marketing tool for increasing the restaurant establishments' profitability" (Ivanenko V. et al. 2022.) analyzed menu design using ABC analysis, in my opinion this could easily be adapted in fine dining restaurants as well. In today's ever-changing business landscape, it is imperative for restaurants to adapt quickly to market shifts. Marketing is a key component in the growth and management strategy of restaurants. Menu analysis is crucial for solidifying market positions and gaining a

competitive edge. This research aims to improve the methodological framework for menu analysis in restaurants to drive profitability. The paper emphasizes the importance of ABC analysis as a valuable marketing tool in the restaurant sector. ABC analysis involves evaluating menu items based on three key factors: sales volume, revenue, and gross profit. By considering these dimensions, restaurants can conduct a comprehensive analysis of their menu offerings. The practical application of ABC analysis in fine dining marketing includes data gathering, identifying top-selling dishes, addressing underperforming items, adjusting prices, optimizing ingredient usage, and exploring menu expansion and replacement. By utilizing ABC analysis, fine dining establishments can make well-informed decisions regarding their menus, increase profitability, and remain competitive in the industry. It is crucial to remember that each restaurant is unique, so adapting these principles to fit the specific context of the fine dining establishment at hand is essential. My guess is that a large number of guests find out about fine dining restaurants through word of mouth, but I will investigate it in my research as well. The study "Linking consumer characteristics to word-of-mouth-related behaviors and referral intentions in restaurants" (Salem I. et al. 2017.) examined the impact of consumer characteristics such as gender, age, education, and dining preferences on word-of-mouth (WOM) behaviors and referral intentions. Results indicated that females, teenagers, and young adults tended to rely more on WOM recommendations for outdoor dining choices. On the other hand, males, older individuals, and quick-service restaurant (QSR) patrons were more likely to refer others, particularly in the case of negative dining experiences. University students were less influenced by negative WOM referrals but actively shared their own unpleasant meal encounters. Furthermore, the research identified key opinion leaders within different consumer groups, enabling restaurant owners to target their marketing strategies more efficiently. In the realm of fine dining marketing, highlighting quality, utilizing digital platforms, and generating buzz prior to the grand opening are essential tactics. The study "The impact of social media on fine dining choice decision" (Pattanachai K., 2015.) also touches on eWOM (electronic word-of-mouth) which is when guests share their opinions online, and other guests inform themselves or make judgements based on their experiences. This study was conducted in Thailand, so it contains some unique characteristics of the Thai fine dining scene, such as having fine dining restaurants in shopping malls which I have never heard about before. Nevertheless, it still gives us a very good insight into the impact of social media, in guests' decision-making process. The impact of social media on consumer behavior is multifaceted. Visual content, particularly food images, significantly influences decision-making. Users find it easy to review comments and share opinions on social media platforms. Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) plays a crucial

role in shaping consumer choices. Additionally, interactions between businesses and customers via social media channels are essential for informed decision-making. The study "Cognitive and affective service marketing strategies for fine dining restaurant managers" (Singer J., Arora R. 2006.) is one of the best studies I have found so far. It highlights the importance of expectations and emotions in the fine dining industry, addressed to fine dining marketing managers. Restaurant managers acknowledge the significance of customer contentment and recurring visits for the endurance and advancement of their establishments. This holds especially true in the realm of dining encounters, where individuals' attitudes and gratification are molded by their consumption experiences. The findings of this research has valuable insights, highlighting the pivotal role of effectively managing customer expectations and emotions within the realm of fine dining. For a fine dining restaurant it is not only important to provide a high level of food and service, but to manage expectations as well. Restaurant owners and managers possess the ability to influence attitudes and intentions through the creation of unforgettable dining experiences. They should aim to surpass customers' expectations by providing a delightful and exciting dining experience that engages all their senses. By placing emphasis on taste, ambiance, and the art of presentation, they have the power to awaken a sense of pleasure and contentment in their guests. Enhancing the dining experience by incorporating features such as a "tasting menu" and customized plate presentations designed specifically for each guest can have a favorable impact on their attitudes after the meal. The study emphasizes the importance for restaurant managers to create a marketing strategy that takes into account emotional and performance aspects in order to cultivate favorable post-consumption attitudes and encourage repeat visits. I included the model which was created in the study with figures.

Figure 1: Path Estimates of Extended Model
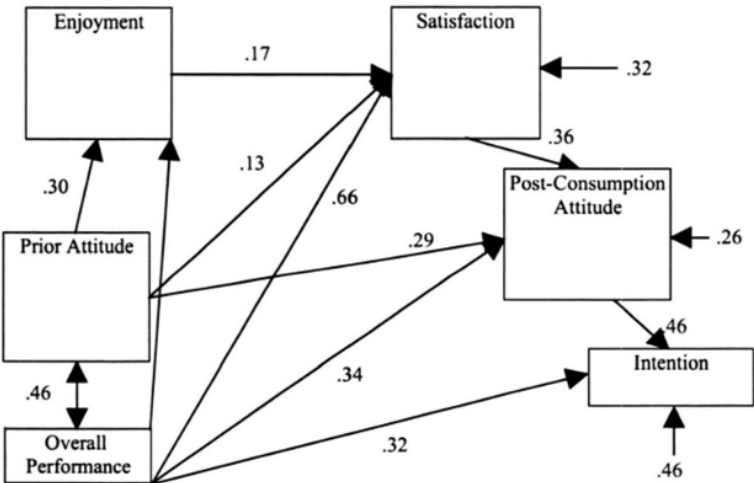
Source: Singer., Arora. 2006

A study made in 2011 analyses what attributes of fine dining restaurant are important for different types of guests. The study mainly focuses on three characteristics: age, gender, and how frequently they visit fine dining establishments. The results show that for guests of different genders, priorities are different from each other. For female guests, price/value, quality and dietary attributes are more important than for males. In terms of age, older diners value atmosphere, healthy options and quiet settings, whereas younger guests, the most important attribute is the value for their money and pricing. Frequent visitors of fine dining establishments are a key for maximizing revenue for restaurants. The most important factors for them are variety and innovation, while price/value is important for both frequent and infrequent diners. Although the study is very thorough and well made, it also has limitations like a young sample demographic, with the median age being 24. (R.J. Harrington et. al.)

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Introduction to the most important participants of the Hungarian fine dining sector through comparative analyses (SWOT, BCG matrix):

In Hungary, the fine dining sector fortunately has many participants, but there are ones, who stand out and stay ahead. It is crucial to look at what factors affect the success and failure of these restaurants. In this section I will be analyzing the most prominent restaurants, and groups through SWOT analysis which assesses the internal and external factors affecting a restaurant. After analyzing them I will position them into a BCG matrix that places restaurants into four categories; stars, cash cows, question marks and dogs, based on market share and market growth.

SWOT ANALYSIS:

Stand is a great example of a true market leader, and pioneer amongst fine dining restaurants, focusing on their Hungarian roots. The restaurant's success could largely be attributed to two names, executive chefs Tamás Széll and Szabina Szulló. They both worked at Onyx, in 2011 which earned the second Michelin star in Hungary. Their first restaurant Stand 25 opened in February of 2017, which was a more casual, bistro style restaurant, with the focus being on, Hungarian cuisine, with a refined, modern twist. The same approach can be observed, when it comes to Stand, but with exclusive ingredients, and fine dining service elements as well as an elegant atmosphere. Opened in July of 2018, Stand earned its first Michelin star nine months after opening, and its second star in 2022. "The kitchen of Stand is a place of dynamic and passionate work, where the traditionally prepared dishes are presented without pomp and

fuss. This is what the team has strived for at their previous restaurants, the Bocuse D'Or, and now at their own restaurants at Stand25 and Stand. The team's constant strives for showcasing the endless possibilities of beauty and diversity within Hungarian gastronomy were accurately rewarded; Stand received its first Michelin star just nine months after opening, and as of last year, the restaurant boasts two coveted Michelin stars among their culinary recognitions. The contemporary dishes are accompanied by a wide array of upscale Hungarian and European wines, providing an aspect of fine-tuned harmony for each meal. The restaurant places great emphasis on sustainable development, terroir, collaboration with Hungarian producers and, most importantly, bringing innovative flavors to the table. The menu centers around the possibilities stemming from high-quality Hungarian ingredients, while ensuring that their elementary dishes find balance between traditional Hungarian cuisine and contemporary gastronomy." (Fine Restaurants, 2023) "A central glass-walled kitchen is the focal point of this eye-catching modern restaurant; a dining room sits either side, and there's a chatty buzz to the room, which is helped along by the personable service team. The two experienced chef-owners are proud of their Hungarian roots and skillfully reinvent and modernize classic Hungarian dishes using a wide range of techniques. The wonderfully rich gulyás soup and the soft, flavorsome venison are hits, as is the ever-present somlói dessert. When it comes to wine, look to the Hungarian options – there are some great sweet Tokajis on the list." (Michelin guide)

Figure 2: Interior of Stand

Source: welovebudapest.hu, 2023

Strengths: The greatest strength of Stand is its established name in the sector, which largely comes from their two Michelin stars. Today the Michelin guide is more popular than ever, and when a restaurant gets awarded a star, or in the case of Stand two, it creates a lot of buzz in the fine dining community. In the Michelin guide, two stars simply refers to a restaurant being worthy of a detour, and apart from the locals, many tourists who like to dine in fine dining

restaurants will take that detour to visit Stand, when they travel to Budapest. The restaurant's central location in the city makes it easy and accessible for locals and tourists, appealing for both market segments. The same goes for the restaurants cuisine which features modern Hungarian gastronomy. The restaurant's elegant atmosphere, with a see-through glass walled open kitchen brings all these elements together for a unique dining experience.

Weaknesses: It is hard to talk about weaknesses when it comes to Stand, but there are a few. Stand's high prices are justified when it comes to quality and service, but they limit the restaurant's customer base. Their tasting menu is one of the most expensive in all of Hungary, and there is not a big enough customer base of local diners, that can afford a meal in the restaurant, to make it economically viable. With these high prices comes the inevitable dependence on tourism. This means that any event significantly impacting tourism, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, could jeopardize Stand's existence.

Opportunities: Stand has many opportunities to expand, with one of them being marketing. Stand has the credentials to make itself a household name, in the European fine dining scene. By increasing its online presence, and inviting famous food bloggers, vloggers, and influencers, Stand could become a global destination for fine dining enthusiasts. Another opportunity is to expand or renew the menu. For multiple years now, Stand's menu stayed mostly the same, with a few changes seasonally, but the core dishes remained. By inventing a new menu, with different signature dishes, Stand could convince guests, who had already dined at the restaurant, to return for something new. There seems to be a shift or at least a change in how some fine dining restaurants diversify or transform their business model. World famous restaurants like Noma in Copenhagen, announced its closing in early January of 2024. Chef and co-owner René Redzepi said that the restaurant was both financially and emotionally unsustainable. He also announced that from 2025 the restaurant will transform into a "food lab", developing products for commercial sale. The same phenomenon could be observed when it comes to David Chang's fine dining fusion chain, Momofuku. Momofuku made a name for themselves in the fine dining scene, but they became worldwide after closing several restaurant chains, and launching their commercial product, Momofuku chili crunch. The crunchy chili oil became so popular that it outgrew the chain itself and saved the company from bankruptcy. Stand could consider developing premium products for commercial sale in the domestic market, to diversify their business model, since they have already made a name for themselves.

Threats: Competition seems to be rising when it comes to fine dining restaurants in Hungary. A new participant, Platán Gourmet restaurant also got awarded two Michelin stars, and with Stand became the only two Michelin star restaurants in the country, but with Onyx

returning to its original form next year, that number soon could change. Stand's location in Hungary is not the best in terms of potential economic downturns. These economic challenges influence people's dining out habits. The number of guests, especially local ones could decrease significantly in terms of an economic crisis. Any scandal or incident could also have an effect on the restaurant's reputation, and customer trust.

Platán Gourmet restaurant is a relatively new player in the Hungarian fine dining scene. Located in Tata, the company Platán, has very diverse offerings from a more casual bistro to a small boutique hotel called Platán Manor, and even a bakery and spa. Platán Gourmet restaurant is the first and only restaurant in Hungary that got awarded two Michelin stars outside of Budapest. Not only that, but the restaurant got these two stars at the same time. To put it into perspective, usually a restaurant first gets mentioned or recommended in the Michelin guide. Even this is a huge accomplishment, being on the same pages with the world's best. After the first appearance the inspectors of Michelin visit the restaurant again, multiple times in the next year, and if all of them agree that the restaurant improved significantly, they award a star. If the restaurant continues to improve, they can get awarded more stars, but if the inspectors feel like there was a drop in quality in terms of the food or service, they can also take them away. In the case of Platán Gourmet, the restaurant went from zero stars to two. This has happened only a handful of times, in the whole world. It's safe to say that this is what put them on the map worldwide, and it's the reason why people from all over the world come to Hungary just to try their food and service. Platán mixes many different styles of cooking, but that is not their focus. It is seasonality. Platán changes its menu every season, with smaller changes inside the current season. The reason behind this is their garden, which was created for a reason of sustainability. Platán offers two options to guests who wish to indulge in their experience. The chef's table offers guests to be "apart" of their team by having an open kitchen in front of the dining room. In my opinion, this option is more for guests who are interested in what a two Michelin star kitchen looks like in action. The other option is the Blue Salon, which is a much more private place of dining, decorated beautifully with velour, and only a few tables. "Only an hour from Budapest, the view from Platán Restaurant is just as awe-inspiring as their dishes. Guests of the restaurant may find themselves mesmerized by the picturesque view of the Old Lake with the Vértes mountain in the background, a scenic landscape which can be seen from the restaurant's terrace. A transformative renovation has separated the venue into two sections: an informal bistro with a more laid-back atmosphere, and the new fine dining section, Platán Gourmet, welcoming its guests with an ambiance of sophistication and culinary excellence. István Pesti

took on the responsibility of heading Platán's kitchen in 2015, with the goal of demonstrating that a countryside restaurant can offer high-quality hospitality. The chef's degustation menus are famous for good reason; he offers guests an extraordinary culinary experience, showcasing stunning food compositions with colorful, flowery designs. The restaurant can be found near Tata Castle and offers 10- or 12-course degustation menus. Beverage pairings include options of elegant, European wines, as well as non-alcoholic choices." (Fine Restaurants, 2023) "The former staff accommodation for the estate of the Counts of Esterházy plays host to this restaurant, which sits beside a charming lake. Your evening starts with an aperitif and snacks on the terrace beneath the castle, before you are shown through to a barrel-vaulted cellar with an open kitchen. Here, the team works with calm efficiency and meticulous precision to create a 12-course tasting menu composed of highly sophisticated dishes packed with deep flavors and bags of personality. For the full experience, stay the night in one of the nearby bedrooms and make the most of their spa." (Michelin guide)

Figure 3: Executive chef István Pesti

Source: velvet.hu, 2022

Strengths: Platán offers one of the most unique dining experiences in the country. The focus is not only on the service and the food, but also the atmosphere and the guest itself. In a seminar held at Budapest Business University, executive chef István Pesti explained, that guests can feel tense, when entering the doors of the two Michelin star establishment. Platán's answer to this, was implementing service elements that puts the guest at ease, with some humor. For example, when serving one of their starters in the beginning of the course, waiters shoot truffle smoke rings at diners. To pull this off, without seeming unprofessional, or informal, chef István Pesti's experience, who has been head of Platán since 2015, is an essential part of the restaurant's success. Another strength worth mentioning about Platán, is their ability to get their hands, on high quality ingredients, in a sustainable fashion, hence their own garden, from which

they implement fresh fruits, vegetables, and herbs as well as preserved goods. The garden also doubles as a picturesque background to the meals.

Weaknesses: Platán's biggest weakness could be its location. The restaurant is located in the city of Tata which is about an hour away from Budapest. Tata is not what people would call a prime tourist destination in Hungary, therefore most of Platán's clientele, Hungarian or foreign, actively seek out the dining experience, and travel there only for the restaurant. This limits Platán's ability to have a steady flow of guests, whereas in Budapest a tourist who would like to have a fine dining meal can search the web and have a plethora of restaurants to choose between, without having to do much planning. Platán also just recently started putting any focus on marketing, which is understandable considering they have just recently been awarded two Michelin stars, which has a stronger effect than any marketing campaign a restaurant could release. However, when this "buzz" slows down a bit, their lack of prepared marketing actions could harm them in the future.

Opportunities: Platán has a great opportunity to tie all their services in package deal experiences. When a guest visits Platán's website, they must make a choice on which part of the companies' products or services they want to know more about or reserve. There is a separate website for the fine dining restaurant, the bistro, the hotel, the bakery and so forth. As I have mentioned Platán's guests mainly come to Tata just for the restaurant. This includes foreign fine dining lovers and enthusiasts as well. Platán could assemble different package deals in good taste, without it seeming cheap. For example, a one-night offer for a guest traveling for the restaurant could include this: A transfer from the airport to Tata (they offer this service separately), lunch at the bistro upon checking in, access to the spa, dinner at the gourmet restaurant, a one-night stay at Platán Manor, and breakfast in bed from Platán baker before checking out. This option would encourage fine dining fanatics to book the package, for an easier streamlined experience, while Platán has an opportunity to showcase all their products and services together. In my opinion this option also gives a better chance to obtain repeat customers.

Threats: People in Hungary gravitate more and more from villages and smaller cities like Tata to larger cities like the capital or Debrecen. This trend could cause issues for Platán since they would have less and less local guests. It would also make it harder for them to find highly qualified working staff, since a full-time job at Platán would require the person to move closer to the restaurant, and this could be a deterrent for some. Platán also has one of the priciest menus in Hungary, so if an economic crisis arises which is not unlikely, the restaurant could observe a significant drop in customers. A unique threat to Platán is climate change. Since they

rely heavily on their garden for high quality fresh ingredients, a change in climate could affect plants and trees negatively, in terms of their yield and quality.

Costes was the first Michelin starred restaurant in Hungary. Opening in 2008 and receiving the star in 2010, Costes was a pioneer in establishing fine dining in Hungary. Owner of Costes and Sziget festival, Károly Gerendai made a brave gamble in opening the restaurant, since at that time, the true amount of demand for fine dining in the country was unclear. In hindsight it was a correct decision since Costes is still operating while never losing its star, and a second restaurant Costes downtown was opened in 2015. "Spoiling their guests with a seven-course tasting menu of contemporary European cuisine, the team at Costes showcases the importance of providing the highest standard of culinary experience in a welcoming, friendly atmosphere. Chef-patron Jenő Rácz assists the Costes team on their mission to consistently provide an extensive journey through an unforgettable culinary experience, while incorporating his personal flair of gastronomical glamour. Every perfectly positioned puzzle piece of the seasonally transforming seven-course tasting menu at Costes is created with keeping sustainability and the quality of ingredients in mind, while the stunningly presented dishes highlight the hidden allure of culinary creativity." (Fine restaurants, 2023.) "Elegance and sophistication lead the way at Costes, from the smart décor to the well-orchestrated service. Ask for a seat to the front of the main room for a feeling of space, then enjoy the eager anticipation as the sommelier presents an exceptional, mostly Hungarian wine selection. The modern 7 course tasting menu comprises memorable dishes which not only look stunning with their bright colors and artistic style, but are packed with vibrant, complementary flavors. Seasonality plays an important role here too, with the featured ingredients always informing you of what's in season right now." (Michelin guide)

Figure 4: Interior of Costes

Strengths: One of Costes's strengths are most definitely the fact that they were the first restaurant recognized by Michelin with a star in Hungary. By receiving the star, they had the "blueprint" to continue to be successful as well as the knowledge about the quality of dishes and level of service they needed to uphold to keep their star. Chef-patron Jenő Rácz is also a great asset for the restaurant. The experience he brings to the table, being a head chef for many international Michelin star restaurants is just what Costes needed. His flair and style are felt through each of Costes's dishes. Costes's location in Ráday street is also a great strength of the restaurant. It is in the city center close to Kálvin square, while not feeling too "touristy".

Weaknesses: In my opinion the greatest weakness of Costes is the lack of focus on the restaurant. In an interview owner Károly Gerendai told Forbes Hungary, that when Costes downtown lost its Michelin star in November of 2022, it came as a huge blow to the entire restaurant group. In the previous month the revenue of Costes downtown was at an all-time high at 87 million HUF. After losing the star, in December, which is usually the busiest month for the hospitality industry, the monthly revenue dropped down to 32 million HUF, while operating costs remained mostly the same. In January Costes downtown ended the month with a loss of about 20 million HUF. This meant that funds had to be taken away from other restaurants, such as Costes, to keep the doors open. This allocation of funds slowed down the progress of improving Costes. The reason such a thing can happen also highlights another weakness of Costes, which is that according to the owner, 90 percent of guests are foreign. This makes Costes more vulnerable than other competitors to events that affect tourism like Covid-19 for example. Another weakness of Costes is their slow website. When I was doing my research about the restaurants featured in this thesis, almost all websites except Costes's loaded in seconds, while Costes's took more than a minute. As we know, purchase decisions, or in this case reservation decisions, take only a few seconds. The blank page of Costes while loading can greatly influence, and discourage a potential guest to make a reservation, and makes them look for other options. It is important to mention that since revisiting the website several weeks later, the problem seems to have been resolved. Still, an error like this could have cost the restaurant to lose many potential guests.

Opportunities: Costes could build on their legacy more as the first Hungarian Michelin star restaurant. A marketing campaign showcasing the story of the first star in Hungary can yield great success. A well-made small documentary video with interviews with staff, and storytelling elements can be an interesting spectacle, not just for people that are interested in fine dining, but for anyone. I feel like there would be a good chance that online news outlets

would pick the story up and write articles about it, which could also be a great advertisement for the restaurant. Looking at Costes's menu, we see influences from French, German, and even Japanese cuisines. A more Hungarian focused tasting menu could attract more local guests balancing out the 90 percent foreign, ten percent Hungarian guest ratio. An expansion internationally could be a great opportunity for Costes, since their branding is really well made and established, and their menu matches a more international environment.

Threats: As I have mentioned, Costes is more vulnerable to events that affect tourism, like Covid-19. This dependence on tourism could also cause problems if there is a Europe-wide economic crisis, because people travel and spend less during these times. A rise in the popularity of plant-based diets and menus could also threaten the existence of Costes. Today Costes does not offer plant-based or vegetarian options, which is more concerning based on the fact that an overwhelming majority of guests are foreign, who are more likely to have these preferences. A rise in competition domestically could also leave Costes behind, since there is not much differentiation between Costes and other fine dining restaurants.

Salt is a Michelin starred restaurant located in Budapest. The focus of their operation is sustainability. The kitchen staff lead by chef Szilárd Tóth, makes every effort to minimize the restaurants carbon footprint. This includes building leftover ingredients into dishes, to alleviate food waste, preserving fresh ingredients, foraging from local forests, working with local small-scale farms and producers, and growing their own fruits and vegetables at the campus of the Hungarian University of Agricultural sciences. Another interesting project of Salt is the collaboration between them and Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design Budapest. They developed a custom plate for the restaurant from mushroom mycelium and hemp, which can be used with no environmental impact. These efforts did not go unnoticed, since Salt got awarded a Michelin green star a year after they received their regular star. A green star is awarded to restaurants annually, for committing themselves to achieve sustainable and eco friendly gastronomy. Salt's approach to gastronomy can be categorized as new Nordic. This style of gastronomy is dominating the fine dining world today, and is characterized by ethical sourcing of ingredients, focusing on sustainability, and innovating. Restaurants like Noma helped to popularize this approach. The story behind each dish is more emphasized rather than just visuals and flavors. Although the approach of the restaurant can be classified as new Nordic, the flavors and many of the dishes derive from the chef's Hungarian and Transylvanian background. "Salt Budapest was founded on the feeling of heartwarming comfort associated with traditional Hungarian cuisine, where native kitchen herbs and wild plants play a central role in animating

the flavors of the dish. The majority of the herbs are collected by the restaurant's head chef Szilárd Tóth himself, from the rolling hills of Hungarian country sides. The team at Salt holds personal connections restaurants, 2023) "Within a boutique hotel sits this small, sophisticated restaurant, whose open kitchen forms an integral part of the stylishly lit room. Shelves are full of jars containing colorfully preserved foraged fruits, vegetables and herbs, and the butter, lardo and Mangalitsa ham are all produced in-house. The surprise set menu is made up of intricate, exquisitely constructed dishes – many of which are updated versions of classic Hungarian recipes – and tables all face the wood-clad 'pass', where the chefs assemble the dishes with skill and dexterity." (Michelin guide)

Figure 5: Executive chef Szilárd Tóth

Source: welt.de, 2024

Strengths: Salt's accolades are strong in the domestic scene, being the only Michelin starred restaurant in the country which also has a green star. The restaurant was also named restaurant of the year in 2024, by Dining Guide, which is a Hungarian magazine that deals with gastronomy. In 2022 Salt got included in "The world's best 50 restaurants" list in the Discovery section, and executive chef Szilárd Tóth is among the world's best 100 chefs list made by The Best Chef awards. All these achievements have considerable effects on the restaurant's fame and prestige, and thus the number of guests. Salt's unique concept is in my opinion the best in the country. Their approach of new Nordic philosophy mixed with the nowadays very popular farm-to-table movement, with Hungarian flavors is a mix that is made for success. Salt has a great wine list and wine pairing, which They also offer a non-alcoholic beverage pairing, not just wines, which consists of different juices, which can be a great option for guests who do not like wine, or who cannot drink alcohol.

Weaknesses: Salt is a rather small restaurant compared to the others I analyzed; therefore, the number of tables and seats are limited. When a restaurant is as popular as Salt is, this can be a weakness when it is fully booked. It can happen that more people want to dine at Salt, than the available seats, making it physically impossible to reach their full potential in terms of revenue. Salt's dedication to using ingredients from small-scale local producers and farmers can also impose difficulties for the restaurant. In the winter, there is much less produce growing, so it takes extra effort for the restaurant to develop a menu that is on the same level and quality as in the warmer seasons. Restaurants who import their ingredients from different countries can have an advantage over Salt during these seasons. The last weakness of Salt that I noticed is not showcasing their menu dish by dish on their website as other competitors do. This can be discouraging for potential guests like me, who want to see what kind of dishes they can expect for paying a premium price.

Opportunities: Salt's main mission is to be as sustainable as possible. They are already doing many things toward that goal, but when it comes to sustainability, the sky is the limit. Salt could replace their equipment in the kitchen and in the dining room, for more energy-efficient options, for example the lights. They could also host workshops and events and educate diners and guests on how they can be more sustainable in the kitchen. For example, how they should battle food waste at home, by implementing leftover ingredients to other dishes, or teaching them preservation techniques. Salt can solve their problem of limited seats, by moving the restaurant into a bigger space. The restaurant has gotten a lot more popular since they opened, so the move would be warranted, plus they could be further away from competition, since Costes is only a couple streets away.

Threats: Salt has received a lot of awards in a short period of time. In the short term this is great for the restaurant, but in the long run if the restaurant does not keep winning awards it can look like a down period for the restaurant, from an outside perspective. I think the biggest threat to Salt right now is losing their executive chef Szilárd Tóth. A lot of international attention has been paid to Salt's head chef recently, and when that happens, most of the time these chefs get an offer from a higher-class restaurant that they can't refuse. Salt should do everything in their power to keep Tóth at Salt, since he has such a big part in the restaurant's success. Competition is also a threat to Salt as well, since many restaurants in Budapest do Hungarian fine dining cuisine, and there is only so many guests.

BCG MATRIX:

Star: Salt

High market share: Salt is one of the most popular restaurants in Hungary today. They are highly regarded both domestically and internationally. They have received numerous awards, including a Michelin star and a Michelin green star, being named restaurant of the year in 2024 by Dining Guide, and being on the Discovery list of "The world's best 50 restaurants" by Best Chef. All these recognitions have contributed to Salt's high market share.

High market growth: Since opening in 2019, Salt has experienced continued growth in the Hungarian market. Salt has a unique concept that focuses on sustainability and innovation. In the world of fine dining globally the restaurants that follow these principles and new Nordic philosophy are the most prosperous in terms of growth. Based on these factors, Salt is well positioned for growth.

Cash cow: Stand

High market share: Stand is one of the most established restaurants in the Hungarian fine dining market, having two Michelin stars by their name. Their concept of serving Hungarian cuisine with modern twists, and refined cooking techniques are popular for local guests and tourists alike. Executive chefs Tamás Széll and Szabina Szulló are keen on providing consistent quality to their guests, and that is one of the main reasons why Stand can keep its high market share.

Low market growth: Although Stand has steadily kept its high market share, it has stayed in the same position for years in terms of market growth. There could be many reasons for this, for example, their menu being mostly the same throughout these years, their high prices and dependence on tourism. Despite these factors, Stand has consistently generated revenue from their stable customer base, making them a cash cow.

Question mark: Platán Gourmet

Low market share: Platán is relatively a new player on the top of the Hungarian fine dining scene. In a short period of time, Platán garnered significant recognition both domestically and internationally, for being awarded two Michelin stars simultaneously, however their customer base is limited due to their location in Tata. Guests primarily come to Tata specifically for the restaurant, therefore the number of tourists they feed are low.

High growth rate: Platán's unique concept and atmosphere, with cooking focused on seasonality is a successful mix of attributes that has high growth potential, which is confirmed by their two Michelin stars among other achievements. The restaurant's location and concept sets them apart from competitors. With effective marketing efforts, Platán could become a major name in the central European fine dining market.

Dog: Costes

Low market share: Despite receiving the first Michelin star in Hungary, Costes is facing several challenges. Costes is very dependent on tourism, has had a slow website, and is competing against new, popular restaurants in a competitive market. These factors, along with Costes Downtown losing a star, have affected Costes's market share negatively.

Low growth rate: Costes's lack of defining USP's and being very similar to other restaurants in its category limit its growth. The biggest limitation of the restaurant was caused by the funds that were allocated to support the operation of Costes Downtown, rather than being reinvested into the restaurant. Costes is more vulnerable to the effects of economic downturns, and more dependent on tourism than its competitors. These attributes lead me to classify Costes as part of the dog category.

Research methodology:

Research background: There are many fine dining restaurants in Hungary competing for guests with each other. In the past, great dishes and exceptional service were enough to attract guests and maintain a successful restaurant. As the sector grows, new restaurants emerge and compete for a solvent customer base. A relatively new tool for acquiring and maintaining in the Hungarian fine dining scene is marketing. Hungarian fine dining is rather young compared to countries like France or Italy. The first Michelin star was only awarded in 2010 to Hungarian fine dining restaurant in Budapest named Costes. Since then, the country boasts nine Michelin starred restaurants, meaning the competition has become fiercer than ever. Today, marketing has become essential for fine dining restaurants to attract local guests, as well as tourists, but the specific activities used by them and their effectiveness remain unclear.

Problem statement: The Hungarian fine dining market is a competitive sector, where not only good food, but effective marketing is needed to bring in customers, however, based on literature analysis, and secondary research, there is a limited understanding of defined tactics and activities, that are specifically effective to fine dining restaurants. This research aims to address to following issues:

Awareness: There are many guests of fine dining restaurants in Hungary, that are unaware of all the different option. Finding out which options they are aware and unaware of, can give us directions to analyze why they are.

Factors influencing visits: There are many factors that influence visits to fine dining restaurants, such as special occasions or broadening culinary experiences, but the importance of these factors are not well understood.

Marketing channels: There is a need to identify the most effective marketing channels, to reach customers, such as traditional media, social media, or word of mouth.

Role of social media: social media plays a big role in how guests discover dining options, however the extent of its influence on consumer behavior requires further exploration.

Consistency in communication: There is lack of information on the effectiveness of restaurants marketing activities, and especially the alignment of their online and offline aesthetics for potential consumer choices.

Impact of marketing activities: The effectiveness and impact of marketing activities employed by Hungarian fine dining varies, with a need of more direct targeting and fine-tuning.

Customer loyalty: Tools enhancing customer loyalty such as CRM systems and personalized emails need to be explored further.

Research questions:

-What drives guests to visit Hungarian fine dining restaurants?

-What factors influence guests' satisfaction the most, when visiting Hungarian fine dining restaurants?

-How do guests perceive Hungarian fine dining restaurants marketing activities?

-What channels do Hungarian fine dining restaurants use for their marketing activities?

-What insights can marketing managers of Hungarian fine dining restaurant offer regarding successful marketing activities?

Research method: This research uses a mixed-method approach. The research has two main parts, including a quantitative questionnaire and qualitative interviews. The reason for this

is to have a deeper understanding of the marketing activities' intention and effectiveness from both the restaurants and guest's viewpoint.

QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS:

Sampling method: Non-probability judgmental sampling. This method involves the selection of participants based on the researcher's judgement about who would be the most appropriate for the study. It is often used in qualitative research to gain in-depth knowledge and understanding of the topic, rather than generalizing results to a larger part of the population.

Inclusion criteria:

1.: Marketing managers of Hungarian fine dining restaurants, that are listed on fine dining restaurant guides. (e.g.: Michelin guide, Dining guide)

2.: Marketing managers of Hungarian fine dining restaurants, that have been open for more than 2 years.

3.: Marketing managers of Hungarian fine dining restaurants that have been involved in making marketing decisions for at least six months.

Participants: Using my judgement, I chose two restaurants, whose marketing managers I will be interviewing. The first interviewee is Ágost Wildner, who is the marketing manager of the two Michelin star restaurant, Platán Gourmet. Platán Gourmet is one of the only two, two Michelin star restaurants in Hungary. Mr. Wildner can provide me with useful insight on how to conduct marketing activities for an established, successful fine dining restaurant. I can also gain valuable information about the challenges of marketing a fine dining restaurant in the countryside, which might differ from those in an urban setting. I got in touch with Mr. Wildner at the beginning of November. I got his email address by attending a lecture at the university campus of Budapest Business University given by István Pesti, executive chef of Platán Gourmet. At the end of the presentation, I went up to him, explained the topic of my thesis, and asked for his colleague's contact information, which he willingly gave me. The other interview will be conducted with the marketing manager of restaurant Onyx, Bianka Balogh. Ms. Balogh can provide me with insights on how a true market leader like Onyx handles their marketing activities, and the specific challenges of reopening after four years. In April I saw an advertisement made by Onyx on Facebook, where the restaurant was looking for a new marketing manager. I wrote an email expressing my interest in the restaurant and made inquiries about there being an available marketing intern position, while mentioning my thesis. After a few emails I joined the application process based on the encouragement of the former marketing

manager, knowing I would not get the position, but rather to establish a connection. After half a year, I reached back to Onyx, to ask for their help regarding my thesis. The person who replied was the winner of the application process, and the new marketing manager of Onyx, Bianka Balogh.

Data collection: The interviews will be conducted with an interview guide containing open-ended questions, with themes that will be mostly the same for both participants. These themes include objectives, challenges, experiences, and more in-depth questions about USP's for example. Each marketing manager will have questions that relate specifically to their restaurant. Both interviews will be recorded in Hungarian. I will translate and transcribe the interview verbatim in English. The interviews will be recorded with my phone, on the Voice Memos application. The interview with Platán Gourmet's marketing manager will be conducted online, through a voice call, however the interview with Onyx's marketing manager will be conducted in person at Café Gerbeaud.

QUANTIATIVE QUESTIONNAIRE:

Sampling method: Nonprobability convenience sampling method. It is a method that is widely used in fields of research where cost-effective, quick, and easily accessible data is required. Using this method for my questionnaire allows me to collect readily available data, within a limited timeframe, and limited resources.

Inclusion criteria:

1. Responders who understand the concept of fine dining.

2. Responders who are at least 18 years old at the time of completing the questionnaire.

Participants: Given the non-probability sampling method, responders will be selected based on their availability and willingness to participate in completing the questionnaire. I will try to target responders who are more likely to have visited fine dining restaurants, to have a majority of responders who have dined at a fine dining restaurant.

Data collection: The questionnaire will be made in Google Forms, including multiple choice, single choice, Likert-scale, and a few open-ended questions. The first segment in the questionnaire will include a description about the definition of fine dining. The responder can

only advance to the next segment if they click the "I understand" option. This ensures that each responder clearly understands the topic, and what restaurants should be defined as fine dining. The questionnaire will be distributed through social media platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram. To have a majority of responders, who have dined at a fine dining restaurant, I will share the questionnaire in a Facebook group called Hungarian Fine Dining with over 12 thousand members. I aim to gather at least 100 responses. The answers will be anonymous. Data analysis will be conducted in Windows Excel.

Research findings:

QUANTITATIVE QUESTIONNAIRE:

The questionnaire was able to reach 117 responses, which is good considering the minimum 100 responses I was aiming for. The distribution of gender in the questionnaire was 51,3 percent female, 47 percent male, and 1,7 percent other. The average age of responders turned out to be quite young with the youngest generation aged 18-25 years old representing 77,8 percent of responses. The second age group with most of the responses were 26-33 years old with 10,3 percent respectively. Older responder segments are all in single-digit percentages. 53,8 percent of responders are from the capital city, Budapest. The second largest group of responders with 26,5 percent live in agglomerations. There is a follow up question for responders who answered that they live in Budapest, about which district they live in. Almost all districts are represented in the questionnaire, with the three largest groups being 25,4 percent from the 11th district, 9,5 percent from the 8th district, and 7,9 percent residing from the 2nd district. Most responders are employees by their employment status, with 44,4 percent. A question about the nature of respondent's current work arrangement reveals that 37,6 percent are part-time, and 34,2 percent are full-time workers. This could be because of the large number of young responders, who are enrolled in education, and thus cannot work full-time.

Figure 6: Which of these restaurants have you heard of before?

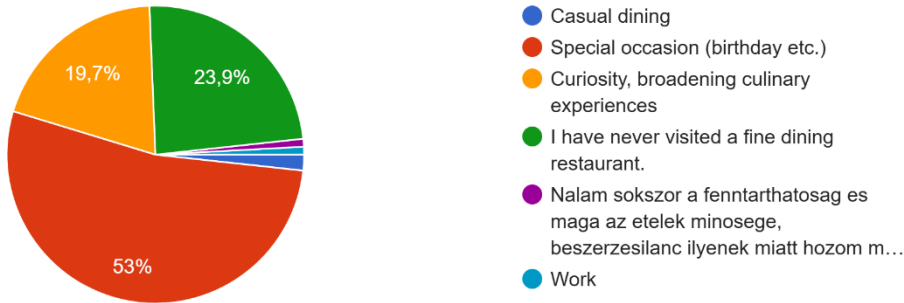Which of these restaurants have you of heard before?

Restaurant	Value
Bábel	39 (33,3%)
Onyx	50 (42,7%)
Textúra	33 (28,2%)
Borkonyha	40 (34,2%)
Platán Gourmet	28 (23,9%)
Salt	35 (29,9%)
Rumour	30 (25,6%)
42	21 (17,9%)
Essência	17 (14,5%)
Costes	29 (24,8%)
Stand	22 (18,8%)
IKON	33 (28,2%)
Spago	18 (15,4%)
Anyukám mondta	36 (30,8%)
FELIX	43 (36,8%)
Nobu	74 (63,2%)
Rutin	26 (22,2%)
Morzsa	23 (19,7%)
Mák	31 (26,5%)
Sparhelt	15 (12,8%)
Arany Kaviár	24 (20,5%)
Macok	13 (11,1%)
Tihanyi Vinarius	9 (7,7%)
None of them	10 (8,5%)
26, Bombay, The Grand c…	1 (0,9%)
	1 (0,9%)
St. Andrea, Kistücsök	1 (0,9%)
Tantris	1 (0,9%)
Virtu	1 (0,9%)
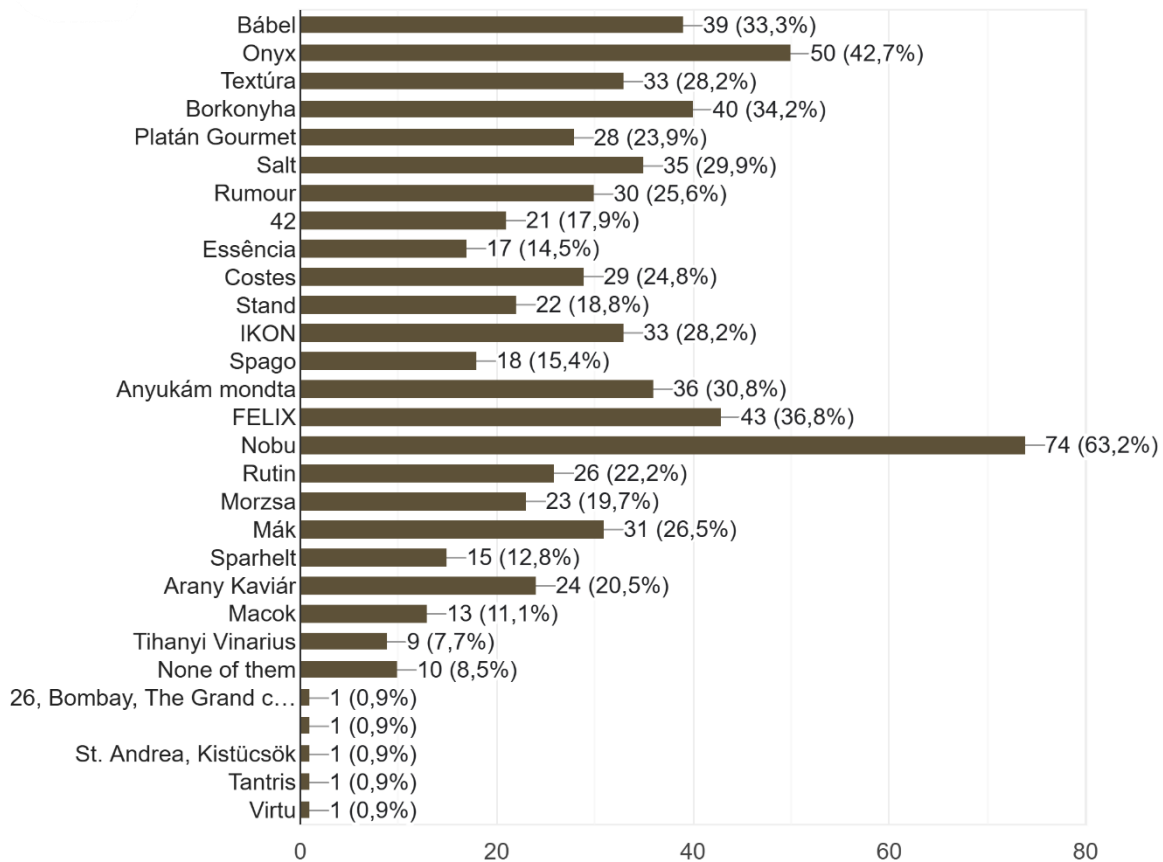
Source: Google Forms based on primary research data collection

After presenting responders with the first segment, which clears up the definition of fine dining, the first question is about the awareness of Hungarian fine dining restaurants. I tried to collect the most prominent fine dining restaurants in Hungary, making sure that I'm representing countryside restaurants as well. I gave responders the opportunity to add restaurants they would consider fine dining, that is not on the list. Fortunately, it seems like the list was sufficient to list the most well-known fine dining restaurants in Hungary. The restaurant most responders have heard of is by far Nobu, with 63,2%. This can be attributed to many factors. Nobu is co-founded and co-owned by Hollywood movie star Robert DeNiro. His personal endorsement of his restaurant can be largely contributed to its success. Nobu is a global fine dining restaurant chain, with restaurants in all major cities across the world, serving Japanese Peruvian fusion cuisine. In rap music, Nobu is mentioned many times, in the context

of having a lavish lifestyle. The restaurant is also frequented by celebrities like the Kardashian family, most notably the Malibu location. Famous dishes, like tuna crispy rice, and miso black cod have also contributed to Nobu's global fame. It is important to mention that Nobu is the only fine dining restaurant chain on the list. In second place is Onyx, with 42,7% of responders hearing about the restaurant. Onyx is a household name in Hungarian fine dining. Opening in 2007, Onyx was the first restaurant in Hungary that could be considered fine dining without a doubt. Earning its first Michelin star in 2011 and their second in 2018, Onyx was also the first two Michelin star restaurant in Hungary. Being one of the original fine dining restaurants, and having such accolades boosted Onyx to being one of the most well-known fine dining restaurants in Hungary. Marketing campaigns like their 2021 last dinner video, have also put attention on Onyx, with the story being picked up by many popular Hungarian online newspapers. More notable restaurants include FELIX, with 36,8%, possibly for its prime location in Várkert Bazár, and exclusive events, like the Formula 1 after party, and Borkonyha, with 34,2%, popularized by executive chef, and TV personality Ákos Sárközi.

Figure 7: What is the most common reason for you to visit a fine dining restaurant?

What is the most common reason for you to visit a fine dining restaurant?

Legend:
- Casual dining
- Special occasion (birthday etc.)
- Curiosity, broadening culinary experiences
- I have never visited a fine dining restaurant.
- Nalam sokszor a fenntarthatosag es maga az etelek minosege, beszerzesilanc ilyenek miatt hozom m…
- Work

Pie chart values: 23,9% ; 19,7% ; 53%

Source: Google Forms based on primary research data collection

This chart shows that the most common reason for responders to visit fine dining restaurants are special occasions with more than half of the answers. I suppose this number would be less and would add to the percentage of the third most answered option, with 19,7%: Curiosity, broadening culinary experiences, if the country's economy would be in better condition. Most responders can only afford to go to fine dining restaurants on special occasions, such as birthdays, but we can suspect that they would visit these restaurants more often just to enjoy culinary experiences, if they could. 23,9% of responders have not visited fine dining

restaurants, and only 2 responders, with 1,7% of answers dine casually in fine dining restaurants, further reinforcing this assumption.

How frequently do you visit fine dining restaurants?

- Every week
- Once a month
- Once in a couple of months
- Once every 6 months
- Once a year
- Once every couple of years
- I have never visited a fine dining restaurant.
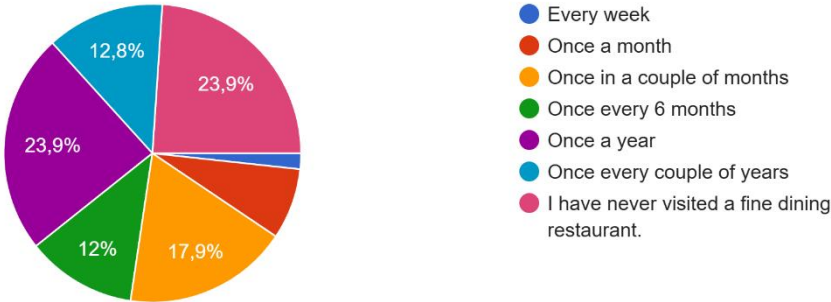
Source: Google Forms based on primary research data collection

The number of answers to each option are quite similar. The two most answered options are once a year, and I have never been to a fine dining restaurant with each of them having 23,9% of answers. The two least answered questions are once a month, and every week. They are also the most frequent answers, which shows that most people cannot afford to dine at fine dining restaurants every week or month. Through these two charts we can see that responders most likely visit fine dining restaurants once a year, on a special occasion.

Figure 9: How often do you use social media to search for dining options?

How often do you use social media to search for dining options?

- Always
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never
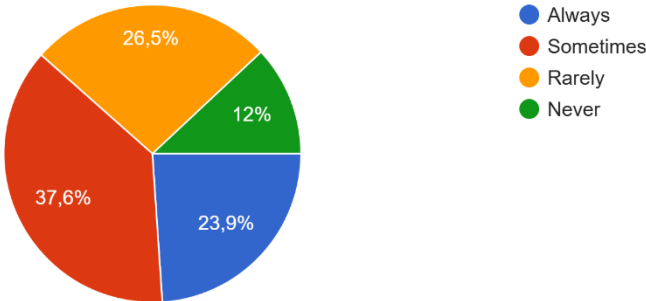
Source: Google Forms based on primary research data collection

From this chart we can conclude that social media has a great role in presenting guests with dining options. Usually, guests can find all the basic information about a restaurant they are interested in on their social media page, like the opening hours, menu, and a link to the restaurant's website. Along with this information, guests can look at pictures of plated dishes, the interior of the restaurant, and get informed about special events and offers, providing a comprehensive image of the restaurant and its aesthetic. In summary social media is used by responders looking for dining options, therefore restaurants should be active on these platforms.

Figure 10: Which social media platforms do you prefer for discovering fine dining restaurants?

Which social media platforms do you prefer for discovering fine dining restaurants?
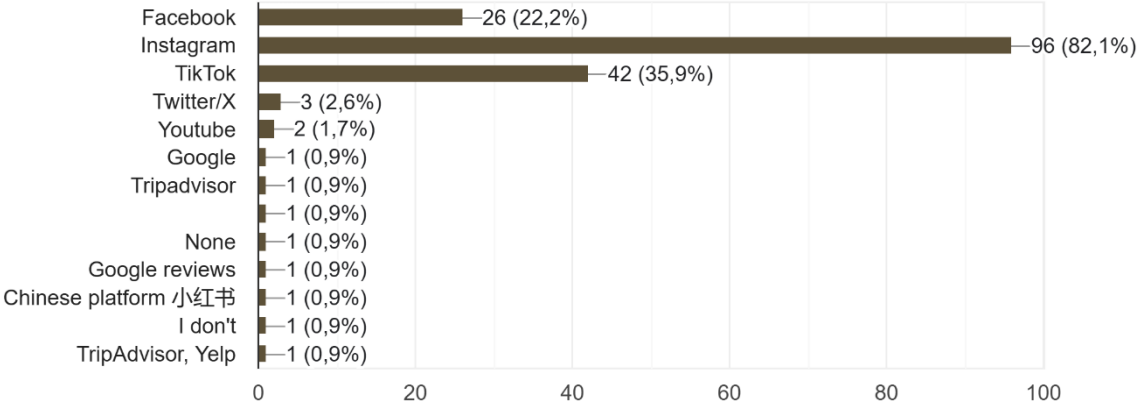
Source: Google Forms based on primary research data collection

Continuing with the theme of social media, here we can see, that Instagram is by far the most preferred social media platform to discover fine dining restaurants by responders. This makes sense, because Instagram mostly focuses on visual content, in this case pictures of dishes and the restaurant, which plays a big part in the restaurant's appeal. In this questionnaire TikTok is considered a more frequented option than Facebook, but this could be attributed to the rather young age of an average responder. One thing is clear, that these three platforms are preferred by responders to look for fine dining restaurants.

In your opinion, how important is a restaurant's online presence (website, social media) when choosing where to dine?
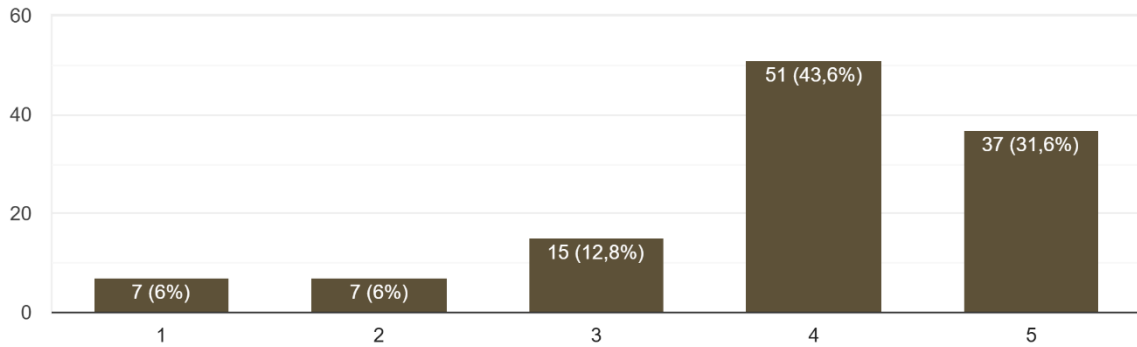
In this questionnaire, responders clearly communicated that the online presence of a restaurant, when choosing where to dine is very important. Altogether 75,2% of responders rate the importance of a restaurants online presence 4 or 5 on a Likert scale.

Figure 12: Do you follow any fine dining restaurants on social media?

Do you follow any fine dining restaurants on social media?
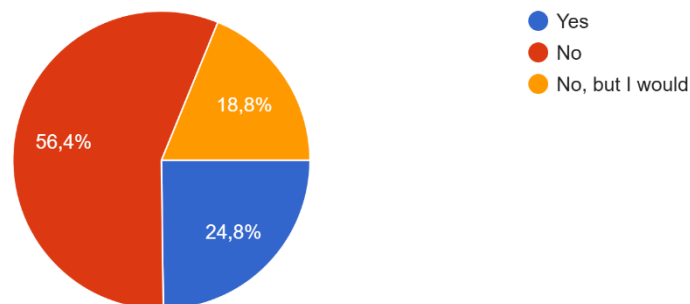
From this chart we can see that although responders use social media to search for dining options, most of them do not follow any fine dining restaurants on social media. This could be because of their lack of interest in fine dining, but also the content of the restaurants themselves

not being interesting and engaging enough. This could also be the case for the 18,8% of responders who would follow a fine dining restaurant in social media, but do not.

Did a specific marketing activity (e.g., social media post, promotion, influencer recommendation) ever lead you to dine at a specific fine dining restaurant?
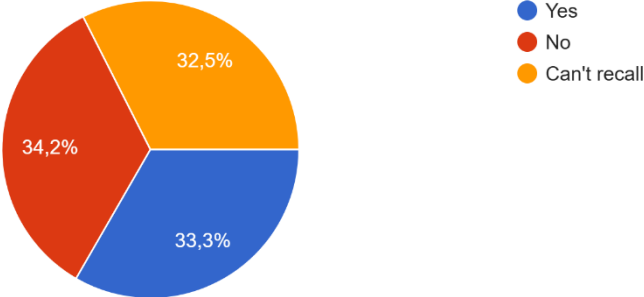
Source: Google Forms based on primary research data collection

For this question the answers are distributed almost equally, in three thirds. For restaurants the 33,3% of responders who were led to dine at a specific restaurant resulting from a marketing activity is definitely a large number and not dismissible. It shows that marketing activities can influence the number of guests a restaurant can bring in.

Does the restaurants communication, and marketing matching the restaurants aesthetic matter to you?
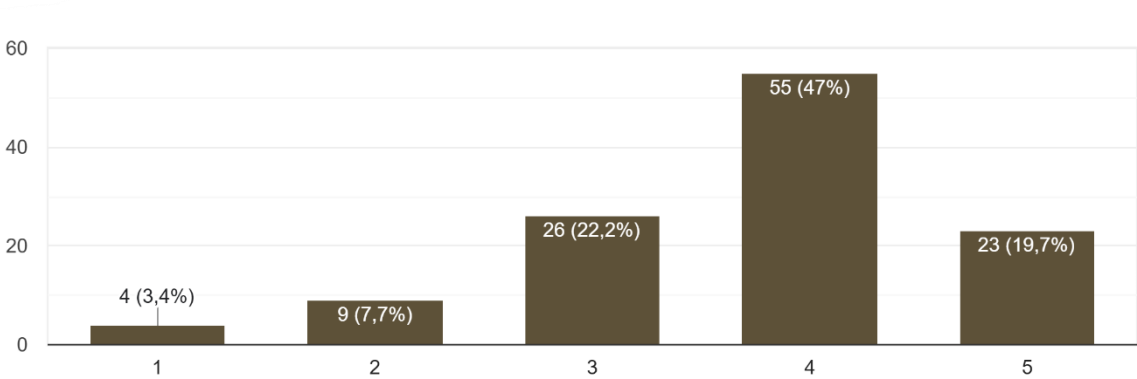
In this graph we can see that communication and marketing matching the restaurants aesthetic matter to responders. A comprehensive image both online, offline, and in the marketing activities is important to achieve for fine dining restaurants.

Figure 15: In your opinion, how important is marketing for a fine dining restaurant?

In your opinion, how important is marketing for a fine dining restaurant?
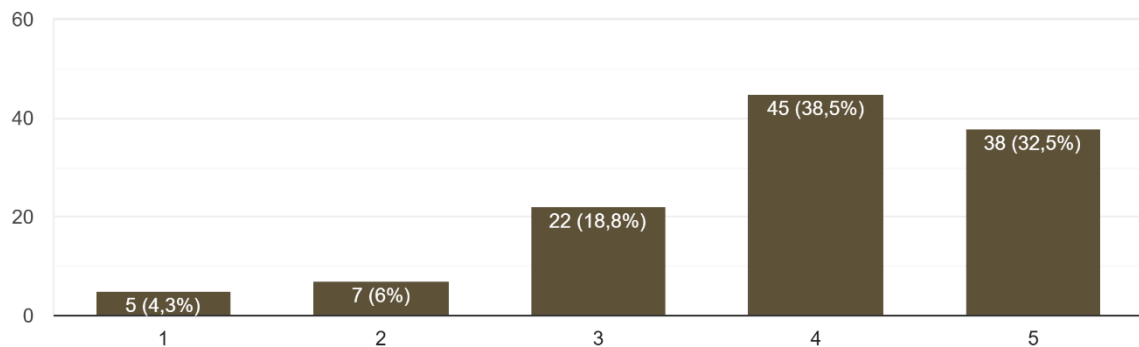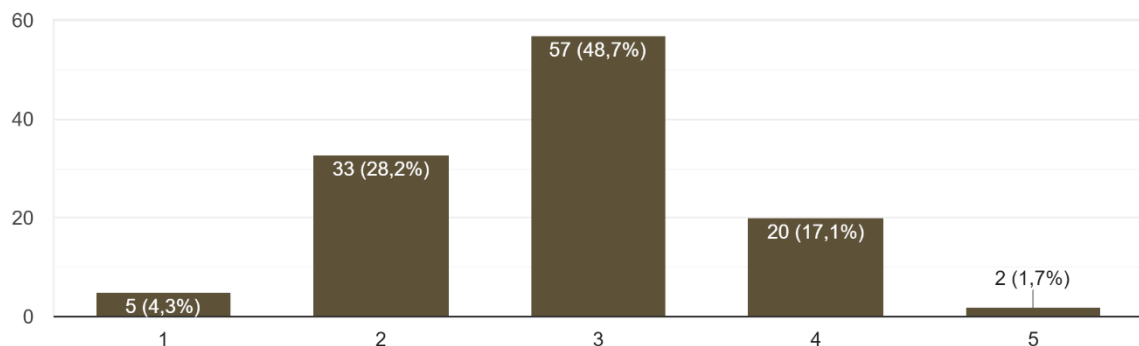
Following the theme of marketing, responders think marketing is important for fine dining restaurants. This question is followed by a similar one, where we can learn more about the perceived success of marketing efforts.

Figure 16: How effective are Hungarian fine dining restaurants' marketing activities in your opinion

How effective are Hungarian fine dining restaurants' marketing activities in your opinion?

Now, this question asks responders whether Hungarian fine dining restaurants' marketing activities are effective in their opinion. This graph shows that responders think these activities are not effective enough, even though marketing is important in their opinion. 81,2% of responders rate the effectiveness of Hungarian fine dining restaurants 3 or lower in the Likert scale.

Figure 17: How much time on average do you spend on social media daily?

How much time on average do you spend on social media daily?
117 válasz

Less than an hour
1-2 hours
2-3 hours
3-5 hours
5+ hours

17,1%
37,6%
9,4%
30,8%
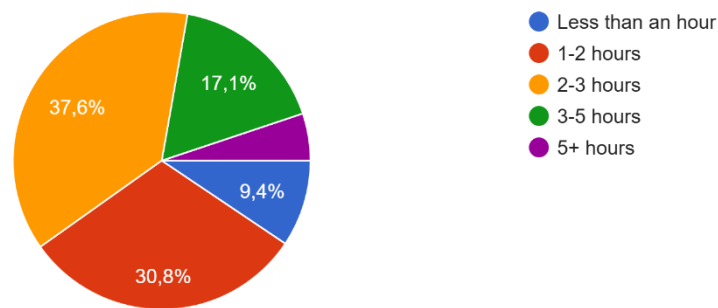
Most responders spend 2-3 hours a day on social media. This is a significant amount, considering the chance for fine dining restaurants to showcase their restaurants on social media through ads or organic reach.

Figure 18: Out of these social media platforms, which ones are you registered on?

Out of these social media platforms, which ones are you registered on?
117 válasz

Facebook — 102 (87,2%)
Instagram — 110 (94%)
Twitter/X — 31 (26,5%)
TikTok — 67 (57,3%)
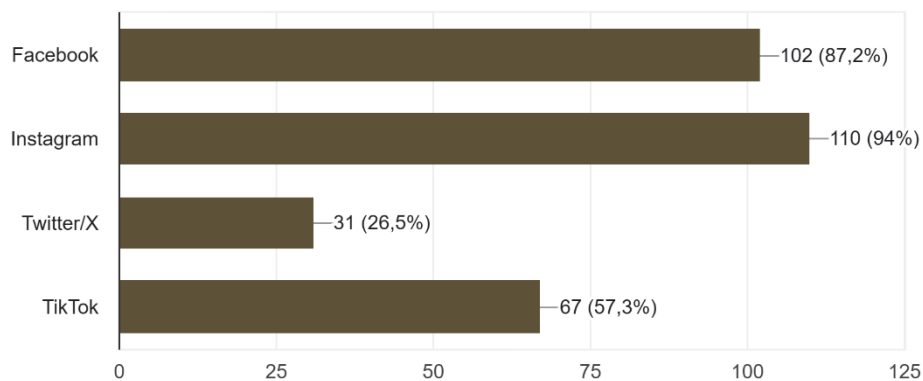
The most popular social media platform for responders is Instagram, closely followed by Facebook. This is surprising for me, considering the number of young responders, and the popularity of TikTok in the age group. Twitter or X have never seemed to be that popular in Hungary and this questionnaire supports that.

Figure 19: What kinds of utilities does your home have?

## What kinds of utilities does your home have?
117 válasz
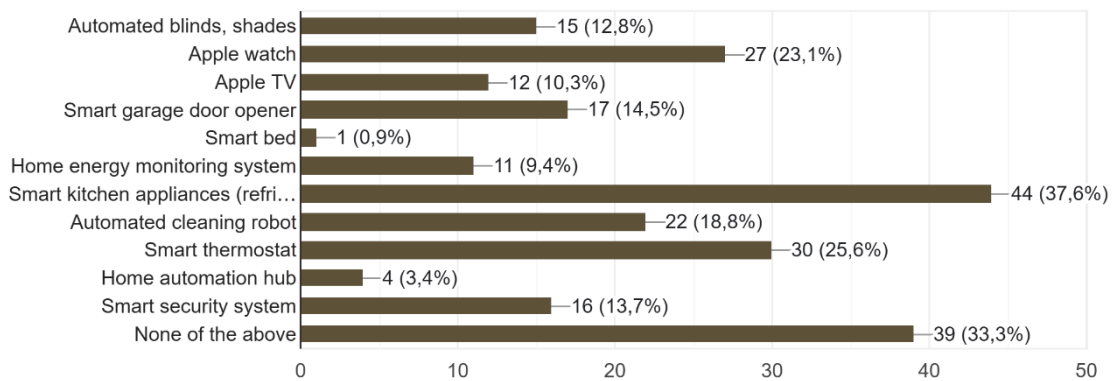
This question was made mainly for cross analysis I will later discuss. The answers on this question are quite dispersed, but responders who do have these kinds of utilities, are most likely to have smart kitchen appliances like smart ovens and smart refrigerators.

Figure 20: To what extent do you feel that the following statements are true for you, on a scale from 1 to 5?

To what extent do you feel that the following statements are true for you, on a scale from 1 to 5? 1=Not true at all, 5=Very true
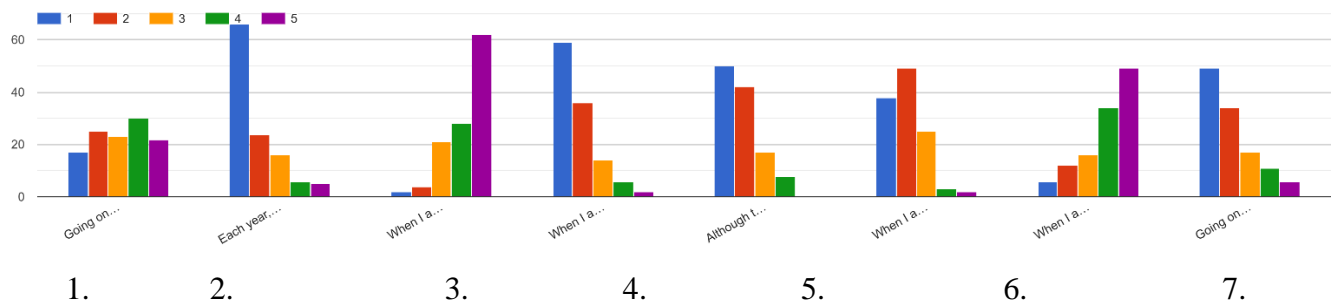
Since I could not insert this graph representing the questions fully, I numbered the questions, and I will write them out.

Going on vacation multiple times a year does not pose any problem for us.

Each year, we travel to destinations outside of Europe.

When I am abroad, I try the local culinary specialties.

When I am abroad, I still prefer flavors from my country.

Although there would be no financial obstacle, we prefer to vacation in Hungary.

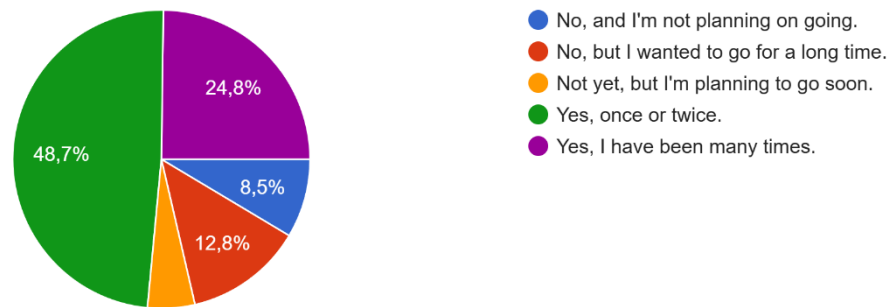When I am on vacation, food is not a priority.

When I am abroad, I check the internet for the best restaurants.

Going on vacation outside of Hungary poses some difficulties for us.

These questions are targeted towards responders' financial status, priorities, openness along with their habits when traveling. The question is presented as a series of declarative sentences, and respondents indicate whether they feel the statements are true for them on a Likert scale. On the first question we can see that answers are very dispersed, which could mean that responders come from diverse financial situations. On the second question, most answers are 1 on the Likert scale, which could mean that most responders are not from the highest financial status. The third question touches on the openness of responders regarding cuisines that are foreign for them, and from the responses, it is clear that most responders are very open to trying local cuisines when travelling. The following question can be called the opposite of the previous one, and the answers are in line with results of question 3. Responders answered that they don't prefer flavors from their own country when travelling. The answers to the fifth question indicate that responders prefer to vacation abroad. This could indicate that responders are generally open to travelling to countries outside of their own, and even prefer it. On question 6. answers indicate that food is a priority for most responders when travelling. Regarding question 7. responders answered that they check the internet for the best restaurants. On the last question, we can see responders answered, that going on vacation outside of Hungary does not pose difficulties for most of them. From this we can conclude that most responders are not in a low financial status.

Have you ever been in a fine dining restaurant?

- No, and I'm not planning on going.
- No, but I wanted to go for a long time.
- Not yet, but I'm planning to go soon.
- Yes, once or twice.
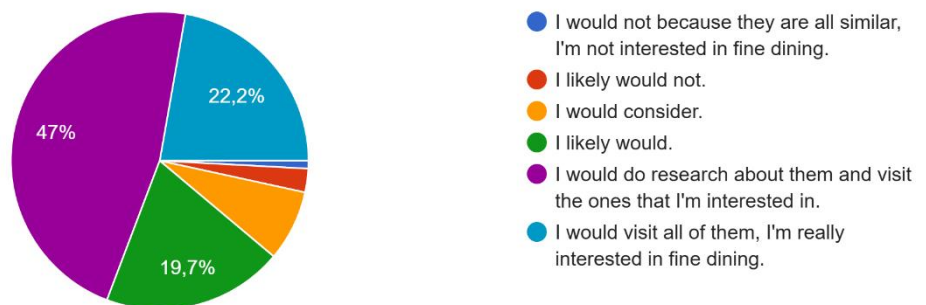- Yes, I have been many times.

24,8%

48,7%

8,5%

12,8%

Source: Google Forms based on primary research data collection

From this chart we can see that fortunately, the majority of responders I was able to collect, have dined in a fine dining restaurant at least once, and almost fourth of them have been many times. This ensures that responders are relevant to the topic and have experience with fine dining restaurants. It is also good to see only 8,5 percent of responders are not planning on going to fine dining restaurants, and the remaining responders have at least an interest in visiting one in the future.

Figure 22: If price were not a factor how like would you be to visit fine dining restaurants?

If price were not a factor, how likely would you be to visit fine dining restaurants?
17 válasz

- I would not because they are all similar, I'm not interested in fine dining.
- I likely would not.
- I would consider.
- I likely would.
- I would do research about them and visit the ones that I'm interested in.
- I would visit all of them, I'm really interested in fine dining.
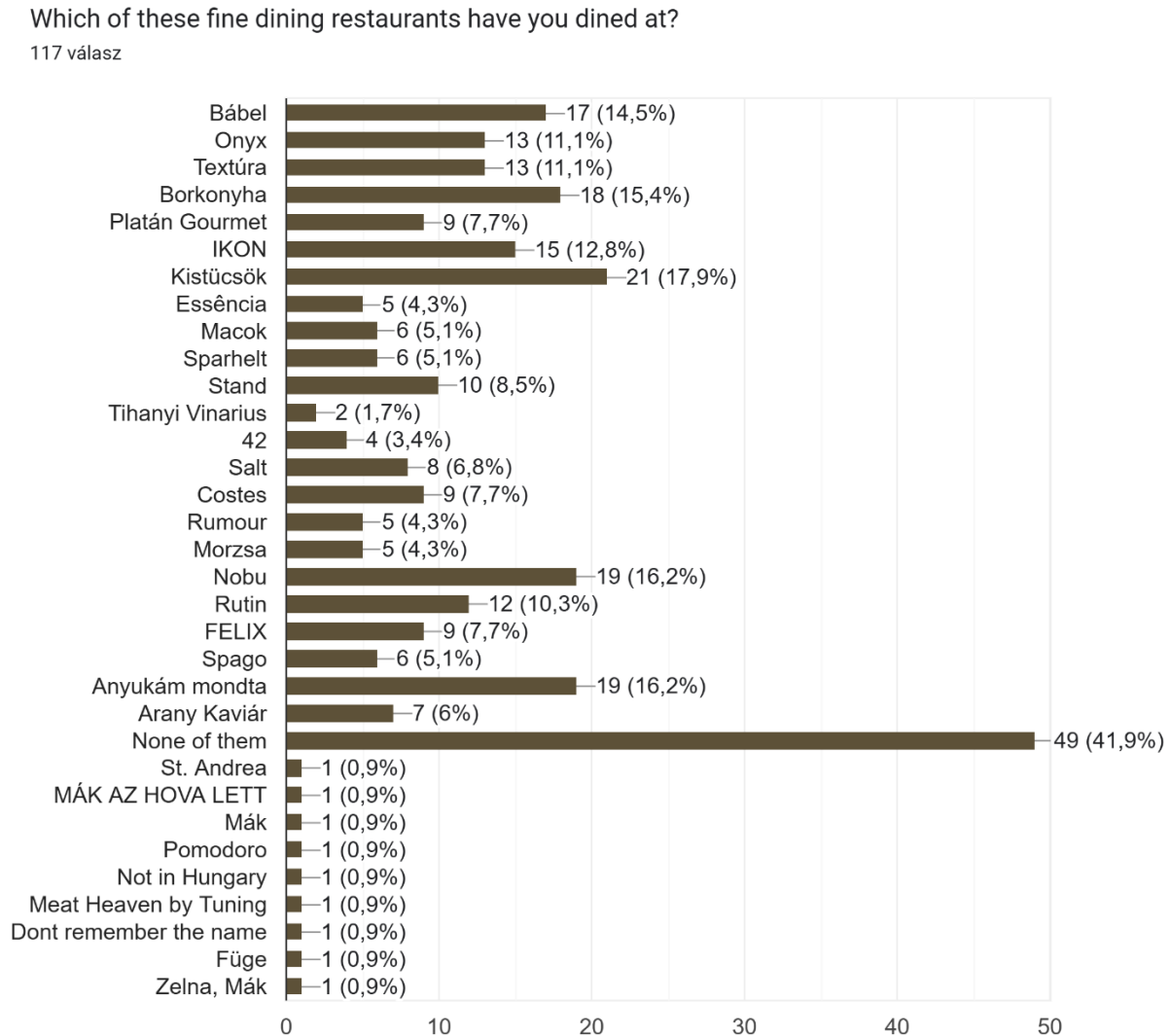
22,2%

47%

19,7%

Source: Google Forms based on primary research data collection

Answers to this question tell us that, if high prices of fine dining restaurants were not a factor, most responders would more likely visit them. Only 3,5 percent of responders answered with likely not, or would not, which is a great number considering the distain fine dining can

38

bring out of some individuals. The most frequent answer was that responders would go to fine dining restaurants they are interested in, if price were not a factor.

Figure 23: Which of these fine dining restaurants have you dined at?

Which of these fine dining restaurants have you dined at?
117 válasz

Restaurant	Count (%)
Bábel	17 (14,5%)
Onyx	13 (11,1%)
Textúra	13 (11,1%)
Borkonyha	18 (15,4%)
Platán Gourmet	9 (7,7%)
IKON	15 (12,8%)
Kistücsök	21 (17,9%)
Essência	5 (4,3%)
Macok	6 (5,1%)
Sparhelt	6 (5,1%)
Stand	10 (8,5%)
Tihanyi Vinarius	2 (1,7%)
42	4 (3,4%)
Salt	8 (6,8%)
Costes	9 (7,7%)
Rumour	5 (4,3%)
Morzsa	5 (4,3%)
Nobu	19 (16,2%)
Rutin	12 (10,3%)
FELIX	9 (7,7%)
Spago	6 (5,1%)
Anyukám mondta	19 (16,2%)
Arany Kaviár	7 (6%)
None of them	49 (41,9%)
St. Andrea	1 (0,9%)
MÁK AZ HOVA LETT	1 (0,9%)
Mák	1 (0,9%)
Pomodoro	1 (0,9%)
Not in Hungary	1 (0,9%)
Meat Heaven by Tuning	1 (0,9%)
Dont remember the name	1 (0,9%)
Füge	1 (0,9%)
Zelna, Mák	1 (0,9%)

Source: Google Forms based on primary research data collection

Unfortunately, I accidentally left restaurant Mák out of the possible answers, and many responders have pointed this out with their own answers. Most responders have never been to either one of these restaurants, which is understandable considering the economic state of Hungary, and the young age of most responders. The restaurant on this list that was most visited by responders was Kistücsök located in Balatonszemes. Kistücsök is a restaurant that has been

well known by gastronomy lovers for almost three decades. It's unique location, traditional Hungarian flavors, and affordable prices, considering fine dining standards, have all contributed to its success and notoriety. Possibly, the affordability of Kistücsök is the reason why it is on the top of this list. The two runner ups with a tie, are Anyukám mondta, with a very similar concept to Kistücsök located in Encs, and Nobu. It seems like the most visited restaurants by responders are mainly restaurants in the countryside, with more affordable prices, than their capital city competitors. In my opinion the affordable prices of these restaurants have much to do with their location not being in Budapest.

The last question was open-ended, and optional for responders to answer. It reads as follows:

What additional suggestions do you have for Hungarian fine dining restaurants to improve their marketing and communication?

Some answers were in Hungarian, so I translated them, and picked the most useful ones in my opinion.

"In fine dining restaurants, I think it's important to be careful not to overdo the marketing, because otherwise, I feel they come across as too pushy. If their social media presence has good aesthetics with pictures and a menu that resonates with the restaurant's vibe, it can be an advantage. Also, I enjoy watching podcasts about restaurants, whether on Partizán or Telex; they are very educational. This is why I like going to Salt, for instance. Additionally, I enjoy many street fine dining places like 101bistro (101neo, 101tigris), Vasüzlet, Enso, and Todo. I think the marketing of these restaurants can be appealing if it reflects the restaurant's experience (service, food, design). If I notice any discrepancies in even one component compared to what the restaurant is trying to communicate, I am reluctant to go back. If I see a fine dining place on Streetkitchen, I definitely won't go there. And even if my partner drags me there, I probably won't like it. I don't know if you understand these subtle sensitivities, haha. (Anon, 2024)"

"Maybe try somehow to appeal to the middle or lower class as well (special price days with online reservations or giveaways perhaps) to give a more accessible experience to the locals as well, not just for tourists. You can feel the exclusive atmosphere at every fine dining place, and even though some people would try more of them, they have this 'exclusivity' tied to them which makes me personally feel like I'm not "worthy" to eat there since I'm just a regular pedestrian. It sometimes can feel like they are only catering to people who are dressed in money. (Anon, 2024)"

"Targeted ads on Facebook, strong presence on Instagram and paying for priority placement in Google search results would probably be effective. Sponsored articles or (unpaid) reviews on blogs like telex.hu and 444.hu might also yield good results. (Anon, 2024)

PR articles on most visited news platforms. (Anon, 2024)"

The feedback emphasizes the need for fine dining restaurants to strike a balance in their marketing efforts. Responders advise restaurants to avoid appearing overly commercialized, while ensuring their marketing communications accurately reflects the in-restaurant experience. Additionally, suggestions include making fine dining more accessible to a broader audience through special offers, while enhancing their online presence by purchasing targeted social media ads and leveraging influential blogs and news platforms for PR and reviews.

CORRELATION ANALYSIS

Figure 24: Social media importance
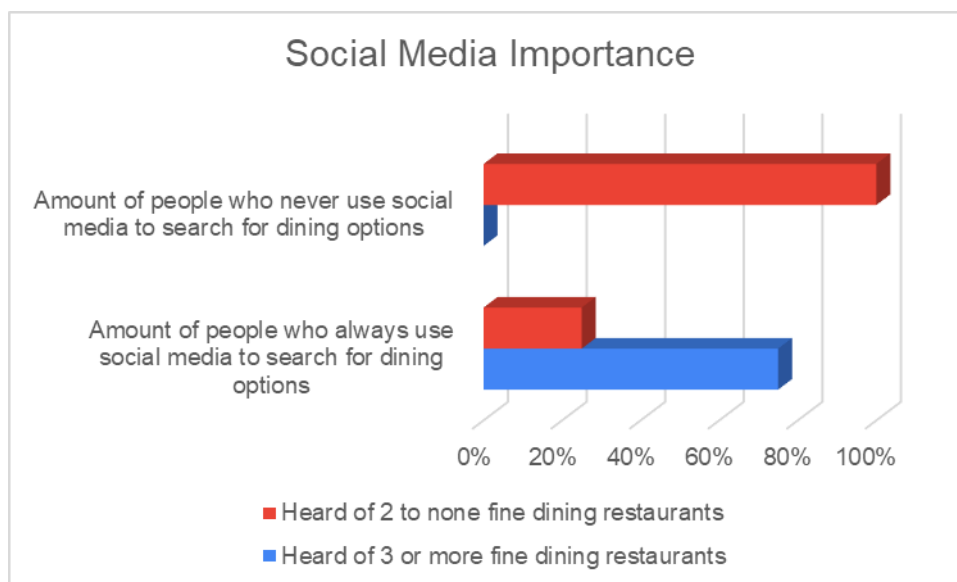
Source: Google Forms based on primary research data collection

In this section I correlate two different questions of the questionnaire, to be able find some connections that can give us some insights. In the first correlated graph I combined the question about how many fine dining restaurants responders have heard of, with how much they use social media to search for dining options. We can clearly determine that responders who use social media when searching for dining options, have heard of more fine dining restaurants. This is a great finding for restaurants and reinforces the need to be active on social media, for guests to know about them.

Figure 25: Frequency of visits to fine dining restaurants
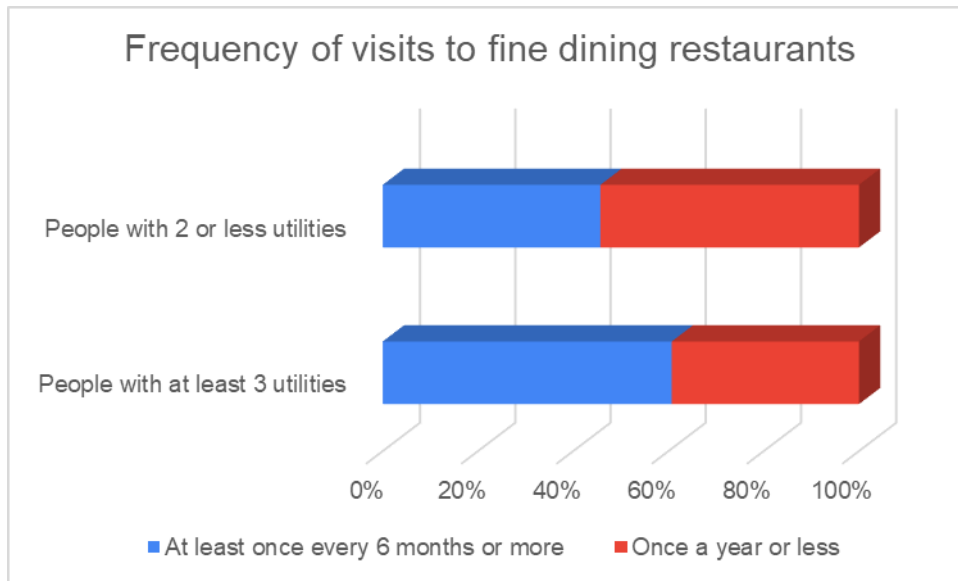
Source: Google Forms based on primary research data collection

I have made this question about utilities in the questionnaire to correlate and measure the relationship of openness of new technologies, to openness to fine dining, and in this case frequency of visits. The results show that openness to new technologies correlates with openness to fine dining. Responders with more utilities are more frequently visiting fine dining restaurants, and they are also more likely to have dined in a fine dining restaurant. This information can be used to target specific target groups, with more success than the regular public.

Figure 26: Relationship of having utilities with fine dining visit
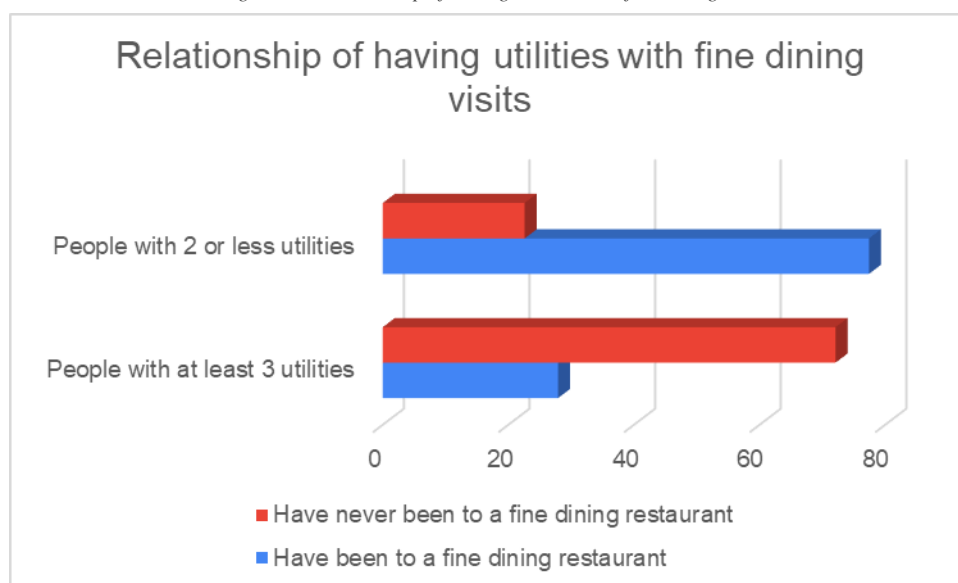
Source: Google Forms based on primary research data collection

QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS:

Interviews with Ágost Wildner, marketing manager of Platán Gourmet restaurant, and Bianka Balogh marketing manager of Onyx.

-What are the core marketing objectives for the restaurant?

- *"Basically, bringing in guests is the goal of all kinds of marketing activities. Brand strengthening. The brand is not there to do anything else for this, but at the moment the specific goal is to provide basic information about Platán to as many guests as possible." (Ágost Wildner, November 14th, 2024)*

- *"Creating a lovable brand is a primary focus for us. While showcasing our fantastic cooking and service is important, conveying that we have an incredible creative community of 30 talented individuals working here is even more crucial. We want to highlight our team's unique contributions and present many aspects of the restaurant. Our goal is to ensure guests see us as more than just a dining spot but as a place where they can have lasting experiences with like-minded people. Both domestically and internationally, we want people to follow our work continuously. Despite the challenges of external communication, having dedicated team members ensures ongoing engagement. By emphasizing our community and the dynamic activities behind the scenes, we aim to build a strong, lovable brand." (Bianka Balogh, November 22nd, 2024)*

- What are the biggest challenges you face in marketing a fine dining restaurant in Hungary?

- *"Well, what is a common barrier is basically the noise in which you have to communicate, and the fact that this applies to all communication channels, that you have to communicate in very loud noise and therefore it is difficult to reach potential consumers. What is a specific issue specific to Platán is that the owners operate several catering units under the Platán brand, and for consumers these are sometimes confusing." (Ágost Wildner, November 14th, 2024)*

- *"Navigating fine dining can be challenging due to pricing and the perception of exclusivity. This often causes people to keep a distance. While young restaurateurs in Budapest are thriving, fine dining is seen differently, often as a white-glove, show-off experience. Our team, generally in their thirties, enjoys lighter, more accessible dining experiences and follows trends. We support new openings and believe that showcasing fine dining as inclusive and*

approachable could help. It's about balancing the elegance and sophistication with a welcoming, engaging environment. This can break down barriers and attract a wider audience.” (Bianka Balogh, November 22nd, 2024)

-How would you describe the restaurant's unique selling proposition (USP) in the Hungarian fine dining market?

- “In a unique, natural and built environment, guests can enjoy a variety of services of a very high level.” (Ágost Wildner, November 14th, 2024)

- “The Onyx Workshop and Onyx share the same values, offering an experience that goes beyond typical fine dining. The experience at Onyx is more extensive, involving communal tables, headsets to listen to the sounds of your bites, art games with plates, and advanced sound and light techniques. This creates a theater-like experience where you feel time has flown by. We provide a take-home card to help diners remember their experience and the food they tasted. The emphasis is on community, sustainability, and local ingredients. At Onyx, even the unique use of ostrich meat reflects our commitment to innovation and the future. Our 5 + 1 USPs are food creation, experience, sustainability, research, and the artistic aspect, all contributing to a community experience.” (Bianka Balogh, November 22nd, 2024)

- Who is your primary target audience, and how do you tailor your marketing strategies to attract them? I'm asking about Platán Gourmet right now.

- “Yes, it is important to distinguish this, because there is a Platán Gourmet restaurant, of which István is the chef, and there is the Platán bistro restaurant, which is not fine dining, but of a very high standard. And, by the way, there is also a Platán bakery, street food and confectionery. I would say that there are two primary target groups, and they are very distinct. So, on the one hand, due to solvency, it is the stratum with the highest social status, which is, let's say, the top 5 percent of Hungary, segmenting the market in terms of social status. They are clearly distinguishable from those who are specifically looking for fine dining and István and come to Platán either as a six-month best of event or instead of a holiday, but they are the ones who are in a completely diverse social status and financial situation, but basically fine dining is the buzzword for them.” (Ágost Wildner, November 14th, 2024)

- Who is your primary target audience, and how do you tailor your marketing strategies to attract them?

- "Our primary target audience includes the Nordic countries, especially Denmark, with about 20% of our guests being Danes. Interestingly, they often hear about us through word-of-mouth recommendations rather than online or magazines. This tendency among young people to recommend the restaurant to each other makes it challenging to reach them directly. Our future goal is to consciously improve our presence in foreign magazines, both online and offline, to increase our visibility. We also aim to attract more Hungarians and strengthen the creative community that Onyx and the workshop represent. We are focused on building a love brand, making Onyx and the workshop a beloved presence in the city centre with a strong, creative community behind it. We run campaigns, like the one in November, where selected guests experience Onyx for free by filling out a questionnaire. Although this may not always result in repeat guests, it helps generate interest in our work. Our guests come from various countries, including Israel, America, and Asia, making our audience very mixed. Some guests come expecting a formal experience but end up enjoying the more relaxed atmosphere, which is great feedback for us." (Bianka Balogh, November 22nd, 2024)

- What are the main marketing channels you use to reach your target audience, and why?

- "Essentially, we use the usual social media platforms as well as the traditional social media channels. On one hand, we utilize Facebook and Instagram. We do not use TikTok. Fundamentally, our buyer persona is not a TikTok consumer. Additionally, there's Google. On these platforms, we share content within the Meta and Google systems, run advertisements, and so far, it's pretty much like what everyone else does—trying to communicate in a noisy environment. What could be considered more of our own system, where we can reach our customers more easily, is the email list of previous customers. Through this, we can directly contact them, and our experience shows that we have a good open rate. This means our emails don't necessarily end up in spam or promotional folders but actually reach our customers." (Ágost Wildner, November 14th, 2024)

"We communicate on social media and through press outlets, which are currently more effective domestically, particularly in the gastronomic sector. However, our communication isn't limited to gastronomy; it also involves interior architecture and design. We aim to broaden this domestic communication to encompass more aspects. Fortunately, our newsletters have a significant reach and perform well. We aim to engage with both online and offline press. Although we utilize the display windows extensively, they currently display a large poster, and this will continue in the future. We don't offer an insight into Onyx from the outside, as it doesn't

have windows, creating a covered, isolated environment. The poster communicates our message without inviting passersby to look inside and want to join. Our goal is to maintain this isolation. Despite this, there's significant activity because the experience we offer is highly emphasized, and our guests often share their experiences." (Bianka Balogh, November 22nd, 2024)

- How does the restaurant position itself in the Hungarian market compared to other fine dining establishments?

- *"Fundamentally, we consider ourselves the best countryside restaurant, and we communicate accordingly. I don't feel that competition directly appears in our communication, but we insist on being the first countryside restaurant with a Michelin star, the first Hungarian restaurant with 2 Michelin stars, and the best countryside restaurant. This is our fundamental background message." (Ágost Wildner, November 14th, 2024)*

"We watch our competitors, but not to imitate them. Some team members don't monitor competitors to avoid subconscious influence. We support good practices in the industry, believing that other fine dining experiences enhance the overall appeal, leading guests to visit us eventually. There has been no recent collaboration within the last five months, as we're focused on perfecting our small restaurant. The workforce is interconnected, with many moving between fine dining restaurants, keeping everyone informed about industry trends. Sustainability is crucial, with many domestic restaurants focusing on green waste and local ingredients, which aligns with our primary goal. Effective communication and having a marketing team are essential for Hungarian restaurants to become likable and visible. Internally, modesty can hinder self-promotion, so we need to communicate our successes more effectively. Recommendations are great, but marketing is vital for reaching new audiences, especially in the current economic climate." (Bianka Balogh, November 22nd, 2024)

- Is there a focus on keeping the same aesthetic in the communication as the food and service?

- *"This is straightforward. I believe that for the credibility of communication, it is essential that it forms a consistent, cohesive picture and nothing stands out awkwardly. We are continually looking for opportunities and limits on how to achieve a friendly, pleasant atmosphere without adhering to a stiff fine dining style, while communicating high standards. This is a difficult task and a significant challenge for us. For example, one of our primary visual communication tools is photos of the building and the dishes, and we always insist that the top*

professionals in the industry work for us, ensuring they are of very high quality." (Ágost Wildner, November 14th, 2024)

- How important is marketing for fine dining restaurants in Hungary?

- *"Well, fundamentally, Hungary is not a demand-driven market but rather a supply-driven market. This is partly due to the general economic situation or attitude towards the situation, and partly due to the number of available services. I believe that today, you cannot do much of anything without a well-thought-out, carefully crafted and precise marketing system behind it." (Ágost Wildner, November 14th, 2024)*

- How big of a role does social media have in the restaurant's marketing activities?

- *"Basically, we think of it as a touchpoint, but we don't think that someone chooses us solely because of social media presence. It's a touchpoint, and it takes a lot more of that for someone who, let's say, is a new customer to visit us. Beyond being a touchpoint, social media has the role of when customers want to check a potential location, they search for it on social media, and when someone hasn't had fresh content for several months, the consumer asks that maybe this restaurant isn't even operating or has closed. So, these are the 2 reasons why you should use social media, in my opinion." (Ágost Wildner, November 14th, 2024)*

- What role does digital marketing play in your overall marketing strategy? Which platforms are most effective for you?

- *"I believe that performance marketing campaigns are the future, where marketing can be conducted with very precise targeting, continuous fine-tuning, and very conscious spending. I think this is the key. If we run a campaign, it is exclusively a performance marketing campaign." (Ágost Wildner, November 14th, 2024)*

- Did you ever work with influencers, bloggers, or other content creators?

- *"There have been attempts like this in the past. Basically, we did not consider this to be a beneficial form of cooperation. Maybe it's also because we have our own influencer, let's say our own famous person in the person of István. For our target group, we can't think of an influencer as credible enough for our brand." (Ágost Wildner, November 14th, 2024)*

- *"We often receive requests from influencers to collaborate on communication, and we generally accept these offers because we see their value. However, we have not yet developed a specific communication strategy for this purpose. There are Danish influencers who produce excellent content aimed at showcasing various aspects of dining experiences. However, we are cautious about influencer marketing, as it can sometimes be seen as just an opportunity for influencers to enjoy a good meal. Therefore, we focus on collaborating with relevant*

influencers who align with our restaurant's values and goals." (Bianka Balogh, November 22nd, 2024)

- Does the marketing team interact with the chef or the kitchen? For example, does chef István Pesti have insight into marketing activities, strategies, or even campaigns?

- *"Rather the other way around and primarily through István. He has a defined style and message. Let's not forget that István has a strong international outlook. Not in a deeply professional approach, but István has a clear vision of the restaurant's positioning, the style and atmosphere that appear in the restaurant, and the behaviour of the waiters. Our marketing is essentially a consequence of this. So, the influence and practice are in this direction and not the other way around." (Ágost Wildner, November 14th, 2024)*

- How do fluctuations in the supplier's availability and cost of raw materials impact your marketing activities and promotional efforts?

- *"The menu changes. We have a season-specific menu, there are unique events and special evenings. Obviously, it is a communication opportunity for us if the menu changes or there is a champagne dinner for example." (Ágost Wildner, November 14th, 2024)*

- Does the unpredictable economic environment influence your marketing activities?

- *"Well definitely, because the unpredictable or negative economic environment will discourage this kind of luxury spending for some of our customers. In a prosperous economy, and it doesn't matter what it really is, but when guests think that the country or their own economic situation is not doing so well, they are much less likely to afford this kind of luxurious spending." (Ágost Wildner, November 14th, 2024)*

- *"Currently, it's noticeable that fewer people are visiting, particularly in November, as Budapest isn't a primary travel destination and not everyone can afford a fine dining experience. This trend was evident in October and November, as we didn't have a full house. The economic situation affects our marketing activities and operations, but we continue to build on our strengths. We open up opportunities for those who can't easily afford our dinners by offering free dining experiences. Over the past four years, we've frequently organized rehearsal dinners to give such opportunities to a broader audience." (Bianka Balogh, November 22nd, 2024)*

- How do you maintain strong demand and attract a solvent customer base given the restaurant's location outside of Budapest?

- *"We may not be in a more difficult situation than a restaurant in Budapest, because we can offer services and USPs that a restaurant in downtown Budapest cannot. It is important*

for us to highlight these and make consumers aware of what other options they have with us. Basically, Platán has a strong brand, it is in the public consciousness. Most of the time, our job is to keep this on the agenda in customers' minds, that we exist, and they use it as a future destination." (Ágost Wildner, November 14th, 2024)

- Does seasonality impact your marketing activities and customer engagement efforts?

- *"Yes, well, there is seasonality here, and the ratio of domestic and foreign guests is what significantly changes. Our goal is to balance this, and marketing is perfect for achieving that. Another advantage of Tata is that it is easily accessible from Vienna or Bratislava, and it offers a fine dining experience. You could even say it has an advantage over Budapest because if people come from Bratislava to Budapest, it's a long journey with many options. However, they can reach Tata in 2 hours, where, amidst much less noise, they will clearly choose us."* (Ágost Wildner, November 14th, 2024)

- What metrics or KPIs do you use to measure the success of your marketing activities?

- *"There are many marketing KPIs (Key Performance Indicators), but from this perspective, we are simple, because the number of customers is the final and ultimate KPI. This provides very strong feedback on whether the marketing team has done a good job or was unsuccessful." (Ágost Wildner, November 14th, 2024)*

"We can be as lovable as we want, but if guests don't join us in the evening, it's all for naught. Our dining room can accommodate 16 people, which allows us to track reservations and guest numbers accurately. Each evening, we summarize our guests, their nationalities, and how they heard about us, aiming to strengthen this data in the future. We organize special events, like a New Year's Eve dinner, but our focus is on ensuring a steady flow of guests throughout the week. This consistency confirms that people are aware of us and see value in our offerings. Although it's challenging to keep up with the ever-changing world and its impact on guest numbers, we diligently monitor these trends and follow up on last year's data for continuous improvement." (Bianka Balogh, November 22nd, 2024)

- What trends could there be for the future, and how do you see fine dining marketing of the future?

- *"Well, it would be great if I knew, and then I would have a much simpler job. I believe that personal connections are what can lead to success. By personal connections, I mean that if we can send an email from our CRM system to a previous customer or guest, saying: 'You spent your evening with us exactly a year ago, we hope you had a great time, and we look forward to welcoming you back. Since then, this is our new menu.' Or when a customer calls*

us with a reservation, and the response is: 'So, would you like the non-alcoholic beverage pairing with the menu again?' If we are prepared for this technologically, I think these small touches can significantly increase customer loyalty.” (Ágost Wildner, November 14th, 2024)

“Our concept involves taking guests on a journey through time, from the past to the present and into the future, with a strong focus on future research and fine dining's place in it. We believe it's crucial to use online tools to shape and convey our message to the community. Although people are becoming alienated due to online interactions, we use social media to bring people together both online and offline. Our goal is for guests to connect, exchange contacts, and build a community that shares similar interests and opinions. Just like in theater, where different experiences cater to various moods, our dinners aim to provide a lasting impact and foster a sense of community. From a marketing perspective, our objective is not just to increase awareness but to create a strong, engaged community. It's more important for us to have genuine interactions rather than just accumulating likes. We aim to balance conveying value with building a meaningful community, adapting our tools and strategies to achieve this.” (Bianka Balogh, November 22nd, 2024)

- What are the advantages and disadvantages of Platán's location not being in Budapest?

- *“The advantage is clearly that we communicate the natural environment as a distinctive advantage, while it is also clearly a disadvantage that the restaurant is perceived as a countryside restaurant. Even if it takes the same amount of time for a guest to reach a downtown restaurant from Budaörs as it does to reach Tata, psychologically the Budapest location seems more accessible to the customer. So, this is clearly a goal to be overcome, and we have various efforts to change this perception in our guests' minds.” (Ágost Wildner, November 14th, 2024)*

- What are the advantages and disadvantages of having to market two different restaurants under the same brand? (Onyx & Onyx Műhely (workshop))

- *“It's challenging to explain since some still come expecting the old Onyx, even though the restaurant and its online presence have been closed for 4 years. Our goal is to have both Onyx and the workshop in the future, but for now, the workshop remains as it's how people recognize us. The team has been developing this for the past 4 years, and while they didn't initially foresee Onyx having a separate identity, it has grown strong enough to function as a test kitchen. Onyx and the workshop will work together and complement each other, supported by the Onyx creative community of about 30 people handling kitchen, service, and research. This dual identity is challenging but feasible with our experienced team. We're currently in a*

soft opening phase, with a full opening planned around March. The Michelin star announcement in December will also help establish the workshop's identity separate from Onyx. Both restaurants will have distinct identities but will complement each other. This week, we had a rehearsal for Onyx with the in-house and office teams, refining every detail. We'll start joint communication on the Onyx page to increase our following and help people understand the two restaurants. After the first dinner, there will be separate communications for each. The workshop will maintain a relaxed tone, giving a better insight into the kitchen with simpler, authentic videos, while focusing on strong aesthetics and artistic elements. Something that's not just about aesthetics but also a little bit about the team behind it or to show a little bit that we're not that serious so that there's not a kind of alienation from people."
(Bianka Balogh, November 22nd, 2024)

Conclusion:

This thesis aimed to analyse how Hungarian fine dining restaurants attract and retain guests, using their marketing activities in a competitive market.

The fundamental research questions were:

-What drives guests to visit Hungarian fine dining restaurants?

-What factors influence guests' satisfaction the most, when visiting Hungarian fine dining restaurants?

-How do guests perceive Hungarian fine dining restaurants' marketing activities?

- What channels do Hungarian fine dining restaurants use for their marketing activities?

- What insights can marketing managers of Hungarian fine dining restaurants offer regarding successful marketing activities?

In Hungary the primary reason why guests visit fine dining restaurants are special occasions, curiosity, and to broaden their culinary experiences. It is essential for Hungarian fine dining restaurants to consider these motivations, and tailor their marketing activities accordingly. The three main reasons for guests' satisfaction are food quality, personalized service, and unique dining experiences. Bringing in emotional and personalized elements, like meeting the chef, or remembering a guest's preferred drink pairing, can boost return visits. While guests perceive marketing as important for fine dining restaurants, they believe that the current marketing activities used by Hungarian fine dining restaurants are not effective enough. Majority of responders rated the effectiveness of Hungarian fine dining restaurants' marketing as mediocre, indicating a need for improvement. The main marketing channels of Hungarian

fine dining restaurants include social media platforms, with the two most prominent being Instagram and Facebook. Google is used as a platform for performance-based campaigns. A channel that is unique to fine dining restaurants, are the emails of previous guests, which are used for email marketing. Hungarian fine dining restaurants engage with press both online and offline, while influencer marketing is only used to a limited extent. Guests expressed that keeping a coherent message online, that matches the offline aesthetic of the restaurant is important for them, when choosing to dine at a potential restaurant. Marketing managers of Hungarian fine dining restaurants emphasized the importance of keeping a high-quality presence online, and the need to build personal communication to guests. Performance marketing, building a strong community, and creating memorable dining experiences are the keys to success according to the managers. The most successful Hungarian fine dining restaurants all build on their cultural heritage, and traditional flavors while incorporating modern twists. Most fine dining restaurants in Hungary rely heavily on tourist visits, while they are also trying to build a local customer base. This dilemma includes challenges like sustaining the perceived exclusivity of the restaurant, while also trying not to alienate potential repeat customers.

Recommendations: According to my research I recommend Hungarian fine dining restaurants, to adopt a more content-based marketing strategy, that heavily utilizes social media platforms like Instagram. This could include more collaborations with influencers, who they see as worthy, and in line with their brand image, to showcase their restaurant. Targeting a more specific audience could also yield better results. It is important for Hungarian fine dining restaurants to address the reliance of tourist visits. To battle this, I recommend them to offer vegetarian or fully plant based tasting menus, further widening their appeal. This is in line with the increasing demand and popularity of sustainable practices, that more and more guests expect from them.

Limitations: The limitations of this research and thesis, including its focus on a very specific market segment, and the predominantly younger demographic in the questionnaire's sample suggest opportunities for further research to be done. Future research could include an older sample, since young people represent more of the consumer side of guests, while the older generation are predominantly customers. Comparative analysis with another country could also produce interesting and valuable results. In my opinion research focusing on the role of sustainability in shaping customers' preferences is the next topic worth looking at.

Summary

This thesis analyses the marketing activities of Hungarian fine dining restaurants, a niche yet very interesting segment of the hospitality industry. Hungary is in a unique position among post-Soviet Eastern bloc countries, having the most the most Michelin stars between them. The study examines how these restaurants deal with challenges, such as attracting both local guests and international tourists, or maintaining a strong customer base. The research of this thesis employed a mixed-method approach, integrating qualitative interviews with marketing managers of successful Hungarian fine dining restaurants and a quantitative questionnaire, to gain a more complete understanding of these restaurants' marketing activities and their effectiveness. The findings show the fundamental role of digital marketing in the sector, most importantly social media, boosting the visibility and appeal of these restaurants. The most successful positioning and branding for Hungarian restaurants seem to be, leveraging Hungary's rich culinary traditions, while incorporating modern gastronomic trends and techniques. The study also identifies areas to improve on for these restaurants, like providing a more engaging and comprehensive communication using digital tools, and greater utilization of analytics for more precise targeting. Challenges like reliance on tourism, economic uncertainty and fluctuations, and increasing competition, highlight the need for innovative and adaptive use of marketing activities. Recommendations from the research include the importance of expanding and improving digital presence and addressing sustainability concerns to attract a broader audience. This study contributes to the under explored field and relationship of fine dining and marketing in Hungary. It highlights new directions for future research, including comparative analysis with other countries. It can also offer valuable insights and findings for industry practitioners.

APPENDIX

SURVEY RESPONSES

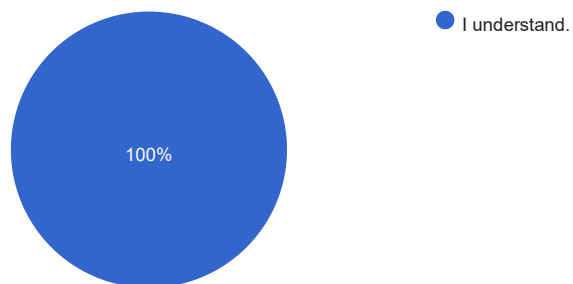# Analysis of Hungarian Fine Dining restaurants' marketing activities

117 válasz

Elemzések közzététele

Fine dining by definition is a style of eating that usually takes place in expensive restaurants where especially good food is served to people, often in a formal way.
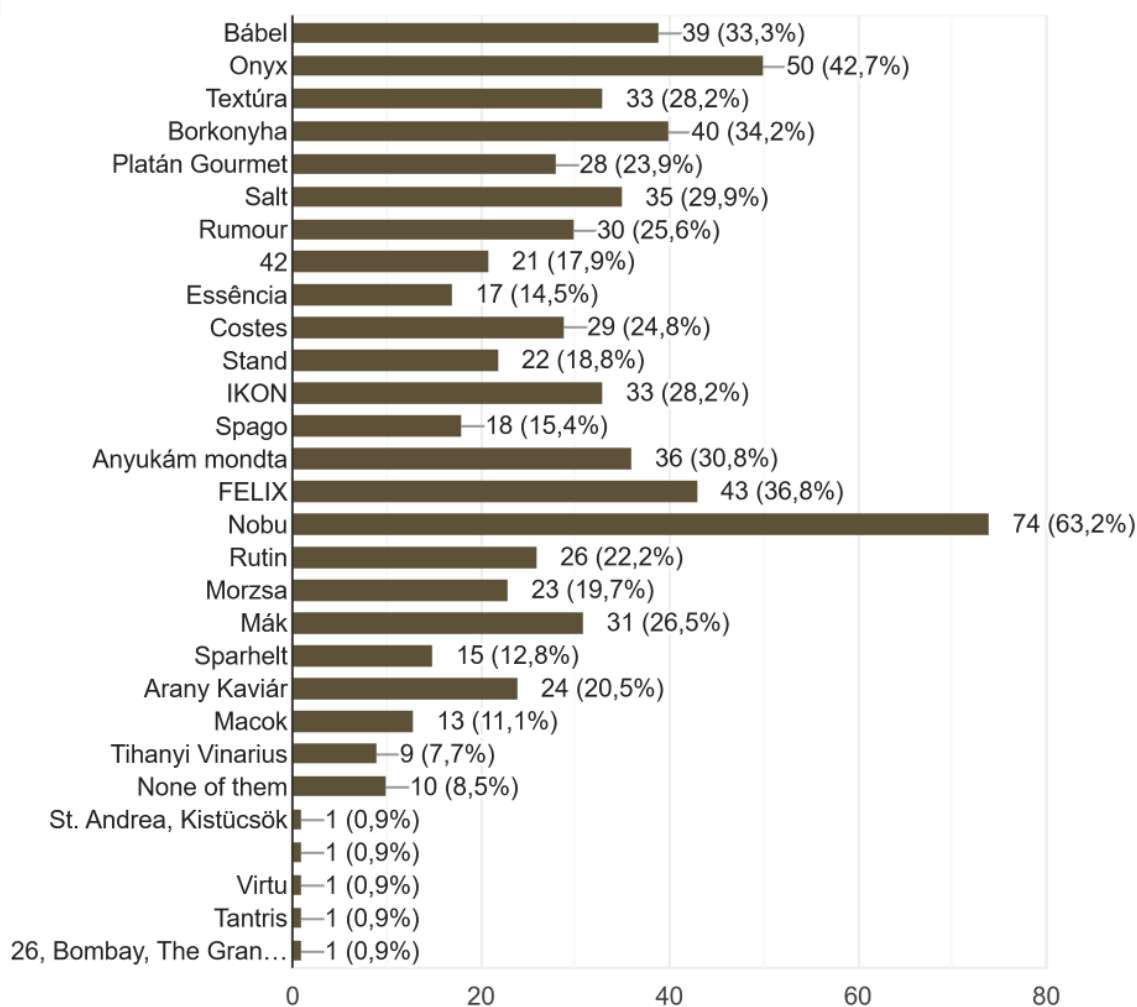
Másolás

117 válasz

● I understand.

100%

Cím nélküli szakasz

Which of these restaurants have you of heard before?

117 válasz

Restaurant	Count
Bábel	39 (33,3%)
Onyx	50 (42,7%)
Textúra	33 (28,2%)
Borkonyha	40 (34,2%)
Platán Gourmet	28 (23,9%)
Salt	35 (29,9%)
Rumour	30 (25,6%)
42	21 (17,9%)
Essência	17 (14,5%)
Costes	29 (24,8%)
Stand	22 (18,8%)
IKON	33 (28,2%)
Spago	18 (15,4%)
Anyukám mondta	36 (30,8%)
FELIX	43 (36,8%)
Nobu	74 (63,2%)
Rutin	26 (22,2%)
Morzsa	23 (19,7%)
Mák	31 (26,5%)
Sparhelt	15 (12,8%)
Arany Kaviár	24 (20,5%)
Macok	13 (11,1%)
Tihanyi Vinarius	9 (7,7%)
None of them	10 (8,5%)
St. Andrea, Kistücsök	1 (0,9%)
	1 (0,9%)
Virtu	1 (0,9%)
Tantris	1 (0,9%)
26, Bombay, The Gran…	1 (0,9%)

What is the most common reason for you to visit a fine dining restaurant?

117 válasz

- Casual dining
- Special occasion (birthday etc.) — 53%
- Curiosity, broadening culinary experiences — 19,7%
- I have never visited a fine dining restaurant. — 23,9%
- Nalam sokszor a fenntarthatosag es maga az etelek minosege, beszerzesil…
- Work

56

How frequently do you visit fine dining restaurants?

117 válasz

- Every week
- Once a month
- Once in a couple of months
- Once every 6 months
- Once a year
- Once every couple of years
- I have never visited a fine dining restaurant.

12,8%
23,9%
23,9%
12%
17,9%

What are the most important factors for your satisfaction when dining at fine dining restaurants?

117 válasz

Factor	Count
Price/Value	58 (49,6%)
Food	106 (90,6%)
Service	60 (51,3%)
Atmosphere	76 (65%)
Innovation	24 (20,5%)
Sustainability (green star)	1 (0,9%)
Es a fenntarthatosag	1 (0,9%)
to find new tastes, new c…	1 (0,9%)
Quality	1 (0,9%)
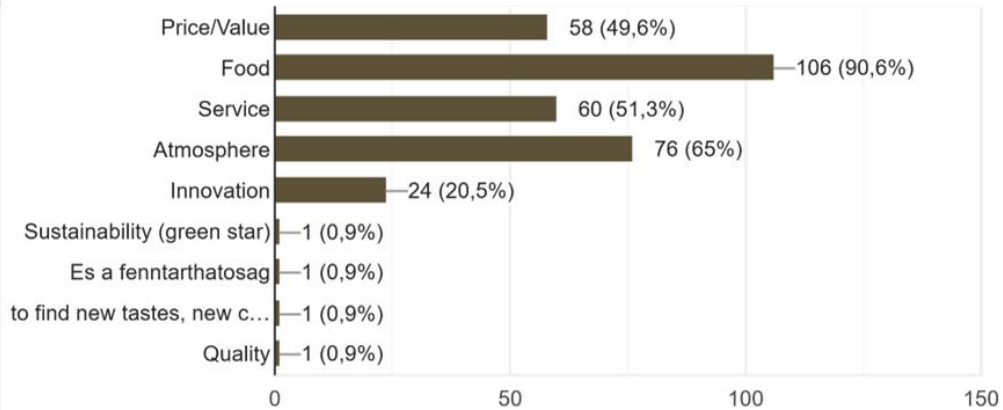
How do you usually find out about fine dining restaurants?

117 válasz

Source	Count
Traditional media (newsp…	9 (7,7%)
Social media	85 (72,6%)
Articles	20 (17,1%)
Advertisements	21 (17,9%)
Word of mouth (recomm…	81 (69,2%)
Noticing the restaurant in…	30 (25,6%)
Food festivals (Gourmet f…	15 (12,8%)
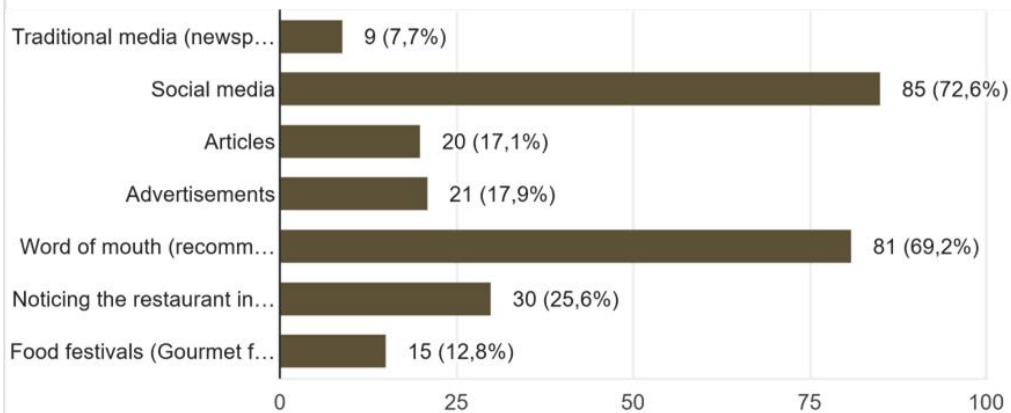
Have you ever seen an advertisement for a fine dining restaurant?
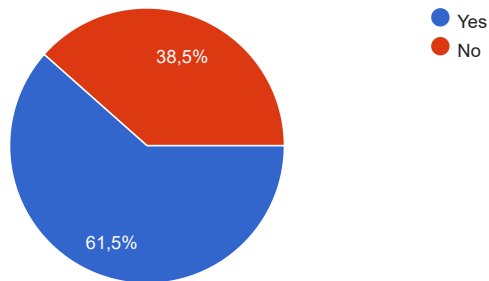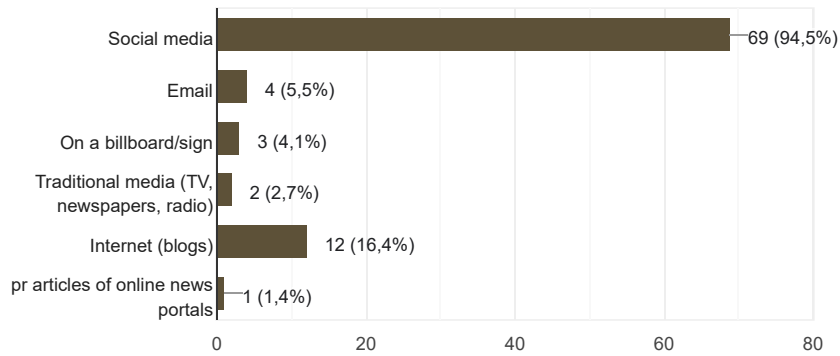
117 válasz

- Yes
- No

38,5%

61,5%

If yes, where?

73 válasz

Social media	69 (94,5%)
Email	4 (5,5%)
On a billboard/sign	3 (4,1%)
Traditional media (TV, newspapers, radio)	2 (2,7%)
Internet (blogs)	12 (16,4%)
pr articles of online news portals	1 (1,4%)

0   20   40   60   80

How often do you use social media to search for dining options?

117 válasz

- Always
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

26,5%

12%

37,6%

23,9%
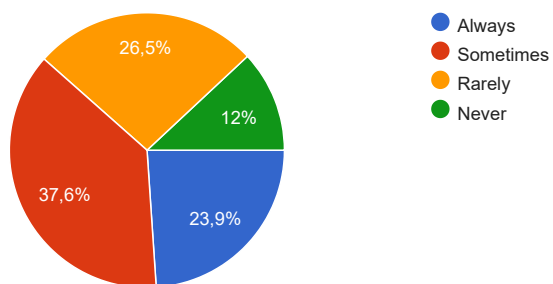
How effective are Hungarian fine dining restaurants' marketing activities in your opinion?
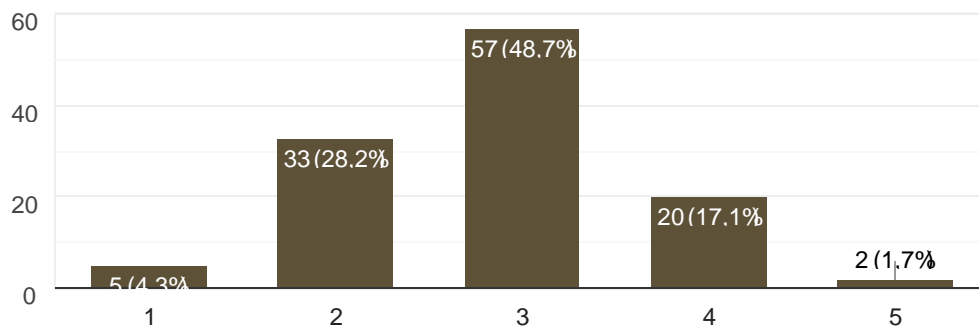
117 válasz

Cím nélküli szakasz

What is your gender?

117 válasz

How old are you?

117 válasz

59
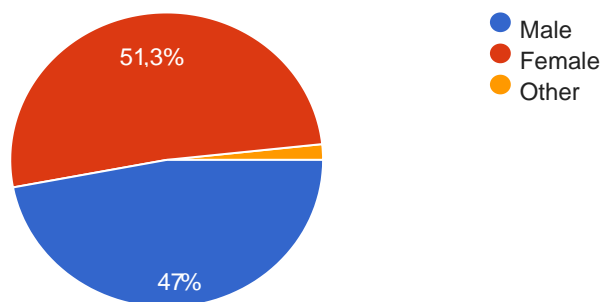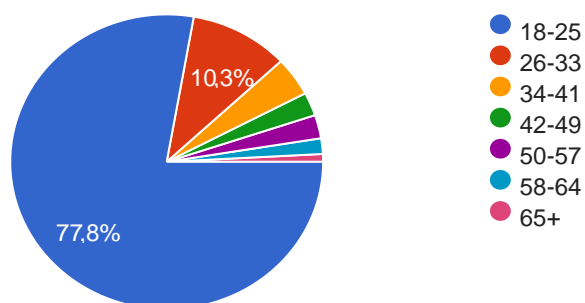
What type of settlement do you live in?

117 válasz

- Capital city (Budapest)
- Agglomeration
- Large city
- Small city
- Village

26,5%

53,8%
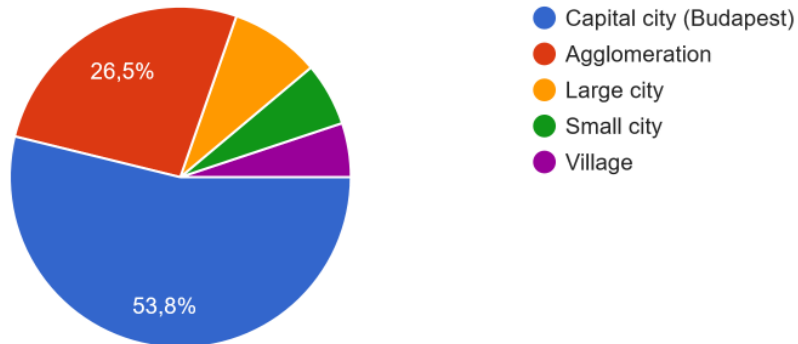
If you live in Budapest, which district do you live in?

63 válasz

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.

1/3

25,4%

9,5%

7,9%
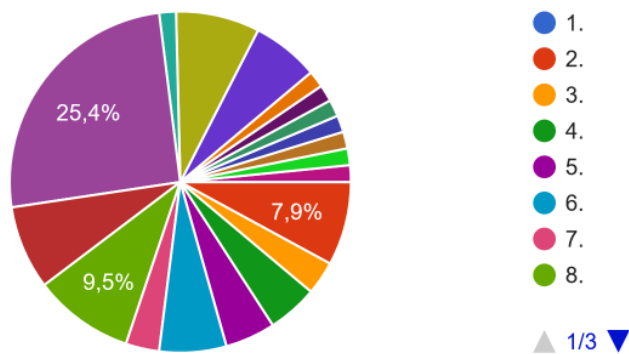
How would you describe your employment status?

117 válasz

- Employee
- Entrepreneur
- Freelancer
- Intern
- Business owner
- Unemployed

22,2%

9,4%

17,1%

44,4%
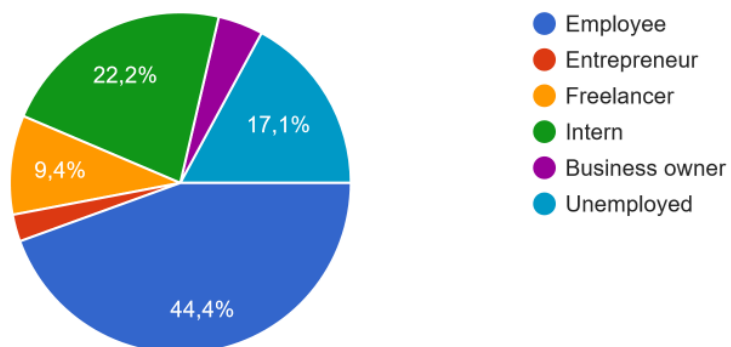
What best describes the nature of your current work arrangement?
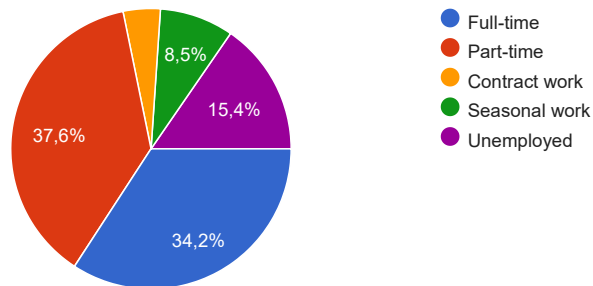
117 válasz

- Full-time
- Part-time
- Contract work
- Seasonal work
- Unemployed

8,5%

15,4%

37,6%

34,2%

How much time on average do you spend on social media daily?

117 válasz

- Less than an hour
- 1-2 hours
- 2-3 hours
- 3-5 hours
- 5+ hours

17,1%

37,6%

9,4%

30,8%

Out of these social media platforms, which ones are you registered on?

117 válasz

Platform	Value
Facebook	102 (87,2%)
Instagram	110 (94%)
Twitter/X	31 (26,5%)
TikTok	67 (57,3%)

What kinds of utilities does your home have?

117 válasz

Automated blinds, shades	15 (12,8%)
Apple watch	27 (23,1%)
Apple TV	12 (10,3%)
Smart garage door opener	17 (14,5%)
Smart bed	1 (0,9%)
Home energy monitoring…	11 (9,4%)
Smart kitchen appliances…	44 (37,6%)
Automated cleaning robot	22 (18,8%)
Smart thermostat	30 (25,6%)
Home automation hub	4 (3,4%)
Smart security system	16 (13,7%)
None of the above	39 (33,3%)

To what extent do you feel that the following statements are true for you, on a scale from 1 to 5? 1=Not true at all, 5=Very true

Have you ever been in a fine dining restaurant?

117 válasz

- No, and I'm not planning on going.
- No, but I wanted to go for a long time.
- Not yet, but I'm planning to go soon.
- Yes, once or twice.
- Yes, I have been many times.

24,8%
48,7%
8,5%
12,8%
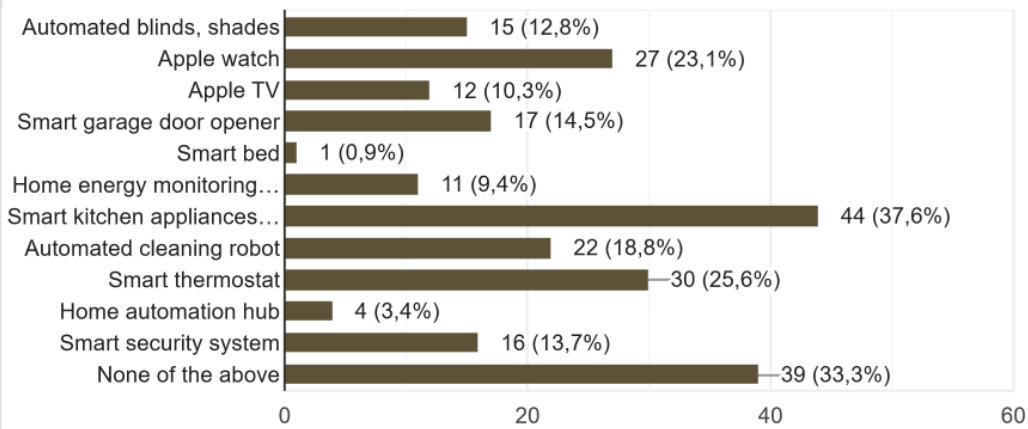
What additional suggestions do you have for Hungarian fine dining restaurants to improve their marketing and communication?

16 válasz

Nicely shot and edited food videos are very effective in my opinion

Targeted ads on Facebook, strong presence on Instagram and paying for priority placement in Google search results would probably be effective. Sponsored articles or (unpaid) reviews on blogs like telex.hu and 444.hu might also yield good results.

I'm not very familiar with their strategies

Finedineing ettermekbek szerintem oda kell figyelni arra hogy ne legyen tul tolva a marketing vagyis nemtom en olyankor izzadosnak itelem meg oket. Ha az o social media feluletukon van egy jo esztetik kepekkel menuvel ami rezonal az etterem vibejaval az elony lehet, illtve en szeretem akar a partizan akar a telex ettermekrol szolo podcastjait nezni tok edukativak. A Saltba pl ezert kedvelek jarni.
Illetve sok ilyen street fine dinigot szeretek pl 101bistro(101neo,101tigris), Vasüzlet, Enso,Todo...
Szerintem az ilyen ettermeknek ugy tud megfogo lenni a marketingje ha az tukrozi az ettermi elenyt(felszolgalas,etelek,design) ha valami elterest eszlelek akar egy konponensben is attol amit az etterem kommunikalni probal akkor nem szivesen megyek vissza.
Streetkitchenen meglatok finedining helyet akkor fix nem megyek el ha elrangat parom akkor is valszeg

nem fog tetszeni. Nem tudom erted e igy ezeket az kis erzekeny eltereseket haha. none

Be more active on social media (mainly tiktok) but also pay attention to how the social media platforms that they focus on targets different age groups (and that those age groups match their targets as well)

Visuals are extremely important. Modern content making skills are priority in my opinion.

I think in the recent years they have been heading at the right direction. Continue that

Start to use Qerko

Just lower the prices and make good advertisments for them

Try to hire marketing specialists not just do as their think is good.

Maybe try somehow to appeal to the middle or lower class as well (special price days with online reservations or giveaways perhaps) to give a more accessible experience to the locals as well, not just for tourists. You can feel the exclusive atmosphere at every fine dining place, and even tho some people would try more of them, they have this 'exclusivity' tied to them which makes me personally feel like I'm not "worthy" to eat there since I'm just a regular

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64

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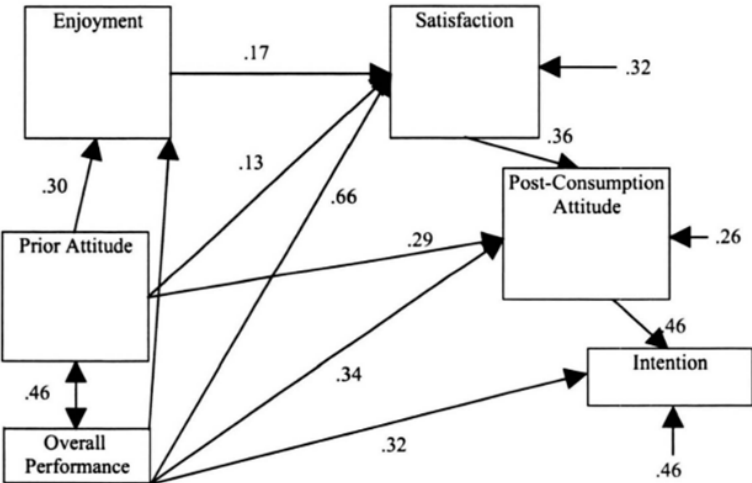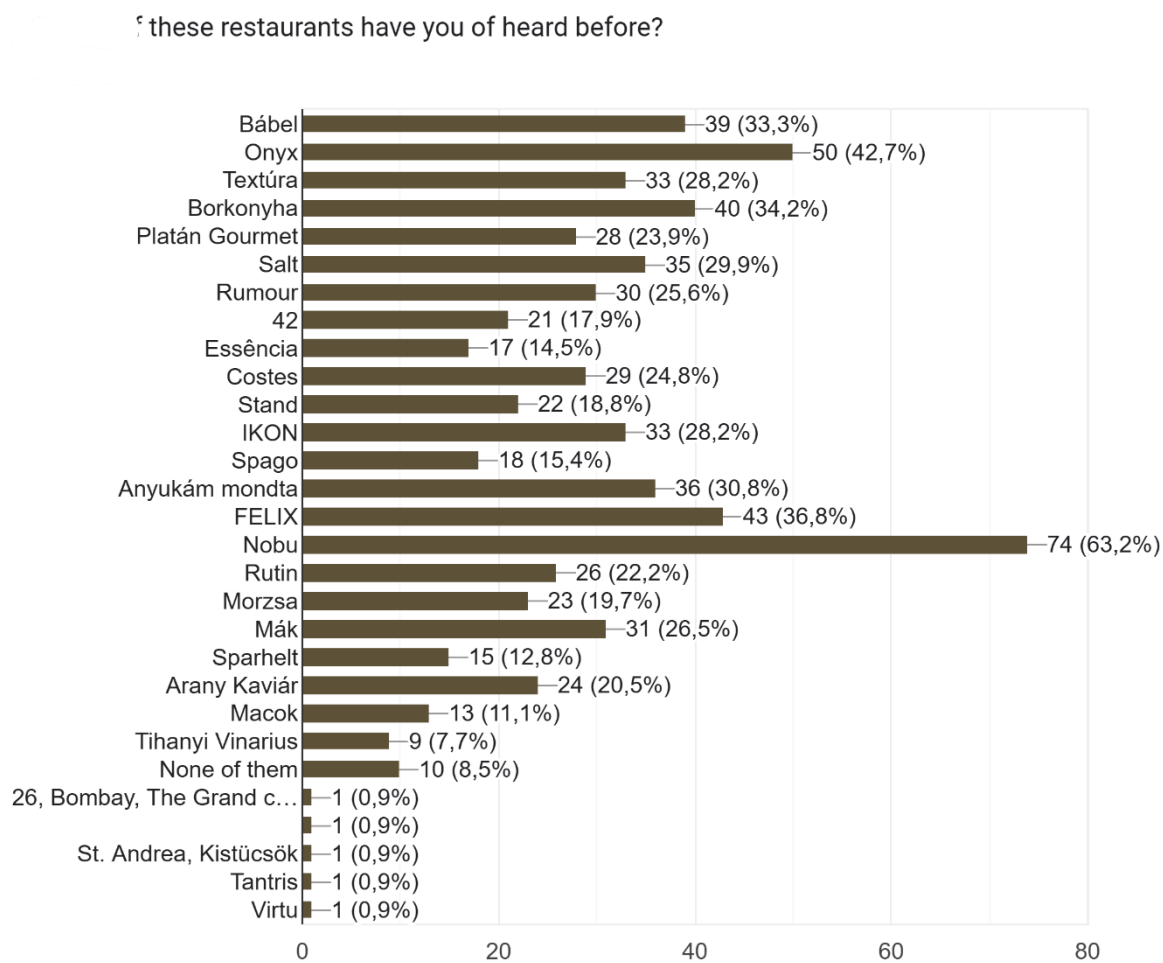
Figure 5: Executive chef Szilárd Tóth

Source: welt.de, 2024

these restaurants have you of heard before?

Restaurant	Value
Bábel	39 (33,3%)
Onyx	50 (42,7%)
Textúra	33 (28,2%)
Borkonyha	40 (34,2%)
Platán Gourmet	28 (23,9%)
Salt	35 (29,9%)
Rumour	30 (25,6%)
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Nobu	74 (63,2%)
Rutin	26 (22,2%)
Morzsa	23 (19,7%)
Mák	31 (26,5%)
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Macok	13 (11,1%)
Tihanyi Vinarius	9 (7,7%)
None of them	10 (8,5%)
26, Bombay, The Grand c…	1 (0,9%)
	1 (0,9%)
St. Andrea, Kistücsök	1 (0,9%)
Tantris	1 (0,9%)
Virtu	1 (0,9%)

Source: Google Forms based on primary research data collection

Figure 2: Interior of Stand

66

Source: welovebudapest.hu, 2023

Figure 3: Executive chef István Pesti

Source: velvet.hu, 2022

Figure 4: Interior of Costes

Source: theworlds50best.com, 2020

Figure 7: What is the most common reason for you to visit a fine dining restaurant?
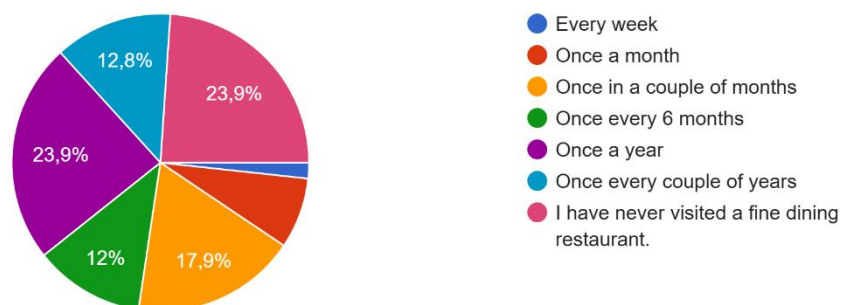
What is the most common reason for you to visit a fine dining restaurant?

- Casual dining
- Special occasion (birthday etc.)
- Curiosity, broadening culinary experiences
- I have never visited a fine dining restaurant.
- Nalam sokszor a fenntarthatosag es maga az etelek minosege, beszerzesilanc ilyenek miatt hozom m…
- Work
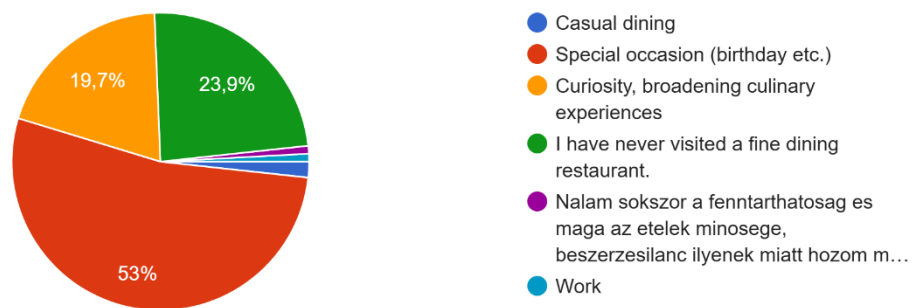
Source: Google Forms based on primary research data collection

Figure 8: How frequently do you visit fine dining restaurants?

How frequently do you visit fine dining restaurants?

- Every week
- Once a month
- Once in a couple of months
- Once every 6 months
- Once a year
- Once every couple of years
- I have never visited a fine dining restaurant.

Figure 9: How often do you use social media to search for dining options?

How often do you use social media to search for dining options?
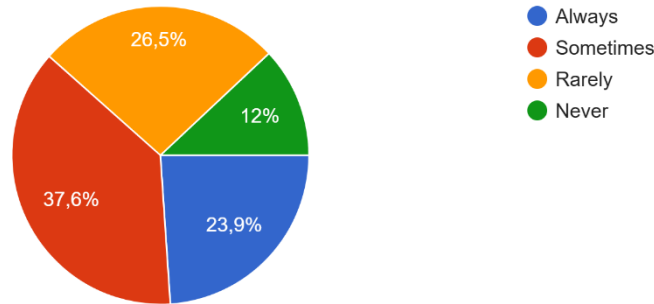
Source: Google Forms based on primary research data collection

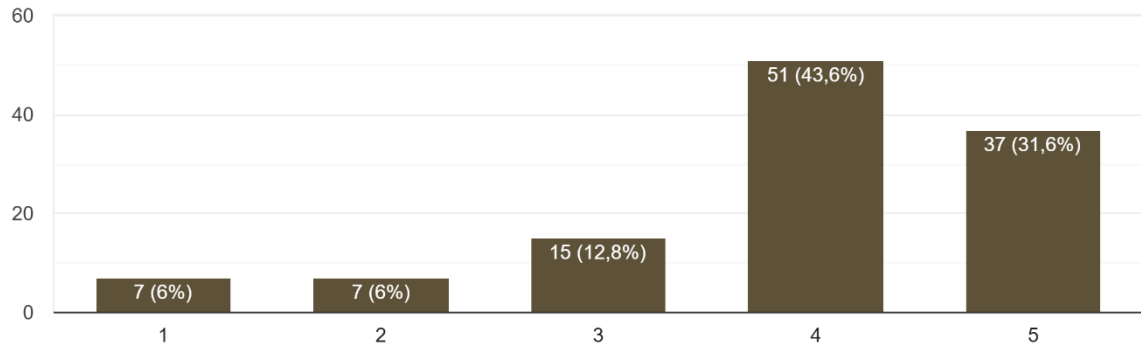*Figure 10: Which social media platforms do you prefer for discovering fine dining restaurants?*

Which social media platforms do you prefer for discovering fine dining restaurants?
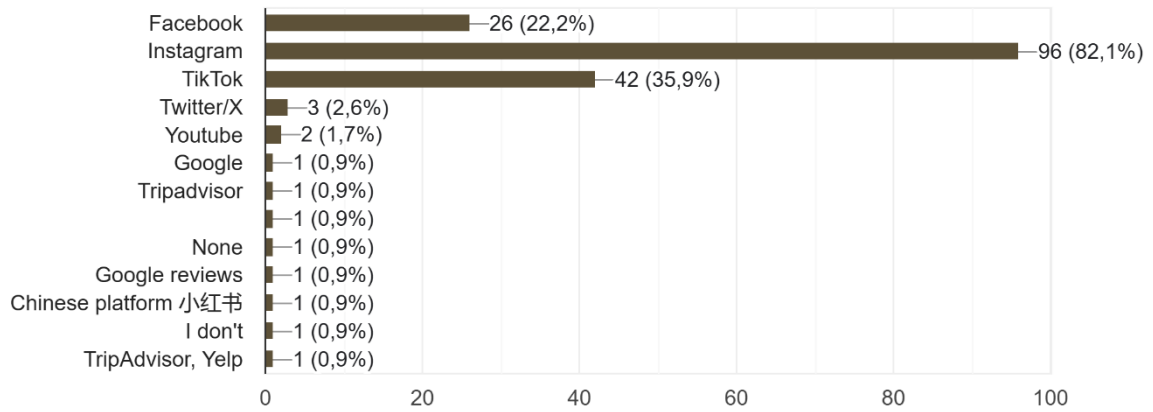
Source: Google Forms based on primary research data collection

In your opinion, how important is a restaurant's online presence (website, social media) when choosing where to dine?

Source: Google Forms based on primary research data collectio

*Figure 13: Did a specific marketing activity ever lead you to dine at a specific fine dining restaurant?*

Did a specific marketing activity (e.g., social media post, promotion, influencer recommendation) ever lead you to dine at a specific fine dining restaurant?
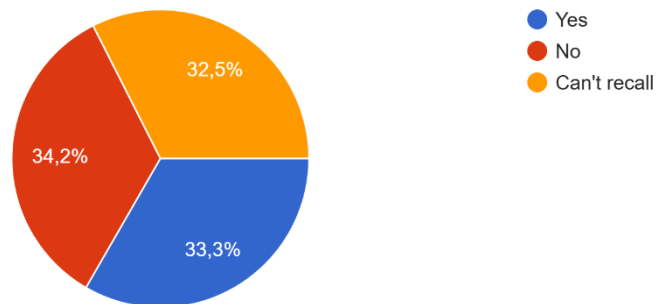
Source: Google Forms based on primary research data collection

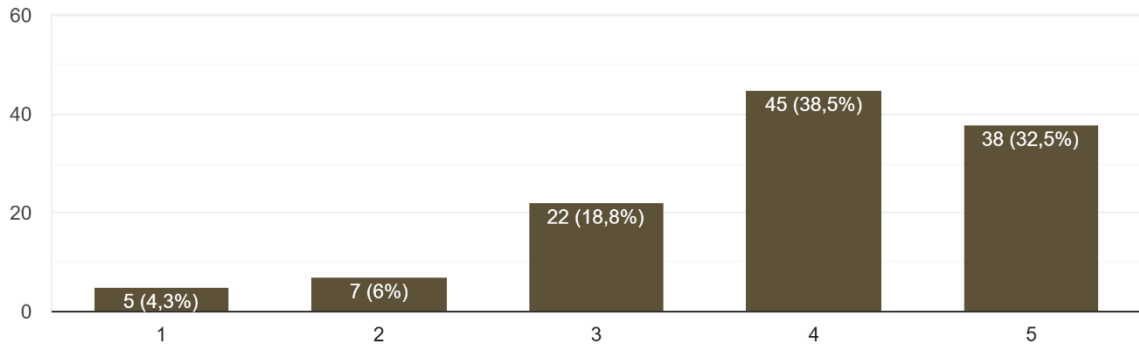*Figure 12: Do you follow any fine dining restaurants on social media?*

70

Do you follow any fine dining restaurants on social media?
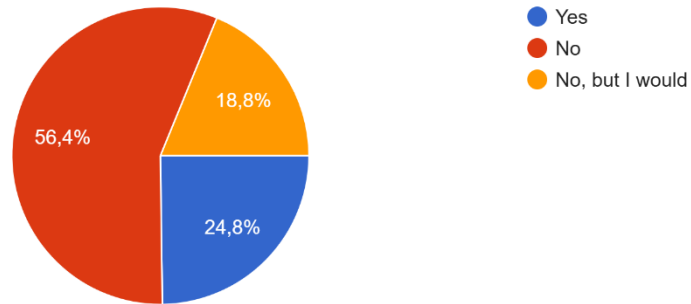
Source: Google Forms based on primary research data collection

*Figure 15: In your opinion, how important is marketing for a fine dining restaurant?*

In your opinion, how important is marketing for a fine dining restaurant?

Source: Google Forms based on primary research data collection

Figure 16: How effective are Hungarian fine dining restaurants' marketing activities in your opinion

How effective are Hungarian fine dining restaurants' marketing activities in your opinion?
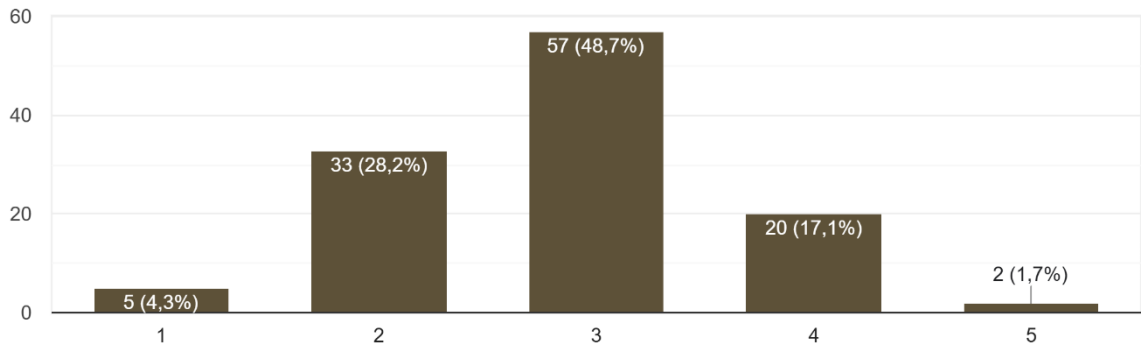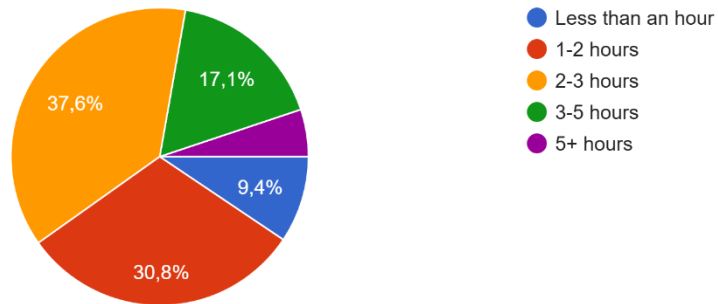

Source: Google Forms based on primary research data collection

Figure 17: How much time on average do you spend on social media daily?

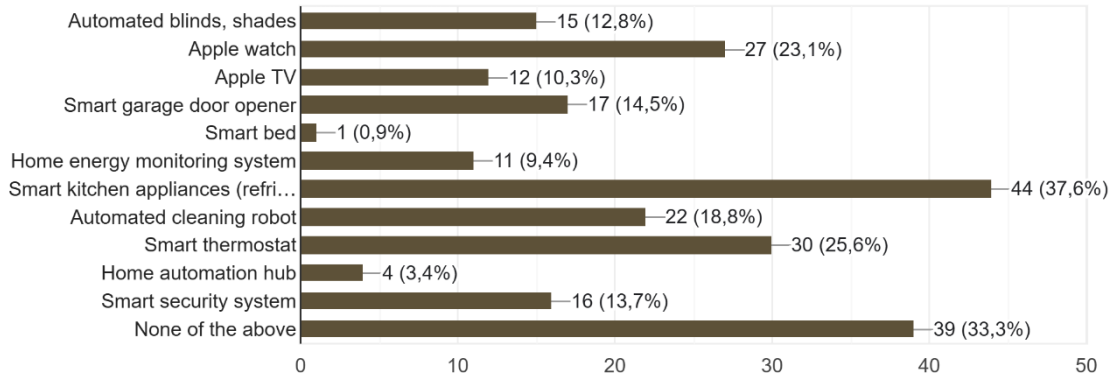How much time on average do you spend on social media daily?
117 válasz

Source: Google Forms based on primary research data collection

Figure 18: Out of these social media platforms, which ones are you registered on?
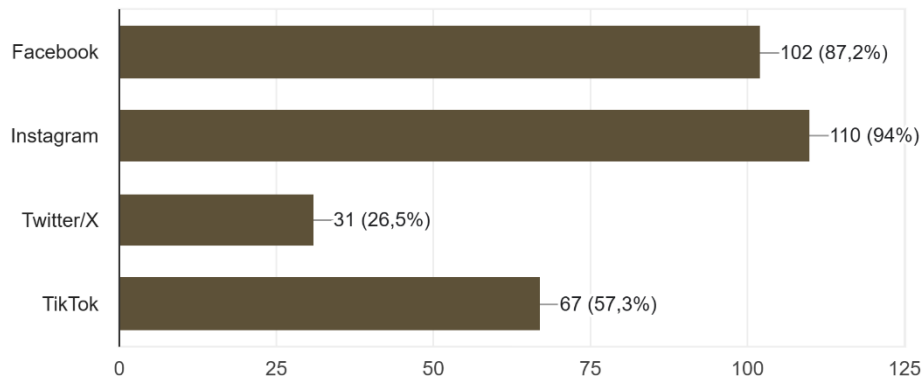
What kinds of utilities does your home have?

117 válasz

Automated blinds, shades	15 (12,8%)
Apple watch	27 (23,1%)
Apple TV	12 (10,3%)
Smart garage door opener	17 (14,5%)
Smart bed	1 (0,9%)
Home energy monitoring system	11 (9,4%)
Smart kitchen appliances (refri…	44 (37,6%)
Automated cleaning robot	22 (18,8%)
Smart thermostat	30 (25,6%)
Home automation hub	4 (3,4%)
Smart security system	16 (13,7%)
None of the above	39 (33,3%)

Out of these social media platforms, which ones are you registered on?

117 válasz

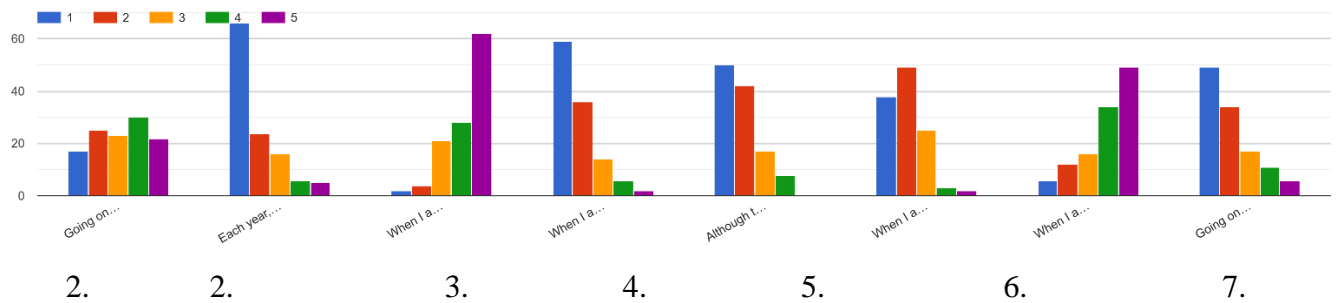|	
Facebook	102 (87,2%)
Instagram	110 (94%)
Twitter/X	31 (26,5%)
TikTok	67 (57,3%)

Source: Google Forms based on primary research data collection

Figure 20: To what extent do you feel that the following statements are true for you, on a scale from 1 to 5?

To what extent do you feel that the following statements are true for you, on a scale from 1 to 5? 1=Not true at all, 5=Very true

2.   2.   3.   4.   5.   6.   7.

Source: Google Forms based on primary research data collection