



DIGITAL SERVICES IN RESTAURANTS – DIGITAL WINE LIST

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Abstract:

In the era of the fifth industrial revolution and constant technological innovations, restaurants are placing a major emphasis on incorporating digital services into their business models. This paper highlights the importance of a digital wine list in the process of developing and maintaining a positive customer experience in restaurants. The key findings of narrative literature review indicate that, in situations where consumers lack prior experience, wish to try something new, or aim to find the perfect pairing with their food, and the sommelier has limited knowledge and experience, the digital wine list becomes an increasingly crucial factor in deciding which wine to order. Digital wine lists provide valuable and detailed information about wines such as their origin, brand and producer, grape varieties/vintage, flavor description (light, fruity, robust), and price. These lists are interactive, providing multiple filtering options based on the guests' interests. They can be easily updated in real-time with a few mouse clicks, and never appear damaged, old, or in poor condition. Furthermore, artificial intelligence algorithms enable the provision of highly personalized wine recommendations to clients, based on their preferences and hidden patterns in their behaviour.

Keywords:

digital business, digital menu, digital wine list, customer experience, decision-making.

INTRODUCTION

Digitalization has permeated every aspect of life and business. No industries or sectors are immune to the process of digital transformation. Any business that wishes to thrive in today's digital world must focus on the digital transformation of their operations (Jaganjac & Lukić Nikolić, 2023). Restaurants are not exempt from the adoption of digital technologies and innovative business practices (Yepes, 2014; Klein *et al.*, 2020; Yim & Yoo, 2020; Grewal *et al.*, 2022). On the contrary, restaurants are digitalizing various aspects of their business, including menus and wine lists, so as to maintain their attractiveness in the digital age and improve overall customer experience.

The menu and wine list are typically among the first elements that individuals notice upon entering a restaurant. Traditional menus possess various features that influence guests and their decisions. These attributes range from tangible aspects such as paper texture, color, font style, font size, to the content-based elements including

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photographs, shape and the strategic placement of items (Beldona *et al.*, 2014). However, regardless of the style and design employed, one of the inherent limitations of traditional menus is the restricted space for providing detailed information and descriptions for each item. In this regard, the advent of modern technological solutions and tools has acted as a catalyst, promoting and accelerating the wide-scale adoption of digital menus (Oronsky & Chatoth, 2006).

Digital menus provide an array of additional ways for guests to interact and engage with restaurants. The relentless advancements in digital technologies have opened up a wealth of opportunities for restaurants to improve their operations and, as a direct consequence, increase guest satisfaction (Beldona *et al.*, 2014). The financial health of restaurants is heavily contingent on wine sales (Hammond *et al.*, 2013). However, the decision-making process regarding which wine to purchase can be a challenging task for consumers (Olsen *et al.*, 2003). With traditional menus, consumers are deprived of the opportunity to view basic information about the wine and its unique characteristics. They are unable to see the wine bottle and label, along with other critical information. Consequently, consumers are left in a state of uncertainty regarding whether the wine will meet their expectations in terms of quality and food pairing compatibility (Hammond *et al.*, 2013).

The objective of this paper is to underscore the pivotal role and significance of digital wine lists in elevating the customer experience within restaurants, while also highlighting the essential content and design considerations inherent to these digital services.

The structure of the paper unfolds as follows: The initial section explores the realm of digital technologies within restaurants, emphasizing the critical need for the digitalization of restaurant services. The subsequent section delves into the key characteristics of digital menus in restaurant settings, followed by the third section, which revolves around digital wine lists and their associated attributes, greatly influencing the wine selection process. Finally, the fourth section focuses on the application of artificial intelligence to provide highly personalized wine recommendations.

THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES ON RESTAURANTS – DIGITAL SERVICES

Contemporary digital technologies are crucial strategic assets that provide a competitive edge in the hospitality and tourism industries (Kim *et al.*, 2008). The digitalization process has profoundly influenced the hospitality industry (Chen *et al.*, 2021) and has transformed service delivery at an accelerated pace (Parasuraman & Colby, 2015). Many people associate the term “digital” exclusively with marketing, using it to refer to digital marketing, electronic business, online shopping, customer experience, and so on. The actual definition of “digital” encompasses the entire business process, business models, organizational culture, and the transformation of how businesses function and operate (Stone, 2019). Customers connect the term “digital” with everything that occurs on the Internet (websites, social networks, online advertising), and everything that can be seen and done with smartphones, TVs, laptops, and sensor-enabled devices (smart refrigerators, smart washing machines). From an organizational standpoint, “digital” refers to any organization segment enabled by current digital technologies: inventories and fixed assets, suppliers, marketing, communication, human resources, sales, and procurement (Herbert, 2017). Digital technologies offer several benefits, including the introduction of new business models, increased efficiency, productivity, flexibility, diversity, automation of organizational procedures and activities, better and faster decisions, and improved frequency and quality of communication and cooperation (Foerster-Metz *et al.*, 2018).

In today’s highly competitive climate, every restaurant seeking to retain existing or attract prospective customers must set themselves apart from competitors. Restaurant owners are changing their previous business methods and adopting relevant technological tools to broaden the scope of their operations and stay ahead of the competition (Yim & Yoo, 2020). Customers can pay for their order online, reducing waiting time and providing numerous benefits such as improved user experience, cost savings, and smooth operation planning (Jiang & Stylos, 2021). Modern technology-driven concepts are all present in the restaurant industry today. According to Grewal *et al.* (2022), hospitality can flourish by utilizing digital technology, including online ordering, interactive social media, various tools for self-service, cloud kitchens, and restaurants. Restaurants are increasingly utilizing digital technologies for reservations, payment, queue management, and digital menus (Yepes, 2014). At the digital age, online ordering is becoming increasingly common at restaurants. Customers prefer online ordering since it is convenient and results in significant time savings; while simultaneously, offering online service provides a restaurant with a new source of revenue (Klein *et al.*, 2020).



There is a growing interest in leveraging digital technology to enhance the consumer's gastronomic and beverage journey (Spence, 2023). The following are the essential questions that must be addressed in the pursuit of creating an exceptional customer experience (Beckford, 2020):

- (1) Who are the clients? What are their distinctive characteristics and expectations?
- (2) What type of experience do they desire?
- (3) Which procedures should be employed?
- (4) What values and behaviors are pertinent?
- (5) How should an organization be managed, adapted, and evolved to meet these objectives?

To craft a favorable customer experience, a plethora of digital technologies are imperative (McKinsey & Company, 2022):

1. Automated mechanisms are essential to meet customer experience expectations.
2. Proactive personalization entails the utilization of customer information for tailoring products, services, and platforms.
3. Contextual interaction involves leveraging knowledge of the customer's position in their journey to deliver them to the next level of interactions.
4. Data-driven innovations benefit both the customer and the brand, encompassing data gathering and customer insights to identify additional services that would be appreciated.

Digital technologies and services hold immense significance in cultivating and nurturing the customer experience. Throughout the entire process of information-seeking, exploring alternative products and services, and engaging in shopping and consumption experiences, consumers traverse a multifaceted terrain encompassing cognitive, affective, emotional, social, and sensory dimensions (McColl-Kennedy *et al.*, 2019).

THE ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF DIGITAL MENU IN RESTAURANTS

Historically, a restaurant's menu has been an essential component of its marketing strategy (Pavesic, 2005; Yim & Yoo, 2020), but restaurants are progressively digitizing their menus through websites, smartphone applications, and other digital display devices. Digital menus have digital displays - computer screens, smartphone screens, and touchscreens - that allow customers to search for food and get detailed descriptions with interactive images (Yim & Yoo, 2020). Digital menus are also known in literature as electronic menus and e-menus (Şahin, 2020). According to Beldona *et al.* (2014) research, respondents who used e-tablet menus appreciated the following factors: (1) order information quality, (2) menu usability, (3) ordering experience satisfaction, (4) novelty, and (5) relative satisfaction. Respondents were particularly pleased with the visualization of their orders, information regarding ingredients and order preparation, the easy retrieval of well-arranged information, and the ability to customize the font size and level of contrast. Overall, respondents reported feeling more confident about their orders and expressed higher satisfaction levels. Various search possibilities for food and drinks through an interactive display, based on various criteria, assist customers in making better choices. Customers can input different search criteria depending on their priorities, sorting food by type (vegetarian or vegan), allergens, price, calories, ingredients, and other factors. Research has shown that all these options lead to increased cross-selling opportunities (Kasavana, 2011).

Beldona, Buchanan, and Miller (2014) conducted a study in which they compared traditional paper menus to digital menus based on a number of criteria, including quality of descriptions, ease of menu access, guest satisfaction, and overall guest experience. According to their research, digital menus are preferred over traditional menus, as they may include more detailed explanations and thus increase their value in the restaurant's sales activity.

According to Yim and Yoo (2020), restaurants should offer both digital and traditional menus. The authors conducted two separate studies on guest reactions to interactive media in restaurants - digital menus. They started with a conceptual model, examining customer reactions to the digital menu published online.



The findings reveal that the way the customer interacts with the digital menu has a significant impact on perceived interaction, influencing the customer's perception and enjoyment of food. The second study built on the first by conducting an experiment in a laboratory comparing the need for digital versus traditional menus based on how customers order food. The respondents were divided into two groups: those who had already tried the food and those who had not. Generally, the results showed that the digital menu generated better satisfaction responses and increased the guest's intention to place more orders in a shorter period of time. This was preferred when respondents had limited prior familiarity with the foods being considered. Based on the obtained results, the authors could not confirm the superiority of digital menus. In fact, when used to expose customers to well-known dishes or food they had a lot of prior familiarity with, digital menus were viewed as being on par with or even better than traditional print menus (Yim & Yoo, 2020).

THE ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF DIGITAL WINE LISTS IN RESTAURANTS

Restaurants rely significantly on their personnel to verbally offer food and beverage to customers due to the limitations of space on traditional, paper menus (Zulkifly *et al.*, 2016). Regular modifications to traditional paper menus demand a lot of time and money, which makes them rigid and prevents restaurants from quickly updating their offers (Lessel *et al.*, 2012). On the other hand, research has shown that higher interactivity in the digital menu results in a favorable consumer experience and satisfaction. Interactive options in digital menus, such as image rotations, image enlargements, 3D views and virtual reality, have the potential to improve communication effectiveness and decision making (Yim & Yoo, 2020).

A digital wine list is a unique tool that can influence customers' wine selections (Labus & Lukić Nikolić, 2023). Digital wine lists should include enough information to allow buyers to decide whether or not to order particular wine. They are the primary written source of wine information (Hammond *et al.*, 2013). The goal of an optimal digital wine list is to increase customer satisfaction while also positively impacting a restaurant's overall image and status (Ruiz-Molina *et al.*, 2010).

Table 1. WinePad – Digital Wine List and Digital Sommelier.

WinePad was created in response to technological advancements and the scarcity of well-trained salespeople and sommeliers. WinePad has progressed from version 1.0 to version 3.0 over the years.

As of 2021, the WinePad team is supporting 500 customers from Austria, Italy, Switzerland, and Germany in the hotel, gastronomy, beverage trade, and wine business. The fundamental concept of WinePad is that a guest can access a restaurant's wine list by scanning a QR code or taking a photo of a label, purchase wine digitally, and order bottles for home delivery straight from the winegrower.

Source: <https://www.winepad.eu/about>

Companies must pay attention to verbal features in order to successfully develop their online presence. They include written words, linguistic style, the number of bulleted features, and information about return policies. In addition to verbal aspects, visual elements play an important part in the online environment, and this includes all content given in images or illustrations that has a symbolic significance for clients (Bleier *et al.*, 2019). Some of the most important and useful facts in wine lists are as follows (Staub & Siegrist, 2021; Ruiz-Molina *et al.*, 2010; Yang & Lynn, 2009):

- The wine's origin;
- The brand and producer;
- The grape varieties/vintage;
- A description of the flavor (light, fruity, robust);
- The price of the wine.



Apart from the wine's name, color, quantity, price, origin, vineyard, and year of production, the wine list may also include the following information: alcohol content, acidity, tannin content, flavor characteristics, and the overall level of quality (Barth, 2011). The process of creating a digital wine list can be challenging and requires a methodical and systematic approach. Here are some recommendations to consider while creating a digital wine list (Uncorkd, n.d.):

1. Choose a clear and understandable template for the wine list.
2. Categorize the wine list from easy to complex, familiar to unique. In this manner, guests are simply able to identify what they are searching for.
3. Arrange the wines alphabetically, by region, and by flavor. Wines should not be listed by price.
4. Introduce several types of wines in the menu, such as dessert, fortified, and so on.
5. Provide specific details of the wine (including the wine's name, grape variety, region, vintage date, and producer).
6. Include food pairings to highlight which foods and wines go well together.
7. Provide a variety of serving sizes (glasses, bottles).
8. Motivate guests to purchase bottles rather than glasses (multiply the price of a glass by four and deduct one dollar for the cost of the bottle).
9. Include an additional menu section to motivate guests to spend more money and feel more special about their choice.
10. Make the wine list available online so that guests can have access to it before visiting the restaurant.

When created properly, digital wine lists offer significant advantages to both restaurants and guests. The primary advantages of a digital wine list are as follows (<https://alfredtechnologies.com/solution/intelligent-wine-list>):

- Improving the consumer experience with simple search choices based on consumer preferences and varied filters (by region, country, price, vintage, flavor, etc.).
- Simplifying the task of service personnel by displaying the precise location of each bottle.
- Assisting those personnel with no prior or limited experience.
- Providing real-time updates on the quantity of each product.
- Avoiding product losses and enhancing earnings - higher profits through efficient rotation of high-turnover and specialty wines in inventory.

Digital wine lists allow for real-time modifications of offerings. They are easy to change with a few mouse clicks, and they never appear damaged, old, or in poor condition as a result of long-term use or lack of care. In contrast, making changes to traditional, paper-based wine lists can be time-consuming and expensive, with added environmental consequences (needed paper and ink).

THE IMPACT OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN THE WINE SELECTION PROCESS

Contemporary consumers seek positive experiences from the products they consume, with a growing demand for personalized offerings that align seamlessly with their needs and desires. This evolving consumer landscape has prompted restaurants to prioritize delivering an exceptional wine selection experience through the utilization of artificial intelligence (AI) systems.

AI, broadly defined as the application of theories, methods, and technologies to enhance and extend human intelligence (Jiang *et al.*, 2022), encompasses modern technologies such as robots, autonomous vehicles, facial recognition, natural language processing and virtual agents, as well as various applications across industries (Berente *et al.*, 2021).



AI has also made significant inroads into the realm of wine selection decision-making. Employing machine learning, AI can effectively discern the preferences and tastes of customers, subsequently providing wine recommendations that align closely with their individual preferences and budget. Furthermore, natural language processing enables the analysis of expert reviews, consumer comments, and wine producer descriptions. By applying modern techniques, AI can even scrutinize wine bottle labels, bottle design and geographical origins, providing consumers with comprehensive data that is pertinent to their decision-making process. These data are notably precise and dependable, thereby reducing the likelihood of making an ill-suited choice and disappointment, while increasing the likelihood that the chosen wine will fully meet consumer expectations (Senevirathne, 2023).

In the context of the digitization wave sweeping through modern restaurants, AI systems have found widespread adoption, with AI algorithms being hailed as the “Sommeliers” of the digital age, possessing extraordinary capabilities (Ndlovu, 2023). AI algorithms surpass reliance on historical customer orders, uncovering hidden patterns in customer tastes and preferences. This leads to highly personalized wine recommendations (Ndlovu, 2023).

Indeed, digital Sommeliers with impressive features and capabilities are already available in the market. One such example is “sommelier.bot,” which provides swift, highly personalized wine recommendations, checks wine availability, facilitates food pairing, and incorporates ChatGPT functionality (<https://sommelier.bot/>).

It is undeniable that the future holds promise for innovative applications of artificial intelligence in personalizing products and services, thereby enhancing the overall user experience.

CONCLUSION

The objective of this paper was to underscore the pivotal role and significance of digital wine lists in elevating the customer experience within restaurants, while also describing the essential content and design considerations inherent to these digital services. The findings derived from a narrative literature review illuminated the critical role of the wine list, particularly in guiding wine selection decisions when customers lack prior experience, seek novelty, aspire to achieve ideal food pairings, or when the sommelier’s expertise is limited. Due to these factors, a digital wine list is becoming increasingly important for restaurants, as well as for consumers and their overall experience.

Research results have unequivocally demonstrated that digital wine lists play a pivotal role in enhancing the overall customer experience and facilitating informed wine selection decisions. Digital wine lists can comprehensively present information such as the wine’s origin, brand and producer, grape varieties/vintage, a flavor description (light, fruity, robust), and the price. Moreover, these lists are interactive, providing a variety of filtering options based on guests’ interests (search wines by region, country, price, vintage, flavor, and more). With the continuous evolution of digital technologies and tools, it is anticipated that more restaurants will embrace digital menus and wine lists in the future. Younger generations, born and raised with smart technologies, will gravitate towards digitally oriented restaurants. Moreover, the integration of artificial intelligence solutions empowers the creation of digital or virtual sommeliers, providing highly personalized wine recommendations tailored to individual preferences and hidden patterns. With the ongoing process of technological advancements, the overall customer satisfaction and experience in restaurants are expected to witness significant enhancements.



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