

USING INTERNET REVIEW SITES TO CREATE RESTAURANT BRANDS

by
Shrideep Tamhankar



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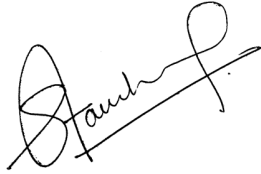
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Shrideep Tamhankar

Presented as part of the requirement for the award of Master of Arts Degree in
Sustainable Leisure Management within the Department of Recreation and Tourism
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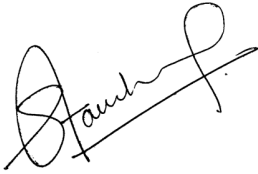
DECLARATIONS

This thesis is a product of my own work and is not the result of anything done in collaboration.

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THESIS EXAMINATION COMMITTEE SIGNATURE PAGE

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Department of Recreation & Tourism Management for acceptance, the thesis titled “*The Role of Internet Review Sites in Restaurant Branding*” submitted by *Shrideep Tamhankar* in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Sustainable Leisure Management.



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ABSTRACT

This study focused on analyzing the role of internet review sites in the process of restaurant branding. A brand is regarded as a set of mental associations amongst the consumers, which help businesses create a unique identity in the market. As such, consumers define the pathway for success or failure of any restaurant organization. The ever-increasing use of internet enables restaurant review sites to act as a vital source of information enabling the consumers to develop mental associations. Review sites are thus regarded as an influential platform for brand promotion and economic success. However, the role of review sites in creating a brand is not clear. Hence, this research study focused on how restaurant operators can use this avenue to create a brand.

This exploratory study adopted a quantitative approach, using face-to-face survey research method to analyze data. The study was conducted in Nanaimo, Vancouver Island. The research findings helped to establish that the brand name of the restaurant was of high importance to the customers and that, customer satisfaction, quality and uniqueness were regarded as the top three factors responsible to create a brand. It was found that the respondents would majorly trust and get highly influenced by the customer reviews posted on review sites. The study also highlighted that the customers required only less than seven reviews to establish strong mental associations about any dining location.

The findings of this research study were congruent with the key perspectives of branding which include: customer's perceptions and the company's financial returns. This study will be significant to the restaurant operators who wish to capitalize on the '*free*' avenue; which is, the internet review sites, to create a restaurant brand. Established brands tend to initiate customer loyalty and retention thereby contributing to the economic sustainability of the restaurant industry.

Keywords: Restaurant branding, Internet review sites, Consumer's role, Sustainable development.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Using Internet Review Sites to Create Restaurant Brands

Branding plays a vital role in ensuring that businesses in different sectors of the economy remain competitive. Establishing a strong brand assists in providing potential customers with cues about a given business entity. It also enables repetitive returns, especially on the part of customers because they feel secure when dealing with a recognizable brand. Since the businesses operate within a significantly competitive arena, even established business organizations cannot get away with being unresponsive to this concept.

For instance, the competition in the restaurant industry is extraordinarily high and requires strategic approach such as branding to improve customer base (Rowley, 2004). Conversely, when restaurants are not branded, realizing success in an already saturated marketplace is a challenging process. On this note, branding could be critical in ensuring that each restaurant in the marketplace presents itself differently compared to the competition.

Traditional branding often focused on the promotion of businesses using advertisement on print, radio, and electronic media such as the television. The costs associated with traditional branding are more expensive and can negatively impact the profits (Hwang & Hyun, 2012). In this regard, restaurant owners identified the need to consider other avenues for branding that seems worthwhile for their businesses in terms of attracting more customers.

To overcome this challenge, restaurant operators are making continuous efforts to ensure that the avenues used to improve their brand are cost effective (Tsai, Dev & Chintagunta, 2015). A new area that is currently being explored by restaurant entities involves the use of online review sites (Trueman, Cornelius & Wallace, 2012). With the advancement of technology,

increasing numbers of consumers are relying on internet review sites to purchase products and services. Prior to buying a product or service, information gathering is critical to help potential customers to make informed decisions (Ha, 2004). In the restaurant industry, one of the major drawbacks is that information regarding various products and services that are offered, especially in the independent restaurants, appears to be limited. Potential customers tend to experience challenges in terms of obtaining the right information regarding the services provided (Wu & Tseng, 2015). Internet review sites assist in overcoming this challenge, as the consumers express their thoughts, decisions, and the experiences they had about any dining location.

Consequently, as a way of saving the costs associated with the traditional promotion of products and services, restaurants have begun to exploit the benefits associated with the growing population of online consumers, who rely on review sites to make conscious decisions. The online review sites are important in information sharing regarding different products and services. In the digital era, information regarding a specific product or service is likely to spread rapidly through social media platforms (Goldsmith, Pangani & Lu, 2013). As such, the internet possibly acts as the best avenue for several restaurant owners to promote their brands and establish themselves in a competitive marketplace in a cost-effective manner (Chunhua, Hai, Chan & Xianghua, 2015).

Chunhua et al. (2015) note that the major economic value associated with online reviews in restaurant branding includes a positive bottom-line. The restaurant industry offers different services to customers of different age groups and the use of online review sites provides businesses in the sector with a more convenient platform to promote their products and services (Belkhamza, 2013). When restaurants rely on online reviews, they are in a better position to understand the changing trend in consumer behavior. Consumer behavior in different market

segments tend to change with time and it is important for businesses to be aware of such changes to avoid making losses by continuing to provide products and services that are out of date (Paley, 2003). Tracking these changes becomes an easy task as increasing numbers of customers write about their experiences in general. By using online review sites to promote a product or a service, the operatives in the restaurant industry have been also able to gauge the prices that resonate with customers in the marketplace by comparing it with parallel competitors. Review sites not only act as a self-sufficient marketing tool, but also serve the operators in understanding business dynamics and assists in cost management. The use of review sites by restaurant owners ensures them that they can come up with competitive prices that potential customers can afford (Pharr, 2011).

While there are, economic benefits involved in the use of internet review sites which impacts restaurant branding that include, for instance, positive bottom line, concerns are also emerging regarding the reliability of various review sites used in restaurant branding (Kim & Lennon, 2013). In a competitive marketplace, business operatives can use such a platform to damage the reputation of their rivals. Customers can also post biased reviews that do not reflect the quality of services offered by a particular restaurant for their own selfish gains.

The reputation of a business entity in the public arena is influenced largely by the views of other people. A business can be efficient in its delivery of services, but how the public views it can have either positive or negative impact on their bottom line (Shen, Hu & Rees, 2015). The restaurant industry is dictated by the quality of services being offered; and when customers visit the review sites, their main purpose is to check for restaurants with the highest ratings in terms of the services or products they need. However, the authenticity of such reviews in measuring

actual quality is still abstract due to lack of a control mechanism to determine their genuineness (Nassar, 2012).

Purpose

The purposes of this study was to analyze the role of internet review sites in restaurant branding.

Research Questions

The following research questions were used in this study:

1. How do the consumers perceive branding in the restaurant industry?
2. What factors, as perceived by the consumers, create a brand in the restaurant industry?
3. How do the consumers perceive restaurant review sites?
4. How effective are the internet review sites in the restaurant industry?
5. What are the attitudes of restaurant industry consumers about the application of internet review sites?

All the above research questions were answered by providing a descriptive analysis of the responses as per four different age groups: 18-30, 31-45, 46-65 and 65+ years. The differentiation was done only to present the findings in a segregated manner as per the different age groups. As noted by Chunhua et. al (2015), restaurants offer products and services to different age groups and hence, segregated results can assist the operators to better understand their target clientele. However, comparing the significant differences between two different age groups was beyond the scope of this study.

Research Significance

Structural changes in most industries have promoted the adoption of innovative approaches by businesses with the aim of attracting a wider market share. Restaurants, like most businesses, rely on successful marketing strategies such as the word of mouth marketing adopted by their consumers. The internet is one of the modern day popular sources which facilitates word of mouth marketing through electronic mediums. It has provided a global platform that eliminates geographic limitations where users can interact and offer both negative and positive reviews regarding a product, service or entity. Li and Hitt (2008), state that online reviews not only promote a product or service sales but are also considered to be one of the reliable sources of consumer information about the experience of a product or service by the consumers themselves.

The analysis of the role created through the use of these platforms helps to understand how restaurants can respond more efficiently to consumer queries in a move aimed at attracting positive reviews. The concept is important and is gaining increasing attention as more and more consumers are increasingly relying on internet review sites to make conscious decision regarding their ideal choice of products or services. The word of mouth campaign carried out through the electronic medium is beginning to hold significant influence as compared to any other marketing strategies by any restaurant. Regardless of the economies of scale of the restaurant or the size of the restaurant, online customer reviews can promote or hinder success. Hu, Bose, Koh, and Liu (2012) found that consumers of all ages are increasingly relying on the various reviews posted on the different websites before making their purchase decisions.

This study aimed to collect critical information which scholars, marketers, and restaurant stakeholders can use to combat the challenges in creating successful restaurant brands. The understanding of how consumers rate each product can help establish how a restaurant brand is created based on actual customer preferences. Studying the consumer's behavior and their responses through the medium of internet review sites will help individual business owners to strategize an operational plan to succeed. The internet acts as a very effective medium for the restaurant owners to understand their customer's behavior by analyzing the reviews posted on various review sites. In an era where more and more consumers, for instance consumers in excess of 60% as stated by Smith (2013) pay importance to review sites before making their decision; indicates that internet review sites can execute a very powerful role in creating brands for the restaurant owners. Understanding this concept will be crucial to restaurant branding as it paves the way for expansion and attraction of more consumers from different age groups, regions, social and cultural groups.

Restaurants can extract ratable reviews from online review sites that can help them decide their expansion decisions with the aim of expanding their brand internationally (Titov & McDonald, 2008). This research identifies how various restaurants can use the online consumer reviews to their advantage through positive evaluation of consumer responses and implementing measures that can help them market their brand effectively amongst the target clientele. No qualitative data (consumer's views, opinions, preferences, and personal experiences) was collected during this study. The literature around the food and beverage industry provides valuable information about various factors or successful strategies for creating brands. The research literature (see Chapter 2) also indicates the popularity and importance of online review

sites. However, there is no significant literature which emphasizes on the fact that popularity of these platforms can be efficiently used to create brands in the food and beverage sector.

The findings of the research will help marketers understand the online popularity through the various review sites that reflect a potential demand for a product (Zhang, Ye, Law & Li, 2010). Restaurant branding has been highly dependent on how effectively the managers would incorporate the views of key stakeholders into establishing their products and services. However, as identified in the literature, consumers execute a key role in creating brands and thus increasing number of marketers are involving consumers to create a brand. This study provides effective guidelines as to how entities can use the global platform which is operated by the consumers to create a successful brand.

This study was linked to the idea of sustainable development. The concept of sustainability as viewed in the report by the UN World Commission (aka Brundtland's report) highlighted three themes namely social, economic and environmental (Brundtland *et al.*, 1987). Food and beverage industry is currently regarded to be one of the largest private-sector employers across the globe and, as Bradsher (2008) mentioned food as "the new oil" in his studies, indicates the popularity of the food and beverage industry. With the rise of social media, this dynamic industry has begun to focus on the non-economic aspects to gain market value and achieve sustainability goals (Arcese *et al.*, 2015). Pullman *et al.* (2009) through their study, have established a strong sense that economic sustainability can be achieved as an outcome of an extensive operational framework which will essentially focus on strategies for the betterment of environment and society. This aspect will enable restaurant owners to secure more economic gains by retaining old customers and attracting the new ones. The study explicitly showcases a link to "leisure and sustainability" as restaurants are a part of iconic attractions within the context

of tourism in any city/town and sustainable restaurant business would mean long lasting and profit making business entities as well as happy and satisfied consumers for years to come which directly relate to the core essence of the definition for sustainability.

Thesis Outline

This thesis is divided in five chapters. The current chapter, Chapter 1, builds by providing a generalized picture about the concept of restaurant branding, and briefly introduces internet review sites and its application in the restaurant industry. It enables the reader to gain a broad understanding about the overall context of the study. Chapter 2 provides the literature around the topic of research. It helps to build a solid understanding about the process of branding. The literature determines the various factors which build a brand and how it helps in the success of an organization. The chapter further identifies consumers' roles and attributes, the role of internet review sites in branding and its impact on the restaurant industry.

Based on the literature reviewed, the researcher conducted face to face surveys which included participants from Nanaimo aged above 18. The methodology including the design, data collection and data analysis, challenges and limitations are explained in Chapter 3. The detailed analysis of the data is provided in Chapter 4, which presents the core findings of this study. Chapter 5 presents valid discussion, conclusions and recommendations surrounding the findings of the research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This chapter presents a literature review about the various aspects introduced in Chapter 1. It begins by establishing a definition for a brand and a brief description about the concept of branding. The chapter further identifies the significance of the concept and describes brand identity. The following section provides an analysis of the different factors that create a brand. The readers are then guided through to understand how the concept of branding is positioned and operated in the restaurant industry. The review of literature further highlights the consumer's behavior as the study specifically focuses on internet review sites which is a platform available for the consumers of the restaurant industry. The later section identifies the consumer's role and their attitude in the restaurant industry. This component finally leads to the concept of internet review sites and its overall impact on the restaurant industry.

The various components in the literature are linked to each other enabling the readers to understand that there is a strong linkage between branding and the internet review sites. However, there is limited research on the role and the application of internet review sites in the process of restaurant branding. Thus, the literature around this topic identifies the need to conduct this study and answer the research questions identified in Chapter 1.

The chapter concludes by providing a short summary which highlights the significant findings from the literature and its linkage to this study.

What is A Brand?

According to Seth Godin “A brand is the set of expectations, memories, stories, and relationships that, taken together, account for a consumer’s decision to choose one product or service over another. If the consumer (whether it’s a business, a buyer, a voter, or a donor) doesn’t pay a premium, make a selection or spread the word, then no brand value exists for that consumer” (Godin, 2009, p.1).

Branding can be approached from two perspectives: the customers’ responses to a brand and the financial returns as leveraged by the brand (Ambler, Bhattacharya, Edell, Keller, Lemon & Mittal 2002). The first perspective is focused on the responses the customers provide in relation to a particular brand. The second perspective focuses on the value that a brand adds to a company (Ambler et al., 2002). This approach involves evaluating the influence of a brand name on the profitability of a company (Ambler et al., 2002). These measurements are based on the assumptions that customer-based brands are highly profitable.

Previous literature on marketing strategies generally focuses on “brand” as a concept and does not provide a clear definition of branding. Therefore, the reader is left to infer the definition of branding based on the context. In this study, branding was treated as the process that leads to a brand. For this study, the definition by Kapferer (2012) was adopted. Based on Kapferer (2012), a brand represents a set of mental associations that are held by customers that add to the perceived value of a particular good or service. Kapferer (2012) further argued that these associations should be strong, exclusive, and desirable.

While most people view a brand as a suggestion of the best choice, others perceive brand as the information about a product that customers have that will influence their choices.

Regardless of its formal definition, branding is normally aimed at building a product's identity (Kapferer, 2012). It is this identity that influences the perceived worth of a given product and increases the brand value of a company to the customer, thus, improving brand loyalty (Ambler et al., 2002). Brand loyalty creates a tendency amongst some consumers to keep purchasing goods, products or services from the same brand rather than the competing ones.

Branding is an important aspect of a business that contributes immensely to its success (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2007). The process involves the creation of mental associations amongst the consumers that are important in the promotion of a company and its products or services. Such processes ensure that a consistent theme establishes a significant business presence in the market to attract and retain consumer loyalty (Rao, Agarwal, & Dahlhoff, 2004). To conclude, branding in the marketing strategy can be defined as a concept that gives businesses a competitive edge in the market as it clarifies a business through differentiating a firm's products and services from the competition (Dinnie, 2004). It is the brand that holds the promise of the company to deliver in meeting the client's expectations.

Creating Brand Identity

A brand identity refers to a particular set of associations that a company aims to develop and maintain (Sääksjärvi & Samiee, 2011). These associations are meant to differentiate between a company and its competitors and normally reflect on the strategies and values of the company.

According to Sääksjärvi and Samiee (2011), the development of a brand identity is important during the initial stages of a business when the customers have limited knowledge of a brand and its products or services. The main objective of brand identity is to develop a relationship between customers and a brand. Strong brands have clearly specified brand identities for marketing communication (Sääksjärvi & Samiee, 2011). Kapferer (2012) argued that the brand identity prism is a suitable tool for evaluating brands because it describes how the owner wants to target customers to perceive the brand. Therefore, companies need to develop a unique and valuable positioning of its brand by providing information regarding the brand's attributes and benefits to the customers (Kapferer, 2012).

Importance of Branding

Consumer markets consider branding to increase the long-run performance of the company in the competitive financial positions (Mudambi, 2002). The branding methods considerably hold the ability of a business to perform in a competitively crowded market in comparison to other brands (O'Loughlin & Szmigin, 2005). The potential of company's products and ability to do well includes the basic understanding about the importance of branding. Branding strategies communicate to potential customers the importance of making purchase decisions (Leek & Christodoulides, 2011). The use of products promotional methods such as catalogs in websites as well as personal selling if made attractive help in increasing the client's interest in a product or service of a company (Todor, 2014).

Branding through physical product improvements helps in improving the quantifiable benefits which a customer appreciates about the product. The improvements contribute in establishing customer's loyalty and appreciation of the brand (Campelo, Thyne & Gnoth, 2013). Through branding and brand promotion, the communication strategy that the firm employs significantly helps in the elimination of perceived risks on products by consumers. Open discussion identifies and evaluates the intangible brand benefits (O'Loughlin, Szmigin & Turnbull, 2004). Buyers perspectives elaborately shape their identification with particular business logos. Building a trusted commercial brand helps with market symbolism in the forms of brand performance (Ibeh, Luo, & Dinnie, 2005). Thus, leading market brands always receive volumes of clients based on trust factors alone. Benefiting from branding requires effective communication on the part of the business marketing strategies to help in measuring individual and real brand aspects.

What Makes a Brand?

There are different branding methods that include individual, manufacturer, corporate and combinational branding. Individual branding is regarded as a policy in marketing segment where products in itself promote the brand. The developed product name is always different from other products existing within the same firm, product family or sector (Christodoulides, 2009). 360-degree branding involves the consideration of brand identity taking a given approach regarded as inclusive in order to enable the brand presentation. Manufacturer branding entails manufacturer firms promoting their products through production lines that differentiate the final commodity

from the competitive substitutes (Clifton, 2009). Corporate branding defines the promotion of company names. Call development solely involves the appraisal of the name identity which, in consideration of scope is much broader than product branding (Anholt, 2004). The appraisal of the identity in this case is through consumer's approach as also witnessed in the restaurant industry. A Combinational branding entails the promotion of both, the company name and products. Combinational branding, therefore, has a wider scope in comparison to the other branding methods (Ashworth, 2009).

Competition in the business market and corporate circles is often intense with every firm always striving to claim a stake in the market. The basic mechanisms for success and survival, therefore, lie on the hope that a business stands out (Vrontis & Papasolomou, 2007). Branding, therefore, ensures that a business, through value proposition strategies can create a differentiated identity and offer products that appeal the target consumers. An established brand compliments the efforts of production, by continuously creating the right perception in the market to suppress the competition from substitute firms (Janonis & Virvilaitė, 2007). The success of a brand and a branding strategy resides on various factors such as audience knowledge, differential exclusivity, passion, consistency, competitiveness, exposure, and leadership (Qian, 2010).

Analyzing both, the market conditions and consumer psychographics can enable businesses to develop achievable brand identities that can consistently be reliable to the customers. The knowledge of the market is feasible through deliberate efforts in market surveys and assessments based on purchasing abilities and product preferences. This understanding is critical in the demarcation of product target market. Moreover, exclusivity in the form of product quality, branding, and marketing strategies enables a business to specialize and take control of

the target market by consistently having reliable services which help in the retention of customers.

Additionally, building a trusted brand that lasts is nearly impossible without passion. Successful brands have ridden on their success stories as a result of the passion vested in the products by their founders (Wengrow, 2008). The desire to excel shapes the urge to continuously improve the quality of the product through constant research and knowledge seeking. Another significant factor adding to brand creation is leadership. Business ideas develop into brands, and the success of such an entity is reliant on the effectiveness of the direction strategies employed by the management of the firm. Sound management skills and leadership helps in forming successful brands (Sohn & Freiling, 2009).

In the constantly evolving market, the concept of branding is continuously changing. Therefore, the strength of a brand lies in its ability to remain relevant for a long period across a wide range of platforms such as websites and social media (Petek & Konecnik Ruzzier, 2013). The consistency of a brand improves customers' trust and loyalty (Kocher & Czellar, 2007). For example, customers can connect with a company more easily if they can clearly distinguish its logo from its competitors.

Branding theory states that management and leadership play critical role in brand development and organization (Uen, Wu, Teng, & Liu, 2012). A company's leadership is important because it is the source of key marketing strategies and key decisions on the brand. Thus, leaders can alter the company's brand strategic direction and impact on brand decisions and operations (Morhart, Herzog, & Tomczak, 2009). In addition, a company with effective leadership will inspire trust that the goods and services offered by the company will consistently meet customers' needs (Uen et al., 2015).

Emotional attachment also plays a major role in the customer's choice of a given brand. According to Malär, Krohmer, Hoyer, and Nyffenegger (2011), emotional brand attachment is the unique bond between a customer and a particular brand which involves their connection, passion, and feelings. When a company develops a strong emotional brand attachment, it can be a powerful tool for building brand equity and convincing customers to use the brand (Thomson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005).

A quality brand is a unique product, service, person, or place that is unique in such a way that customers perceive them as having exclusive added values which fully satisfy their needs (Khan, Zain-Ul-Aabdean, Nadeem, & Rizwan, 2016). If a brand offers superior goods and services over a long period, it gains an added value of trust and acquaintance (Ferenčić & Wölfling, 2015). These added values can also result from reliability, familiarity, and risk which result from the experience of using the brand.

Customer satisfaction is a marketing goal for most companies. According to Ahmed, Rizwan, Ahmad, and Haq (2014), customer satisfaction is viewed as the most productive route to improved marketing performance. O'Cass and Viet Ngo (2011) argued that customer satisfaction should not be defined as a goal, but a means of improving the company's performance. Currently, most companies focus on increasing customer satisfaction because satisfied customers are more likely to repurchase products and make referrals.

Due to the competitiveness in the business world today, companies rely on marketing strategies to attract customers (Jeon, Jung, Lu & Jones, 2012). The main purpose of marketing strategies in a company is to address the market needs, increase the market share, and improve the shareholder value (Kim, Jeon, Jung, Lu & Jones, 2012). Therefore, companies should

constantly ensure that their marketing strategies are effective to ensure growth (Amini, Darani, Afshani & Amini, 2012).

Customers' need for uniqueness is also important when building a brand (Kao, 2013). The customers want products and services that are distinctive from others. This is mainly common in material goods that customers acquire to enhance themselves and maintain a social image (Kemp, Childers & Williams, 2012). A strong brand is unique and provides customers with an added value, thus, improving customer loyalty and trust.

What factors make a brand in the restaurant industry? As noted above, branding involves multiple factors which play varying roles in creating a successful brand. Similarly, the successful creation of a brand in the restaurant industry is also subject to multiple factors which have significant contribution. As identified by Bowden (2009), the customers hold the key to the success of restaurants, and as such, their experience should be enhanced to ensure they keep coming back. On the same note, Bowden (2009) further reiterates that brand experience is a key influencing factor for the success of restaurants. Tsai et al. (2015) examined the perceptions of customers regarding restaurants and found that they are highly particular regarding the quality of services and the restaurants' design. Bowden, Dagger and Elliot (2013) noted in their study that the internal design of restaurants are integral in enhancing the customers' experience and reflects on the quality of services. The establishment of a brand in the restaurant sector denotes improving the customers' experience, for instance, by appealing to their tastes and preferences (Bowden & Dagger, 2011).

On the other hand, Hyun and Kim (2011) suggest that establishing a brand in the restaurant industry requires consistency. In this regard, Hwang and Hyun (2012) also reiterate that consistency contributes to the establishment of an impactful brand identity. In addition, such

consistency should be recognizable in the restaurant's communications, menus and marketing strategies (Hyun et al., 2011). Kim and Kim (2007) examined the importance of the staff in creating a positive or negative impression on customers. They noted the need for the staff to be friendly, informative and dressed appropriately as the ideal strategy to improve the brand of a given restaurant. Chu-Mei, Chien-Jung and Mei-Liang (2014) observe that getting customers to be involved in the plans and processes of a given restaurant also contributes to the establishment of a brand in the industry. Chu-Mei et al. (2014) further reiterate that such a process may involve sharing facts regarding ingredients used in the restaurant.

In the restaurant industry, customers tend to make purchases based on emotions, and as such, marketing often focuses on the delivery of high quality services. Hence, a focus on branded identity helps to connect restaurants with their targeted customers. Aureli, Forlani and Pencarelli (2015) explain that over the past two decades, the restaurant industry has firmly recognized the value of branding as an important component of marketing strategy. Lee, Back and Kim (2009) assert that brand value is influenced by potential customers' awareness of the brand and their view regarding quality. The success of restaurant branding largely depends on the view that brands contributes towards benefits to customers and restaurants respectively (Lee et al., 2009).

The establishment of a brand in the restaurant industry also depends on efficient management, particularly from the point of view of corporate strategy. Well-managed restaurant brands tend to enjoy a considerable market share. Aureli et al. (2015) further reiterate that branding involves, for instance, the mind and emotion. Customers also rely on brand names to minimize the risk that is associated with staying in a property that is unknown. A brand in the restaurant industry is also expected to interact consistently with the customers rather than

creating disappointments. Such a relationship is enhanced by ensuring that consumers become aware of the brand (Bowden, 2009).

The Role of Branding in The Restaurant Industry

The competitiveness in the marketplace requires establishing a differentiation strategy to attract more customers. Branding plays an important role in assisting restaurants to position themselves in the marketplace. Through branding, restaurants are certain of maintaining their customer base, and this helps to increase sales and profits. In the restaurant industry, branding helps customers to discard generic products as a way of minimizing search cost and risk. Customers often face risks in terms of identifying the preferred choice of restaurant especially when travelling from one city to another. Restaurant branding contributes to repetitive profit as a result of the risk reducing function associated with branded services (Johnson, 1995).

Restaurants who serve their customers at several locations, can take advantage of branding to attract customers to a single brand in different locations. Restaurant branding also contributes to financial advantages due to good reputation that can bring numerous benefits. A well-established restaurant brand is likely to open other chain restaurants faster. O'Neill and Mattila (2010) also note that restaurants with an established brand name tend to fare better in the industry compared to those who are not established, especially during harsh economic times. In their study that examined the performance of restaurants during recessionary and expansion periods, they found that restaurants with an established brand were more profitable compared to other non-established restaurant brands. However, debate has also emerged regarding the benefits of brand affiliation and other non-established restaurants. Their study also examined the financial performance of over 50,000 restaurants in the United States between 2001 and 2008.

They found that established restaurant brands recorded a higher net operating income especially in the recessionary period as compared to others.

Hur and Aldler (2011) on their part, emphasize that a significant share of a restaurant's intangible asset value rests in the brand itself. Researchers also contend that brands tend to provide potential customers dependable service and positive experience. Hsu, Oh and Assaf (2011), on the other hand, associate emotional share with branded restaurants, and suggest that during recessionary periods, customers tend to consider brands to offer some level of security. In this regard, Kwun and Oh (2007) concur that branding plays an important role in helping restaurants remaining competitive in the marketplace.

The Role of Consumers in Restaurant Branding

In the restaurant industry, the main target is the consumer and their role in promoting a brand is highly important in terms of establishing brand loyalty and increasing sales and profits. The restaurant industry in the current globalized marketplace is competitive and consumers can play a role in establishing the reputation of a given restaurant. Consumers can promote a brand by referring other potential buyers to the same place. Achieving success in the restaurant industry depends largely on developing a brand name. As the industry expands, large firms are taking advantage of economies of scale to establish their operations in the marketplace. Some of the strategies they use involves, for instance, opening chains of restaurants in different locations. A large percentage of consumers tend to identify themselves with such brands as they travel from one location to another (Valcic & Bagaric, 2015).

Consumers increase the brand loyalty by being willing to pay slightly higher prices for services which appeal to them. Most established restaurants survive the difficult competitive

marketplace as a result of consumers' attachment to such restaurants. They consider such restaurants to offer them security due to being accustomed to their services (Radojevic, Stanistic & Stanic, 2015). Such consumers prefer being associated with the same brand when making any kind of purchases.

Consumers also help to differentiate restaurants in the marketplace. Frequent visits to a particular restaurant tends to elicit interest from other consumers who are eager for new experiences. Consumers also play an important role in setting standards with regard to services that are offered. Their views regarding different restaurants in the marketplace contribute to the establishment of a recognized brand. For instance, the increasing trend of awareness on healthy food products is contributing to the consumer opinions in the marketplace that tend to impact on the reputation of different restaurants (Failla, 2015).

The perception of consumers with a preference for natural food products have contributed to the negative image suffered currently by restaurants using artificial ingredients (Hayes, 2005). Ong (2012) also posit that, while branding in the industry is necessary to be different from the competition, consumers' influence with regard to brand association is also an important factor in the marketplace. The attitude that consumers attach to brands may hasten or derail their establishment, for instance, in new markets (Hayes, 2005). The sophistication that is currently associated with the industry is also largely influenced by the changing tastes and preferences of potential customers belonging to different age groups. How restaurants are designed today is influenced by what appeals to the targeted customers (Hayes, 2005). The trust that restaurants establishes in the marketplace is also based on the ratings of consumers that visits the restaurants. Without the ratings of consumers, it is a challenging process to establish a brand especially in the restaurant industry where the competition is aggressive (Lee, Hsu, Han & Kim, 2010).

Consumer Behavior Attributes

In the restaurant industry, consumer behavior has an impact in the establishment of restaurant brands. The consumers' taste and preferences tend to vary, and as such, restaurants should consider such variations when establishing their brands in the marketplace. Consumer spending limits in the industry also depend and fluctuate during recessionary and expansion periods. Restaurant operatives need to understand the different consumer behaviors in the industry in order to enhance their reputation in the marketplace (Duarte Alonson, O'Neil, Liu & O'Shea, 2013). Consumers are also particular about the quality of services, and this may have an impact on how restaurants are perceived in the marketplace. In the restaurant industry, there are different segments of customers both young and old. The services that are offered by restaurant operatives should consider the taste and preferences of the targeted customers. In the upscale market, the services offered by restaurants tend to focus on the youth and the working class who have a taste for fast foods. However, this is not the case with older customers who are more concerned with the experience that a restaurant can provide (Ali & Nath, 2013). Thus, restaurants need to focus their strategy on getting closer to their target customers as a way of building their reputation.

The lifestyle embraced by consumers who frequently visit restaurants also influences the type of services being offered. Currently, the shift towards healthy products has contributed to significant changes in restaurant menus in order to meet the needs of health conscious customers. Consumer behavior trends also contribute to intensive marketing embraced by various operatives in the industry. The industry is competitive with more international operatives taking advantage of their economies of scale to attract more customers. The influence of customers in the industry

has also contributed to the competitive prices offered in different segments. Restaurants are merging to take advantage of brands that resonates with customers in the marketplace.

The expansion of the industry around the world is also influenced by consumer trends that includes a high demand for hospitality services in particular regions (Josiam, Kallidin & Duncan, 2014). Dongjuan (2014) also notes that consumer behavior in the restaurant industry is complicated. For instance, while the reputation and improved profits for restaurants depends on the customer's repetitive returns, the perceptions of customer's experience tend to differ. As such, some customers may fail to return because of being unconvinced with the services offered. Other factors such as advance payment for services that is common in the industry can also affect customers' satisfaction of the services provided. Conversely, the industry also has to deal with customers' desire to experience new environments which they convincingly express from time to time. This feedback can be generated or assessed by examining customer feedbacks personally or with the use of media and review sites.

According to Mintel report (2013), about 86% of audiences found online reviews helpful in making decisions which not only indicates the wide application of online review sites to express consumer's expectations but also provides necessary hints as to how the unexperienced customers are acknowledging the information available to them. As such, customer loyalty to a particular brand may change due to the need for a new experience in an industry that seems to be homogeneous in terms of the services offered (Duarte Alonson et al., 2013). It also means that it is significantly important to analyze the role of internet review sites, the way it is responded to by the audience and its impacts in the process of restaurant branding.

The Popularity, Application, and the Impact of Internet Review Sites on the Restaurant

Industry

With the advancement of technology, internet has become an important platform in restaurant branding. Today, restaurant owners recognize the impact of positive reviews, for instance, on sales. A study conducted by dos Santos, Chaves and Pedron (2014) found a connection between online ratings and the decisions taken by consumers to visit certain restaurants. Dos Santos et al. (2014) also note that through online ratings, customers are able to gauge the quality of services provided. A study conducted by Di Pietro, Di Virgilio and Pantano (2012) also found that restaurants have surpassed other competition businesses in the same market place as they were reviewed most on the internet. The study further noted that restaurant denotes a type of business where online reputation is highly important. A growing trend among customers involves using the online platform to view pictures of the dining location, post recommendations, write about personal experiences and read reviews. Consequently, prospective customers are in a position to view different reviews, ratings and picture through the medium of online review sites (Sevin, 2013).

Improving customer base in the industry also depends on restaurant owner's determination in regards to internet review sites which can help improve their business profile, reputation and goodwill. With the expansion of the restaurant industry around the world, operatives in the sector may consider embracing several measures to know their ratings in the marketplace. Targeting in a competitive market require restaurant operatives to develop an appropriate marketing plan. Such a plan may involve the use of internet review sites to market products and services to potential customers (Liddle, 2000). Social media platforms such as Facebook are increasingly being used as review sites by restaurants with intentions to improve

their customer base. Virginia Phelan, Mills, Douglas and Brian Aday (2013) also identified online review sites as the major reason for increased visibility of restaurant businesses across the world.

The significance of internet review sites is that there is an increasing population of online buyers. This involves implication of online systems to order food services. Restaurants can take advantage of this new phenomenon to improve their reputation, sales, and profits. Also, more buyers of products and services are now relying on customer reviews to help inform their final decisions. A recent study by Gamper (2012) noticed that a significant percentage of young vacationers placed their trust on online reviews to make informed decisions. However, it will be interesting to recognize, whether consumers of different age groups in the restaurant industry will follow this trend as well.

The reputation of restaurants in the market place hugely depends on customer's ratings. Ankomah Opoku, Abratt, Bendixen and Pitt (2007) state that as the population groups of the potential customers in the restaurant industry are becoming techno savvy, operatives in the sector can exploit online review sites to improve their reputation. Maria Munar (2011) contend that business owners need to understand the importance of keeping customers happy. Online review sites involve other customers approving or disapproving the services of firms listed in particular review sites (Moore, 2015).

An online review site targeting the restaurant industry can help its customers to find out about the reputation of different companies in the market and whether they offer products and services that satisfy their customer's needs. A positive or negative rating has a significant influence on the decision that the customers make regarding the restaurant of choice.

Consequently, higher ratings have a positive effect on restaurants reputation and vice versa (Gao, Greenwood, Agrawal & McCullough, 2015).

The Role of Internet Review Sites in Restaurant Branding

Online review sites play an important role in branding because they help to establish trust and credibility for business entities. By using online review sites, business entities are likely to increase their customer base and most likely increase their profits as well. These sites also tend to provide brands with an important avenue to give consumers the information they need regarding particular products or services (Dabeva, 2012). The response to customers' reviews whether they are positive or negative tend to influence customer's decision with regards to trust or mistrust of a brand. Conversely, online review sites also act as a free advertising platform. Owners of restaurants, for instance, can effectively save their costs associated with promoting their brand by using this platform over the traditional methods. When customers establish trust for a particular brand, they are likely to return and refer other potential customers. The reviews customers often leave on the sites established by business entities, and particularly, social media play a role in exposing such businesses to a wide range of customers. Such an exposure is often highly valuable and money making when businesses use these channels to promote their brands (Ruzic & Bilos, 2010).

New consumers in the market also tend to trust what other consumers say. As per a survey carried out by Rupert Hills and Cairncross (2011), they found that a significant population of consumers across different market segments, belonging to different age groups, tend to trust the consumer opinions posted online. Online review sites also encourage constructive criticism since they allow businesses to improve in areas that they are weak in an

attempt to build their reputation in the marketplace. The economic benefits associated with online review sites also emanates from the low cost of promoting a brand compared to the traditional means of luring customers to a particular service or product. The traditional methods of advertising cost businesses millions and yet sometimes failed to achieve their objectives. However, the use of online review sites is cost effective in the sense that it is the consumers themselves who take an active role in promoting a particular product or service. More customers are likely to base their decision on the experience of other customers who have initially used a particular product or service (Evans, 2009). The benefits of online review sites also involve creating a positive impact on the restaurants' bottom line (Evans, 2009).

To conclude the role and importance of review sites, we can focus on the first section of this chapter which helped identify various factors such as satisfied customers, quality, design, consistency, staff, marketing policies, customer involvement, brand awareness, customer involvement and corporate strategies responsible for creating a brand. The online review sites are suggested as platforms that provide information about different aspects such as service, quality, consistency, staff, and design. This set of knowledge is available in the form of pictures and reviews posted by customers. If these avenues are managed efficiently by the restaurant owners it will lead to brand awareness, satisfied customers and most importantly act as cost effective medium of marketing. Increasing number of satisfied customers would mean more economic gains in terms of rising sales. The overall scenario is increasingly profitable to the owners as review sites can play an important role in creating a brand image of the facility.

While online review sites may have a positive impact on restaurant branding and there are economic benefits associated with it, there are several challenges as well. The common challenge which emerges is with regards to the reliability of internet review sites in terms of

measuring the actual quality of the restaurants in the marketplace. The issue of reliability is big as these platforms can be accessed by anyone to post reviews which may not be sincere. As such, it becomes increasingly difficult to identify the genuineness of the reviews posted on many of the public platforms. Also, online reviews at times can be detrimental to the reputation of some restaurants in the marketplace. As such, future research would essentially focus on how restaurants owners can not only manage good responses, but, also have a clinical strategy to tackle the negative responses posted online and win back the customer's trust.

Summary

The concept of branding is gaining significant attention as it enables several business organizations to create an identity in the competitor market and establish a long lasting relationship with the consumers. It is evident through the review of relevant literature that restaurant industry, alike several other business streams, realizes the importance of branding. The various factors responsible for branding as highlighted in the literature include consumer satisfaction, quality, consistency, effective leadership, emotional attachment, uniqueness and efficient marketing strategies.

However, in specific relation with the restaurant industry, the literature conveys that consumers have a significant role to play in creation of brand. Since the consumers buying behavior highly impacts the existence of a restaurant business in the market, it can be stated that satisfied customers hold the key to achieve success in the restaurant industry.

With the rise of technology, internet review sites are one the platforms that are currently being utilized extensively by the consumer world on a global platform. The easy access to these review sites enable the consumers to write about their own experiences and read about the ones

posted by others. Additionally, online buying options are on a high and the literature suggests that buyers are more likely to trust the online reviews and make informed decisions. Increasing numbers of these review sites on internet elicit the growth in the online activities by the consumers. As such it is highly important for the restaurant operatives to pay undivided attention towards the consumer activities on the review sites.

The literature identifies that consumers execute a significant role in the success of restaurant industry and that internet review sites is one of the vital mediums through which consumers perceptions can be tracked and controlled effectively to the benefit of the company.

CHAPTER 3

Research Methodology

This chapter introduces and describes the methodology that was used in this study. The methodology is a guided work plan which enables the researcher to answer the research questions. It essentially focuses on multiple dimensions and steps that were incorporated in the study to achieve the research objectives. The chapter begins by providing an explanation of the nature and the design of the research. It further elicits a brief description about the research method and its significance. The data collection section describes sampling, validation and the face-to-face survey questionnaire, data gathering procedures, the pilot study, data analysis, limitations and storing the information. The chapter further outlines the research ethics process involved in this study. A short summary is provided which highlights the conclusions from this chapter.

Research Design

This study was conducted in Nanaimo, Vancouver Island with an aim to analyze the role of internet review sites in the process of restaurant branding. Given the scope of this study, a single method exploratory research study was the preferred approach.

Exploratory study. The general aim and purpose of conducting an exploratory study is to create a ground level understanding about the nature of the research problem and develop new insights, innovative ideas and unique solutions which enables an individual to gain more knowledge about a research topic (Brown, 2006; Creswell, 2003; Sarantakos, 2005). Within the context of tourism research, exploratory studies are believed to identify innovative solutions and guide the trajectory for future research on the topic (Mason, Augustyn & Seakhoa-King, 2010).

This research study was also conducted to identify innovative solutions to deal with the growing market of internet review sites. Previous research includes numerous studies on the growth of the internet and its impact on the restaurant industry e.g., Wynne, Berthon, Pitt, Ewing and Napoli, 2001; Zhang et al., 2010, the impact of review sites on the sales of products and services e.g., Luca, 2011; Öğüt and Onur Taş, 2012; Di Pietro, Crews, Gustafson and Strick, 2012, consumer empowerment e.g., Bowden, 2009, importance of branding and factors responsible in creating successful brands in the restaurant industry e.g., Tepeci, 1999; Laroche and Parsa, 2000; Bowden, 2009; Koh, Lee and Boo, 2009. However, the role of internet review sites in restaurant branding is a relatively new research area and hence the approach of exploratory research design was employed in this study.

Quantitative research. This research study was guided by using a quantitative research design. The quantitative style of research is regarded as one of the most effective methods of providing descriptive, correlational and experimental research findings (Walker, 2005). One of the common benefits of conducting quantitative research is that it seeks to gather only desired information, chances of bias are minimized and hence the data can be more precise and richer. Analyzing quantitative data provides a better insight in terms of numbers as the conclusion is drawn from a large amount of data (Brandimarte, 2011). This design also proves to be highly effective in answering the research problems which are recognized and understood in a distinct manner by the respondents. For instance, within the context of the tourism industry, different products and services gain complex characteristics because of the varied perceptions that arise amongst the consumers. Due to this diversification, no conclusion can be drawn by generalizing the opinions or experiences of a small sample size. As such, the use of a quantitative research

design, which includes the responses of a larger sample size is preferred in this study over the qualitative research design (Abeyasekera, 2005).

This study used a face-to-face survey questionnaire (See Appendix A), which is one of the four types of quantitative research. The questionnaire method essentially refers to the process of collecting data from large populations in which each respondent is asked the same set of questions in a predefined order (Akinci & Saunders, 2015).

One of the main reasons to conduct face-to-face surveys was that it helped the researcher to save money and time (Veal, 2011). The researcher could identify potential participants and enquire if they were willing to participate. This helped to achieve a higher response rate. Telephonic conversations might have not enabled the researcher to get in-depth knowledge. Also, language, speech accent, technical flaws might add to the constraints. While web surveys would have helped to omit the above-mentioned shortcomings, and reach large number of respondents, web based surveys are not cost effective and bring along the risk of achieving a low response rate (McCartt et. al., 2011). The added benefit of employing face-to-face questionnaire is that it helps in targeting individuals who cannot be reached through online channels. Another advantage of using this research tool was that the respondents could seek help from the researcher if any of the questions in the survey were not clearly understood.

Research Method

Sampling. The researcher adopted a convenience sampling approach during the process of data collection. Thompson (2012) identified that sampling is done with an intention to draw specific information from a part of a population which can help to make an estimate about the whole. This research used random and non-random convenience sampling method in which

individuals aged above 18 were approached to participate in the study. Sullivan (2009) indicates that convenience sampling includes respondents who are chosen for participation because of easy access and availability. Hedt and Pagano (2011) iterate that the cost of collecting data is less in adopting convenience sampling method.

The respondents in this study included researchers' friends, work colleagues, Vancouver Island University students and residents from Nanaimo and other locations of the Vancouver Island. The major reason to choose the above sample was the factor of convenience and accessibility. The research study was also aimed at connecting with '*general*' restaurant industry consumers. This aim was achieved by targeting the above-mentioned sample and hence their identity, gender or socio-status were not considered during the participant selection process.

Nearly 20% of the participants knew the researcher prior to data collection, however, no personal information about their education, income or status were identified in this study. Their identity or relation with the researcher did not impact the process of data collection and the responses were not only undistinguished from others but also had no significant variance in the output of this study.

The participants included in the study were grouped into four age categories: 18-30, 31-45, 46-65 and 65 plus. The division of age groups was designed to track the different responses of these specific age groups. Segregated results, based on aged sampling, can help individual restaurants to better assess the behavior of their clientele (Auty, 1992; Knutson, 2000; Moschis, Curasi & Bellenger, 2003). The researcher did not include any participants aged under 18 by assuming that they would possess in sufficient knowledge about the research topic.

Validation and revision of face-to-face survey questionnaire. Various free survey templates (see Appendix E) available on the Survey Monkey website were used as the starting point for designing the face-to-face survey instrument used in this study. The questionnaire was carefully selected and organized by studying different types of survey instruments, for example, brand awareness surveys, customer satisfaction surveys, customer service surveys, hotel feedback and mobile apps surveys (Survey Monkey, n.d.).

The questionnaire design, sentence structure and the measurement scales were noted from the free templates, however specific questions used in this study were identified using the content from the review of literature. The first draft was shared with the research instructor on March 04, 2016, for the feedback. All the questions were discussed in detail and suggestions were noted. All the recommendations were implemented and the revised draft was shared for approval on March 23, 2016. It received approval from the research instructor on March 30, 2016.

The first draft had 13 questions which were all quantitative in nature. Two more quantitative questions were added in the final draft. The questions were specifically designed to ensure that the respondents clearly understood the purpose of each question. It also meant that the participants had a limited set of choices to pick the answers that were right for them. The rating scales for most of the questions were in a standardized format to assure that they were simple and easy to follow.

Two different types of scales, Summated Rating Scales and Semantic Differential Scales, were used as response actions for most of the quantitative questions in the survey (see Appendix A). In a Summated Rating Scale, the respondents are usually provided with more than 2 choices. Respondents rate a statement on a three-point, four-point or five-point scale (Likert's Scale). In

this study, Questions 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 12, 15 used four or five-point Rating Scales. Questions 9, 10, 11, 13, 14 used Semantic Differential Scales (Bradley & Lang, 1994; Komorita & Graham, 1965).

To ensure that only the respondents who surf online review sites and read/trust the reviews posted by others could provide their insights in this study, a filter was added after Question 4 and Question 7. The questions being:

Question 4: How often do you surf online review sites for making a decision of choice about dining establishments?

Question 7: Do you trust online customer reviews as much as personal recommendations?

If the respondents answered 'Never' to Question 4, they were asked to progress to question 13. Similarly, if the respondents answered 'I don't trust or I don't read any customer reviews', they were asked to skip Questions 8-11. All other Questions from 1-3 and 13-15 were general questions related to their age and their insights about branding, internet review sites and sustainability.

Pilot study. Williams (2003) states that it is imperative to thoroughly examine the questionnaire before commencing data collection. This is significant as the quality of data gathered is highly dependent on the design of the questionnaire and the way in which it is administered. To achieve the external validity, a pilot study was conducted on July 05, 2016. Prior to the commencement of actual data collection process, the test survey was shared with five individuals who were the researchers' work colleagues and they were asked to complete the survey and provide their feedback. The feedback was collected in terms of the font style and size, layout, grammar, and the readability of the questions. All the respondents in the sample for the

pilot study were hospitality professionals and hence the researcher believed that they could provide some valuable insights about the survey tool as they could better understand the aim and the purpose of this study.

The feedback received enabled the investigator to make certain changes to the sentence structure and the layout of the survey. The order of the questions was appropriately changed too. However, the investigator identified 2 typing flaws in the instrument post conducting a pilot test which were then manually fixed during actual data gathering.

Data gathering. Data collection is one of the crucial step involved in a research process and Serrant-Green (2008) identified that choosing the right method is vital in the overall success of a research study. The data collection for this study took place over a period of five weeks starting from July 11, 2016 and ending on August 14, 2016. At the end of data collection process, individual responses were recorded to Microsoft Excel for in-depth data analysis.

As stated earlier the respondents were chosen by adopting random and non-random sampling techniques. The protocol to conduct surveys was that the researcher would introduce himself to the potential participants and induce a conversation about the study. All specific details related to the aim and purpose of the study, importance of data collection, the participant's role, their rights and duties were explained thoroughly by presenting them with a copy of the consent form (see Appendix B). The initial conversation lasted about approximately 3-4 minutes following which the interested participants were provided with a pen and a copy of the printed survey instrument. The researcher waited until the respondents finished answering the questionnaire, then collected them, which took the participant's 5-7 minutes on average. The interested participants were also provided with a copy of the debrief form (see Appendix C) after participation.

The data collection was done at different venues. The VIU library was accessed on weekdays during hours between 10am until 2pm. The Sikh temple (Gurdwara) in Central Nanaimo was another facility used for data collection. This site was accessed only on Sundays during hours between 12pm until 2pm. Other venues included the coffee shops in downtown Nanaimo and a restaurant in central Nanaimo, which was researcher's work place. These venues were visited on all days of the week during hours between 4pm until 11pm. Specific details about the daily response count are elicited in Appendix D.

The researcher collected a total number of 165 surveys at the end of the survey period. The survey sample include 43% respondents between the age group of 18-30, 26% between 31-45, 19% between 45-65, and 12% were aged above 65. A total number of 33 respondents denied participating in the study either due to lack of knowledge or due to some other commitment. The overall response rate was 83.33%.

Data analysis. The quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS (statistical package for the social sciences) software. SPSS is a commonly used and an easily available tool employed for analysis of data using a variety of statistic approaches (Greasley, 2008). This study included the use of descriptive statistics approach to analyze the data related to the respondents' responses regarding the influence of internet review sites on their buying behavior and the frequency of their online activities related to restaurant review sites.

All the questionnaires in the face-to-face survey instrument were quantitative (see Appendix A). Before doing the data analysis it is crucial to identify different levels of measurement, as it defines the pathway for the type of analysis to be conducted. Two measurement scales were employed in the survey instrument (nominal and ordinal) for different

questions. Questions 1, 3, 5 and 13 aimed to collect nominal data and all other questions were directed to collect ordinal data (see Appendix A).

Descriptive statistics were widely used during data analysis. In descriptive statistics, the numerical data is organized and summarized, and the collected data is further explained by illustrating the inferences. The age group was used only as a filter to provide descriptive statistics in the responses of the participants belonging to different age groups. No two individual age groups were compared to record the differences as it was not a part of this study. The data was presented using histograms, pie charts, bar charts and tables to provide descriptive statistics for nominal and ordinal data (Botti & Endacott, 2008).

Microsoft Excel was also used to create charts and reports which provide better visual effect. The use of excel to produce visual display of data was beneficial as it was easy to interpret and understand (Greasley, 2008).

Research methodology limitations and challenges. A major disadvantage of employing face-to-face survey questionnaires was the excessive consumption of time earlier on in the process (Veal, 2011). The researcher spent three weeks in designing the survey instrument. Another major challenge was to approach and initiate a conversation with the potential participants.

An attempt was made by the researcher to approach random individuals at shopping venues, such as the Woodgrove mall and the North Town Shopping Centre in north Nanaimo, but zero % response rate was achieved from eight individuals, following which these venues were omitted.

Since many of the respondents were engaged in their personal activities when approached for participation (which included for instance, students studying in the VIU library or customers dining in the restaurant) it was difficult to approach all the potential respondents. To overcome this challenge, the researcher targeted single diners in restaurants and coffee shops which proved highly effective. Within the restaurant and coffee shop environment, the researcher also specifically approached individuals who were aged above 45, as they were observed to be lesser busy in using their phones, tablets or laptops as compared to youths. Also, students who were studying or accessing the library services in groups of two or more were focused over individual students.

The possibility of biasness was also one of the challenges faced. To overcome this challenge, the survey was designed in a neutral manner and a pilot test was conducted to learn about any confusions in the design of the survey instrument. A further limitation was the risk of collecting data from non-study population groups (that is, some respondents may have not been over 18 years of their age) (Serrant-Green, 2008).

Data storage. The face-to-face survey responses were and are stored by the researcher in a safe box and all the data documents, including the excel sheets and analysis reports, are stored on the researcher's computer. The survey responses will be shredded and all the e-files will be deleted post April 01, 2017.

Research Ethics

The ethics application for this research study was submitted to and approved by the Vancouver Island University Research Ethics Board (REB) on June 27, 2016. For the purpose of research ethics, following documents were developed: a) Consent form (see Appendix B), b)

debrief form (see Appendix C), c) face-to-face survey instrument (see Appendix A) and d) latest certification of ethical conduct for research involving humans (Tri-Council Policy Statement 2).

To ensure that the researcher responded to the ethics process, the participants were provided with a copy of the consent form and the de-brief form. The researcher also employed certain strategies whilst conducting surveys. The first one was to ensure that the respondents were made aware that their participation in this study was completely voluntary. Additionally, they were informed that they could quit the survey process at any time. The researcher made efforts to help the participants understand the nature, purpose and the scope of the study by using a copy of the consent form which included all the above-mentioned aspects.

Additionally, the researcher did not collect any personal data that would reveal the identity of any participant in the process. Also, in Chapter 4, real names of the participants are not identified, thereby ensuring complete anonymity. Finally, a copy of the debrief form was provided to the interested participants which specified details about future contact with the researcher or the REB committee for any details about the research, data handling and results. The researcher did not further explore the data for any personal gains other than for this study.

Summary

This study was conducted in the city of Nanaimo, Vancouver Island and adopted a single method exploratory research design. Given the scope of the study, quantitative analysis was chosen as an appropriate approach. The research methodology used in the study was face-to-face surveys. All the respondents were given the same set of questions printed on paper in the form of a survey. The questionnaire was revised after conducting a pilot test and included 16 questions designed to collect quantitative data. The data was collected from 165 respondents at different

venues in the city of Nanaimo, such as the VIU library, the researcher's work place, coffee shops and restaurants in the downtown, and the Sikh temple (Gurdwara) in central Nanaimo. A Convenience sampling method was employed to select potential participants in this research study. All the collected data was stored in a safe box under the responsibility of the researcher. SPSS was used for conducting descriptive analysis of the quantitative data. The study encountered challenges such as excessive consumption of time and barriers to identify and approach potential respondents. All the VIU ethics requirement were fulfilled and the participants' confidentiality was assured.

CHAPTER 4

Research Results

This chapter describes the findings that emerged from this study. This study sought to analyze the role of internet review sites in the process of restaurant branding. The five research questions were:

1. How do the consumers perceive branding in the restaurant industry?
2. What factors, as perceived by the consumers, create a brand in the restaurant industry?
3. How do the consumers perceive restaurant review sites?
4. How effective are the internet review sites in the restaurant industry?
5. What are the attitudes of restaurant industry consumers about the application of internet review sites?

The chapter is divided into six main sections. The first section of the chapter covers the face-to-face survey questions (see Table 1). It also provides an insight into the demography of the survey respondents. The following sections present the researcher findings in relation to the above-mentioned research objectives. The individual research question sections conclude by providing a short summary highlighting the major findings of this study.

Table 1

Categorization of face-to-face Survey Questions under Research Questions

Research question	Survey questions
Demographic question	<i>Question 1:</i> What age group do you fall under?
Question 1: How do the consumers perceive branding in the restaurant industry?	<i>Question 2:</i> When choosing a particular dining option, how important is the brand name of the company to you?
Question 2: What factors, as perceived by the consumers, create a brand in the restaurant industry?	<i>Question 3:</i> Which factors in your opinion play the most significant role in building brand name for a particular dining establishment?
Question 3: How do the consumers perceive restaurant review sites?	<i>Question 4:</i> How often do you surf online review sites for making a decision of choice about dining establishments? <i>Question 5:</i> When surfing through a particular food/dining review site what do you actually look for? <i>Question 6:</i> How often do you write an online review of the experience you had at a particular dining location?
Question 4: How effective are the internet review sites in the restaurant industry?	<i>Question 7:</i> Do you trust online customer reviews as much as personal recommendations? <i>Question 8:</i> How likely do you get influenced by the reviews of any organization available on internet review sites? <i>Question 9:</i> How many customer reviews would you read before you feel confident about making a decision of choice? <i>Question 10:</i> How many positive reviews would it take you to believe that a particular dining location is extremely good? <i>Question 11:</i> How many negative reviews would it take you to believe that a particular dining location is extremely bad?

Question 5: What are the attitudes of the restaurant industry consumers about the application of internet review sites?

Question 12: If a particular restaurant operator would respond to address a comment of appreciation or grievance about an online review provided by you, would that make you feel more valued with that brand?

Question 13: Would you recommend restaurant operatives to heavily rely on internet review sites to market their brand?

Question 14: In your opinion, do you think having more numbers of positive/negative online reviews will enable a particular food establishment make/break its brand name in the market?

Question 15: Is it important to you that food review sites identify some innovative practices by restaurant owners such as environment protection plans, waste management, use of organic/local ingredients, effective human resource management?

Demography of Respondents

The participants in this study included the researcher's work colleagues, Vancouver Island University students and other residents from the city of Nanaimo, British Columbia. The survey was administered to a total number of 165 respondents.

Age groups. The respondents were categorized into four different age groups: 18-30, 31-45, 46-65 and 65+ years (see Table 2). As shown in the Figure 1, the largest age group sample was the 18-30 years old age group at 43% ($n = 71$). This group was followed by the group aged between 31-45 at 26% ($n = 43$). The age groups of 46-65 and 65+ were 19% ($n = 32$) and 12% ($n = 19$) respectively.

Table 2

Division of Respondents as per Age Groups

Age groups	Number of respondents	Percent
Between 18-30	71	43.0
Between 31-45	43	26.0
Between 46-65	32	19.0
Over 65	19	12.0
Total	165	100.0

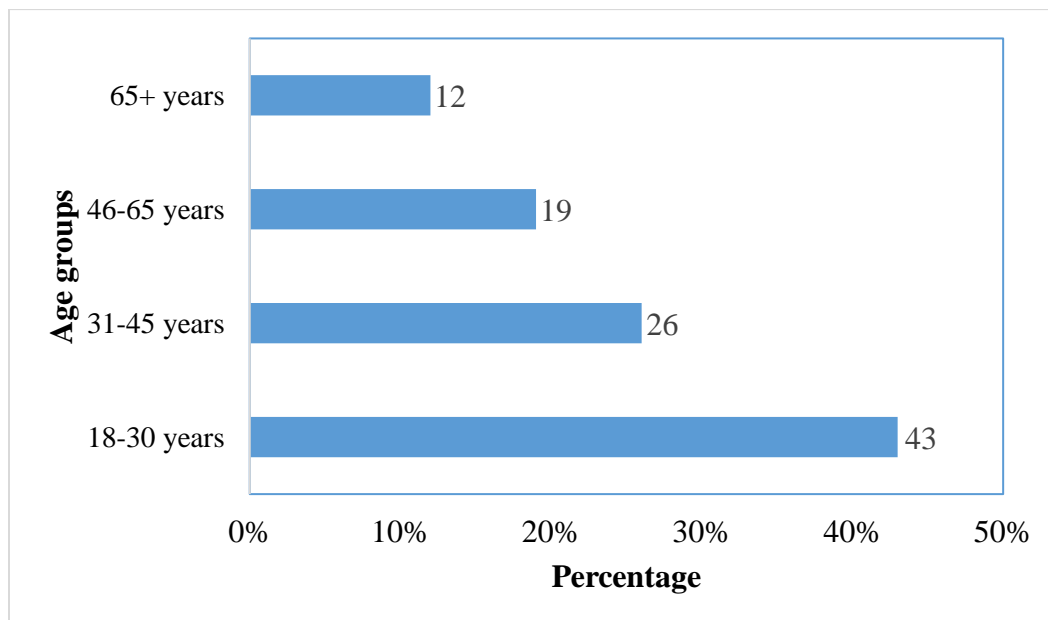


Figure 1. Age group

The following sections highlight the research questions and present the brief findings of each survey questions corresponding to the research questions used in this study. Each of the

research questions conclude with a short summary of the findings for individual research questions.

Research Question # 1: How do The Consumers, aged 18 and Above, Perceive Branding in The Restaurant Industry?

The following presents the findings for the face-to-face survey question corresponding to this research question.

Survey question 2 asked: when choosing a particular dining option, how important is the brand name of the company to you? The participants were required to provide their perceptions regarding the importance of the brand name of a company when choosing between different dining options. The responses were scored on a 4-Point Likert scale: 1-Highly important, 2-Fairly important, 3-Less likely important, and 4-Not at all important.

All the participants ($N = 165$) responded to Question 2. Table 3 shows the overall response to Question 2. As per the responses, 17.6% ($n = 29$) of the participants perceived the company's brand name as being *highly important* when choosing a particular dining option (see Figure 2). Of the remaining 82.4% participants, 49.1% ($n = 81$) indicated that a company's brand name was *fairly important* when choosing a given dining option. Also, 21.2% ($n = 35$) of the participants viewed the company's brand name as *less likely important* when choosing dining options (see Figure 2). Finally, 12.1% ($n = 20$) of the participants viewed a company's brand name as *not being important at all* when choosing dining options (see Figure 2).

Table 3

Identifying Brand Importance Amongst Consumers

Importance of Restaurant Brand Name	Number of respondents	Percent
Highly Important	29	17.6
Fairly Important	81	49.1
Less Likely Important	35	21.2
Not at all Important	20	12.1
Total	165	100

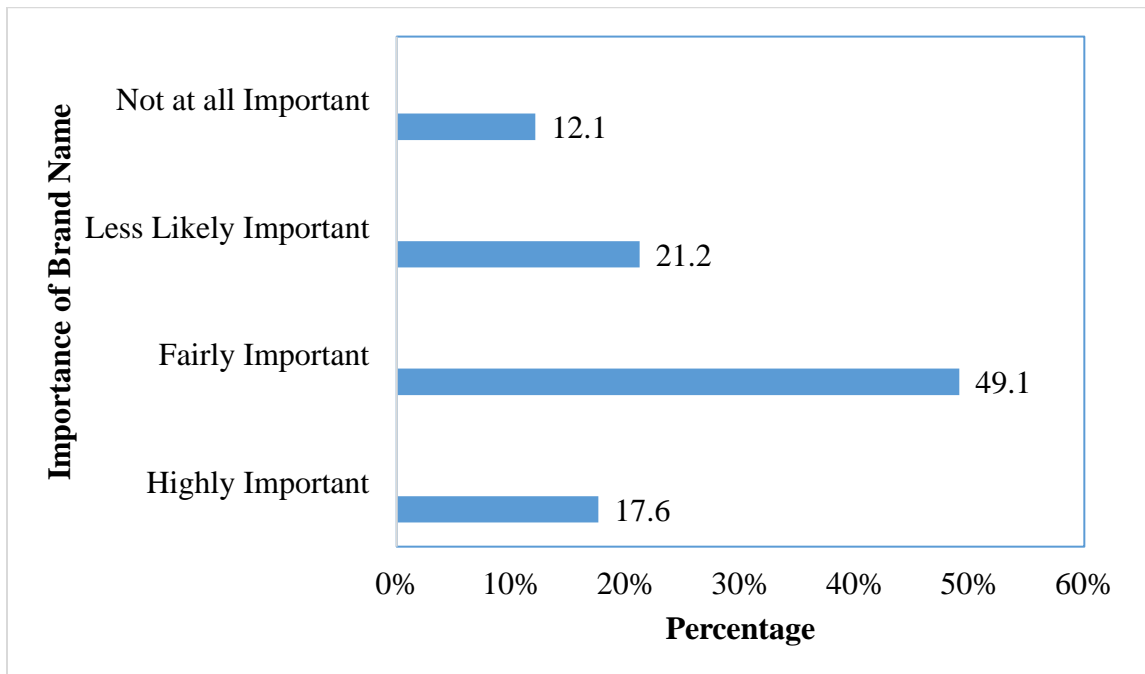


Figure 2. Importance of the brand name of a restaurant amongst the consumers.

Research Question #1 Summary

Based on the results found in this study, it can be concluded that the majority (66.7%) of the participants believed that a company’s brand name was either *highly* or *fairly important* to them when choosing a particular dining option. Only 33.3% respondents believed that the

company's brand name was *less likely important* or *not important at all* when choosing a particular dining option.

Research Question # 2: What Factors, As Perceived by The Consumers, Create A Brand in The Restaurant Industry?

The following presents the findings for the face-to-face survey question corresponding to this research question.

Survey question 3 asked: Which factors in your opinion play the *most significant* role in building brand name for a particular dining establishment? The participants were required to choose a maximum of three out of 13 options which included: Size of business, customer satisfaction, menu offerings, external features, and consistency in performance (e.g. ambience, location, and staff clothing), uniqueness, quality assurance, competitiveness, contribution towards better environment and/or society, customer involvement, marketing strategies, emotional attachment, great leaders, and none of the above.

All the participants ($N = 165$) responded to survey Question 3. Based on the responses, 50.3% ($n = 83$) of the respondents indicated that *customer satisfaction* was one of the most important factors which builds a brand name for the company (see Table 4). The other major factors highlighted were: 47.3% respondents ($n = 78$) identified *uniqueness*, 40% ($n = 66$) respondents identified *quality assurance*, 27.3% ($n = 45$) participants perceived *competitiveness*, while 25.5% ($n = 42$) identified *consistency in performance*, 25.5% ($n = 42$) identified *external features* and 21.2% respondents ($n = 35$) identified *marketing strategies* as the important factor.

Also, *menu offerings* (17.0%), *size of business* (14.5%), *emotional attachment* (6.7%), *customer involvement* (6.7%) and *great leadership* (4.8%) were not regarded as very important factors. Only 1.2% ($n = 2$) participants believed that *contribution towards better environment and/or society* assists in building a brand name (See Figure 3). None of the participants believed that the provided options were not important when building a brand name.

Table 4

Identifying Factors that Create a Restaurant Brand

Factors creating a restaurant brand	Number of respondents	Percent
Customer satisfaction	83	50.3
Uniqueness	78	47.3
Quality Assurance	66	40
Competitiveness	45	27.3
consistency in Performance	42	25.5
External Features	42	25.5
Marketing strategies	35	21.2
Menu offerings	28	17.0
Size of Business	24	14.6
Emotional attachment	12	7.3
Customer Involvement	11	6.7
Great Leaders	8	4.9
Contribution towards better environment and/or society	2	1.2

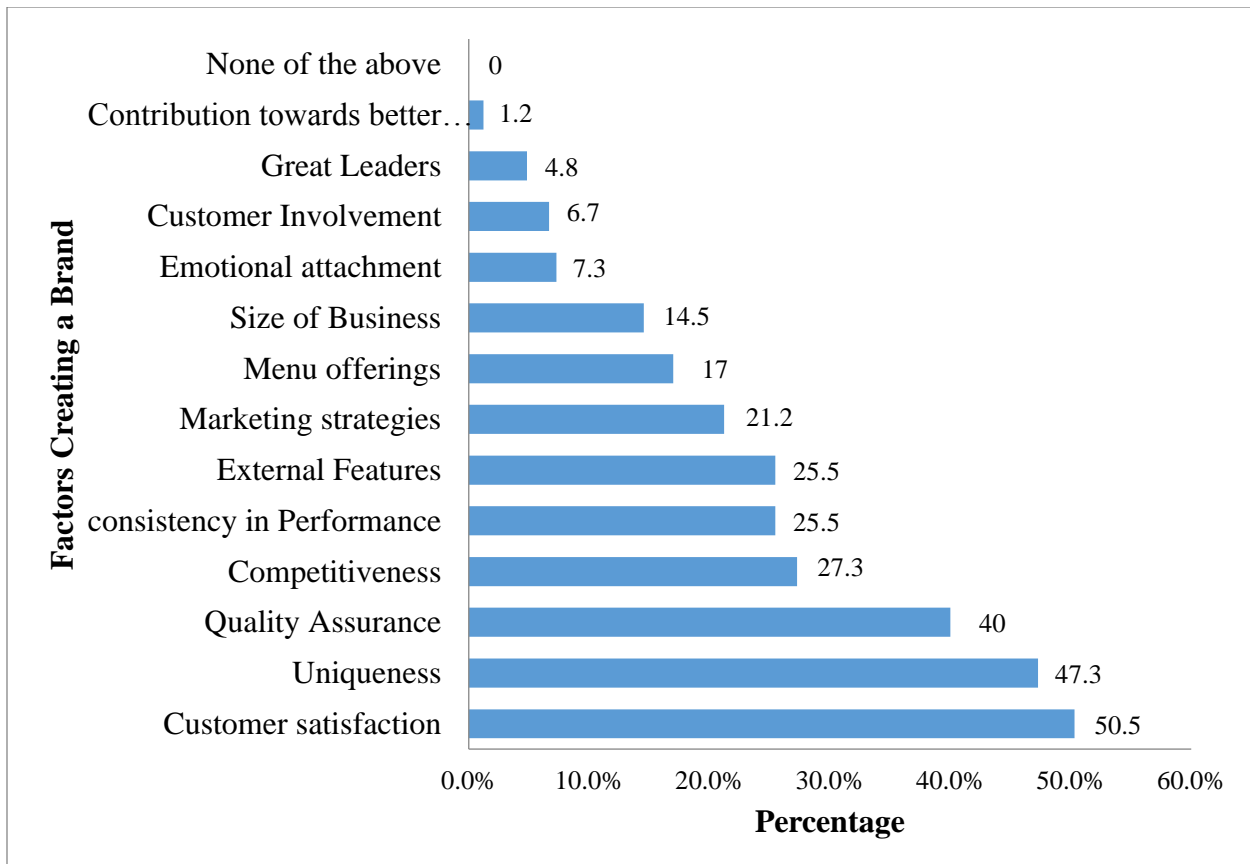


Figure 3. Perceived factors creating a brand in the restaurant industry.

Research Question #2 Summary. Based on the findings of this study it can be concluded that more than 50% respondents believe that *customer satisfaction, uniqueness* and *quality assurance* are the top three factors which help create a brand.

Competitiveness, consistency in performance, external features, and the restaurants' marketing strategies were other important factors highlighted in this study.

Yet another major finding was that the *contribution to the betterment of environment/society* was regarded as the least important factor which assists in creating a brand name.

Research Question #3: How do The Consumers Perceive Restaurant Review Sites?

The following section presents the findings of the face-to-face survey questions corresponding to this research question.

Survey question 4 asked: How often do you surf online review sites for making a decision of choice about dining establishments? The respondents were required to indicate the frequency in which they surfed online restaurant review sites. The respondents were required to choose from: (a) every time, (b) sometimes, (c) rarely, and (d) never.

All the participants ($N = 165$) responded to survey Question 4. Based on the responses, 37% ($n=61$) of the participants surfed online review sites *sometimes* before making a choice on dining establishments, while 21.8% ($n=36$) surfed online review sites *rarely* (see Table 5). Twenty percent of the participants ($n=33$) surfed online review sites *every time* before making a choice on dining establishments (See Figure 4). However, 21.2% of the respondents ($n=35$) *never* surfed online review sites before making a decision regarding dining establishments. Participants who chose '*Never*' were not eligible to respond to Questions 5-12.

Table 5

Frequency of Surfing Restaurant Review sites

Frequency	Number of respondents	Percent
Every Time	33	20.0
Sometimes	61	37.0
Rarely	36	21.8
Never	35	21.2
Total	165	100.0

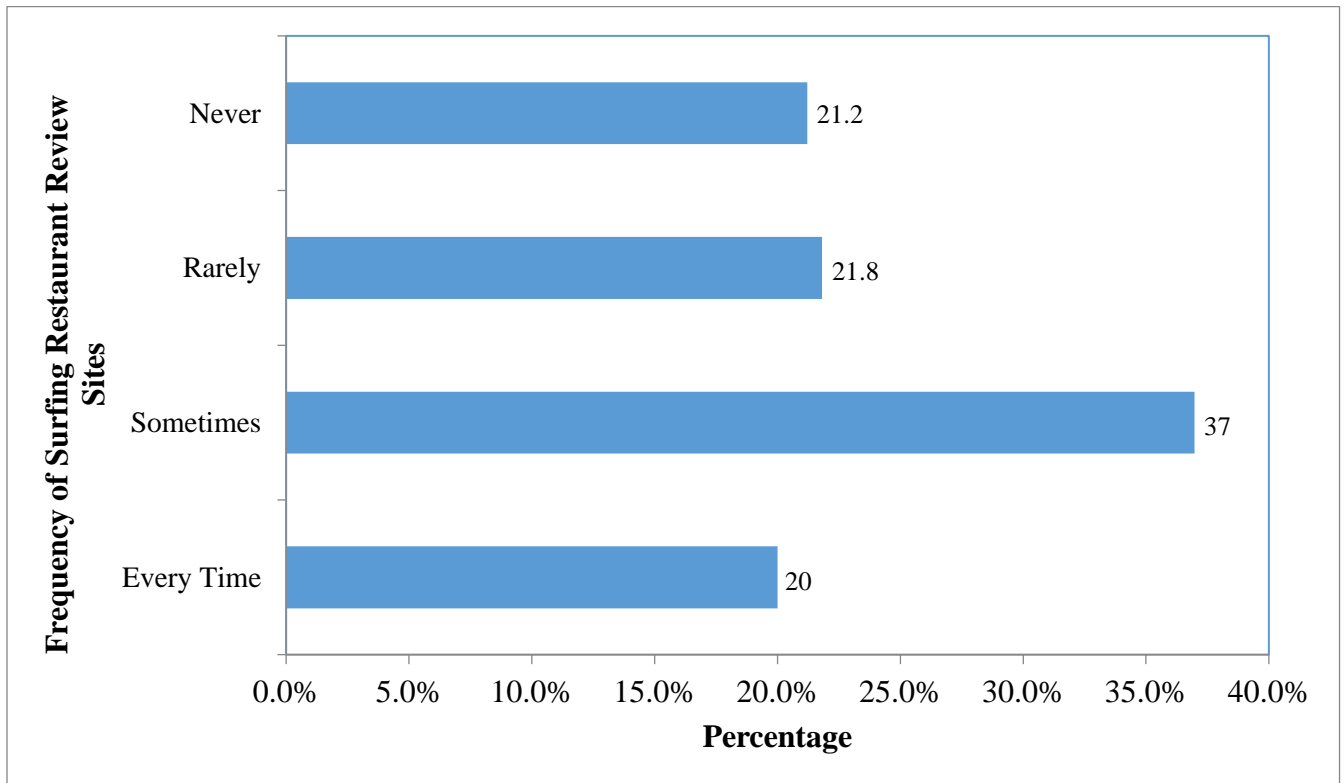


Figure 4. Frequency of surfing restaurant review sites amongst consumers.

Survey question 5 asked: When surfing through a particular food/dining review site what do you actually look for? The participants were required to choose the major features they look for when surfing a particular food/dining review site. The options included 1-Customer Reviews, 2-Ratings only, 3-Pictures, 4-Menu details, and 5-All the above.

A total of 131 participants responded to survey Question 5. The majority of the participants indicated that they mainly looked for *customer reviews* (47%) when surfing a particular food/dining review site, while 42%, 13%, and 6% looked for *menu details*, *pictures*, and *ratings only* respectively (see Table 6). 41% of the participants indicated that they looked for *all the provided options*- menu details, pictures, ratings, and customer reviews (see Figure 5).

Table 6
Restaurant Review Sites Content of Interest to Consumers

Restaurant review site contents	Percent
Customers Reviews	47.0
Ratings only	6.0
Picture	13.0
Menu Details	42.0
All the above	41.0

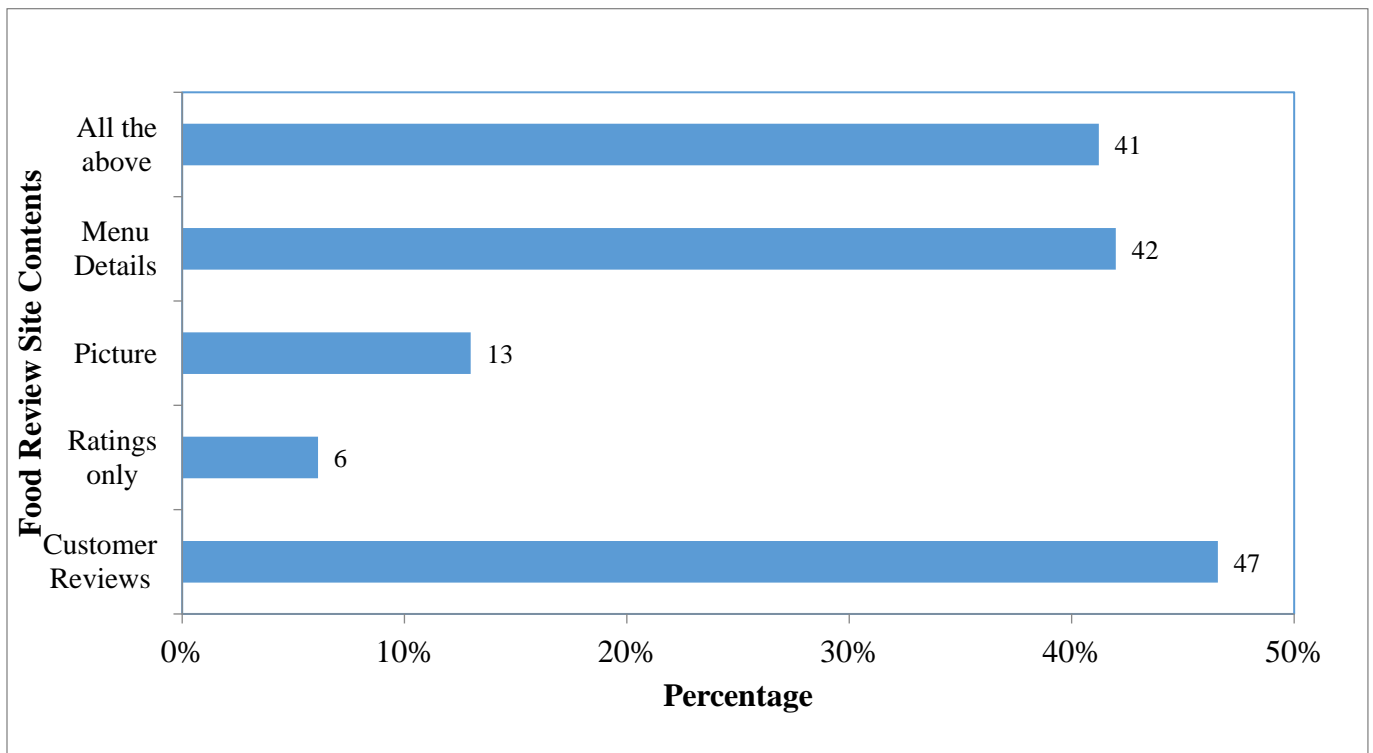


Figure 5. Food/dining review site contents of interest to consumers.

Survey question 6 asked: How often do you write an online review of the experience you had at a particular dining location? The participants were required to choose from 5 options: (a) Almost every times, (b) Occasionally, (c) ONLY when I have a good experience, (d) ONLY when I have a bad experience, and (e) Never.

A total of 131 participants responded to survey Question 6. Based on the responses, 38.2% of the respondents indicated that they *occasionally* wrote online reviews of the experiences they had at particular dining locations (See Table 7). Also, 33.6% of the respondents *never* wrote online reviews of the experiences they had at dining locations, while 13.7% only wrote online reviews *when they had bad experiences* at the dining locations. In addition, 8.4% of the respondents wrote online reviews *almost every time*, while 6.1% wrote online reviews *when they had good experiences* at the dining locations (See Figure 6).

Table 7

Writing Online Restaurant Reviews

Frequency of writing restaurant reviews	Number of respondents	Percent
Almost every time	11	6.7
Occasionally	50	30.3
Only when I have a good experience	8	4.8
Only when I have a bad experience	18	10.9
Never	44	26.7
Total	131	79.4

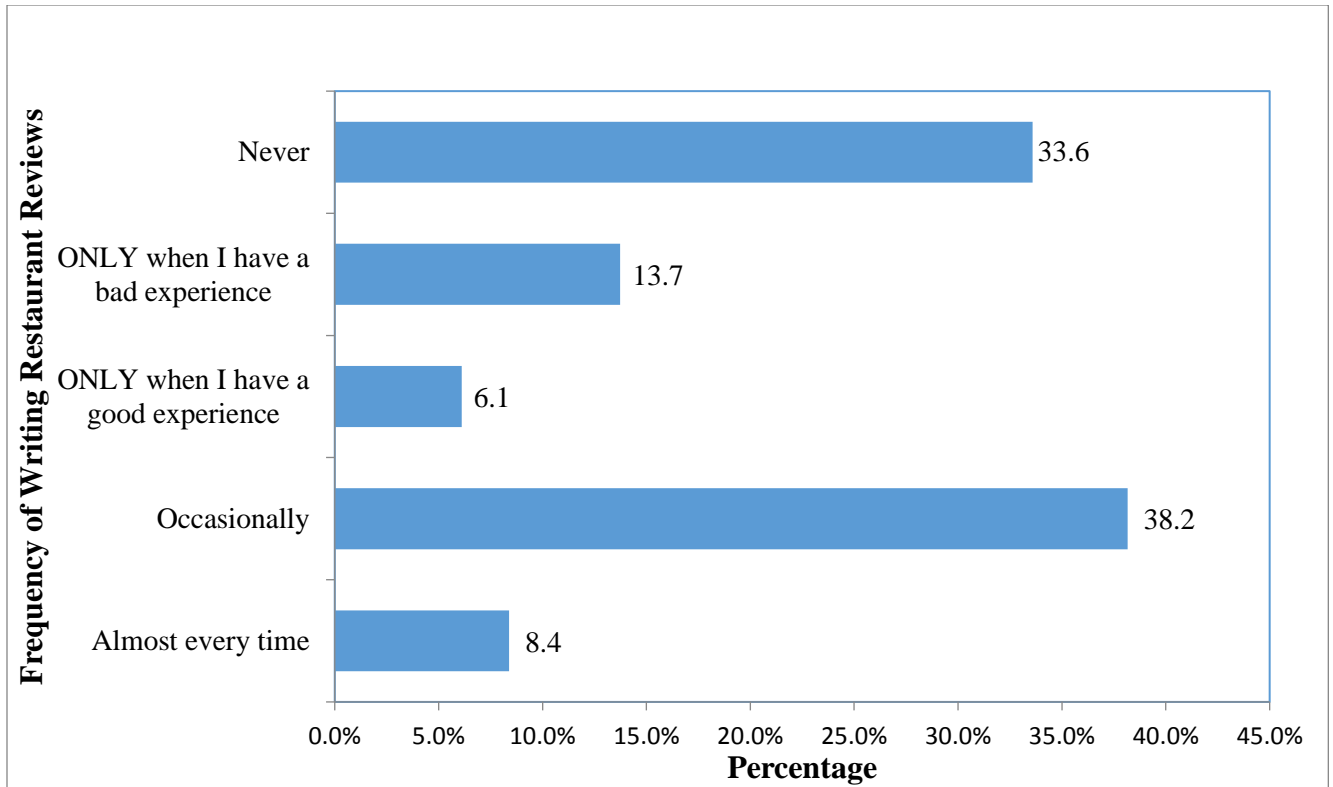


Figure 6. Frequency of writing reviews on restaurant review sites.

Research Question #3 Summary

The findings of this study indicate that 57% respondents surf restaurant review sites *every time* or *sometimes*.

The study indicates that 47% the respondents looked for *customer reviews* when surfing a restaurant review site. It was also noted that 41% of the total respondents chose to answer *all the above*, which meant that they looked for customer reviews, menu details, rating, and pictures of a dining location.

This study highlights that nearly half the number of respondents (46.8%) wrote online reviews *every time* or *occasionally*.

Research Question 4: How Effective are The Internet Review Sites in The Restaurant Industry?

The following presents the findings of the face-to-face survey questions corresponding to this research question.

Survey question 7 asked: Do you trust online customer reviews as much as personal recommendations? The respondents were required to indicate whether they trusted online customer reviews as much as personal recommendations. The options included, 1-Definitely Yes! 2- Most likely, 3-Less Likely, 4-I don't trust any reviews, and 5-I don't read any reviews.

A total of 131 participants responded to survey Question 7. Based on the responses, 53.4% respondents ($n=70$) indicated that they were *most likely* to trust online customer reviews as much as recommendations, while 23.7% respondents ($n=31$) *definitely* trusted online customer reviews as much as recommendations (See Table 8). However, 13% of the participants ($n=17$) indicated that they were *less likely* to trust online customer reviews as much as recommendations. Also, 6.9% of the participants ($n=9$) *did not read any reviews*, while 3.1% *did not trust any reviews* at all (See Figure 7). Participants who chose '*I don't trust any reviews*' or '*I don't read any reviews*' were not eligible to respond to Questions 8-11.

Table 8

Trusting Online Reviews Over Personal Recommendations

Consumer perceptions	Number of respondents	Percent
Definitely Yes!	31	6.7
Most Likely	70	30.3
Less Likely	17	4.8
I don't trust any reviews	4	10.9
I don't read any customer reviews	9	26.7
Total	131	79.4

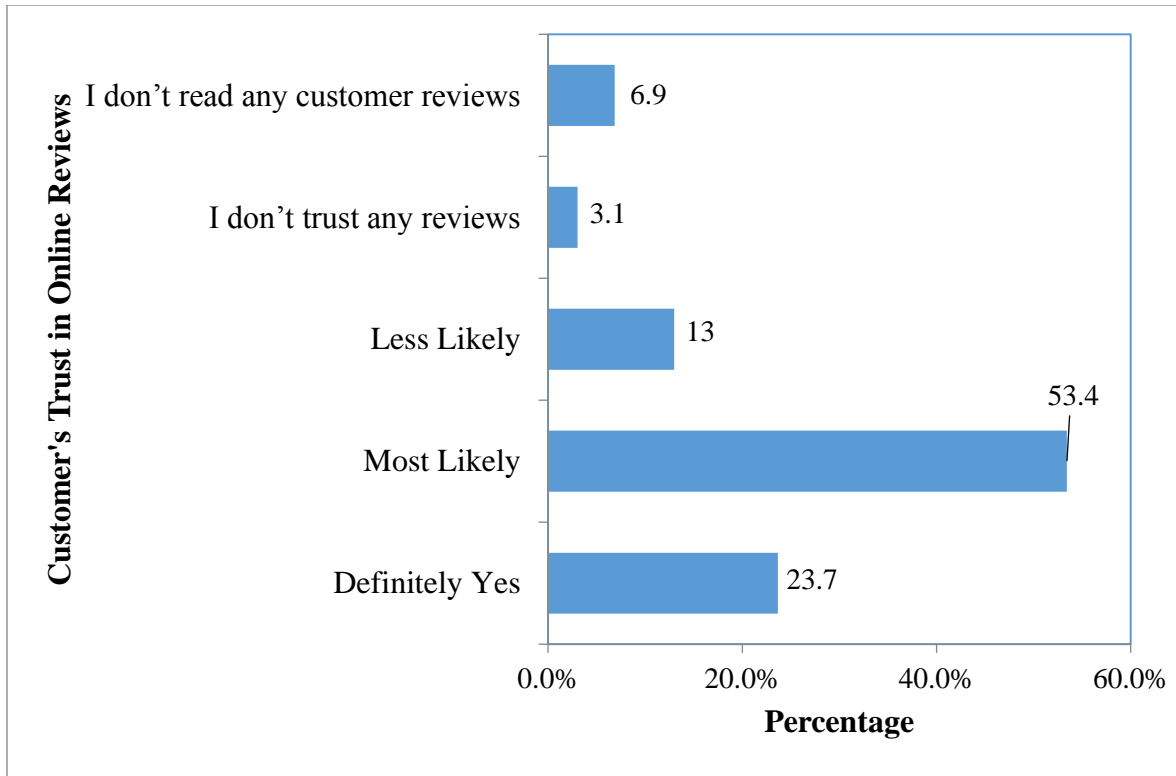


Figure 7. Trustworthiness of restaurant reviews.

Survey question 8 asked, “How likely do you get influenced by the reviews of any organization available on internet review sites?” The respondents had four options to choose from: 1-Highly influenced, 2-Partially influenced, 3-Less likely influenced, and 4-No influence whatsoever.

In total, 118 participants responded to survey Question 8. Based on the responses, 48.3% respondents ($n=57$) were *highly influenced* by the reviews of any restaurant, posted on internet review sites (see Table 9). 39.8% of the respondents ($n=47$) indicated that the online reviews of restaurants *partially influenced* them, while only 11.9% ($n=14$) respondents were *less likely to be influenced* by the online reviews. None of the participants indicated that online reviews did *not influence them whatsoever* (see Figure 8).

Table 9

Influence of Online Restaurant Reviews on Consumers

Rate of influence	Number of respondents	Percent
Highly influenced	57	34.5
Partially influenced	47	28.5
Less likely influenced	14	8.5
Total	118	71.5

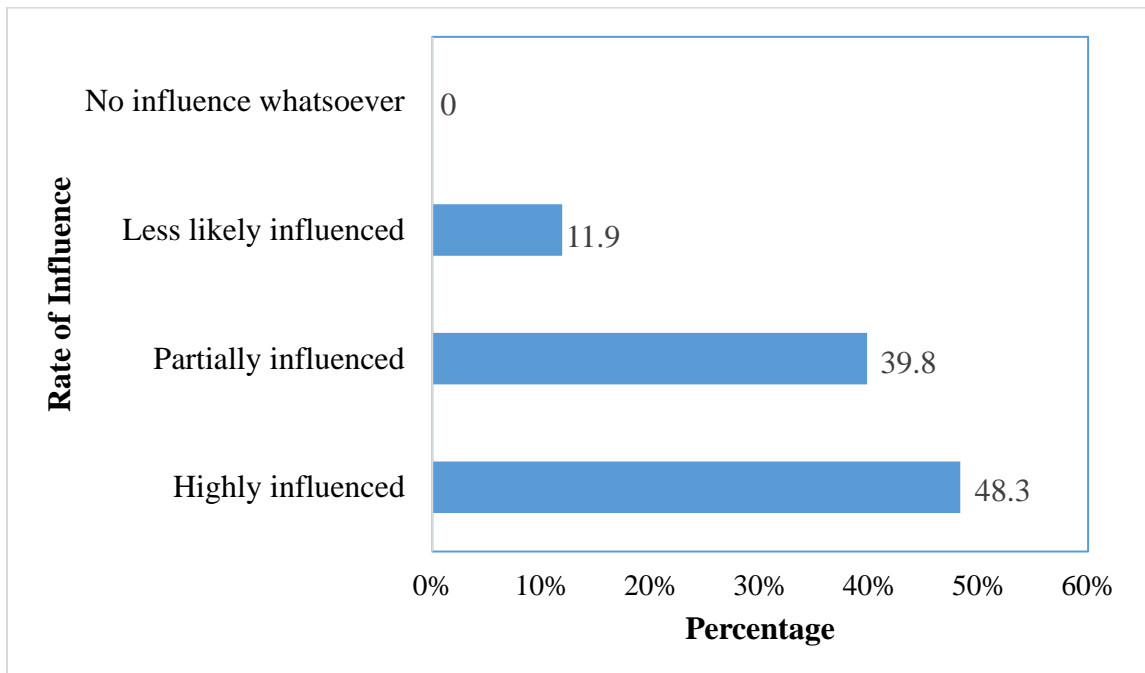


Figure 8. Influence of restaurant reviews on consumers.

Survey question 9 asked: How many customer reviews would you read before you feel confident about making a decision of choice? The respondents had four choices to choose from: (a) 1-3 (37%), (b) 4-8 (60%), (c) 9-15 (3%), and (d) I try to read as many as possible.

A total of 117 participants responded to survey Question 9. The responses indicated that majority ($n=71$) of the participants (60.7%) had to read 4-8 reviews before feeling confident about making a choice, while 36.8% ($n=43$) and 2.6% had to read 1-3 reviews and 9-15 reviews

respectively to be confident about making a choice (see Table 10). None of the participants indicated that they *tried to read as many reviews as possible* (See Figure 9).

Table 10

Total Restaurant Reviews Required to Make Decision of Choice

Number of reviews required	Number of respondents	Percent
1-3	43	26.1
4-8	71	43.0
9-15	3	1.8
Total	117	70.9

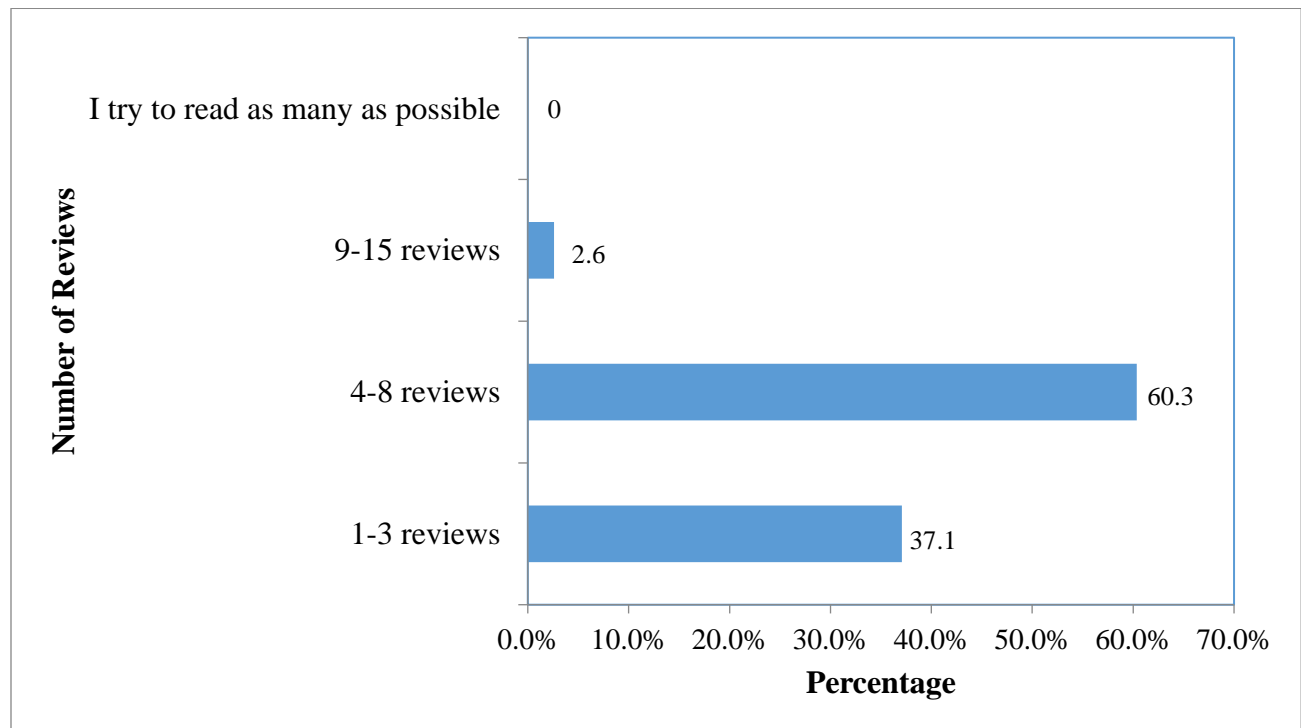


Figure 9. Number of customer reviews required to make a decision of choice.

Survey question 10 asked, “How many positive reviews would it take you to believe that a particular dining location is extremely good?” The respondents were required to choose from the following four options: 1-Less than 3, 2-Somewhere between 3-7, 3-More than 7, and 4-I do not reach any conclusion based on reviews.

A total of 117 participants responded to survey Question 10. Based on the responses, 59.8% ($n=70$) indicated that *between 3 and 7* reviews were enough to convince them that a particular dining location was extremely good, while 36.8% respondents ($n=43$) believed that *less than three* reviews were enough for them to believe that a particular dining location was extremely good (See Table 11). Also, it would take *more than 7* reviews to convince 2.6% of the participants that a particular dining location was extremely good (See Table 11). Only 0.9% ($n=1$) of the participants *did not reach any conclusions based on customer reviews* (See Figure 10).

Table 11

Impact of Positive Reviews

Number of positive reviews	Number of respondents	Percent
Less than 3	43	26.1
Somewhere between 3-7	70	42.4
More than 7	3	1.8
I do not reach any conclusion based on reviews	1	0.6
Total	117	70.9

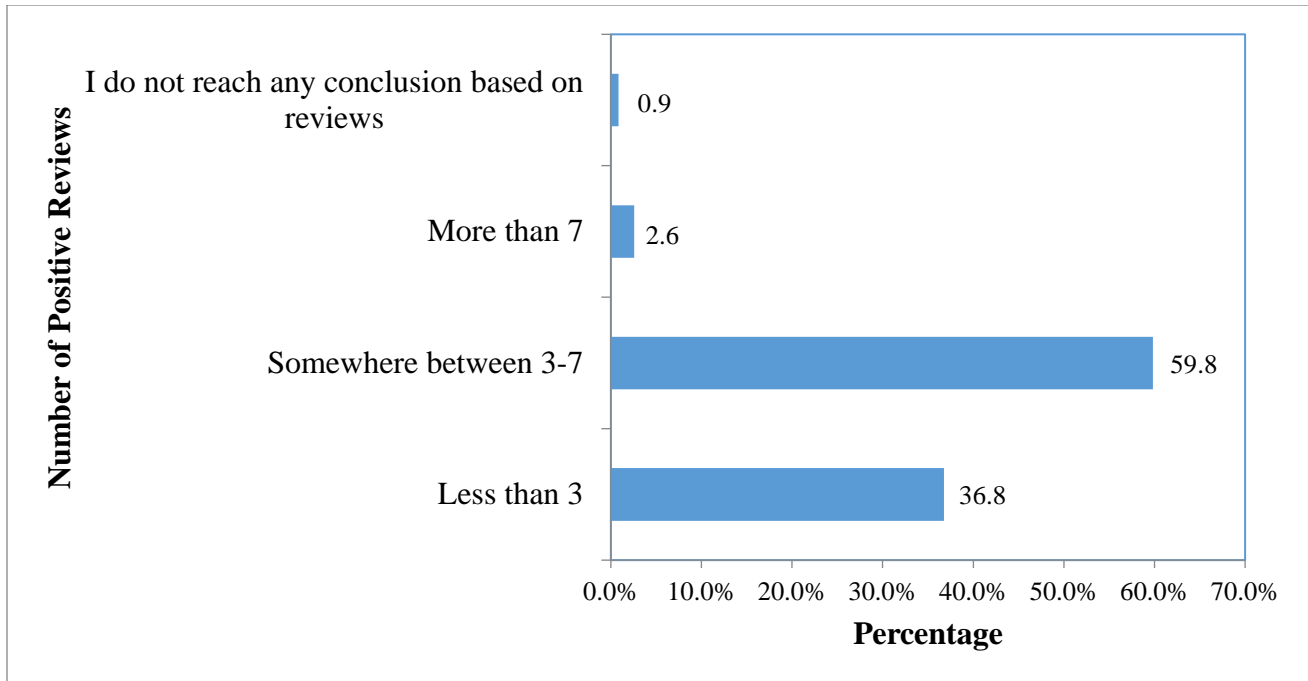


Figure 10. Positive reviews required by the consumers to believe that a particular dining location is extremely good.

Survey question 11 asked: How many negative reviews would it take you to believe that a particular dining location is extremely bad? The respondents were required to choose from four options: 1-Less than 3, 2-Somewhere between 3-7, 3-More than 7, 4-I do not reach any conclusion based on reviews.

A total of 117 respondents answered survey Question 11. Based on the responses, majority ($n=58$) of the participants (49.6%) claimed that it would take them to read *between 3-7* negative reviews to believe that a particular dining location was extremely bad (See Table 12). The responses also indicated that it would take *less than three* negative reviews to make 47% of the respondents ($n=55$) believe than a particular dining location was extremely bad. Also, 2.6 % of the participants indicated that it would take *more than seven* negative reviews to believe that a particular dining location was extremely bad (see Figure 11). Only 0.9% percent of the participants *did not reach any conclusion based on reviews*.

Table 12

Impact of Negative Reviews

Number of negative reviews	Number of respondents	Percent
Less than 3	55	33.3
Somewhere between 3-7	58	35.2
More than 7	3	1.8
I do not reach any conclusion based on reviews	1	0.6
Total	117	70.9

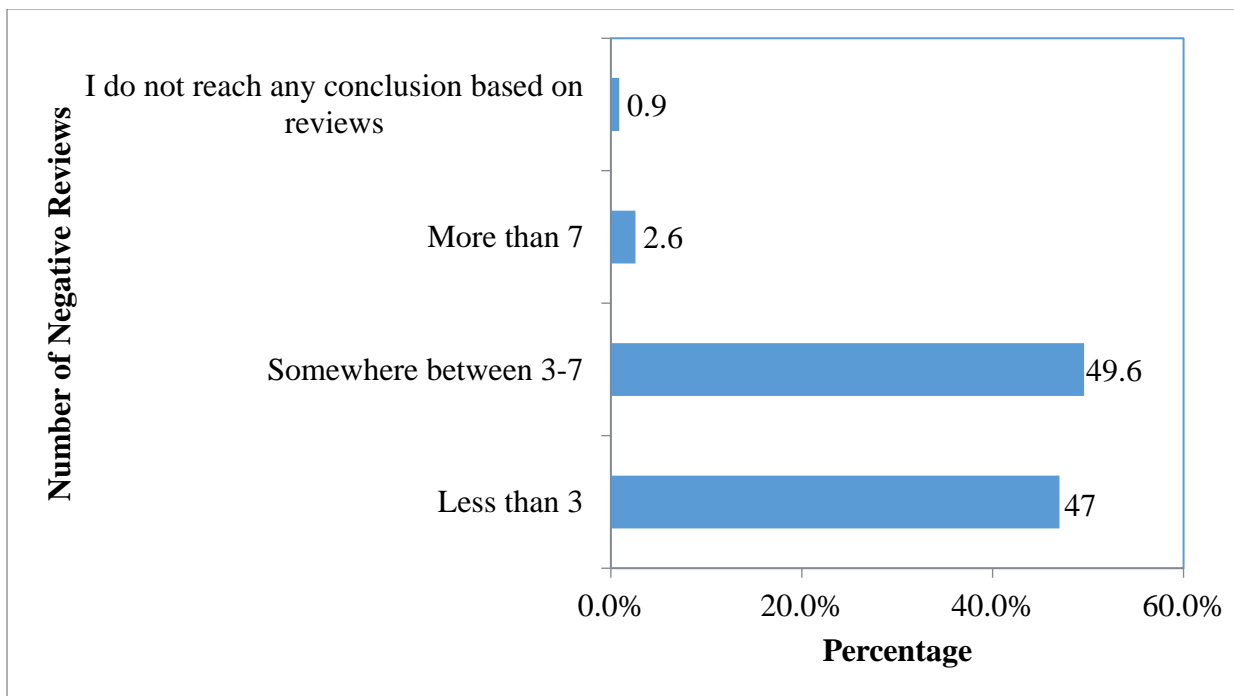


Figure 11. Negative reviews required by the consumers to believe that a particular dining location is extremely bad.

Research Question #4 Summary. The study indicates that 77.1% respondents are *definitely* or *most likely* to trust the consumer reviews posted on online restaurant review sites. It was also found that 88.1% respondents were highly or partially influenced by the reviews on restaurant review sites.

The majority of the participants (97.5%) were confident in making a decision of choice about a dining location after reading consumer reviews between 1-8.

The majority of the respondents (96.6%) had to read between 1-7 positive/negative reviews to conclude that a particular dining location was extremely good or bad.

Research Question #5: What are The Attitudes of The Restaurant Industry Consumers About the Application of Internet Review Sites?

The following presents the findings of the face-to-face survey questions corresponding to this research question.

Survey question 12 asked: If a particular restaurant operator would respond to address a comment of appreciation or grievance about an online review provided by you, would that make you feel more valued with that brand? The participants were required to choose from five options: 1-Definitely YES! 2-Not really, but I would be happy to see a response, 3-No, but it might prove helpful to other readers, 4-Wouldn't matter to me in any way, and 5-It is difficult to answer this one!

A total of 130 participants responded to survey Question 12. Based on the responses, 38.5% of the respondents ($n=50$) indicated that they would *definitely feel valued* by a brand if a particular restaurant operator addressed comments of appreciation or grievance, while 19.2% of the participants indicated that they would *not feel valued* by the brand if the restaurant operators addressed comments about online reviews, *but it might be helpful to other users* (see Table 13). Additionally, 16.2% of the participants indicated that they *would not feel valued by the brand, but they would be happy to see the operators' responses* (See Figure 12). The responses also

indicated that for 14.6% of the respondents, the operators' responses regarding online reviews *would not matter in any way*. However, 11.5% of the participants had a difficulty in responding to this question (See Figure 12).

Table 13

Impact of Operator Response on Consumer Attitudes

Impact of operator's response on consumer's attitude	Number of respondents	Percent
Definitely YES!	50	30.3
Not really, but I would be happy to see response	21	12.7
No, but it might prove helpful to other readers	25	15.2
Wouldn't matter to me in any way	19	11.5
It is difficult to answer this one	15	9.1
Total	130	78.8

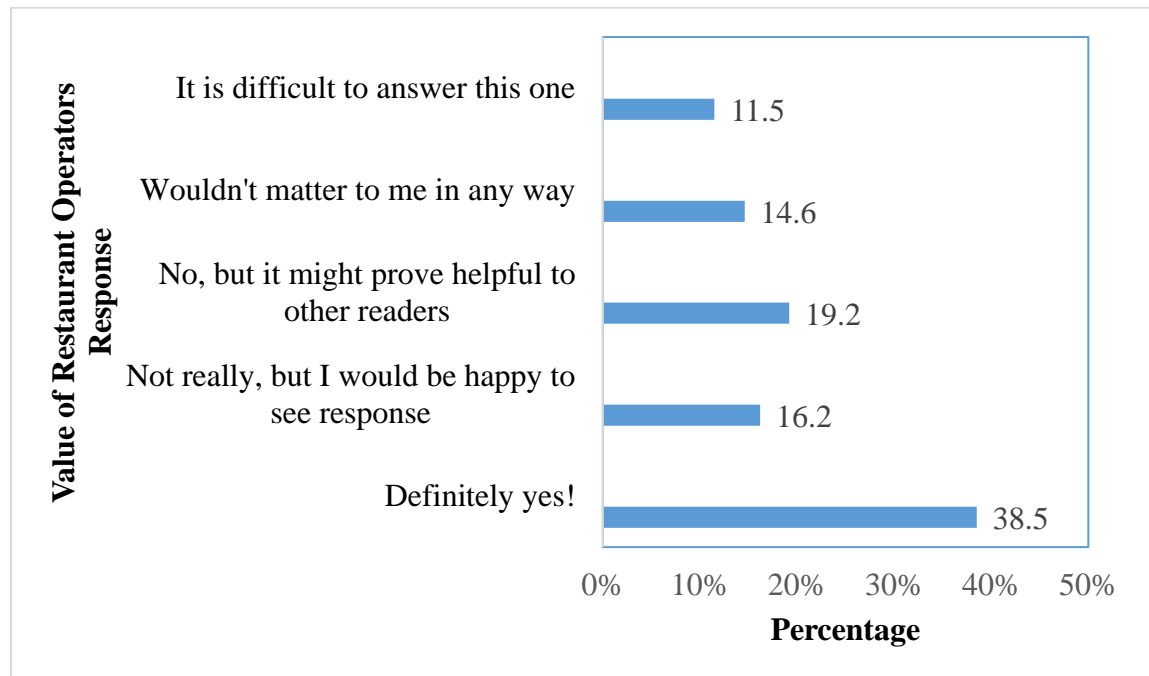


Figure 12. Impact of response provided by restaurant operator on consumers.

Survey question 13 asked: Would you recommend restaurant operatives to heavily rely on internet review sites to market their brand? The respondents were required to choose from following six options: 1-YES! It is easy, highly accessible & effective, 2-If only there were

some means to guarantee that no reviews were FAKE!, 3- In my opinion, review sites cannot replace other marketing forms, 4-A combination of both (Review sites & Traditional forms) would be perfect!, 5-I prefer traditional forms of marketing as I don't have access to internet, and 6-I don't care about internet review sites.

A total of 165 participants responded to survey Question 13. Based on the responses, majority ($n=61$) of the participants (37%) indicated that they would recommend restaurant operatives to use a *combination of review sites and traditional methods* to market their brand (see Table 14). Also, 26.1% of the respondents indicated that they would recommend restaurant operatives to *heavily rely on internet review sites* to market their brand *if only the legitimacy of the reviews was guaranteed*. 17% of the participants agreed that they would recommend restaurant operatives to *heavily rely on internet review sites* to market their brand because it is easy, highly accessible, and effective (See Figure 13). However, 7.3% of the participants indicated that review sites *cannot replace other forms of marketing*, and 6.1% preferred traditional forms of marketing as they did not have access to the internet (See Figure 13). 7% of the participants *did not care about internet review sites*.

Table 14

Consumer Perceptions on Application of Restaurant Review Sites

Consumer perceptions	Number of respondents	Percent
YES! It is easy, highly accessible & effective	28	17.0
If only there were some means to guarantee that no reviews were FAKE!	43	26.1
In my opinion, review sites cannot replace other marketing forms	12	7.3
A combination of both (Review sites & Traditional forms) would be perfect!	61	37.0
I prefer traditional forms of marketing as I don't have access to internet	10	6.1
I don't care about internet review sites	11	6.7
Total	165	100

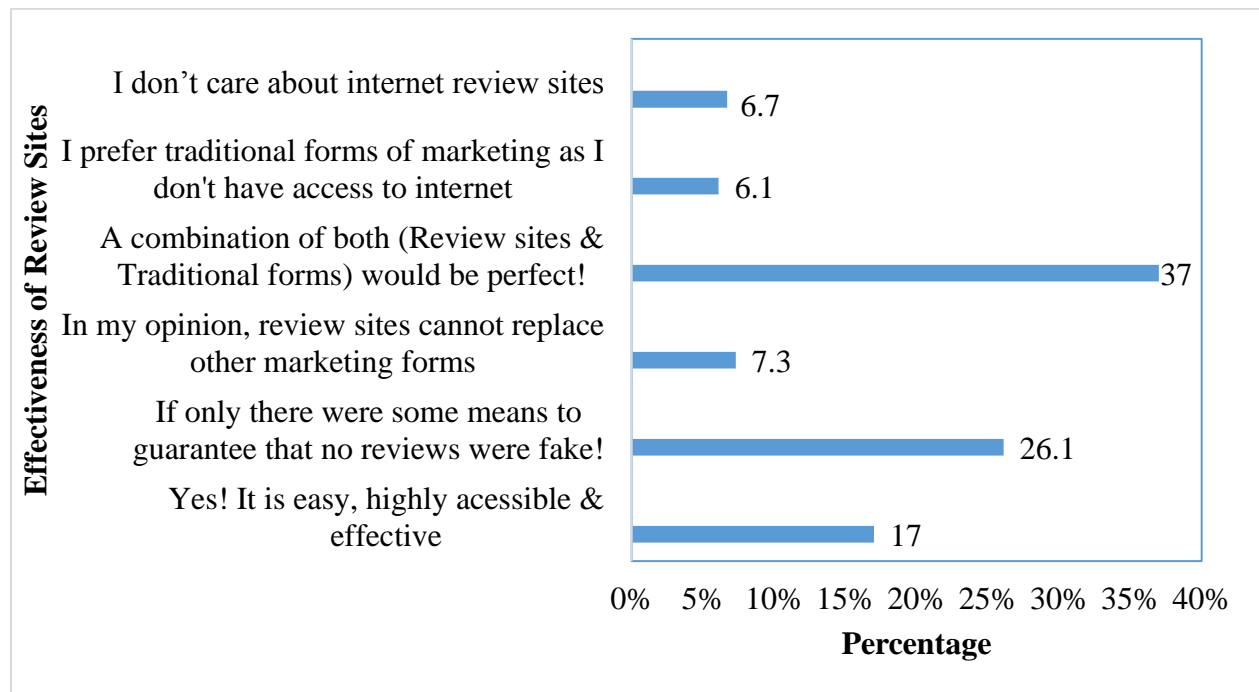


Figure 13. Consumers recommendation on application of the restaurant review sites.

Survey question 14 asked: In your opinion, do you think having more numbers of positive/negative online reviews will enable a particular food establishment make/break its

brand name in the market? The respondents were required to choose from the following seven options: 1-Definitely YES! 2-Not sure about positives, but more negatives will destroy the brand identity, 3-Not sure about negatives, but more positives will definitely build a brand name, 4-I'm unsure about branding but the places will definitely either attract/lose more or more customers, 5-May be or may not be, 6-Will not affect the brand in any way, 7-I don't have an answer.

A total of 165 participants responded to survey Question 14. Based on the respondents' opinions, 28.5% ($n=47$) were *not sure about branding, but indicated that more positive/negative reviews would either attract or lead to loss of customers* (see Table 15). Also, 27.9% of the participants ($n=46$) were *not sure* whether having a large number of negative and positive online reviews could affect the brand name of a particular food establishment. Additionally, 18.8% of the participants agreed that *having more positive/negative online reviews would enable food establishments to enhance or diminish its brand name in the market* (See Figure 14).

Further, 12.1% of the participants were confident that *negative reviews would destroy the brand name of the food establishment, but were not sure about positive reviews*. Only 2.4% indicated that *positive reviews would definitely build a brand name, but were not sure about negative reviews* (See Figure 14). Finally, 3% of the participants indicated that *having a large number of negative/positive online reviews will not affect the brand in any ways*, while 7.3% did *not have an answer* to this question.

Table 15

Impact of Positive/Negative Reviews on Brand Name of Restaurant Establishments

Consumer responses	Number of respondents	Percent
Definitely YES!	31	18.8
Not sure about positives, but more negatives will destroy the brand identity.	20	12.1
Not sure about negatives, but more positives will definitely build a brand name.	4	2.4
I'm unsure about branding but the place will definitely either attract/lose more and more customers.	47	28.5
May be or may not be	46	27.9
Will not affect the brand in any way	5	3.0
I don't have an answer	12	7.3
Total	165	100

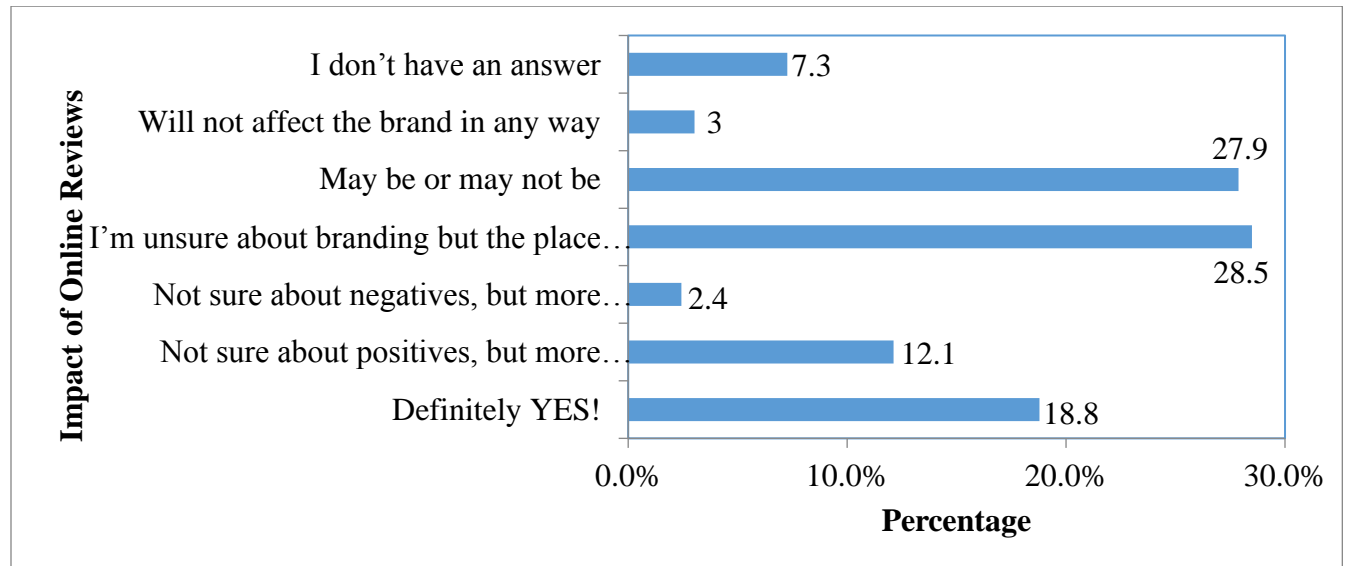


Figure 14. Impact of positive/negative online reviews on brand name of food establishments in the market.

Survey question 15 asked: Is it important to you that food review sites identify some innovative practices by restaurant owners such as environment protection plans, waste

management, use of organic/local ingredients, effective human resource management? The respondents were required to choose from the following 5 options: 1- Definitely Yes, 2- Most likely, 3- Less Likely, 4-I am not interested in that stuff, and 5-Not sure.

Survey Question 15 was answered by 165 participants. Based on the responses, the majority ($n=79$) of the participants (47.9%) indicated that it was *most likely* important for them that food review sites identified some innovative practices by restaurant owners including environment protection plans, waste management, use of organic/local ingredients, effective human resource management (see Table 16). The participants also indicated that it was *definitely important* (20.6%) and *less likely important* (10.9%) that online review sites identified some innovative practices by restaurant owners (See Figure 15). However, 18.2% of the participants were *not sure* (17%) or were *not interested* (2.4%) about the importance of online review sites identifying innovative practices by restaurant owners (see Figure 15).

Table 16

Consumer Perceptions About Sustainable Innovations in Restaurant Industry

Consumer responses	Number of respondents	Percent
Definitely Yes!	34	20.6
Most Likely	79	47.9
Less Likely	18	10.9
I am not interested in that stuff!	4	2.4
Not sure	30	18.2
Total	165	100.0

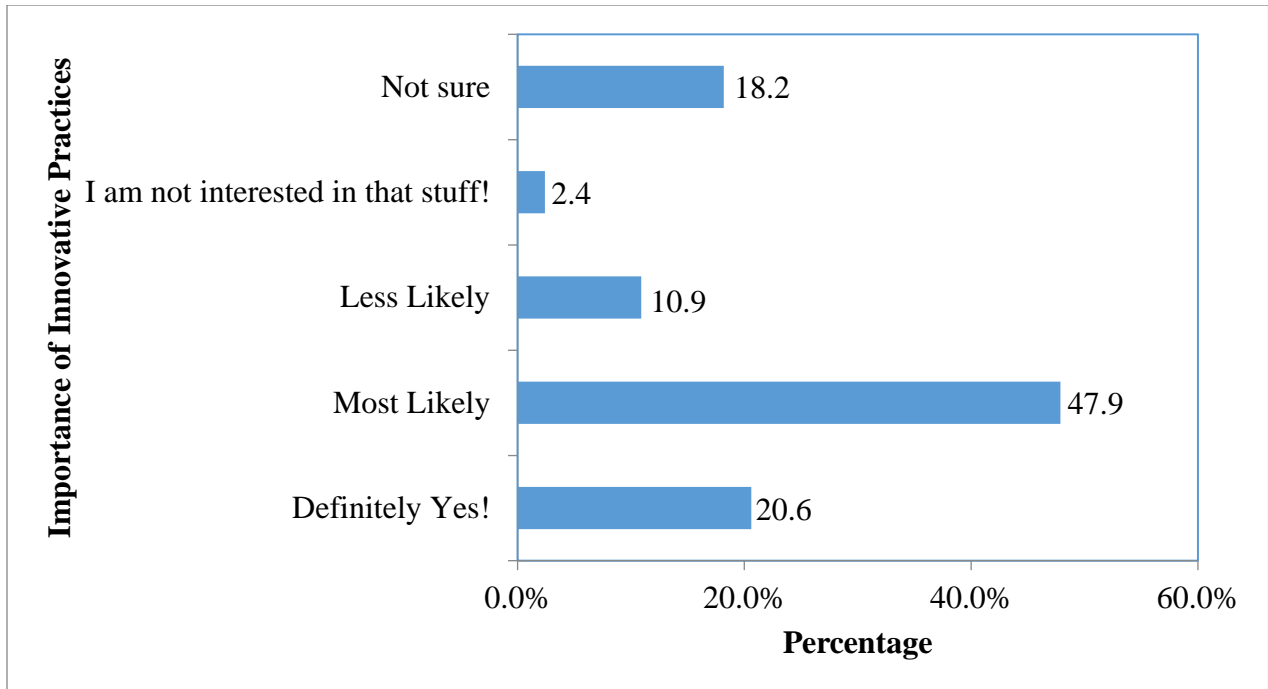


Figure 15. Importance of innovative practices by restaurant owners amongst the consumers.

Research Question #5 Summary

The findings of this study indicated that nearly 40% respondents would feel *highly valued* with a particular restaurant brand if the operators were to address the reviews posted by the consumers on review sites.

The research found that only 26.1% respondents would *recommend the restaurant owners to rely on internet review sites to market their brand if there were some means to guarantee the legitimacy of the reviews*. Additionally, 17% respondents opined that the restaurants should *rely on internet review sites*. 37% respondents however chose to recommend that the restaurant operators should use a *combination of different methods*.

It was found that only 18% respondents felt that a restaurant can *definitely make or break its brand name due to positive/negative reviews*.

This study reveals that 68.5% consumers would *definitely or most likely* feel that it is important for review sites to identify innovative practices being undertaken by restaurant operators such as waste management, environmental protection plans, effective human resource management, and the use of organic/local ingredients.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter illustrates the discussion and the conclusion around the topic of this research study and its core findings. The chapter begins by defining the purpose of this study followed by a brief description of the major research findings. The chapter further outlines the importance of this research study and provides a comparison between the literature around the topic and the results of this study. The subsequent sections identify the limitations acknowledged in this study and proposed research design improvements. The last section provides suggestions for future research and research summary.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this research study was to analyze the role of internet review sites in the process of restaurant branding.

Research Study's Major Findings

This section identifies the study's most important findings. The relation between the literature and all the research findings have been presented in the subsequent section of this chapter.

Branding is a process involving two key perspectives- the consumer's perceptions and the company's financial returns or the monetary value as leveraged by the brand. Based on the results of this study, it was found that the majority of the respondents believed that the brand name of the restaurant was *highly important* to them.

Customer satisfaction, uniqueness and quality were the top three rated factors that assist in creating a restaurant brand. *Customer satisfaction* involves improving company's performance resulting in consumers most likely to repurchase the products and services or refer the company to others. *Uniqueness* is the customers desire to experience distinctive products and services which helps in improvising customer loyalty. *Quality* refers to adding value to the customer experience, which fully satisfies their need. By offering superior goods and services consistently, restaurants can essentially gain customer trust.

The majority of the respondent's surf restaurant review sites *almost every time* before making a decision of choice, and *customer reviews* is what attracted them the most.

Nearly half of the sample posts reviews about their experiences on the restaurant review sites *occasionally*. It was found that the majority of the participants *highly trust* and are *highly influenced* by the reviews posted on the restaurant review sites. The majority of the respondents required only between 1-7 reviews to make a decision of choice. It was also found that most of the participants only required *less than 3 positive/negative reviews* before attaining to a conclusion about whether a particular dining location was good or bad.

The study identified that half of the respondents would feel *valued* if the operator of a particular brand responded to their comment of appreciation or grievance.

The majority of the participants felt that it was *highly important* to them that the review sites identify some of the innovative restaurant business practices, such as, waste management, environmental protection, use of local ingredients, and human resource management. Contribution to the betterment of environment/society was the least important factor identified by the respondents, assisting in the creation of a restaurant brand.

Importance of the Results

The main purpose of conducting this exploratory research study was to analyze the role of internet review sites in the process of restaurant branding. The findings of this study are consistent and confirm the findings of the previous researches, while also revealing distinct and valuable information about the topic that adds to the research literature.

The exploratory approach facilitated the development of a baseline understanding of online reviews in the restaurant industry (Creswell, 2003 & Brown, 2006). It also provides a strong foundation for future research in identifying the economic value or the economic impact of internet review sites in restaurant branding (Mason et al., 2010). The data can also be further used to compare the different age groups with one another to record the differences in consumer's behavior, approach, and attitude as per the age difference. The findings of this study identify important factors that should be considered by the restaurant operators when creating a brand in the market.

The study will enable the restaurant operators to better understand customer perceptions about the application of internet review sites in the restaurant industry. The findings of this research study will be useful to the restaurant operators who wish to capitalize on the benefits of internet review sites in creating or growing their restaurant brand.

Results and the Literature Review

Importance of brand name in the restaurant industry. The major findings of this study were consistent with the research literature relating to the impact of online consumer reviews on customers' decision making in the restaurant industry. As identified in the results, most of the participants perceived a company's brand name as *highly important* when choosing a

particular dining location. Similar results were found by Schlutz (2012) who evaluated the impact of a product image based on the brand name, on the customer turnout in the restaurant industry. Schlutz (2012) evaluated restaurants in Nairobi-Kenya, and the results identified that the restaurant managers felt the brand name attracts the customers most, helps them earn repeated guests, enhances the restaurants' popularity in the market, and improvises the sales (Schlutz, 2012).

This study found that for the majority of the respondents, the brand name was an *important* factor in choosing a particular dining location which is consistent with Aureli et al. (2015). Aureli's (2015) work indicated that the well-developed brands enjoyed a larger market share as compared to the non-established ones, and that customers focus on the brand name of the company that appeals to them when making decisions of choice. The importance of having an established brand name was also highlighted by O'Neill and Mattila (2010) who argued that restaurants with established brand name tend to record higher profits as compared to the non-established brands, especially during economic crisis.

Perceived factors creating a brand in the restaurant industry. Approximately 50% of the respondents identified *quality assurance, customer satisfaction* and *uniqueness* as the three major factors that assist in developing a brand. This finding is congruent with the conclusion of Al-Msallam (2015) who found that customer satisfaction significantly influenced the customer loyalty in the hotel industry.

Ferencic and Wolfing (2015) also indicate that providing goods and services of superior quality in a consistent manner adds value to the brand and improves customer satisfaction index. Hanaysha (2016) also found that the quality of service is important in developing brand identity in the restaurant industry. Hanaysha (2016) concluded that quality assurance was identified as a

strong factor to influence brand loyalty, brand image and brand preference (Hanaysha, 2016). The impact of quality on branding was also confirmed by Al-Tit (2015) who found that quality influences customer retention, and customer retention strengthens the company's competitiveness in the restaurant industry.

Consumer perceptions about restaurant review sites. The findings of this study indicated the importance of online review sites in the restaurant industry. With the rapid growth in technology and ever-increasing use of internet, online customer reviews have become a vital source of information, for both, the restaurant operators, and the consumers (Goldsmith et al., 2013). Based on the findings of this study, over half of the respondents indicated that they visited restaurant review sites *every time* or *sometimes*. The results indicate that customers specifically look for *customer reviews* when they surf restaurant review sites. This study also indicated that the majority of the participants *occasionally* chose to write online reviews. This finding suggests that online review sites are an important element amongst the consumers of the restaurant industry.

Effectiveness of restaurant review sites. The participants indicated that they tend to *highly trust* the online reviews as much as personal recommendations. This implies that the presence of online reviews about any restaurant can significantly influence the customer's thoughts and behavior, thus, impacting on the economic performance of any restaurant. This finding is consistent with Wu, Che, Chan and Lu (2015) who analyzed the economic benefits of online reviews on restaurants and consumers. Wu et al. (2015) identified that online reviews provide important information to consumers and guide their preferences. According to Wu et al. (2015), the most valuable reviews were regarded as those who relate to the quality and

uniqueness of the restaurants and personal comments from customers who have had positive/negative experiences on their previous visits to any of the restaurants.

Bowden (2009) argued that customers can define the path for success or failure of a given restaurant and therefore, restaurant operators must ensure that their customers receive quality service and unique experiences to ensure satisfaction and retention. Brand experience is regarded as an important element in ensuring success in the restaurant industry (Bowden, 2009).

Dabeva (2012) identified that restaurant review sites can be used as an effective tool in increasing restaurants' customer base, which in turn increases profit volumes. The information about customer experiences on previous occasions can be shared with the present-day customers to increase customer loyalty and retention. The majority of the participants in this study indicated that they were likely to get *highly influenced* by the reviews of various restaurant organizations available on online review sites. The customers use online review sites to make decisions about the dining locations, which indicates that restaurant operators cannot directly influence the customer's choice (Goldsmith et al., 2013).

Online review sites help potential customers to understand the type of a particular restaurant, the quality of products and services offered, and the overall experiences of other customers before physically visiting a restaurant. The findings of this study indicated that most of the participants would read *less than 7-8 reviews* to feel confident in making a decision of choice. These findings are consistent with Browning, So and Sparks (2013) who found that online restaurant reviews can either build or destroy a brand.

The findings of this study reinforces the important role that internet review sites play in the process of restaurant branding. Online review sites could be used to improve the quality of

the foods and services offered, by monitoring consumers' experiences. Online review sites act as an influential platform for the exchange of key product information to/with the customers and provide the restaurant owners with an avenue to engage customers in the company's success and address any complaints from the unsatisfied customers (Kim & Lennon, 2013).

Consumer attitudes in regards to restaurant review sites. The findings revealed that nearly half the respondents would feel *highly valued* with a particular brand if the restaurant operator responds to a comment of appreciation or grievance provided by them. This finding is congruent with Ruzic and Bilos (2010), who identify restaurant review sites as a channel for brand promotion and economic success.

This finding also relates to the second perspective of adding value to the brand. When customers are likely to feel, valued and secured with a brand, it influences brand loyalty and brand preference. These factors may affect the profitability of the restaurants thereby indicating economic impact of review sites in the process of restaurant branding (Browning et al., 2013).

Based on Browning et al. (2013), highly descriptive negative reviews can reduce the readers' likelihood of visiting a particular restaurant. Browning et al. (2013) argued that positive online customer reviews that relate to a company's core services are more likely to elicit positive brand attributions, while negative reviews are most likely to influence customers' perceptions in a negative manner.

Most of the participants indicated that it was *highly important* to them that the restaurant review sites identify innovative practices, such as waste management, environmental protection, effective use of human resources, and the use of organic or local ingredients. Respondents' preference for green restaurant practices is consistent with Di Pietro and Gregory (2013).

According to Di Pietro and Gregory (2013), green practices by the restaurants not only influence the customers' willingness to contribute to the green practices, but also strengthens their decision to visit restaurants that employ green practices.

Research Study Limitations

The results from this exploratory research study highlights the role of internet review sites. The findings cannot however be generalized to other sample settings. This study did not seek to identify any demographic and/or psychographic factors that could have affect the results.

Age as a factor was used as a means to provide descriptive statistics for the exploratory analysis of individual preferences and choices as per the age group. However, the study did not aim to conduct comparison between the age groups. Hence, no similarities/differences were recorded.

The researcher did not include diverse population groups in the study sample due to the limitations of conducting face-to-face surveys.

Proposed Research Design Improvements

To improvise the quality of the data, the focus should be on the design of the survey instrument. The survey tool should be improvised for better structure, wording, and organization.

VanGeest et al. (2007) suggest that researchers can achieve a higher response rate by offering monetary incentives to the participants. Established restaurant organizations can conduct similar studies by offering coupons, vouchers or gift cards which can lure the potential respondents to participate in similar studies.

The study sample lacked diversity. The respondents were chosen using convenience sampling practices and covered residents only from the city of Nanaimo.

Suggestions for Future Research

To determine the economic impact and analyze the role of internet review sites in restaurant branding the future research could use following suggestions:

1. Future research could be conducted by using both- quantitative and qualitative methods.

As suggested by VanGeest, Johnson and Welch (2007), mixed methodology may be more cost effective and can highly increase the response rate.

2. The study indicated that there are economic benefits associated with the use of review sites. There exists a rich research opportunity to identify these benefits and determine the economic value or the economic impact of review sites in restaurant branding.
3. Future research can employ web survey design instead of face-to-face surveys to reach more diverse and large sample. Web surveys are not only cost effective, but essentially help the researcher in saving time (Veal, 2011). An added benefit is that the researcher can send multiple reminders to the non-respondents enabling them to achieve higher response rate.
4. The study can be conducted in different sample settings to determine the differentiating factors other than age groups which affect the responses. This may result in establishing new research statements and conclusions.
5. Future studies can explore the differences in the perceptions of the consumers by comparing different age groups. A research opportunity exists to analyze the age differences which can assist restaurant operators in better understanding their target clientele.

6. This study only used the 'age factor' as one of the means to explore the overall responses of the participants. Future research can include more filters such as socio status, income, gender, and education, to determine additional differences in responses.
7. With the advancement in the field of technology and social media, tracking changes over time in people's perceptions, thoughts and attitudes about online review sites and the concept of restaurant branding provides as an exciting research opportunity.

Research Summary

This research was conducted with an aim to analyze the role of internet review sites in the process of restaurant branding. Consumer perceptions and company's financial returns were the two key perspectives identified in the process of restaurant branding.

The research revealed that branding was *highly important* to most of the restaurant industry consumers. This finding indicates the need to create a brand identity in the restaurant industry. Three factors that were identified by the consumers which help create a restaurant brand were: *quality*, *customer satisfaction* and *uniqueness*. These three factors essentially provide insights about consumer perceptions about a particular restaurant brand. The consumer perceptions appear on the internet review sites and are accessible to every other consumer of the restaurant industry. The consumers prefer to look for customer reviews on review sites, and tend to believe and get highly influenced by them. These findings assist in concluding that consumer perceptions can be effectively manage using internet review sites.

To ensure that consumer perceptions stay positive all the time, the restaurant owners need to provide quality food products and maintain uniqueness in the services offered. This practice will ensure that restaurants continue to satisfy their customer needs which will raise their brand

awareness, brand preference and increase the brand loyalty. These factors directly affect the profitability state of the company as happy customers tend to repurchase products and services.

Consumers perceptions about a restaurant brand can be effectively managed to the benefit of the restaurant thereby affirming the crucial role that internet review sites execute in the process of restaurant branding.

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APPENDIX A

Survey Instrument for Face-to-Face Surveys

QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Survey No: _____

Instructions: 1- Kindly answer all the questions below unless specified. 2- Answer the questions by selecting the most appropriate choice in your view. 3- Do not select more than 1 option unless specified. 4- You may seek guidance from the researcher for any queries you would have during participation. 5- You may decide to quit/withdraw from participation at any point of time.

1. What age group do you fall under?

A. 18-30 B. 31-45

C. 46-65 D. 65+

2. When choosing a particular dining option, how important is the brand name of the company to you?

(a) Highly important (b) Fairly important

(c) Less likely important (d) Not at all important

3. Which factors in your opinion play the MOST SIGNIFICANT role in building brand name for a particular dining establishment?

(You may choose to select a maximum of 3 options.)

1. Size of Business
2. Customer Satisfaction
3. Consistency in Performance
4. Menu Offerings
5. External Features (E.g. Ambience, Location, Staff clothing.)
6. Uniqueness
7. Quality assurance
8. Competitiveness
9. Contribution towards better environment and/or society
10. Customer Involvement
11. Marketing strategies
12. Emotional attachment
13. Great Leaders
13. None of the above

4. How often do you surf online review sites for making a decision of choice about dining establishments?

(a) Every time (b) Sometimes (c) Rarely (d) Never

*If you chose option 'd' (Never), skip questions 5-12.

5. When surfing through a particular food/dining review site what do you actually look for?

(You may choose to select more than 1 option.)

1. Customer Reviews 2. Ratings only

3. Pictures 4. Menu details

5. All the above

6. How often do you write an online review of the experience you had at a particular dining location?

(a) Almost every time

(b) Occasionally

(c) ONLY when I have a good experience

(d) ONLY when I have a bad experience

(e) Never

7. Do you trust online customer reviews as much as personal recommendations?

- (a) Definitely Yes!
- (b) Most Likely
- (c) Less Likely
- (d) I don't trust any reviews
- (e) I don't read any customer reviews

*If you chose option 'd' or 'e' (I don't trust/read any customer reviews), skip questions 8-11.

8. How likely do you get influenced by the reviews of any organization available on internet review sites?

- (a) Highly influenced
- (b) Partially influenced
- (c) Less likely influenced
- (d) No influence whatsoever

9. How many customer reviews would you read before you feel confident about making a decision of choice?

- (a) 1-3 (b) 4-8 (c) 9-15 (d) I try to read as many as possible

10. How many positive reviews would it take you to believe that a particular dining location is extremely good?

1. Less than 3

2. Somewhere between 3-7

3. More than 7

4. I do not reach any conclusion based on reviews

11. How many negative reviews would it take you to believe that a particular dining location is extremely bad?

1. Less than 3

2. Somewhere between 3-7

3. More than 7

4. I do not reach any conclusion based on reviews

12. If a particular restaurant operator would respond to address a comment of appreciation or grievance about an online review provided by you, would that make you feel more valued with that brand?

(a) Definitely YES!

- (b) Not really, but I would be happy to see a response
- (c) No, but it might prove helpful to other readers
- (d) Wouldn't matter to me in any way
- (e) It is difficult to answer this one!

13. Would you recommend restaurant operatives to heavily rely on internet review sites to market their brand?

- (a) YES! It is easy, highly accessible & effective
- (b) If only there were some means to guarantee that no reviews were FAKE!
- (c) In my opinion, review sites cannot replace other marketing forms

(more options continued on the next page...)

- (d) A combination of both (Review sites & Traditional forms) would be perfect!
- (e) I prefer traditional forms of marketing as I don't have access to internet
- (f) I don't care about internet review sites

14. In your opinion, do you think having more numbers of positive/negative online reviews will enable a particular food establishment make/break its brand name in the market?

- (a) Definitely YES!
- (b) Not sure about positives, but more negatives will destroy the brand identity.

- (c) Not sure about negatives, but more positives will definitely build a brand name.
- (d) I'm unsure about branding but the place will definitely either attract/lose more and more customers
- (e) May be or may not be
- (f) Will not affect the brand in any way
- (g) I don't have an answer

15. Is it important to you that food review sites identify some innovative practices by restaurant owners such as environment protection plans, waste management, use of organic/local ingredients, effective human resource management?

- (a) Definitely Yes!
- (b) Most Likely
- (c) Less Likely
- (d) I am not interested in that stuff!
- (e) Not sure

Thank you for your participation!

APPENDIX B

SURVEY CONSENT FORM

TITLE: THE ECONOMIC VALUE AND THE ROLE OF INTERNET REVIEW SITES IN
RESTAURANT BRANDING.

Researcher: Mr. Shrideep K. Tamhankar

Designation: Master of Arts Student; Dept. of Recreation and Tourism Management.

Institute: Vancouver Island University

Email: Shrideep_90@yahoo.com; Cellular: +1(250)740-5423

Instructor: Dr. David Robinson; Email: david.robinson@viu.ca

Hello! I am a graduate student enrolled in the Master of Arts program in Sustainable Leisure Management. I am conducting a research study on the topic “The Economic value and the Role of Internet Review Sites in Restaurant Branding” which directly links to the approach and the behavior of the Food & Beverage industry consumers and so your opinions are valuable to this research. You must be at least 18 years of age in order to participate in this survey.

The purpose of the study is to define the role of internet review sites and assess the economic value associated with it in the process of restaurant branding. During this activity, you will be requested to answer a few questions which will assist the researcher in achieving the above mentioned purpose. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may decide to withdraw from the process at any point of time without providing any explanation and without penalty. You may also choose not to answer any question for any reason. There are no

foreseeable harms/risks associated with your participation in this research. The participation time will be approximately limited between 7-10 minutes. During the course of participation, you are allowed to seek guidance from the researcher or question the researcher for doubts if any.

All records of participation will be stored strictly confidential. However, my research instructor will have access to all the data. All the hardcopy data will be shredded post completion of this study. The researcher will not intend to seek any private/confidential data, thereby safeguarding the identity of the participants and ensuring anonymity. Also any information about the project will not be made public in any way that identifies individual participants.

The direct benefits to the participants would include a soft copy of the analyzed report showcasing the results of the study that can be made available to the interested participants. The researcher is hopeful that the study will enable the restaurant industry operatives to build brand experiences for their customers, which will thereby benefit you as a consumer of the food & beverage industry. No incentives or compensation of any sort shall be provided at the beginning/end of your participation in this study.

If you have any concerns about your treatment as a research participant in this study, please contact the VIU Research Ethics Officer, by telephone at 250-753-3245 (ext, 2665) or by email at reb@viu.ca. If you have any questions about this research project, or would like more information, please feel free to contact me at the e-mail address above.

(Consent) By providing a completed survey you consent to participate in today's research study.

APPENDIX C

Debrief Form

RESEARCH TITLE: THE ECONOMIC IMPACT AND THE ROLE OF INTERNET REVIEW
SITES IN RESTAURANT BRANDING.

DATE OF ETHICS APPROVAL: 27/06/2016.

RESEARCHER: Mr. Shrideep K. Tamhankar

DESIGNATION: Master of Arts Student; Dept. of Recreation and Tourism Management.

INSTITUTE: Vancouver Island University

EMAIL: Shrideep_90@yahoo.com; Cellular: +1(250)740-540

Research Description: This study focuses on identifying the role of internet review sites and determining its economic impact in the process of restaurant branding. A large number of hospitality consumers freely express their opinion of choice, experience and understanding on platforms provided by the internet review sites. These review sites are well acknowledged by, and have great influence on the new consumers before they make the final decision of choice. As such, this study aims at analyzing the impact of the popularly growing review sites, assess the role that they execute and the economic value associated with it. The results of the study will assist the restaurant operatives in understanding the dynamics of their target client population, thereby enabling them to provide brand experiences to their customers.

References: Should you be interested in knowing more about this topic, here's a list of few popular sources which define the rationale behind the execution of this research study.

Goldsmith, R. E., Pangani, M., & Lu, X. (2013). Social network activity and contributing to an online review site. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, 7(2), 100-118.

Pharr, J. M. (2011). A research agenda for investigating the effectiveness of branding in virtual reality. *Journal of Management and Marketing Research*, 8, 1-11.

Trueman, M., Cornelius, N., & Wallace, J. (2012). Building brand value online: exploring relationships between company and city brands. *European Journal of Marketing*, 46(7/8), 1013-1031.

Dissemination of Results: If you are interested in the results of this study, you may contact Dr. Aggie Weighill (Chair – Dept. of Recreation & Tourism and also the Coordinator MA Sustainable Leisure Management) after the completion of this study (post mid-September'2016). The contact details being: +1(250)753-3245 ext. 2416 & Email: Aggie.Weighill@viu.ca

Contact Number: If you have any further questions or concerns about this study, please contact Mr. David Robinson (Thesis supervisor, Faculty Dept. of Recreation & Tourism at VIU) at +1(250)753-3245 local 2832, Email: david.robinson@viu.ca

THANK YOU FOR YOUR VALUABLE PARTICIPATION.

APPENDIX D

Daily Response Count

Table 17

Daily response count

Day and Date	Survey Count
Monday, 07/11/2016	0
Tuesday, 07/12/2016	6
Wednesday, 07/13/2016	8
Thursday, 07/14/2016	5
Friday, 07/15/2016	0
Saturday, 07/16/2016	7
Sunday, 07/17/2016	5
Monday, 07/18/2016	13
Tuesday, 07/19/2016	4
Wednesday, 07/20/2016	9
Thursday, 07/21/2016	3
Friday, 07/22/2016	0
Saturday, 07/23/2016	7
Sunday, 07/24/2016	4
Monday, 07/25/2016	12
Tuesday, 07/26/2016	9
Wednesday, 07/27/2016	3
Thursday, 07/28/2016	4
Friday, 07/29/2016	0
Saturday, 07/30/2016	2

Sunday, 07/31/2016	2
Monday, 08/01/2016	17
Tuesday, 08/02/2016	4
Wednesday, 08/03/2016	4
Thursday, 08/04/2016	2
Friday, 08/05/2016	0
Saturday, 08/06/2016	2
Sunday, 08/07/2016	6

Monday, 08/08/2016	7
Tuesday, 08/09/2016	4
Wednesday, 08/10/2016	3
Thursday, 08/11/2016	4
Friday, 08/12/2016	0
Saturday, 08/13/2016	5
Sunday, 08/14/2016	4

APPENDIX E

Survey Templates- Survey Monkey

Table 18

Brand awareness survey template

Questions	Choices
Q: Which of the following brands have you heard of? (Select all that apply)	<input type="radio"/> Your brand <input type="radio"/> Competitor 1 <input type="radio"/> Competitor 2 <input type="radio"/> Competitor 3
Q: How familiar are you with our brand?	<input type="radio"/> I have used it <input type="radio"/> I haven't used it but I know a lot about it <input type="radio"/> I know a little about it <input type="radio"/> I've just heard the name <input type="radio"/> I've never heard of it
Q: In the past 3 months, where have you seen or heard about our brand? (Please select all that apply)	<input type="radio"/> Friends, family members or colleagues <input type="radio"/> Social media <input type="radio"/> Ads in a mobile app <input type="radio"/> Online video <input type="radio"/> Online search <input type="radio"/> Online news/magazine article <input type="radio"/> Printed news/magazine article <input type="radio"/> TV advertisement <input type="radio"/> Radio advertisement <input type="radio"/> Mailed advertisement <input type="radio"/> Public transportation <input type="radio"/> Billboards <input type="radio"/> Coupons <input type="radio"/> Our website <input type="radio"/> At a store <input type="radio"/> I don't remember hearing about or seeing advertising for this brand in last 3 months <input type="radio"/> Other (Please specify)

Table 19

Customer satisfaction survey template

Questions	Choices
Q: Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with our company?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Very satisfied <input type="radio"/> Somewhat satisfied <input type="radio"/> Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied <input type="radio"/> Somewhat dissatisfied <input type="radio"/> Very dissatisfied
Q: Which of the following words would you use to describe our words? (Please select all that apply)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Reliable <input type="radio"/> High quality <input type="radio"/> Useful <input type="radio"/> Unique <input type="radio"/> Good value for money <input type="radio"/> Overpriced <input type="radio"/> Impractical <input type="radio"/> Ineffective <input type="radio"/> Poor quality <input type="radio"/> Unreliable
Q: How responsive have we been to your questions or concerns about our products?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Extremely responsive <input type="radio"/> Very responsive <input type="radio"/> Somewhat responsive <input type="radio"/> Not so responsive <input type="radio"/> Not at all responsive <input type="radio"/> Not applicable
Q: How likely are you to purchase any of our products again?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Extremely likely <input type="radio"/> Very likely <input type="radio"/> Somewhat likely <input type="radio"/> Not so likely <input type="radio"/> Not at all likely

Table 20

Customer service survey template

Questions	Choices
Q: Overall, how would you rate the quality of your customer service experience?	<input type="radio"/> Very positive <input type="radio"/> Somewhat positive <input type="radio"/> Neutral <input type="radio"/> Somewhat negative <input type="radio"/> Very negative
Q: How well did we understand your questions and concerns?	<input type="radio"/> Extremely well <input type="radio"/> Very well <input type="radio"/> Somewhat well <input type="radio"/> Not so well <input type="radio"/> Not at all well
Q: How much time did it take us to address your questions and concerns?	<input type="radio"/> Much shorter than expected <input type="radio"/> Shorted than expected <input type="radio"/> About what I expected <input type="radio"/> Longer than expected <input type="radio"/> Much longer than expected <input type="radio"/> Did not receive a response

Table 21

Hotel feedback survey template

Questions	Choices
Q: How quick was the check-in process?	<input type="radio"/> Extremely quick <input type="radio"/> Quite quick <input type="radio"/> Moderately quick <input type="radio"/> Slightly quick <input type="radio"/> Not at all quick
Q: How clean was your room upon arrival?	<input type="radio"/> Extremely clean <input type="radio"/> Quite clean <input type="radio"/> Slightly clean <input type="radio"/> Not at all clean
Q: Overall, were you satisfied with our hotel, dissatisfied with our hotel, or neither satisfied nor dissatisfied?	<input type="radio"/> Extremely satisfied <input type="radio"/> Quite satisfied <input type="radio"/> Somewhat satisfied <input type="radio"/> Somewhat dissatisfied <input type="radio"/> Quite dissatisfied <input type="radio"/> Extremely dissatisfied

Table 22

Mobile apps survey template

Questions	Choices
Q: How many apps do you currently have on your Facebook account?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> 0-4 <input type="radio"/> 5-9 <input type="radio"/> 10-19 <input type="radio"/> 20 or more
Q: Which type of apps do you currently have on your digital devices (computers, tablets, phones, etc.)? (Check all that apply)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Travel apps <input type="radio"/> Social networking apps <input type="radio"/> Sports apps <input type="radio"/> Productivity apps <input type="radio"/> Entertainment apps <input type="radio"/> Game apps <input type="radio"/> Search tool apps <input type="radio"/> Utility apps <input type="radio"/> News apps <input type="radio"/> Weather apps <input type="radio"/> Other (please specify)
Q: Which types of apps are most useful to you?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> News apps <input type="radio"/> Travel apps <input type="radio"/> Search tool apps <input type="radio"/> Social networking apps <input type="radio"/> Entertainment apps <input type="radio"/> Game apps <input type="radio"/> Sports apps <input type="radio"/> Productivity apps <input type="radio"/> Utility apps <input type="radio"/> Weather apps

