# eWOM: THE EFFECT OF ONLINE REVIEW AND FOOD QUALITY ON THE INTENTION TO VISIT A RESTAURANT

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ABSTRACT

*The rapid development of the food establishment industry witnessed the online reviews for restaurants becoming a significant tools for restaurant owners to increase their sales, image and customers. Thus, this research is conducted to measure the effect of online reviews on intention to visit restaurants. The study was conducted by distributing a self administered questionnaire involving 156 respondents and analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20. All variables measured was significantly influence the consumer's intention to visit restaurants, especially in terms of positive online reviews (eWOM), negative online reviews (eWOM) and online food quality reviews. Moreover, the results showed a positive relationship between positive online reviews, negative online reviews and food towards consumer intention to visit restaurant. The result also demonstrated that food quality online reviews was least effected on consumer intention to visit restaurant with lowest correlation value. The study confirmed that the online reviews became crutial in improving the quality of sales, image, food and also service of the restaurant.*

**Keywords:**eWOM, online review, casual restaurant, service, quality

## INTRODUCTION

The increases statistic of Consumer Price Index (CPI) on food taken away from home reported by Department of Statistic Malaysia 2015 reflecting the changes in Malaysian lifestyle. As the amount of restaurants increases, there are many choices for individuals to choose a dining restaurant. Restaurants possess wide characteristics in appearance and products, including a huge variety of cuisine and service models ranging from inexpensive fast-food restaurants and cafes to mid-priced family restaurants to luxury restaurants at high prices. The selection of a full-service restaurant involves a broad range of restaurants (such as casual, family, fine dining, or upscale restaurants). Spears and Gregoire (2006) stated that full-service restaurants provide consumers with dining table service and differs significantly in terms of style and atmosphere from casual. As this definition suggests, full-service restaurants not only provide their consumers with food, but also full service experiences (Yüksel&Yüksel, 2003), and these consumers not only review the food (a functional result of the service) but every aspect of service experience (Ladhari, 2008).

Furthermore, with Malaysian multicultural and multiracial, restaurants can therefore constantly create new menus or offer more food variety to attract diners, and more option will be available to customers (Shu Yee, 2016).

Generally, Malaysia has 24 million active Internet users, cover to 68% of the population. Kaplan and Haenlein (2009) referred social media and the use of social networking sites as Internet applications that help consumers share views, insights, experiences and views. Social media included a broad scale of online, word-of-mouth forums together with blogs, company sponsored discussion boards and chat rooms, consumer-to-consumer e-mail, consumer product or service ratings websites and forums, internet discussion boards and forums, and social networking websites, to name a few. Through social media, people like to network with people who have the same interests and needs as theirs (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Hence, in this 21st millennium demonstrate the important impact of social media on consumer behaviour, affecting brand consciousness, buying behaviour, views and product assessment (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). In addition, the Internet based social media has been used tremendously by organizations to comprehend consumers and stay connecting with them instantly rather than by using the conventional mass media such as radio or television (Tran, 2015).

In the restaurant selection process, online consumer reviews are also a type of eWOM (e-Word-of-Mouth), which has allowed customers to acquire comprehensive data with confidence and legitimacy. Positive or Negative Online review through Instagram, blogs and other social sharing platforms allow everyone to be a "foodie" and are often use as a source of information by restaurant consumers when they are not familiar with a restaurant and may include both exceptional and poor consumer experiences (Parikh, Behnke, Almanza, Nelson, &Vorvoreanu, 2017). The number of online reviews (quantity of reviews) of a product can be considered to represent the popularity of the product, since it is reasonable to assume that the number of reviews relates to the number of consumers who purchased the product (Alba, Joseph, John Lynch, Barton Weitz, Chris Janiszewski, Richard Lutz, Alan Sawyer, 1997; Chen & Xie, 2008). Through online reviews, data such as customer feedback, consumer rating on restaurants can be access by potential customer as reference (Gunden, 2017) on choosing restaurant to dine in. The consumer-generated ratings represent the quality of food, the environment and service provided at particular restaurants (Zhang, Ye, Law, & Li, 2010).

Findings from previous research indicate that online reviews can have a significant and positive impact on the popularity and sales of some products (Zhang, Ye, Law, & Li, 2010). However, regardless of reported studies on the effect of online review towards sales and popularity, the direct relationship and the impact of online review either positive or negative on the intention to visit the restaurant is remain less focus and need to be investigate further. Hence, this study was conducted with purpose to measure the effect of online reviews on intention to visit restaurants. This study will focusing on how positive and negative online reviews and food quality may effect on restaurants' sales, image and consumers' expectation and enhance the intention to visit the restaurant.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Restaurant online reviews

The World Wide Web-based WOM (eWOM or electronic word-of-mouth) commonly accessible with the new technology advance. Online consumer review is a new type of word-of-mouth electronics. Numbers of previous studies has reported that the online reviews have influenced consumer

buying behaviour in the restaurant industry (Dipietro, Crews, & Gustafson, n.d.; Yan, Wang, & Chau, 2015). By reading reviews of restaurants, consumers can learn more about the overall dining experiences of previous consumers, such as food quality and service (Titz, Lanza-Abbott, & Cordúa y Cruz, 2004) that assisted consumers to make preliminary decisions. Taylor and Aday (2016) concluded that consumers pay more attention on positive reviews rather than the negative reviews of the restaurants. Moreover, Jeong & Shawn (2011) state that positive online reviews improves the total amount of customers and has an important effect on enhancing the reputation of a restaurant.

***Positive Online Reviews***

Positive online reviews were acknowledged as a useful vehicle for product and service promotion. Since positive online reviews were useful for product and service promotion (Cheung, Lee, &Thadani, 2009), it also have a favorable effect on the image of the restaurant and on customer buying intentions (Jeong& Shawn, 2011). A latest purchase decision is more probable to be encouraged. Different studies on the impacts of positive online reviews on sales and marketing have been studied, they appear to agree that positive online reviews can boost sales volumes (Ye, Law &Gu, 2009) and that eWOM impacts consumer decision-making (Robins & Holmes, 2008). Hence By referring aforementioned literature, the following hypotheses are proposed:

*H1 Positive Online Reviews significantly influence the intention to visit restaurant*

***Negative Online Reviews***

Customers who are not satisfied can go online and leave their thoughts on websites or online communities for review. Studies indicate that negative online reviews impacts are likely to be even greater than positive online reviews impacts (Park & Lee, 2009). Wetzer et al. (2007) stated that negative thoughts are linked to negative objectives (e.g. warning and vengeance) and that those objectives may impact the content of communication that is spread to others. Negative online reviews of the restaurant may effect on the image and will decrease the intention for customers to visit the restaurant. However, previous study also reported that the truth of negative review can motivate restaurant executives to create management of customer assessment (Zhang et al., 2010) and can also point to fields that need enhancement for restaurateurs. By referring to aforementioned literature, the following hypotheses are proposed:

*H2 Negative Online Reviews significantly influence the intention to visit restaurant*

***Food Quality Online Reviews***

Food quality is generally regarded as the most essential component of the overall restaurant experience and regarded a very significant aspect of the quality of the restaurant's dining experience (Ha & Jang, 2010). Food is the restaurant's key product, so food quality is an absolute necessity to meet restaurant consumers ' needs and expectations. Food quality is becoming a key factor affecting the consumer (Shaharudin et al., 2011). Moreover, based on consumer reviews, food quality is the highest qualifier element of the restaurant (Kivela, 1999). Other researchers has reported that great food experiences encouraged consumers to spread positive reviews to help the restaurant, as higher quality of food stimulates the altruism of restaurant consumers towards the restaurant business (Jeong& Shawn, 2011). The selection of

consumer decisions is extremely correlated with the quality of food (Jung, Sydnor, Lee, & Almanza, 2015). Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

*H3 Food quality online reviews significantly influence the intention to visit restaurant*

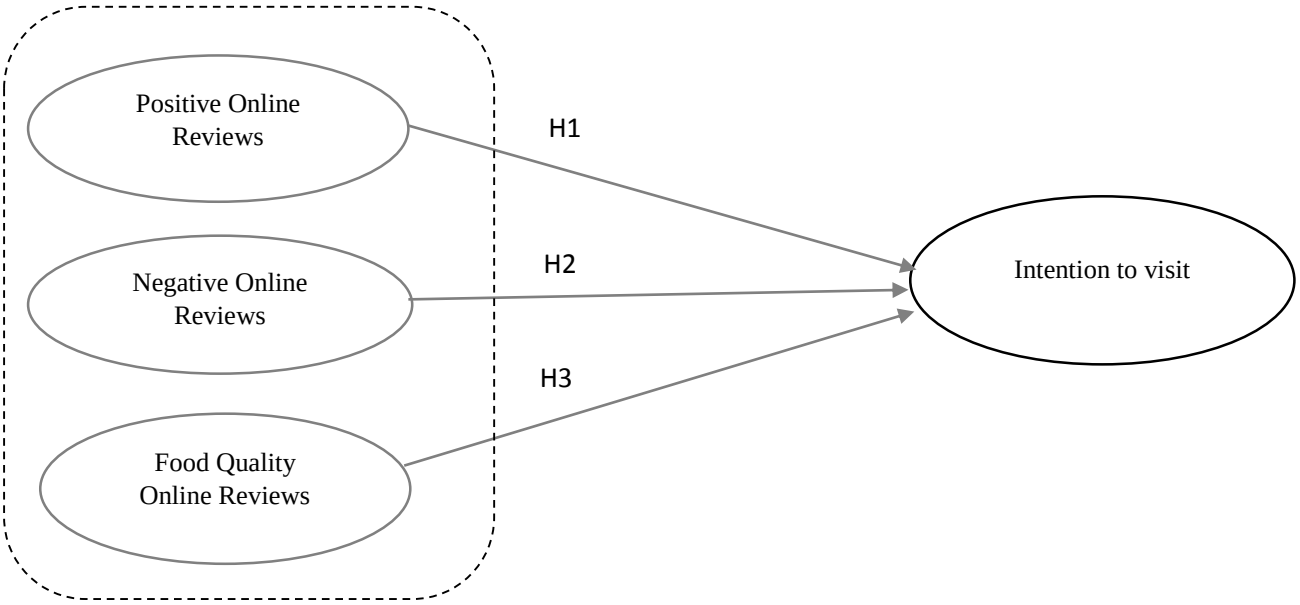


Figure 1: Research Framework

## METHODOLOGY

A quantitative approach of study was used in collecting and analyzing data. This study used convenience sampling to select and recruit respondents. The sample size was determined using G-Power resulted of 119 respondent; however 156 respondents were responded to the survey. The self-administered questionnaire was designed and distributed through online Google Forms with measurement scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The questionnaire consisted of six parts: Part A, Restaurant Preferences (Gunden, 2017; 8 items); Part B, Restaurant Positive online reviews (Wei et al., 2014; 3 items); Part C, Restaurant Negative online reviews (Wei et. al., 2014; 3 items); Part D, Customers Future Visit Intension (Zhao et al., 2015; 3 items); Part E, Food Quality (Wu, 2015; 6 items) and Part E, Demographic. Before collecting the data, a pre-test assessed content adequacy using two academic expertises and were reworded based on feedback received. A pilot test was conducted on 40 respondents from diploma and degree students in UiTM Cawangan P.Pinang to test on reliability of the questionnaire. All the data was analysed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) Version 20.0.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### *Reliability Test and Normality*

Table 1. Cronbach's Alpha

| Variables | Cronbach's Alpha | No. Of items |
|---|---|---|
| Positive Online | 0.983 | 3 |
| Negative Online Reviews | 0.977 | 3 |
| Food Quality Online Reviews | 0.792 | 6 |
| Consumer Intention to Visit Restaurant | 0.881 | 2 |

The estimation of internal consistency for reliability was measured using cronbach's alpha. Result showed that all measured variables exceed 0.7 (Table 1), which range from a very good to excellent results thus validated the questions.

While for normality test, the central limit theorem is used in this study as mean and variance that only need to be considered. This theorem states that if data is independently drawn from any distribution and the sample size is large enough, the sample mean always appears to be normally distributed. Thus, all data is treated as identical and independently distributed.

### *Respondents Profile*

### *Gender*

The females were a majority consumer that relied on online review prior to visit the restaurant as shown in figure 1 below.

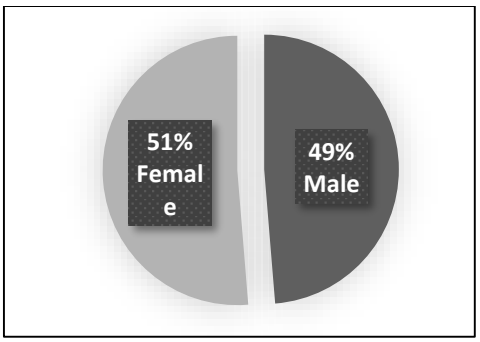


Figure 2: Respondents Profile- Gender

***Age***

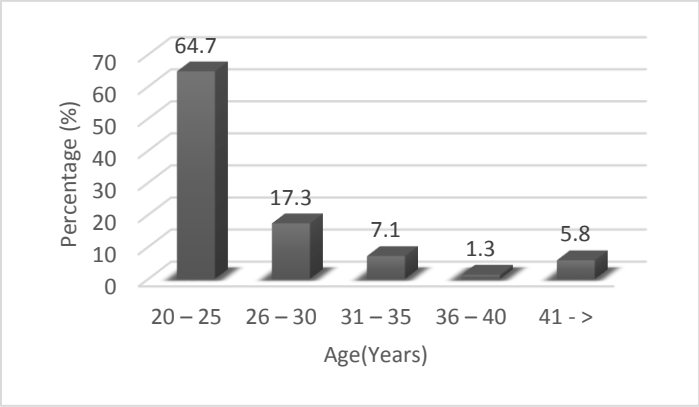


Figure 3: Respondents Profile- Age

Millenial age group (20-25 years) was found dominated and mainly relied on online review (64.7%) prior to their visit to restaurant.Meanwhile, Gen X and Baby Boomer age group were found least dependent on online review prior to their visit to restaurant.Thus,concluded that,people between the ages of 20 to 25 are more interested and aware of online reviews of the restaurants as they been exposed and depended towards the current technology.

Table 2. Pearson Correlation

| | | **POSITIVE eWOM** | **NEGATIVE eWOM** | **FOOD QUALITY** | **INTENTION TO VISIT** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| POSITIVE eWOM | Correlation Coefficient | 1.000 | .571** | .268** | .698** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | . | .000 | .001 | .000 |
| | N | 156 | 156 | 156 | 156 |
| NEGATIVE eWOM | Correlation Coefficient | .571** | 1.000 | .348** | .656** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | . | .000 | .000 |
| | N | 156 | 156 | 156 | 156 |
| FOOD QUALITY | Correlation Coefficient | .268** | .348** | 1.000 | .393** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .001 | .000 | . | .000 |
| | N | 156 | 156 | 156 | 156 |
| INTENTION TO VISIT | Correlation Coefficient | .698** | .656** | .393** | 1.000 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | .000 | .000 | . |
| | N | 156 | 156 | 156 | 156 |

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 revealed that, there is a strong relationship between positive online reviews and the intention to visit restaurant, where the correlation is r = 0.698. The result also shown that there is still strong correlation between negative online reviews and the intention to visit restaurant, which stated the correlation is r = 0.656. Meanwhile, the correlation of the food quality online reviews shows a poor relationship with the intention to visit restaurant, where their correlations are r = 0.393. However, Table 3 indicates that positive online reviews, negative online reviews and food quality online reviews significantly influenced the intention to visit restaurant ($p<0.05$).

Table 3. Summary of Significant Results

| Hypothesis | **Result** | **Achieved** |
|---|---|---|
| *H1: Positive Online Reviews significantly influence the intention to visit restaurant* | p = 0.000 (p < 0.05) | Yes |
| *H2: Negative Online Reviews significantly influence the intention to visit restaurant* | p = 0.000 (p < 0.05) | Yes |
| *H3: Food Quality Online Reviews significantly influence the intention to visit restaurant* | p = 0.000 (p < 0.05) | Yes |

The strong relationship between positive online reviews and intention to visit restaurant reported in this study was aligned with previous study reported by Jeong and Jang (2011), stated that positive reviews have a positive effect on the image of the restaurant and this will increase consumer intention to visit the restaurant. This was also agreed by Dichter (1966), who stated that positive online reviews boosted the buying intentions of consumers for new products because it decreases the risks involved in purchasing. In addition, positive online review's distinctive features can leverage its ability to influence consumer's decision making process. Understanding what motivates consumers to spread positive online reviews can increase the ability of managers to restructure their restaurants to be more customer-oriented and increasing customer visits.

In this study demonstrated that negative online reviews have strong correlation and significantly influenced consumer's intention to visit. Although it was reported elsewhere that negative online reviews may tarnish the image of the restaurant and decrease the consumer's intention to visit the restaurant, Zhang et al., (2010) conversely stated that the truth of negative review can motivate restaurant executives to create management of customer assessment and identified point that seeking for improvement. It is therefore helpful for companies to be

conscious of the significance of negative effect and the variables linked to the negative online reviews intention of customers (Boo & Kim, 2013).

In this study, even though food quality reviews have poor correlation with consumer intention to visit, the result also reported it was significantly influenced the intention to visit the restaurant. This probably due to restaurant managers are more rely on positive online reviews in order to improve business therefore guarantee they would be enhancing or maintaining quality of food (Jeong& Shawn, 2011). Similarity, food quality is considered by consumers to be the most important characteristic (Gregory & Kim, 2004) apart from food presentation and food variation (Namkung& Jang, 2008). Previously, Ryu and Han (2010) and Jeong and Jang (2011) have recently revealed that food quality has been the biggest contributor to the picture of the restaurant, which in turn impacts perceived value, consumers satisfaction and behaviour. Gupta et al. (2007) report that the most significant attribute is food quality, followed by cost, greeting and service. According to Jang (2007), a favorable connection between food quality and happiness and behavioral intentions has been discovered and it has been reported that food quality is the most significant factor influencing the dining experience of the customer at a restaurant.

## CONCLUSION

Overall, this study demostrated three (3) factors that significantly influenced the consumer intention to visit the restaurant based on online reviews, which were the positive online reviews, negative online reviews, and food quality online reviews. The results reported from this study can be as reference for the restaurant managers on the importance of online and food quality review in order to boost customer intention to visit. Restaurant managers must understand what motivates consumers to spread positive online. This can be done through negative online reviews in order to improve. Negative online review can increase the ability of managers to restructure their restaurants to be more customer-oriented and increasing customer visits. Therefore, regardless of positive or negative online reviews, both are very important for the restaurants without excluding food quality, that may gave an impact on the restaurants. Moreover, it helps restaurant's owners to improve their restaurant's sales, image and customers. By referring to the encouraging response on the social media usage, it was clear that online reviews are significant factors that affect consumer restaurant selection hence intention to visit.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors would like to thank Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Pulau Pinang for the funding.

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