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The background of the slide is a warm, slightly blurred photograph of a group of people dining at a restaurant. In the foreground, a woman's hands are clasped together, and she is wearing a silver bracelet. The table is set with various dishes, including bread, a bowl of food, and a glass of iced tea with a lemon slice. The overall atmosphere is casual and social.

**UNDERSTANDING
DINERS' DECISION-
MAKING BEHAVIOUR.**

Insights – Understanding Consumer Decisions When Eating Out

Introduction

In this cluttered and competitive market, it is becoming increasingly challenging to explain consumer behaviour, its drivers and influences. This led us to consider the issues our customers face in trying to understand what motivates diners to eat out, as well as what decision process they go through when selecting where to eat.

Unlike traditional research which informs on the state of things, we wanted our findings to be both practical and actionable, including a wealth of information you can apply to your business to pull in diners and keep them coming back.

In the event, our research delivered far more than we expected. So much, in fact, that we could split it into five, distinct parts. We hope you find the insights useful and that you can successfully apply the findings to your business.



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PART 1. EATING SOMEWHERE NEW.



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PART 2. EATING OUT BEHAVIOUR.



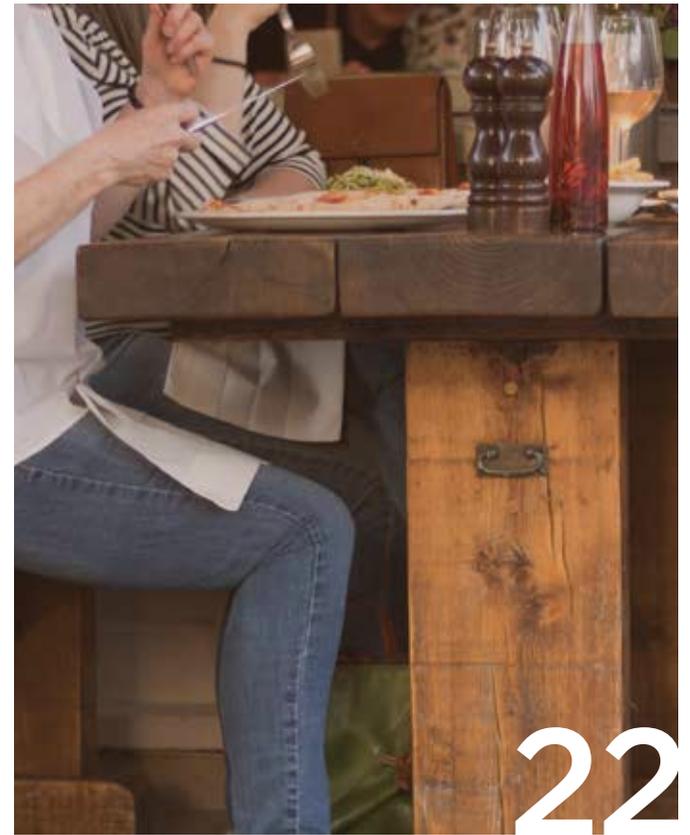
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**PART 3.
LATEST TRENDS IN
EATING OUT.**



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**PART 4.
CHOOSING WHERE
TO EAT.**



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**PART 5.
PULLING IT ALL
TOGETHER.**

A photograph of a woman with long blonde hair sitting at a restaurant table, drinking from a wine glass. She is wearing a white jacket over a red top. In the foreground, another woman with long blonde hair is seen from the side, eating. The table is set with a bottle of wine, a glass of water, and a plate of food. The background is a busy restaurant with other patrons and warm lighting.

**PART 1.
EATING SOMEWHERE
NEW.**

Visiting Somewhere New

Interestingly, **25%** of consumers surveyed said they visited somewhere new the last time they ate out, with **40%** of those visiting local independent restaurants.

We also discovered that:

25%

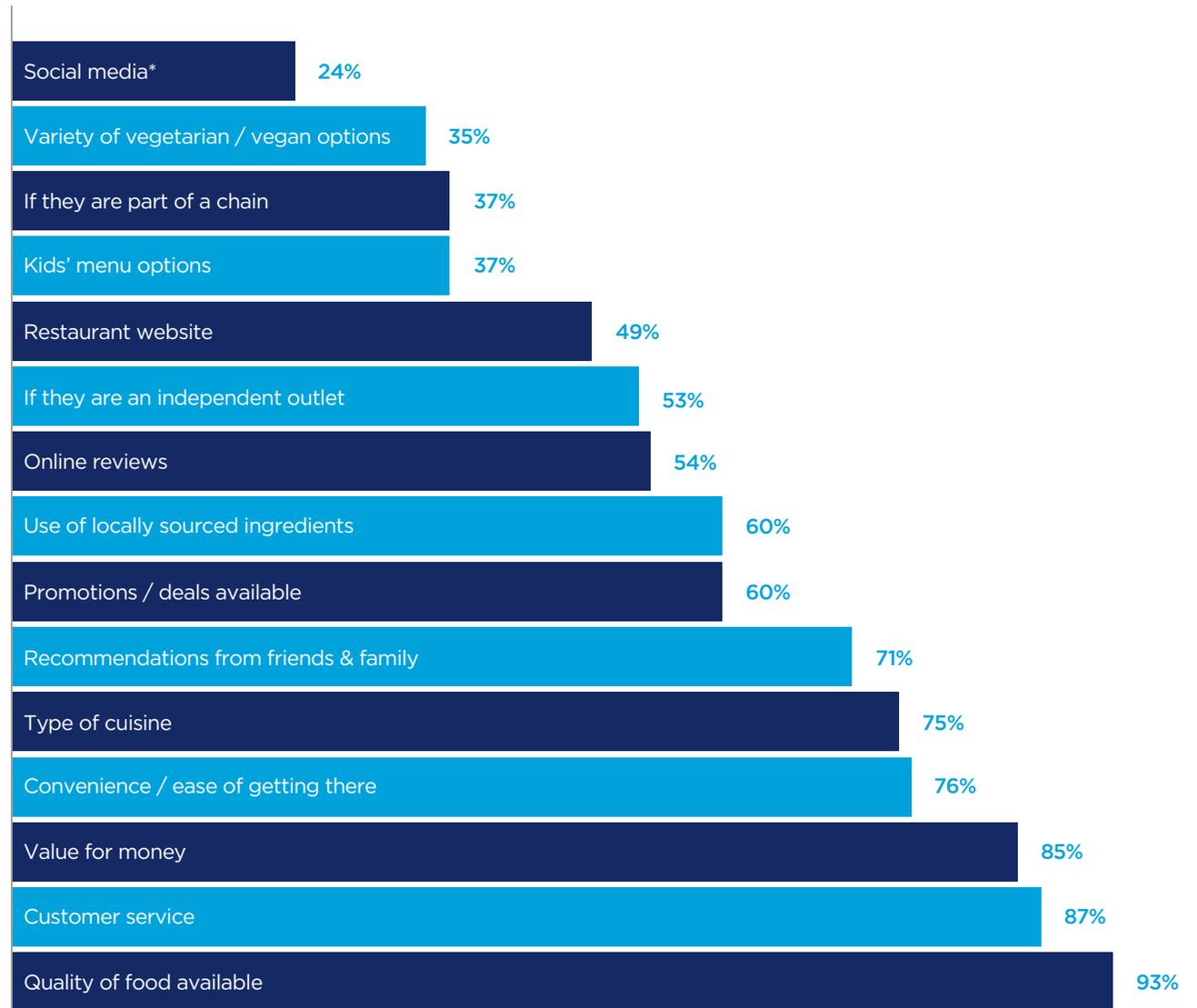
visited somewhere new the last time they ate out

40%

of those visited local independent restaurants

- older consumers are more likely to have eaten somewhere new recently, with **50%** dining in the establishment for the first time when they ate out.
- younger consumers, **aged 18-25**, were least likely to have eaten somewhere new for the first time.
- local independent pubs/bars and restaurants were amongst the top choices for those seeking to try somewhere new, with chain bars, bars or pubs second. Fast food outlets were next, followed by fine dining or premium restaurants, local independent cafes, and chain cafes.

FACTORS DRIVING VENUE CHOICE



* Instagram, Facebook or Twitter page

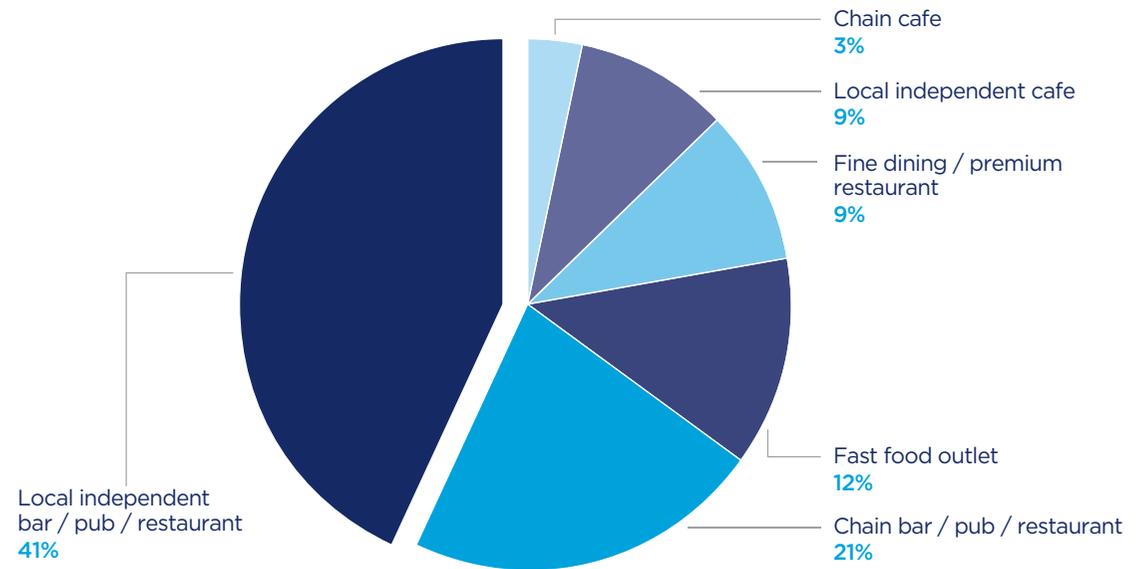
Motivators For Eating Somewhere New

It wasn't a surprise that friend or family recommendations are pivotal in encouraging consumers to try eating somewhere for the first time.

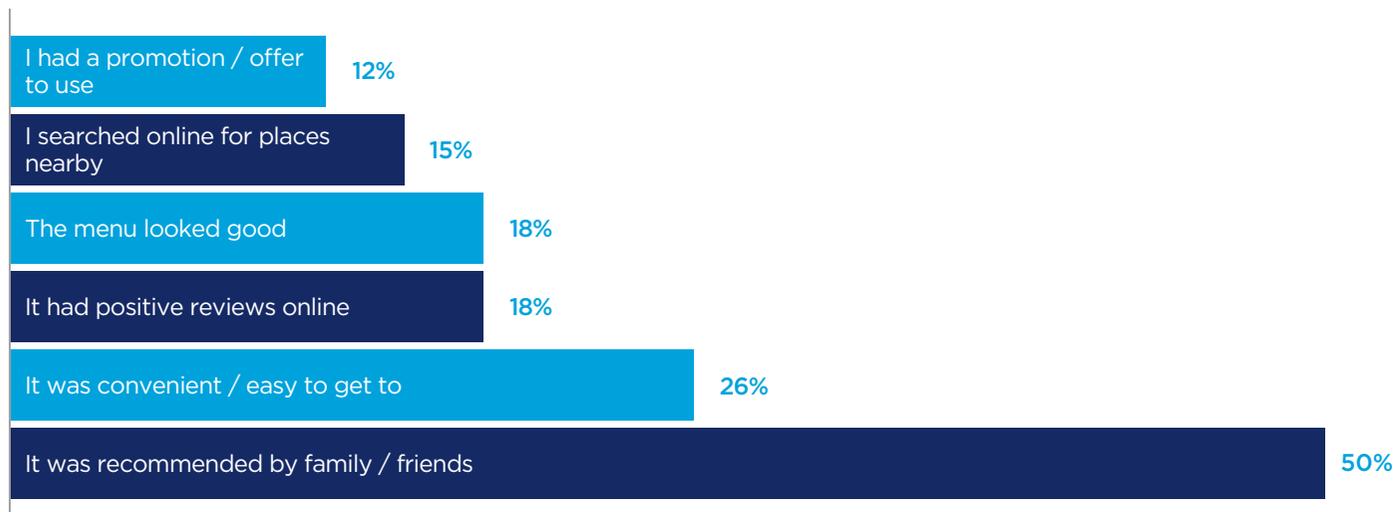
Interestingly, older customers were less likely to say their choice had been influenced by a recommendation (**20% of participants**) but were instead more likely to choose somewhere easy to get to (**60%**).

Younger consumers, **aged 18-24**, were most likely to visit somewhere if they had a promotion or offer to redeem (**67%**).

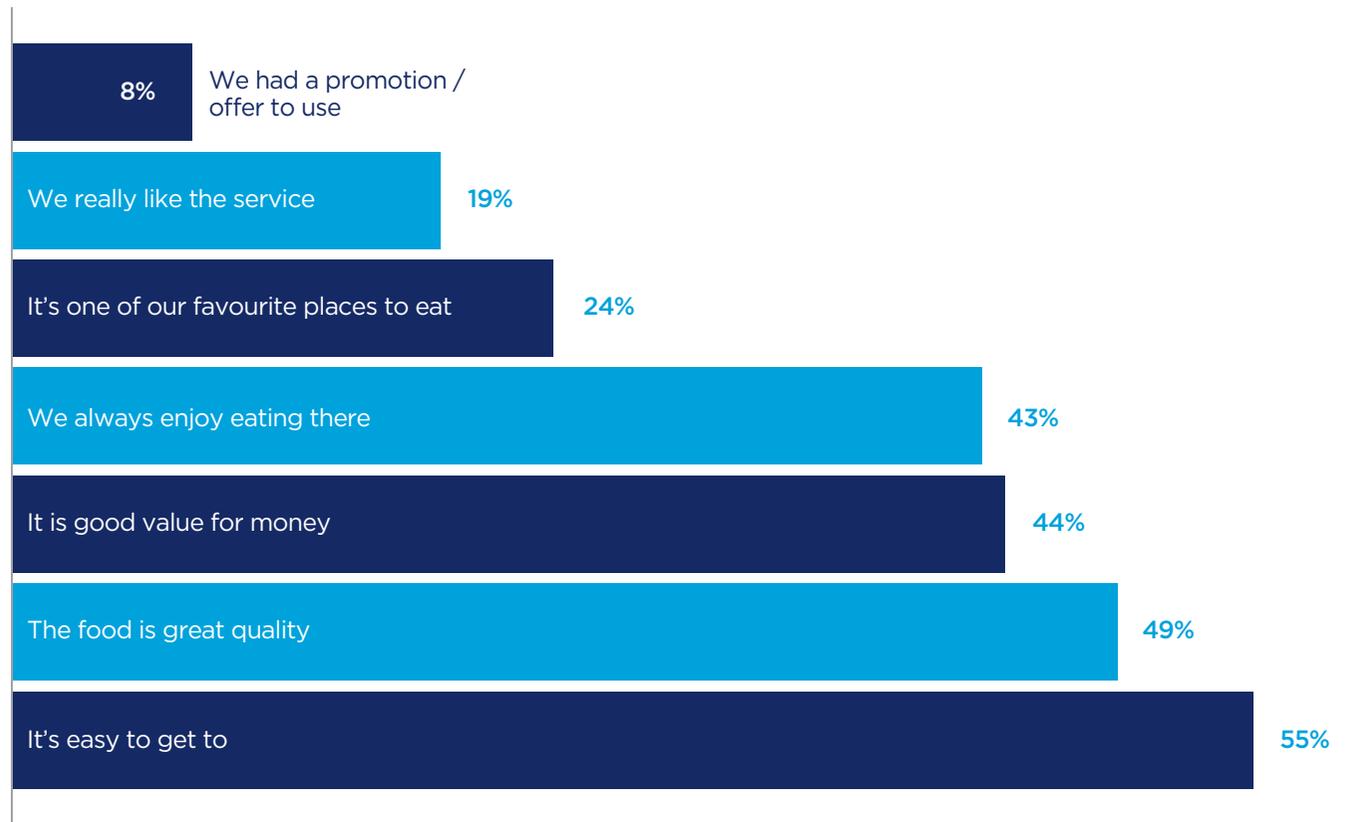
TYPES OF NEW ESTABLISHMENT VISITED



WHY DID YOU TRY SOMEWHERE NEW?



WHY DID YOU EAT THERE AGAIN?



Repeat Visits

For those who were making a repeat visit to a restaurant, the chart to the right shows the reasons (of which some diners chose more than one) which helped shape diners' decisions.

Offers and promotions are helping influence customers.

Learnings

So, how do you get diners through the door?

The bottom line is this: dish up great food and people will come back. Offers and promotions are helping influence customers, while great service, good online reviews, easy access to menus ahead of a visit, and an extensive range of

vegetarian and vegan options also motivate diners.

With all those points in mind, caterers can take actionable steps to improve their offering and encourage loyalty in their customers.



PART 2.
EATING OUT
BEHAVIOUR.

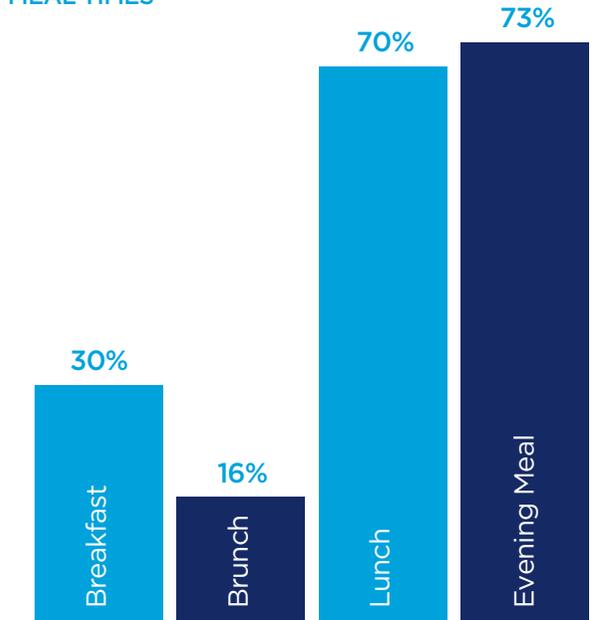
Here we look at the behaviour around diners eating out - where they are eating, when, why and with who. We focus on the time of day people choose to eat out, what kind of cuisine they choose when they do, and the outlets they visited.

Meal Times

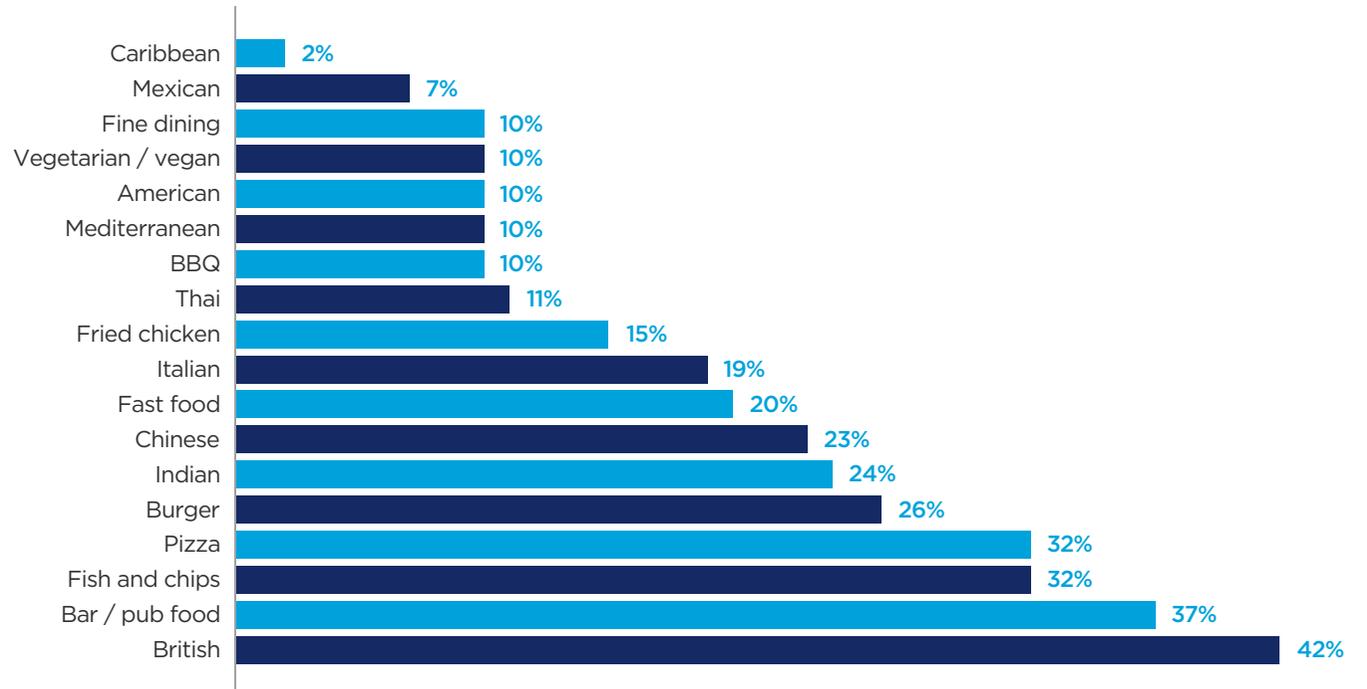
Not surprisingly, lunch and evening trumped breakfast when it came to the most popular times to eat out. Both age groups - **18-24 (82%)** and **65+ (80%)** - are more likely to dine out for lunch.

Meanwhile, those in the **45-54** age group (**83%**) are most likely to have eaten an evening meal out in the last month.

MEAL TIMES



CUISINE TYPES



Cuisine Types

While it's clear people love eating out, budget-friendly eateries still reign supreme, with pizza, burgers, fish and chips and general 'pub grub' often favoured over fine dining.

Diners were asked: 'In the last month, which of the following cuisine(s) have you had when you eat out?'

The majority (**70%**) of the **65+** age group said British cuisine enticed them into a restaurant, with the **18-24** age bracket sampling a wider range of cuisines. Fast food was the most popular 'cuisine' over the last month.

Surprisingly, **vegan** and **vegetarian-friendly** fast food

options are enticing meat eaters as well, with The Take Out website cementing this fact, stating that beef burger growth 'remained flat', but meat-eaters' appetite for meatless burgers was helping drive sales of vegan and veggie food in general.

Interestingly, **24%** of people who took part in our survey also said they'd eaten Thai food in the last month, while **18%** plumped for Mexican.

The CGA website backed up our Thai stat, saying: 'Thai managed restaurants have more than doubled in the five years to December 2018'.

Outlets Visited

Consumers are most commonly visiting local independent pubs, bars or restaurants and this was consistent across all age groups.

Middle-aged diners are driving independent restaurant take-up, with **70%** of those **aged 35-44** saying they'd visited a local, independently owned restaurant or bar over the last month. Older consumers were less likely to visit chains, with only **10% of 65+** having eaten in one over the past month.

The reason for eating out, and the people you are eating with, heavily influence the type of establishment visited.

Outlet Frequency

Consumers tend to be visiting the same kind of outlet once or twice a month; more regular visits are very unusual. A total of **26%** of consumers visit a local restaurant once a month, while fine-dining restaurants were considered a 'treat' visit.

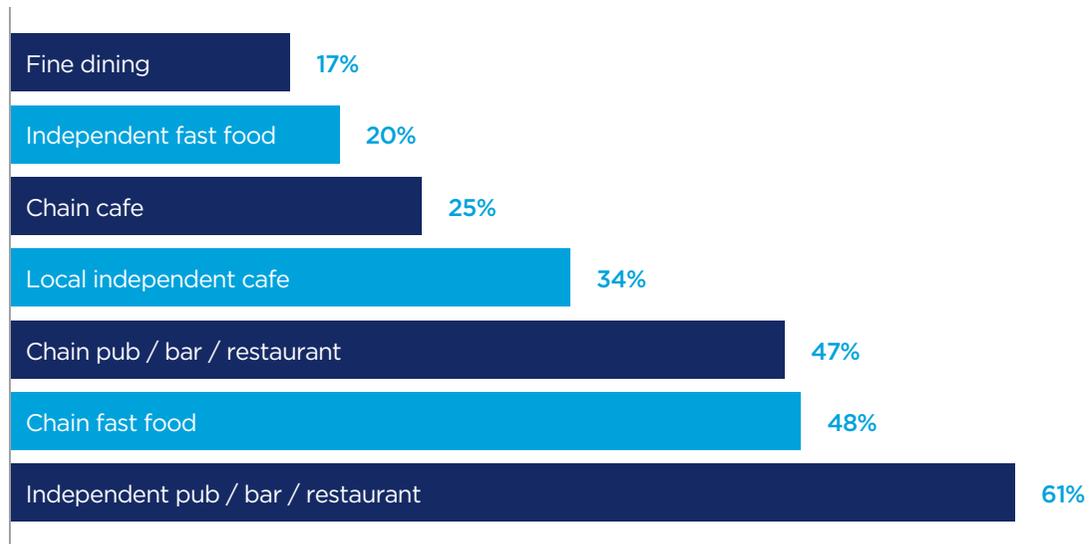
10%

of those aged 65+ have eaten in a chain over the past month

26%

of consumers visit a local restaurant once a month

OUTLETS VISITED



Occasion and Venue Choice

Convenience proved the reason fast-food outlets are so popular, with diners choosing to visit one before or after scheduled activities. When local independent restaurants are visited with family or friends, convenience is much less important.

For celebrations, consumers are more likely to consider independent restaurants that offer great food.

20%

of diners visited independent fast food restaurants before or after an activity

30%

of diners visited a fine dining or premium restaurant as part of a celebration or reward

OCCASION AND VENUE CHOICE

■ highest percentages by venue

	Venue average	Local ind. pub/bar/restaurant	Chain pub/bar/restaurant	Fast food independent	Fast food chain	Local independent cafe	Chain cafe	Fine dining/premium restaurant
Had a meal out with family	26%	39%	39%	12%	21%	22%	8%	40%
It was convenient	25%	11%	16%	44%	38%	29%	38%	0%
Had a meal out with friends	22%	40%	25%	24%	12%	22%	12%	20%
It's a regular visit	20%	14%	12%	12%	10%	29%	50%	10%
Wanted a night off cooking	16%	19%	20%	20%	31%	10%	0%	15%
Wanted to eat great food	15%	19%	10%	12%	6%	7%	4%	45%
Wanted to try something new	15%	14%	16%	12%	13%	15%	12%	20%
As part of a celebration/reward	13%	20%	12%	8%	8%	7%	8%	30%
Had a promotion to use there	9%	3%	12%	16%	10%	5%	19%	0%
Ate out before/after an activity	9%	4%	4%	20%	17%	2%	4%	10%
Date/night out with partner	7%	9%	4%	8%	2%	2%	4%	20%

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Accompanying Party

Consumers, particularly those aged 35-64, most commonly eat out with their partner.

One in five consumers (21%) aged 18-34 last ate a meal out with their parents. Furthermore, when dining out at premium restaurants, young consumers are most likely to be with their parents.

Those aged 44 to 54 (21%) and 65+ (20%) were most likely to have eaten out alone. The Telegraph highlights an impressive stat from booking site, OpenTable, which suggests restaurant reservations for solo diners jumped 160% between 2014 and 2018 in the UK.

It came as no surprise that food quality, service and overall value for money were the key reasons people chose a venue. Quality of food is especially important to older eaters, with those aged 35+ rating the importance of the quality of food at 90%. Interestingly, the quality of food is less important for the 18-25 age group.

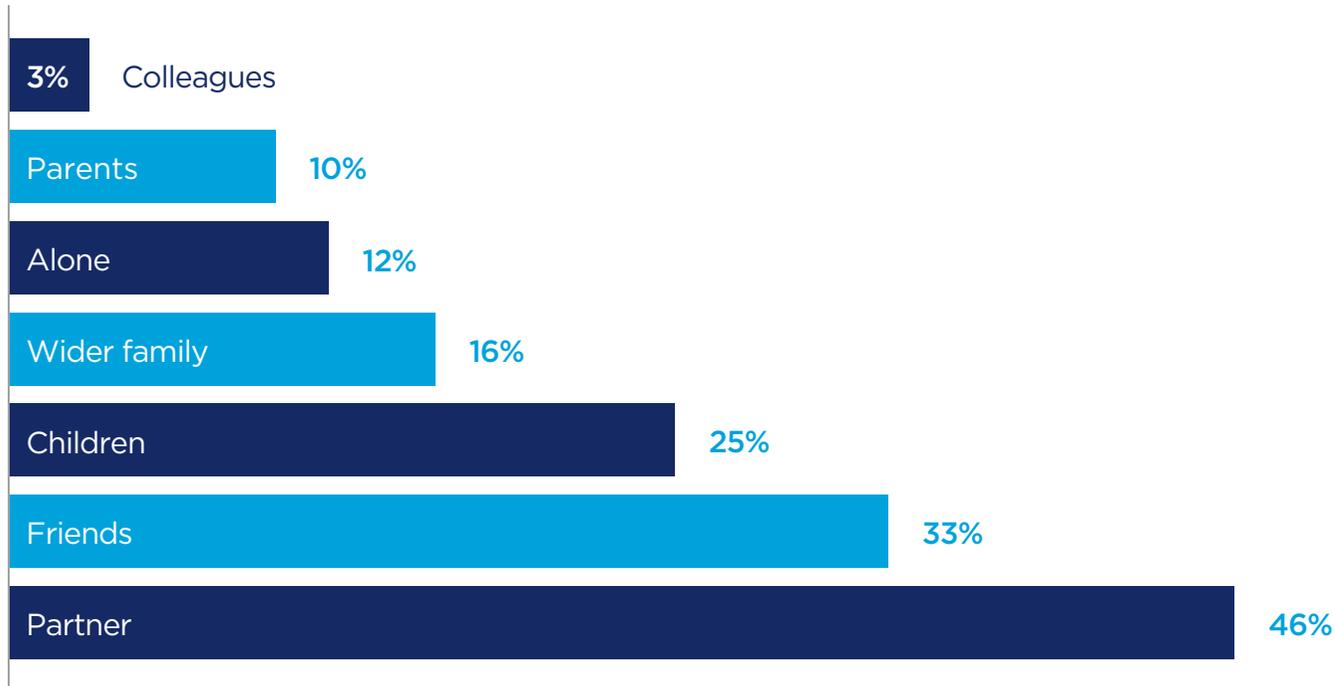
Those aged between 35 and 44 are likely to regard kids' meal options as more important than other age groups, too.

Kids' meals must put health first, though, with The Daily Mail reporting that seven out of 10 children's meals contain too much fat – food for thought for chefs everywhere?

90%

of those aged 35+ rated the quality of food as important

ACCOMPANYING PARTY



Learnings

While the research confirmed some of the trends, such as Thai food and vegan / vegetarian, it was interesting to note that meat eaters are also being pulled in to explore vegan / vegetarian options.

The insights showed how distinct each demographic group is – so much so that you can specifically target a group by your establishment type. For example, caterers can market fine dining to parents and not younger audiences, or target older diners with British food at lunch time.

Thanks to the growing number of solo diners, you may want to consider their needs through menu choices, but ensure you target couples, as couples continue to eat out regularly.

Finally, look at your children's menu and ensure it has healthy options.





**PART 3.
LATEST TRENDS
IN EATING OUT.**

Moving onto part three, in which we share the latest trends in eating out. After all, the most important driving forces behind consumer behaviour in any sector are trends – and if caterers are to get ahead, they can do much worse than keeping on top of them.

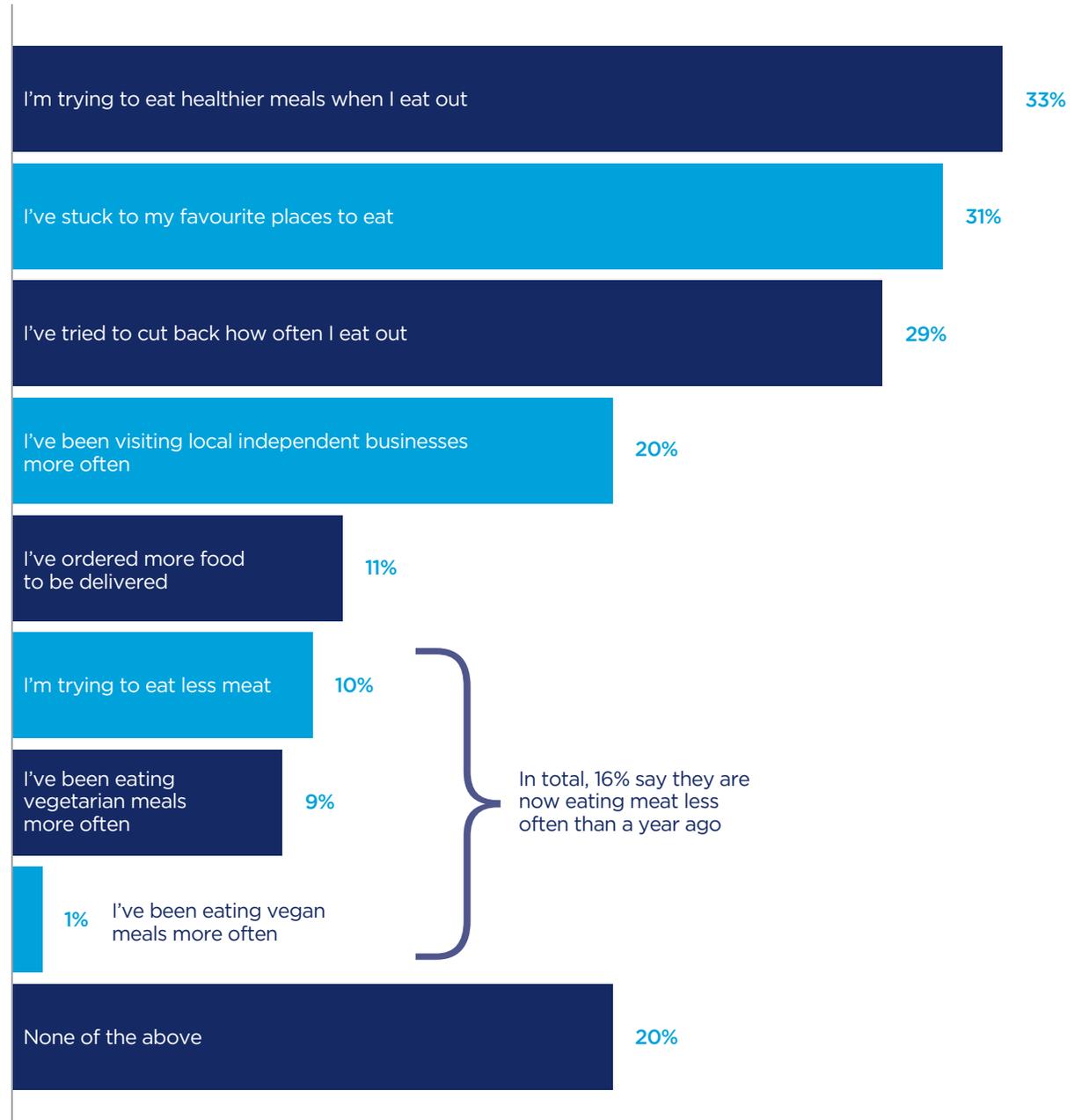
Instigated by industry influencers, trends gather traction in the media and via word of mouth, until they become the latest must-have for any diner.

Eating out has become as much about enjoying the whole experience as it is about eating delicious food. These experiences are seen to add value to dining out, which is of utmost importance to diners on either end of the age spectrum. In fact, value for money is a key factor for those **aged 18-25 (57%)** and **65+ (67%)**.

Over time, the definition of value for money has changed. These days it doesn't necessarily mean cheap food or larger plates. For the modern diner, value includes the bigger picture, from the welcome they receive to how effectively and graciously their dietary requirements are catered for. Attention to detail is vital, especially in an era of customer reviews.

Where value is concerned, quality is also key. On average, those **aged 35+** (a key demographic where spend is concerned) rate the importance of the quality of food at over nine out of 10.

EATING TRENDS



Eating Trends - Healthier Diets

Trying to eat a healthier diet is a key driver of food choice - especially amongst the **35-44 age group**, where **50%** are actively trying to increase the number of healthy options they choose.

The same age group have also been trying to cut back on how often they eat out. In fact, in general, **29%** of diners across all age groups say they are trying to cut down the amount they eat out, and **11%** have ordered more food to be delivered over the past year.

What does this tell us? A handful of things:

- Healthier options are less available in restaurants
- Eating out is seen as a 'cheat day' reward
- Home cooking is still gaining in popularity
- Restaurants are unable to cater for their dietary needs
- Delivery has become much more convenient.

This last point is an interesting one, as it highlights the growing number of diners choosing to eat differently due to lifestyle changes.

50%

of 35-44 year olds are actively trying to increase the number of healthy options they choose

29%

of diners across all age groups say they are trying to cut down the amount they eat out



Eating Trends - Lifestyle Choices

In total, **16%** of all diners from **18-65+ years old**, say they are eating less meat than a year ago.

Breaking this down, **10%** are actively eating fewer meat products, **9%** have become vegetarian, and **1%** are eating vegan meals more often. Interestingly, it's the older demographic who are eating more vegetarian meals based on their usual habits, with **17% of 55-64-year olds** and **20% of 65+** year olds topping the poll.

For many diners, choosing to eat less meat is as much about environmental impact and health as it is about animal welfare. It is important to remember then, that diners who expect vegan and vegetarian options will also appreciate eco-friendly amendments to menus, and are looking for ways to reduce their personal carbon footprint.

This can be achieved by:

- Sourcing local ingredients.
- Using biodegradable materials rather than plastics.
- Reducing food waste.

Of course, each of the above suggestions can be easily be advertised and used for promotional materials.

16%

of all diners from 18-65+ years old,
say they are eating less meat
than a year ago



Eating Trends - Eat Local

One of the most positive trends for the local high street is the move towards eating local.

Our report shows that **20%** of diners are visiting local, independent businesses more often. A range of factors is driving this trend, from influencers such as critics and bloggers, to personal lifestyle changes (as noted left in 'Eating Trends - Lifestyle Choices').

How individual businesses can capitalise on this trend depends on the individual restaurant but including yourself in local events and publications is certainly a good start.

40%

of diners are visiting local,
independent businesses more often

Learnings

In part three, we've learned lots about the latest trends in eating out. Not surprisingly, value for money is as important as ever, with **57%** of those **aged 18 to 25** choosing an eatery based on its prices, and **67%** of people in the **65+** bracket. The quality of the food was also key for those **aged 35 and above**, with people **aged 35 to 44** also looking for healthier options when eating out.

While eating out is still a pastime enjoyed by many, **29%** of diners (across all age groups) are cutting back, with a meal out being a 'cheat day' reward and home cooking gaining in popularity.

People are consuming much less meat, too, with **9%** having recently gone vegetarian. With that in mind, plant-friendly menus can give restaurants a welcome boost.

With **20%** of diners visiting independent restaurants over larger chains, smaller establishments can continue promoting their menus and events to further increase footfall.



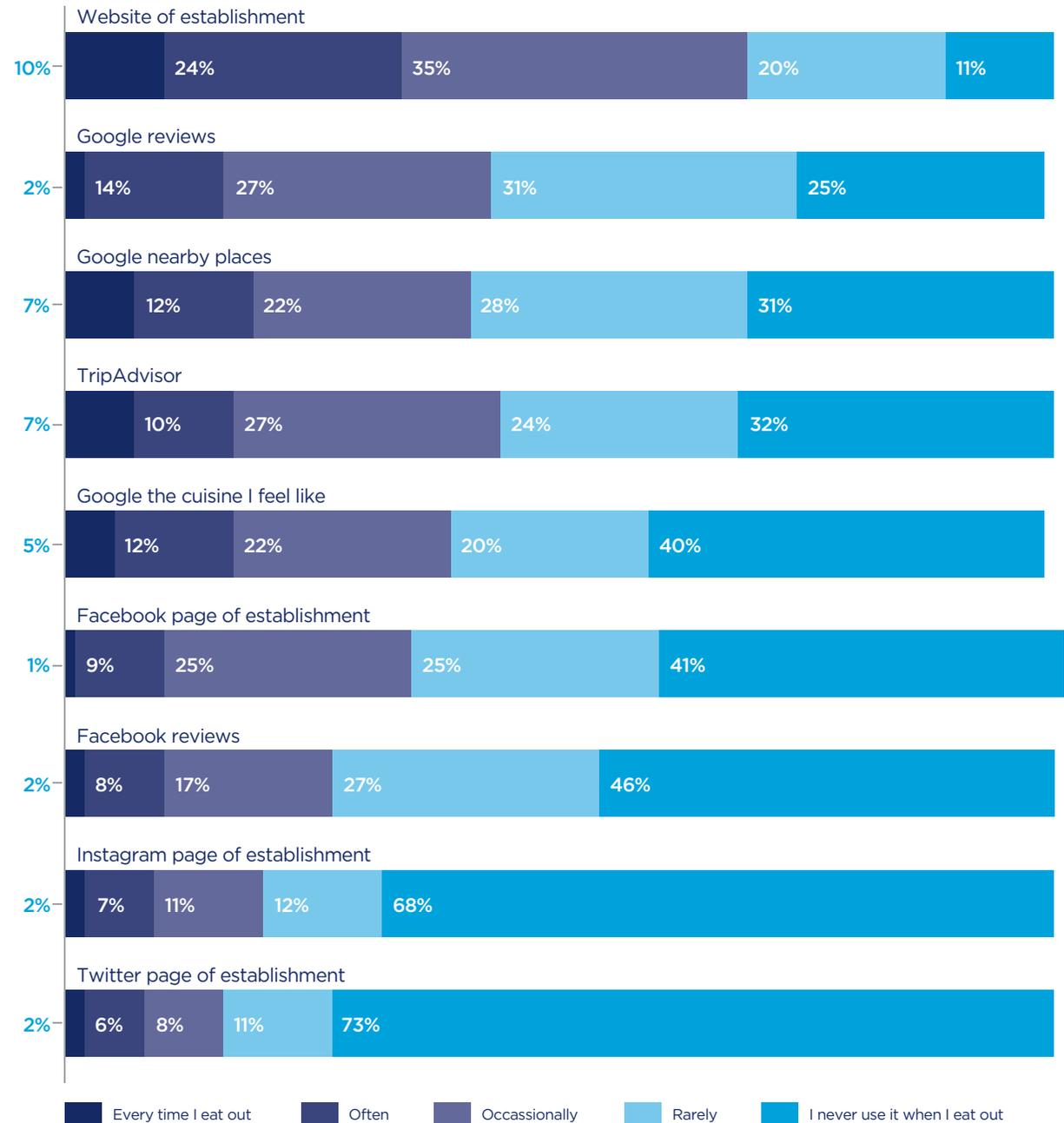
**PART 4.
HOW DINERS
RESEARCH WHERE
TO EAT.**

Choosing where to dine has long since outgrown the traditional guidebook. While the Michelin Guide may still be relevant, most diners are choosing where they spend their hard-earned money by other means – and by using a range of platforms to piece together their plans.

This section looks at how people decide where to eat – and what influences the decision-making process.

Caterers can help keep prospective customers walking through their doors by understanding what they expect, and learning what each demographic feels is vital to their dining experience.

ONLINE SOURCES



How Young Diners Choose a Restaurant

A total of **76% of 18-24-year olds** aren't looking for restaurants they want to eat at. They're searching for the type of cuisine they feel like eating instead, putting cravings ahead of culture.

The next natural step for this group is to narrow down their options, based on online reviews and the information they can easily find about the food they've searched.

The process goes:

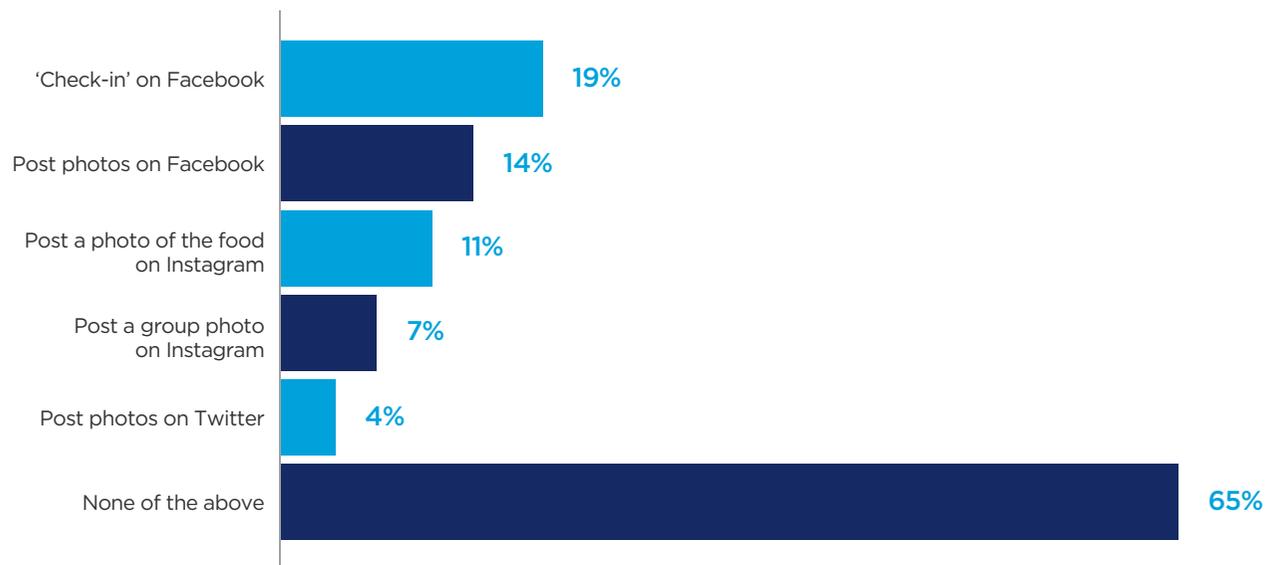
- decide on what to eat.
- search for specific food.
- narrow down options based on location.
- narrow down options based on reviews or star ratings.

Surprisingly, younger diners are much more likely to remain loyal to their favourite restaurants. A sense of security and the ease of not having to work through the decision-making process means that they are least likely to have eaten somewhere for the first time the last time they ate out. A total of **18% of 18-24-year olds** agreed that the last place they ate at was new to them, compared to **50%** of those **aged 24+**.

Another big factor that affects how young diners choose where to eat is Instagram. A large proportion (**40%**) of **18 to 24-year-olds** at least occasionally check an eatery's Instagram page before visiting.

Caterers, are you doing enough to ensure your online presence stretches to Instagram and reaches this important group?

SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS



76%

of 18-24 year olds are searching for the type of cuisine they feel like eating

67%

of over 65s say value for money is what's important to them when choosing where to eat out

How Older Diners Choose a Restaurant

Overall, those in the **65+** age group use fewer online sources to select an eatery. Younger diners, meanwhile, are more likely to visit a venue's website first, with Google or TripAdvisor being used as the next most common websites. In this 'younger' group of diners:

- **70%** go to the establishment's website.
- **40%** use Google reviews.
- **40%** Google nearby places.
- **30%** use TripAdvisor.

For **aged 65+**, **67%** say value for money is what's important to them when choosing where to eat out, and **80%** say their choices are not made by online recommendations. Importantly, **60%** of diners within this demographic choose to eat out at restaurants that are easy to get to.

Sharing Positive (and Negative!) Experiences

When customers have a positive experience at a restaurant, they're more likely to passively respond through recommendations. They're also far more likely to visit again. Those in the **25-34 age** bracket are more likely to follow the establishment on social media (**38%**) or post to Instagram (**29%**).

Interestingly, those aged between **35 and 44** are most likely to leave a review on TripAdvisor (**40%**), with people in the **45-54** or **55-64** age group most likely to share a post on Facebook (**29%** and **33%** respectively).

Of course, if diners have a negative experience at a restaurant, they generally don't return. They also tend to share their experience with friends or family. They might also complain to staff. Those in the **35 to 44 age group** are the most inclined to post reviews to TripAdvisor (**25%**) or contact the venue on social media to complain (**15%**).

Eighteen to 35-year-olds under-index in saying they would never return to an establishment after a negative experience (**41%**).

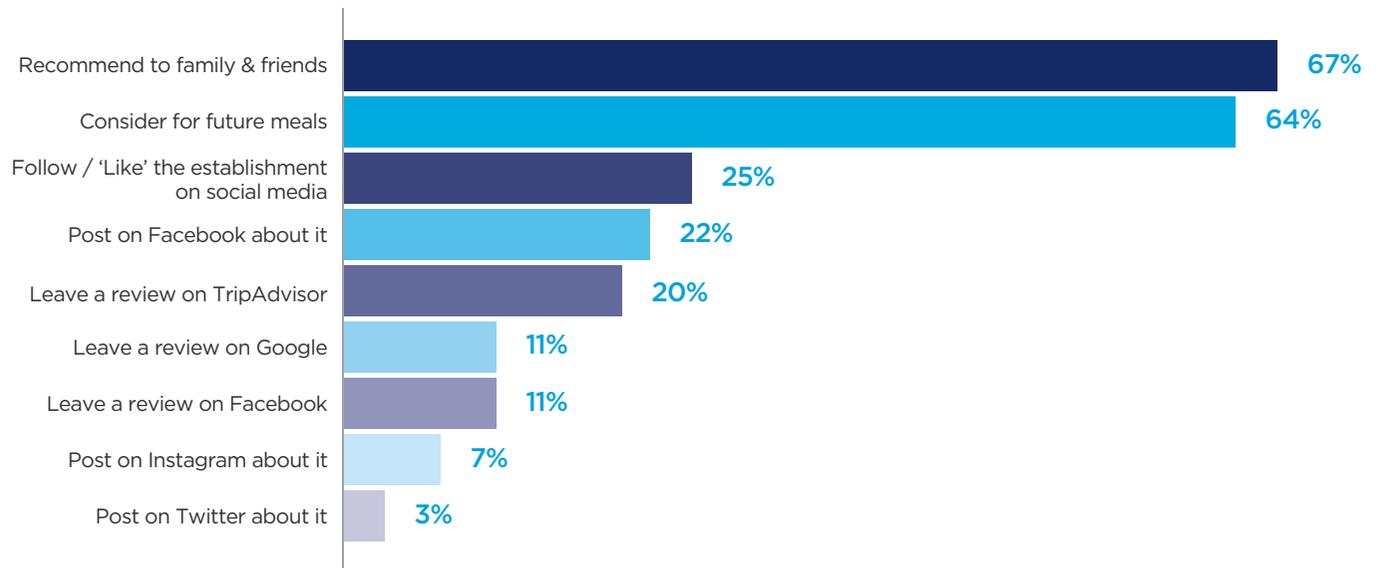
38%

of 25-34 year olds follow the establishment on social media

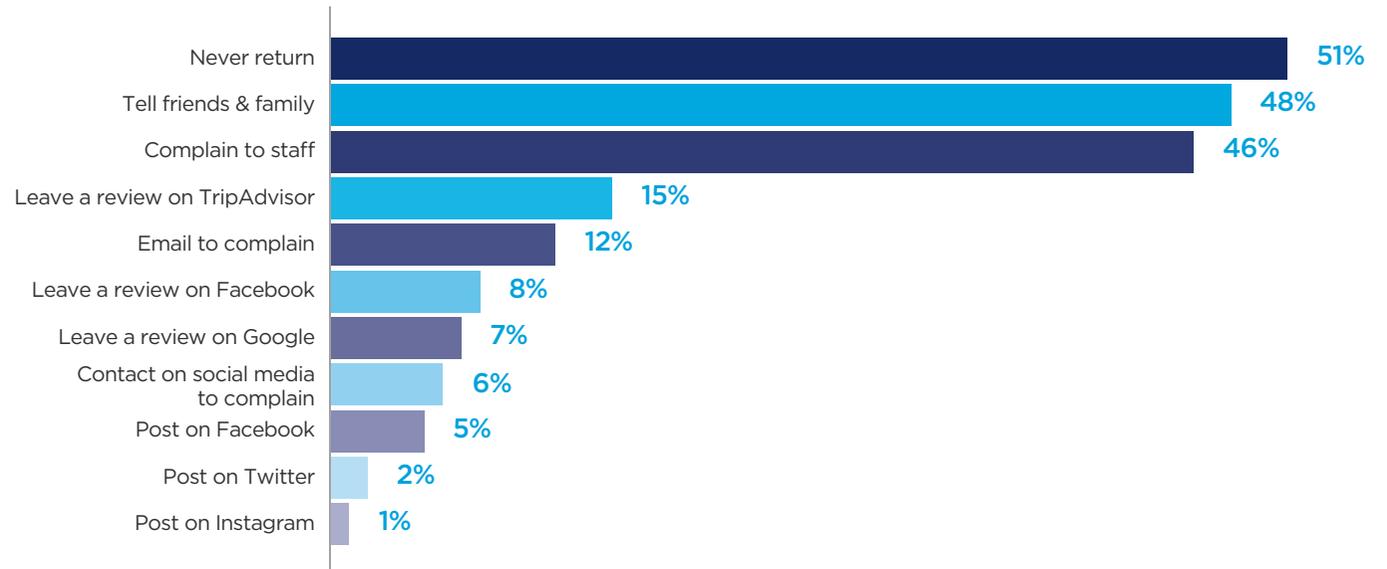
25%

of 35-44 year olds will leave a negative review on TripAdvisor

SHARING POSITIVE EXPERIENCES



SHARING NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES



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Word Of Mouth

It's easy to see why so many caterers are hung up on promoting themselves online, but the truth is, creating a quality dining experience is at the heart of customer attraction and retention.

Half of all diners say that their choice of where to eat was driven by a recommendation by a close friend or family member.

Friend or family recommendations are pivotal to encouraging consumers to try eating somewhere for the first time. These recommendations only come about from genuinely positive dining experiences - and it goes without saying that negative reviews from family and friends are extremely hard to come back from.

Seeing a friend or family member 'check in' on Facebook can count as a recommendation. Facebook check-ins are most popular amongst the **25-34 (29%)** and **35-44 (30%)** age groups, and **35-44s** are also most likely to post pictures of their experience on Facebook (**25%**).

1/2

of all diners say that their choice of where to eat was driven by a recommendation by a close friend or family member



When customers have a positive experience at a restaurant, they're more likely to passively respond through recommendations.

Learnings

Diners aren't looking for the kind of restaurants they'd like to eat at but are instead basing their decisions on the cuisine they'd prefer to tuck into. Online reviews, then, are key to helping them decide where they'll dine, with younger diners far more loyal to their favourite restaurant. Instagram is another place diners will check, further highlighting the importance of well-maintained social media channels.

It's vital your website is also fully optimised and easy to navigate, with consumers more likely to visit your site than anywhere else. Google and TripAdvisor come second and third, respectively, when it comes to where to check out an establishment online. That said, those in the **65+** group are more likely to place value for money above how tempting a restaurant looks online.

Restaurants have an opportunity to create a winning dining experience for their guests, with online reviews and recommendations important to future footfall. After all, when customers have a positive experience at a restaurant, they're more likely to passively respond through recommendations.

A negative experience, meanwhile, might mean the customer(s) doesn't return to the restaurant. On top of that, they may share their experience online, thereby turning prospective diners off, too.

Elsewhere, convenience is an important consideration for diners, as is a good word-of-mouth recommendation. A Facebook check-in can go some way to getting people through the door, which emphasises the importance of creating a good online presence for your venue.



**PART 5.
PULLING IT ALL
TOGETHER.**



In this, the final section of our report, we pull together all our learnings from our carefully curated research. Let's take a closer look...

Quality, Service and Value Are Key

When deciding where to eat, quality, service and value matter the most to diners, with a convenient location also coming near the top of the list.

Personal recommendations are still important when it comes to visiting a restaurant for the first time, but a venue's website is the main online channel consumers will check prior to going out for a meal.

The search for menu information is what often takes customers to a venue's website, with **15% of diners having reduced their meat intake** and therefore looking for the food choices which reflect this.

Healthy eating is also a key priority for many customers, giving restaurants and cafes an opportunity to tailor their offering with that in mind.

Dining Decisions: Summary By Age Group

Here are a few of the key takeaways from our research, ordered by age group to help you best target your customers:

18-24s

- The 18-24 age category is more likely to base their decisions on convenience and the accessibility of online menus.
- Food quality is less important, and they enjoy eating a wider variety of cuisines.
- Promotions are a key driver when it comes to trying new places to eat.

25-34s

- Eating out regularly, the 25-34 age bracket enjoys trying somewhere new.
- They're most likely to have eaten out in a fine dining restaurant.
- They're heavy Instagram users and will often Google nearby places.

35-44s

- This age group more commonly eats out with their partner and kids.
- They try hard to move towards eating a healthier diet, which can help influence eateries' menu offering.
- Visiting websites prior to a visit, an easy-to-navigate online presence is key.
- They're also keen Facebook users.
- They're likely to read and leave restaurant reviews.

45-54s

- Huge convenience-seekers, the 45-54 age group relies heavily on word of mouth recommendations.
- They're also over-index for visiting chain cafes.
- They're active Facebook users, but are less likely to share relevant posts or info.

55-64s

- With a penchant for traditional, British fayre, the 55-64 age bracket are also most likely to be actively reducing their meat intake.
- Convenience and recommendations help when opting to try somewhere new.
- This age group is active on Facebook, which means restaurants and cafes can use targeted ads and content to their advantage.

65+

- Lunch is a key dining occasion for the 65+ age group, of which most enjoy traditional British fayre.
- Convenience is a key driver in where to eat, while those in this group are also happy to try somewhere new.
- Low social media usage means eateries must consider targeting the 65+ category on the premise itself, by way of relevant coupons or promos.

A photograph of a woman with long brown hair, smiling warmly at a man whose back is to the camera. They are in a restaurant with tables set with white plates, glasses, and silverware. Other diners and staff are visible in the background.

Recommendations

Managers, chefs and staff can all do their bit to ensure a pleasant and welcoming experience for diners - and not just at the point they walk through the door.

Here are some tips, using the information gleaned from our survey:

Make your website simple to find and navigate; it's the shop window to the world, so consider everything from Search Engine Optimisation (SEO), to an easily accessed and downloadable menu.

Ensure your location is clear. Your customers want to know how to find you, so offer key information, such as bus routes or parking availability.

Market healthy options. By clearly marking healthy or meat-free alternatives on your menu, you could well be encouraging repeat visits. Consumers are also trying to reduce their meat intake, so think about offering traditional meals with a meat-free twist, which could appeal to older consumers.

Use promotions wisely. Encourage young people and families to visit your restaurant by offering timely deals and money-off coupons. Younger consumers (18-25s) are most likely to visit somewhere new if they have a promotion to recoup. Families, meanwhile, will be more inclined to make a repeat visit if they have a promotional offer. If you are targeting these audiences, promotional offers should be a key tactic to encourage footfall.



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