

Comparative content analysis of online and professional reviews for full-service
restaurants in Auckland

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Abstract

This study applies content analysis to investigate online and published restaurant reviews of full-service restaurants in Auckland. By interpreting the underlying meanings and identifying key words of each review, the evaluation criteria adopted by two kinds of reviewers are revealed.

The findings of this study show that, while the quality of food and service are always the primary measures for online and professional restaurant reviewers, there are several differences between these two types of reviews. Cost draws attention from both online and professional reviewers, but only online reviews involve strong personal judgments about price fairness. As for themes that only appear in one type of review, only online reviewers talk about their dining companions, while only professional reviewers provide specialised information that is not accessible to the public about the chef, owner and operational circumstances of the restaurant. The criteria adopted by online and professional reviewers are compared and the differences explored from the perspective of the association between social differentiation and reviewers' and audiences' writing and reading habits.

Furthermore, this study makes recommendations for restaurant practitioners about maintaining their restaurants' online reputation, and enriches the literature that employs user-generated content as a new data source.

Attestation of authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

As review websites (such as Trip Advisor) emerge as new platforms on which for online users to post and share their experiences and judgment on the quality of restaurants, customers' tendency to seek online restaurant reviews before dining out has increased (Yang, 2013). This phenomenon has been identified as a form of electronic word-of-mouth, that is, online communication between customers for non-commercial purposes about particular products (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004; Lee & Youn, 2009). Given that the restaurant industry offers both tangible and intangible products, reviews by previous customers would significantly impact potential customers' purchase decisions (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Therefore, online restaurant reviews have drawn attention from several researchers for academic and commercial purposes (Chu & Kim, 2011; Jeong & Jang, 2011; Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008). No previous study has focused on New Zealand's restaurant industry. To address this, this study will be conducted in the context of the Auckland restaurant industry, the market share of which accounts for a large percentage of the New Zealand restaurant industry (Statistics New Zealand, 2015).

In contrast to the newly-emerged online restaurant reviews, traditional restaurant reviews are commonly considered as published – in magazines and newspapers. Given that published restaurant reviews are a traditional form of word-of-mouth, they can provide a foundation for the inquiry into how the online type is taking form. Therefore, in this study, content analysis is conducted of restaurant reviews both online (on the internet) and published (in magazines and newspapers). The criteria adopted in each

kind are identified, then the two kinds are compared. On the basis of the findings and the identification of the similarities and differences, further discussion is presented. As the association between published restaurant reviews and reviewers' social identity has been proposed in previous research (Williamson, Tregidga, & Harris, 2009), the different social identities of the two types of reviewer will be disclosed. Given that people's food consumption habits have been confirmed to be closely connected with their social identity (Ashley, 2004; Calnan & Cant, 1990; First & Brozina, 2009; Warde, 1997), the difference in social identity between the audiences of the two types of review will be investigated as well.

This study consists of a content analysis of online restaurant reviews in order to identify the criteria these reviewers adopt. These criteria will then be compared with those of professional reviewers for the purpose of understanding the difference between online and professional reviewers in terms of how they evaluate the quality of a restaurant. The concepts involved in this study will be discussed next.

This study is conducted against the backdrop of the prevalence of online travel agencies (OTAs). OTAs are web-based platforms for customer booking and reviewing of hospitality- and tourism-related products. Given that review websites are a new digital technology that empowers online users with a platform on which to seek, spread and exchange information (O'Reilly, 2005), the concept of user-generated content (UGC) has been widely discussed. Hermida and Thurman (2008) describe UGC as the comments, photos and videos that citizens post on online platforms such as YouTube, Wikipedia and TripAdvisor. However, in the context of this study, UGC especially

refers to the online restaurant reviews posted by users. The underlying concept of the huge amount of UGC on the internet is electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). Electronic word-of-mouth is about customers sharing product-related information on online platforms. There are many places where eWOM communication can take place; however, this study will focus on web-based communication.

In order to compare online and professional restaurant reviewers' criteria, the literature investigating the underlying patterns of these two types of review will be discussed as well.

Regarding sales in the restaurant industry in New Zealand, statistics show a steady increase from 2008 to 2015 (AUT University Hospitality & Tourism and Restaurant Association of New Zealand, 2013; Statistics New Zealand, 2015). Sales in the Auckland region account for 37% of the total, while the percentages in other regions vary from 5% to 12.5%. These percentages indicate Auckland's relatively large market share. There are 7,147 cafés and restaurants operating and 61,040 employees in the industry there (Statistics New Zealand, 2015). Given that Auckland has 33.4 percent of the national population, the demand for public dining there is relatively high (Statistics New Zealand, 2013). The average national growth rate in 2014 was 6.3% in terms of restaurant revenue; however, the Auckland region outstripped that with 6.9%. The statistics point to high demand and intense competition in the Auckland restaurant industry, which requires an appropriate strategy for operating a successful business. In addition, among all the dining outlet types, the revenue of cafés and restaurants showed the most significant increase in 2014: a \$345.4 million increase – nearly 10% on 2013.

Meanwhile, the rate at which takeaway business is increasing began to slow from 2012. This contrast indicates that dining out might be becoming customers' preference. In this context, the restaurant operator needs to put more effort into maintaining a successful business.

The increasing importance of the role of social media in decision making about hospitality products stimulates hospitality practitioners to utilise customer-generated content, enhancing their companies' reputations; this has drawn serious attention in the academic field (Leung, Law, Hoof, & Buhalis, 2013). The emergence of OTAs such as TripAdvisor and Zomato provides channels through which customers can make restaurant reservations as well as write and read online reviews. According to Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy and Silvestre (2011), the advent of social media has changed traditional customer-to-customer communication. Through the internet, users can share their experiences and opinions more easily with other users in the international online community.

Given that customers regard non-commercial information as more reliable (Leung et al., 2013; Litvin et al., 2008), it is not surprising that more and more of them, as internet users, are taking advantage of the opportunity to gain information from review websites about restaurant products, such as the quality of service, waiting time and the taste of food. Reviews from TripAdvisor, one of the world's eminently popular OTAs, focus on the hospitality industry. However, even as the great value of online reviews is being accepted, there are still concerns about their credibility (Ayeh, Au, & Law, 2013). Online reviews might be utilised for strategic manipulation and abuse, that is, the

hospitality operators themselves could post positive reviews to enhance their business reputation (Dellarocas, 2003).

Given the opportunity brought by online reviews (Lazer, 2009), they have become a new area of research (Mahrt & Scharkow, 2013). However, the capabilities of these reviews have not been fully discovered in the context of the hospitality industry. Xiang, Schwartz, Gerdes and Uysal's (2015) research is an example of using online reviews to shed light on the content and style adopted by online reviewers to express their experience of hotels. It reveals the association between customer satisfaction and the several factors: core product, hybrid, deals, staff and family-friendliness. The results indicate that hybrid, deals and family-friendliness are strongly associated with high satisfaction ratings.

Online reviews by previous customers have significant impacts on potential customers' purchasing decisions, especially in the hospitality industry (Sparks & Browning, 2011; Xiang et al., 2015). A study conducted on the restaurant industry reveals that, before customers go to a restaurant, they tend to search the reviews left by previous customers to inform their decision. The huge influence of online reviews is partially due to concern with the intangible attributes of service products and customers' wish to avoid the risk of an unpleasant experience (Li, Ye, & Law, 2013). The behaviour of information searching is facilitated by online review websites; thus, OTAs play an irreplaceable role.

1.1 Research aim

This research centres on a content analysis of online and published restaurant reviews collected from the internet and publications respectively. The criteria adopted by both the online and professional reviewers are identified, and the differences compared. By comparing the criteria respectively adopted, the underlying issues regarding social differentiation can be discussed in the findings. Therefore, the research questions proposed below are the main focus:

- Research Question 1: What criteria measuring restaurant quality do online reviewers emphasise?
- Research Question 2: How are the criteria adopted by online reviewers different from those emphasised by professional restaurant reviewers?
- Research Question 3: How is the writing used in online reviews different to that of published reviews?
- Research Question 4: How are the criteria adopted by both types of restaurant reviewers associated with social identity?”

As customer-generated content on social media continues to grow and affect the hospitality industry, online restaurant reviews might reflect customer experience and have indeed been shown to affect customer post-purchasing behaviour; however, they have not been widely studied by academics. Within this context, this study will apply content analysis to investigate online reviews of full-service restaurants in Auckland. By interpreting underlying meaning and identifying keywords of each review, the evaluation criteria adopted by customers who write them can be revealed. These criteria are then compared with those adopted by professional reviewers. Recommendations are

made for restaurant practitioners in regard to managing online reviews. Overall, the study enriches the literature that employs this new data source.

This study investigates the criteria adopted by regular customers to evaluate the perceived quality of service of full-service restaurants in the Auckland market. Their criteria in online reviews on the internet have scope to be different from those of professional reviewers who publish review articles in magazines and newspapers. This study takes customer-generated content as the data source to investigate these criteria. Except for the one conducted by Xiang et al. (2015), few academic studies have employed customer-generated content as a data source, so there are two aspects (both hinted at above) to the potential contribution of this study. Firstly, by analysing customers' online reviews, practitioners could find out their needs and preferences. In this regard, this study provides managerial recommendations for restaurant owners, particularly for owners of full-service restaurants in Auckland. Given that customer satisfaction is positively related to online reputation and sales, this study could help restaurant operators to set appropriate business strategies. Secondly, this study enriches the literature that employs customer-generated content as a data source to answer an academic research question related to the hospitality industry. In addition, as different criteria for restaurant service adopted by reviewing customers and professional reviewers are compared, a gap in the academic field regarding how customers evaluate restaurants is partially filled.

1.2 Dissertation overview

This study includes six chapters: literature review, methodology, findings and discussion, besides the conclusion.

1.2.1 Introduction

Besides this overview, the introduction presents the background, aim, research questions and possible contribution of the study.

1.2.2 Literature review

The literature review provides a solid theoretical foundation and presents previous literature on online and published restaurant reviews. The chapter starts by introducing the concepts of user-generated content and electronic word-of-mouth. Then, previous studies investigating the criteria adopted by online and professional restaurant reviewers are overviewed. Finally, in order to build the conceptual model for the research, the SERVQUAL and DINESERV scales for restaurant quality assessment (which the study applies) are also reviewed.

1.2.3 Methodology

The research questions of the study are proposed first. Some available research paradigms are then explained from ontological, epistemological and methodological perspectives. In light of such explanation, the internal logic of a research paradigm can be clarified. After justifying the research paradigm, the detailed steps of the research

method are presented. The data sources, sample size and coding process are also demonstrated in this chapter.

1.2.4 Findings

This chapter reveals the key criteria of both online and professional reviewers assessing restaurants. Details of the further investigation conducted on the themes that most drew reviewers' attention will be presented. The comparison of the types of review will be illustrated in terms of similarity and difference.

1.2.5 Discussion

This chapter builds the connection between the respective reviewers' criteria and social differentiation. The social identities of the two types of reviewer and of their target audiences are pointed out. The association between individuals' preferences in restaurant reviews and the social classes they come from is discussed from three main perspectives: (1) social identity and food consumption habits, (2) economic ability of different social classes and (3) intention of exposing personal social relationships.

1.2.6 Conclusion

A conclusion regarding the key findings and discussion is presented in this chapter. The answers to the four research questions are reviewed, as are the main points in the discussion chapter. Then the implications for further study and the limitations of this study are indicated.

Chapter 2 Literature review

Previous literature has been reviewed for the purpose of providing a solid foundation for this study. Firstly, the concepts of user-generated content and electronic word-of-mouth will be introduced, since this study investigates the behaviour of online reviewers posting user-generated content: restaurant reviews. Moreover, the behaviour of posting them could be identified as electronic word-of-mouth. The importance of these two concepts will be discussed from both restaurant practitioners' and academics' perspectives in terms of business value and academic contribution, respectively. Given that published and online restaurant reviews are the main objects of this study, research on them is overviewed in order to lay a foundation. The criteria that could potentially be adopted in either are identified and compared. The different focuses of online and published reviews indicate that these two kinds of reviewer might have diverse eating habits and preferences. Then, literature on the association between people's food habits and their social identification will be covered. Finally, the restaurant measuring scales SERVQUAL and DINESERV will be introduced to present the conceptual model for the data analysis.

2.1 The value of user-generated content

User-generated content (UGC) has been recognised as a new form of customer-to-customer communication, which takes place on an online platform, about non-commercial, detailed and up-to-date experiences (Hill, Jones, Galvin, & Haidar, 2007).

UGC refers to information on products voluntarily posted by internet users instead of professional reviewers. In the case of user-generated restaurant reviews, it refers to the content posted directly by customers about their thoughts and assessment of the restaurant. The influence of UGC spreads beyond the boundaries of the individual internet users' limited social circles and brings them useful information (O'Connor, Höpken, & Gretzel, 2007). The emergence of UGC shows that, over the past decade, the internet has transformed from a passive information repository to an active information exchange platform (Blank & Reisdorf, 2012).

2.1.1 From the practitioner perspective

Thevenot (2007) argues that people no longer rely on traditional media due to the increased availability of online platforms. The efficiency and influence of customer-to-customer communication has been boosted by the development of social media (such as TripAdvisor), which provide channels for people sharing their opinions and experiences. Furthermore, easy access to social media is breaking down the boundary between media producers and reviewing customers (Chouliaraki, 2010). Not only has social media strengthened customer-to-customer communication, but the information they post has a strong impact on each other's decision making (Thevenot, 2007).

Despite the valuable information on review websites for customers, they have been criticised by mass media and restaurant practitioners. The negative feedback about them is typified by the complaint of a San Francisco café against the reviews on a website in 2008 due to a local newspaper claiming that the operator of the website had manipulated the reviews for business purposes. Given that negative online reviews can

reduce sales (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Ye, Law, & Gu, 2009; Zhu & Zhang, 2010), appropriate strategies have to be applied to maintain a business' online reputation; however, some small and medium-sized companies which cannot afford to hire the expertise of strategy makers might face failure. Hence, the popularity of review websites requires business practitioners to put more effort into keeping up with the developments of technology (Pantelidis, 2010).

As such, UGC has brought both challenges and opportunities to e-commerce (Sigala, 2009); however, its influence in the hospitality industry has not been widely studied, either in the academic field or by industry practitioners. From the perspective of the practitioner, Ye et al. (2009) conducted research in the context of the hospitality industry. Their analysis of users' reviews posted on OTA websites revealed that reviews written by previous customers could significantly affect the online booking of a hotel room. Ye et al. (2009) also suggest that this finding could apply to other businesses in the hospitality industry and online retail (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006).

UGC not only provides information for potential customers about previous customers' experiences of the service but also brings the opportunity for restaurant practitioners to discover marketing strategies and customer preferences. UGC is considered an electronic form of word-of-mouth marketing (Kim & Hardin, 2010).

2.1.2 From the academic perspective

The academic value of UGC is the main focus for this study. Xiang et al. (2015) conducted a study highlighting the role of UGC on the hospitality industry as an

important data source for researchers. UGC has been used in a new research paradigm that interprets and predicts patterns based on data on the internet (Mayer-Schönberger & Cukier, 2013). However, few types of research have applied UGC to solve academic questions in the hospitality industry. There is increasing literature in which UGC is analysed to identify opinions and beliefs about products, as technology is developed to capture and analyse the textual content of websites (Halevy, Norvig, & Pereira, 2009). Nevertheless, in the last decade, criticism has emerged as well (Ekbja et al., 2015). The criticism especially targets the use of UGC as a data source for academic research. Ekbja et al. (2015) highlight the epistemological dilemmas in existing UGC analytics, while threats to the generalisability and validity of claims have been pointed out as well (Ruths & Pfeffer, 2014; Tufekci, 2014). However, due to the contribution of UGC for studying emerging social phenomena, it has received increasing attention in the academic field. Furthermore, the hospitality and tourism industry has been viewed as an ideal field in which to apply UGC to solve research questions (Xiang, Du, Ma, & Fan, 2017).

Schuckert, Liu and Law (2015) summarise the journal articles published between 2004 and 2013 that analyse online reviews in the context of the tourism and hospitality industry. They analysed 50 relevant articles to answer the research question “What have hospitality and tourism researchers done with regard to the use of online reviews?” (p. 617). Customers’ responses have been recognised as a source of fast and up-to-date information, which has become the word-of-mouth of the digital age (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). As UGC plays a role providing free information to assist in customer’s

decision-making process, it has drawn the attention of business practitioners seeking to maintaining their online reputation. Schuckert et al's study (2015) reveals that the association between online reviews and online buying behaviour has also drawn the attention of academics.

Another popular topic is customer satisfaction and online review management. What motivates customers to engage in electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has been less studied. Regarding data collection, the USA and China are the most popular locations. In summary, UGC as a substantially trustworthy and helpful information source plays a key role in the hospitality and tourism industry, especially in promotion, online sales and reputation management.

A recent study conducted by Lu and Stepchenkova (2015) reviewed 100 articles on UGC published before April 2013 in hospitality and tourism journals. They revealed that UGC is an increasingly important data source widely used by researchers to detect and explore trending topics in the academic field. Online reviews have mainly been studied in terms of their influence on online buying, and can be seen as an indicator of customer satisfaction and management efficiency. Regarding the importance of online reviews for sellers and buyers, studies explore online buying behaviour in three dimensions: customers' purchasing decisions, price and sales. Sentiment analysis, motivations of e-WOM and the credibility of UGC are popular topics as well. A review of previous literature evidences the validity and credibility of UGC, therefore, despite some criticism of some of its applications.

In addition, this data source is valuable for social science research. In a study conducted by Baginski, Sui and Malecki (2014), the UGC – restaurant reviews – was utilised to explore the geography of social media users. Since a large portion of restaurant reviews were relatively concentrated in certain areas of a city, the researchers collected data from review websites and Google Maps to reveal the geographic trends of internet users and to prove the feasibility of applying UGC in academic research.

2.2 E-WOM in the restaurant industry

The advent of OTAs has provided internet users with a platform for sharing and seeking information. The growth of customer-generated content on these platforms heavily influences both customers and restaurant owners. The underlying concept of customers sharing product-related information online has been termed electronic word-of-mouth (Ewom). The impact of eWOM is especially noted in the hospitality industry due to the difficulty of measuring intangible services (Bronner & Hoog, 2011; Jeong & Jang, 2011; Litvin et al., 2008). One reason for this important role could be customers' intention to avoid some of the high risk involved in buying intangible services. For such an audience, online reviews by previous users, which provide neutral evaluation, have been shown to significantly impact purchasing decisions (Li et al., 2013). Before choosing which restaurant to dine in, customers tend to seek out the comments of those who have been to potential restaurants. Review from customers who have already experienced the restaurant's services give valued information (Xie, Miao, Kuo, & Lee, 2011; Yang, 2013).

Compared with traditional avenues of word-of-mouth, the distinct characteristics of the internet enable review websites to reach more people, who together engage in eWOM and generate and gather non-commercial product information. The increased influence of online reviews not only gives eWOM an important role in customers' purchasing decisions but also deserves the serious attention of marketing researchers and industry practitioners. By reviewing 50 articles related to the hospitality field, Schuckert et al. (2015) find that eWOM is strongly associated with customer buying behaviour, which means that positive online reviews directly promote sales. This means, furthermore, that encouraging customers to post positive online reviews is helpful for practitioners wanting to boost sales. In addition, Schuckert et al. (2015) also found that maintaining a good reputation is a focus for the industry practitioners.

Electronic word-of-mouth has been explored in several studies, which could be categorised into two main fields: the generating factors of eWOM and the impacts of eWOM (Cantalops & Salvi, 2014). Cantalops and Salvi (2014) review the existing studies on the motivations and main consequence of eWOM. Given that the most significant review-generating factor is the service quality of restaurants (Cantalops & Salvi, 2014), if customers have been satisfied with their dining experience, they tend to recommend the restaurant to other customers who use the review website. Conversely, dissatisfaction with the restaurant service leads to negative comments on the websites.

Several studies identify the direct relationship of customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction with positive and negative online reviews, respectively (Li et al., 2013; Xiang et al., 2015; Yang, 2013). Other influential factors mentioned by researchers are

community belonging, social identity and pre-purchase expectation. To a lesser extent, customers' gender and age also affects their behaviour of posting online reviews.

Bronner and Hoog (2011) reveal that the 35 to 55 age group is more likely to engage in posting online reviews or researching others' reviews. Fan and Miao (2009) explored the impact of eWOM on customer purchase intent from the perspective of gender differences. The result indicated that female customers accepted eWOM more than males.

There are two perspectives from which to evaluate the impact of eWOM: that of customers and that of restaurant practitioners. From the customer perspective, online reviews can strongly affect both purchasing intentions and trust (Sparks & Browning, 2011), thus influencing their expectations of products and purchasing decisions (Black & Kelley, 2009; Jiang, Gretzel, & Law, 2010; Zimmer, Aarsal, Al-Marzouq, & Grover, 2010). Turning to the practitioner perspective, Toh, DeKay and Raven (2011) elucidate that eWOM and new technologies have enhanced market transparency. Given that customers can so easily access and process the reviews (Papathanassis & Knolle, 2011), opportunities now exist for practitioners to make the best use of these reviews to catch on to new trends in customers' preferences. According to previous studies, online reviews can be drawn on when practicing quality control, designing marketing strategies, reinforcing restaurant reputation and retaining competitive advantage (Dickinger & Stangl, 2011; Loureiro & Kastenholz, 2011). In addition, eWOM provides practitioners with a new channel through which to communicate with customers, which could foster customer loyalty (Loureiro & Kastenholz, 2011).

2.3 Two types of restaurant reviews

As the aim of this study is to investigate the differences in criteria between professional and online reviewers, the latter will be discussed in this section. The next will cover the research on the history of published restaurant reviews and reviewers' criteria.

2.3.1 Online restaurant reviews

Most professional reviewers have had journalistic training, but the wide usage of the internet brings the opportunity of becoming a critic to the general public (Hollis, 2011). There are two types of online reviews: user-generated and semi-professional. User-generated reviews account for the dominant portion and, therefore, are the object of this study. Due to the largeness of the user group and the huge volumes of reviews, user-generated reviews play an important role in customers' decision making. However, few studies have been conducted on UGC, especially as relates to the restaurant industry.

Although review websites increase the competition between restaurants, a large proportion of business owners express positive feelings toward them. Websites provide a new channel through which restaurant owners can communicate with customers; in light of it, their strategies can be adjusted according to customers' preferences (Litvin et al., 2008). The commercial value of online reviews in terms of marketing and advertising has been widely recognised (Bronner & Hoog, 2011; Chen & Xie, 2008; Hardey, 2011; Robson, Farshid, Bredican, & Humphrey, 2013).

The criteria of online restaurant reviewers have been studied by academics as well. In Pantelidis' study (2010), six aspects of the dining experience were frequently mentioned by online reviewers: (1) food, (2) service, (3) atmosphere or ambience, (4) price, (5) menu and (6) design or decor. This result has been proposed as a basis for content analysis of user-generated reviews posted on websites. Jeong et al. (2015) explored online reviewers' motivation to post positive reviews. Although their study focuses on positive online reviews, it reveals how online reviewers evaluate their dining experience from another perspective. The criteria it reveals are especially those of casual customers who also play the role of restaurant online reviewers. The factors identified that encourage the behaviour of posting online reviews are food quality, service quality, atmosphere and price fairness.

Considering the importance allocated to each of these factors, the key ones are clearly food, service and atmosphere. However, in reviewing studies on online restaurant reviews, a gap is apparent in the context of the New Zealand market. Therefore, this study will involve a content analysis to explore the criteria of online reviews in the context of New Zealand restaurants.

2.3.2 Published restaurant reviews

Warde (1997) argues that the anxiety of people living in modern society about food consumption encourages the development of restaurant reviews. ““What to choose?” becomes a tormenting, invasive and occasionally insurmountable question” (1997, p. 30). The emergence of restaurant reviews reduced customers' anxiety by playing the role of information provider. The history of restaurant reviews starts in 1782, when Le

Grand d'Aussy published the first guidebook *The History of French Private Life*. At that early stage, the focus was on the “manner and taste” of the food. It was not until the mid-19th century when articles published in the *New York Times* built the foundation and role of today’s restaurant reviews (Brown, 2012). The food editor of the *New York Times*, Craig Claiborne (from 1957-1972), disclosed the new function of the restaurant review: educating the public about taste. Besides the quality of the food and dining experience, the social setting of the potential diners was emphasised in the *New York Times* reviews. This consideration made restaurants more customer-oriented, as practical advice was offered about appropriate dining places for various customers. In summary, during the development of restaurant reviews, their focus included the food quality, the dining experience and the social setting for the restaurant.

Regarding Warde’s (1997) point about food choice being a source of anxiety and restaurant reviews reducing that as information sources, Davis (2009) elaborates that restaurant reviews is far more than just statements about whether the food is good or not. They also have the power to attract the attention of both diners and industry members. Restaurant reviews should include the public opinion about the restaurant management, ingredient quality, cooking skills and aesthetic pursuit of food.

In contrast to newly-emerged online restaurant reviews, traditional ones are commonly considered as published, as they appear in magazines and newspapers. Given that customers tend to use reviews as sources of information when they are unfamiliar with restaurants, the impact of these reviews can be tremendous on profitability, sales, employee morale and customers’ purchasing decisions (Bradley, Sparks, & Weber,

2015). However, previous studies show little interest in the criteria in restaurant reviews (Goodsir, Neill, Williamson, & Brown, 2014).

Hsu, Roberts and Swaminathan (2012) state that current research on professional reviews has established various criteria according to industry principles. For example, the manufacturing industry has strict criteria to evaluate the quality of products and the user experience. However, no standardised criteria exist yet in the restaurant industry, either from the perspective of practitioners or of academics (Hsu et al., 2012). Most professional restaurant reviewers have had journalistic training, which could partially explain the similarities in their reviews. However, the style and underlying structure of published reviews might vary depending on professional reviewers' personal experience and preferences.

The differences between each reviewer mean that no standardised criteria can be adopted when evaluating a restaurant's quality (Titz, Lanza-Abbott, & Cruz, 2004).

Davis (2009) argues that the target audience of professional reviews is different from that of user-generated reviews. The motive for reading professional reviews, especially those published in the *New York Times*, is the same as for reading book and theatre reviews, as familiarity with restaurants and food has “become part of a modern, sophisticated, urban identity” (p. 2). Given that professional reviewers do not evaluate restaurants alike, customers tend to follow the writer who adopts criteria similar to their own (Plucker, Kaufman, Temple, & Qian, 2009). However, the audience of online restaurant reviews are mainly regular customers who are looking for a place to dine out

(Yang, 2013). The dissimilarity in audiences indicates that the style and underlying structure of these two types of review might be different as well.

A study which compared professional and user-generated restaurant reviews in plenty of detail was conducted by Parikh, Behnke, Almanza, Nelson and Vorvoreanu (2016).

They explore the main focuses among nine factors: atmosphere, décor, wine, spirits, food, price, service, chefs and waiters. Through content analysis of published and online restaurant reviews, the different focuses were noticed. The researchers used the percentages of word count dealing with each factor as a measure. Food, as the primary concern, accounted for 17.5% of published reviews and 38.7% of online reviews. The assessment of restaurant service was the second consideration of online reviewers, accounting for 11.3% of the total word count, but it drew much less attention from professional reviewers: only 1.3% of their total word count. Besides the major differences, the chef and the décor were factors mentioned much less by online reviewers, while they accounted for a relatively large portion of the published reviews. Meanwhile, compared with online reviewers, professional ones spent less words on the cost. Therefore, except for food being the important criteria for both kinds of reviewer, the professional reviewers were quite different, spending more words assessing the chef and décor and less on the cost.

Reviewers who write articles for newspapers and magazines tend to avoid restaurants that are newly opened and need time to achieve a stable performance. Restaurants widely recognised to be of poor quality are not usual objects either (Parikh et al., 2016). Titz et al. (2004) conducted content analysis of published restaurant reviews in five US

cities, revealing that the criteria fit within eight dimensions: “(1) Quality of food and beverages (2) Quantity of food (3) Quality of service (4) Ambience and atmosphere (5) Menu variety (6) Price and value (7) Other customers (8) Professionalism” (Titz et al., 2004; p. 1). This study also suggests that the quality, ambience and atmosphere are reviewers’ primary concerns.

Craig Claiborne, a legendary *New York Times* reviewer, proposed a framework for restaurant reviewing. First, the reviews should be done individually and anonymously. Besides this, the reviewer needs to visit the restaurant at least three times with three other diners. To evaluate the quality and taste of the dining experience, reviewers are better to try one dish more than once to assess consistency. At the same time, reviewers should make an effort to assess the whole menu. In addition, free meals are unacceptable for reviewers (Sietsema, 2010). Before Claiborne proposed and applied this framework, the validity of reviews in newspapers and magazines was questioned by the public as perhaps being just a marketing tool utilised by restaurant owners.

Addressing this, Claiborne’s framework brought “‘a sense of integrity and advocacy’ to restaurant reviewing” (Blank, 2006; p. 50). The first male food editor of the *Times*, Claiborne had gained experience as a chef in previous years, and built a foundation of professionalism for future editors and reviewers (Sietsema, 2010).

Switching focus to the New Zealand market, it is clear that, as the restaurant industry has faced tremendous change over the past five decades, reviews and recognition have become more important for a successful restaurant. The intense competition due to the relatively small market in New Zealand puts pressure on industry practitioners to

achieve increased sales by means of positive reviews (Morris, 2011). Goodsir et al. (2014) researched in New Zealand by inviting Peter Calder, a well-known restaurant reviewer for a New Zealand Sunday newspaper, to explain the process and criteria of conducting and writing a restaurant review. This study revealed that articles written by professional restaurant reviewers were constructed to cover the taste, social capital, authenticity and nationality of food in a restaurant (Goodsir et al., 2014).

Another study on restaurant reviews analysed 200 published reviews published in the popular New Zealand food magazine *Cuisine* for its knowledge structure. The results indicated that, in the context of New Zealand's restaurant industry, the focus of reviewers included three main dimensions: food, wine and ambience. Besides these three key dimensions, other factors such as service, chefs, cost and operations of the restaurant has been outlined as well (Williamson et al., 2009). This study also emphasises that: published restaurant reviews created a language of exclusion and social separatism. This argument could be supported by the assessment criteria identified in reviews. Given this study was conducted in the content of the restaurant industry of New Zealand, it could provide a solid foundation for this study.

Williamson et al's article (2009) reveals that food is the most important criterion, indicating that the professional restaurant reviewers have an obsession with it. It was also found that "literary" words were used by professional reviewers when describing the restaurant food: words such as "masterful", "sublime", "divine", "heavenly" and "yin and yang balance". In addition, exotic ingredients and rare and expensive wines received serious attention. It is noticeable that the reviewers tended to brush over more

common food items using statements such as “all readers are familiar with.” Williamson et al. (2009) suggest that this is evidence that professional restaurant reviewers tend to use exclusive language and distinguish their audiences from “other” people. This goal needs to be understood in light of social differentiation and audience-perceived social identity. Defining social differentiation, Smelser (1959) states that it is the process of one social group dividing into two or more. In these terms, the purpose of professional restaurant reviews is to gather people who like to talk about food and wine in a quite refined way, creating “an elite club” for people with higher education, less economic concern and a passion for food (Williamson et al, 2009). Social differentiation is closely associated with individuals’ perceived social identity (Marilynn, 1991; Marilyn, 1996; Buckley, 1958), as Buckley (1958) suggests that the behaviour of individuals within a certain social group can be predictable. Therefore, the goal of professional restaurant reviewers’ exclusive language style is to target the audiences they want to attract, instead of writing articles appropriate for people from all social classes.

The study of Williamson et al (2009) also reveals the absence of concern for value in published restaurant reviews – and, by implication, the unimportance of this aspect of restaurant experience to these reviewers and their audiences. Firstly, given that the target audience has relatively few financial constraints, this could be interpreted as a signal of social division. Secondly, it eliminates one difficulty for reviewers during the evaluation process. In other words, it removes the complexity of price fairness issues (“is a \$300 bottle of wine discernibly five times better than a \$50 bottle?”). Without these issues in mind, the reviewer can finely gauge other qualities without reservation.

Williamson et al's research (2009) discloses the issue of social differentiation underlying published restaurant reviews. The purpose of the exclusive language style used in these reviews is about establishing an image consistent with their social identity as experts in the food industry. Consequently, the audiences of published reviews can also form their social identity as knowledgeable foodies.

Combining the studies conducted overseas and those especially referring to the New Zealand market, it is obvious that food is an important factor in professional reviewer's evaluation criteria. Furthermore, service and atmosphere are key criteria; this has been proposed in several types of research (Jang & Namkung, 2009; Jeong & Jang, 2011; Ryu, Lee, & Gon Kim, 2012; Yang, 2013). The criteria for restaurant evaluation will vary according to the characteristics and personal experience of the individual reviewer (Sietsema, 2010; Titz et al., 2004), so standardisation of criteria is still lacking in the academic field. However, as the emergence of review websites empowers internet users to become restaurant critics, customers' online reviews have come under scrutiny (Goodsir et al., 2014). For the purpose of presenting a clearer comparison between these two different reviews, the various focus of restaurant reviews has been collected in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparison of published and online review criteria

Published restaurant reviews	Online reviews
Food, Ambience, Wine, Service (Williamson et al., 2009)	Food, Service, Atmosphere, Price, Menu, Decor (Pantelidis, 2010)
Food, Service, Atmosphere, Price, Menu, Decor (Pantelidis, 2010)	Environmental cleanliness, Attentive service, Taste of food and reliability of service (Liu & Jang, 2009)
	Food quality, Service quality, Atmosphere, Price fairness (Jeong et al., 2015)
	Food and beverage, Service, Hygiene, Price fairness (Cousins, Foskett, & Gillespie, 2013)
	Food quality, Attentive service, Cost, Ambience (Ribeiro Soriano, 2002)
	Food quality, Service quality, Atmosphere (Kim, Li, & Brymer, 2016)

2.3.3 Food habits and social identity

By reviewing the studies on online and professional reviewers' criteria, the overlap and difference between the two types of review have been disclosed preliminarily. In line with the argument proposed in Williamson et al.'s research (2009), that professional reviewers' writing is for the purpose of social differentiation between various classes,

other previous studies (Ashley, 2004; Calnan & Cant, 1990; Hupkens, Knibbe, & Drop, 2000; Palma, Ness, & Anderson, 2017; Warde, 1997; Wills, Backett-Milburn, Roberts, & Lawton, 2011) have confirmed the association between people's food consumption habits and their social identities. This association leads to different food choices by people from various social classes.

As Warde (1997) suggests, people are under pressure to choose food consistent with their social identities, even though they are faced with increased food choices. Given that restaurant reviews can directly influence audiences toward or away from certain types of food (Hsu et al., 2012), reviews can be closely associated with reviewers' and audience's food choices. Hence, the reviews not only represent reviewers' assessments but also reflect the food consumption habits of the audience. The same argument is made in Ashley's research (2004), in which food writing is viewed as a reflection of food consumption habits. Given the difference between the criteria and language adopted by online and professional reviewers, the social identity of them and their audiences is investigated in this study as well.

Besides this, the economic constraints on reviewers and audiences have been identified as factors influencing the content of reviews. Just as Williamson et al's (2009) studies suggest that professional reviewers pay less attention to the cost, Warde (1997) and Ashley (2004) also propose that, if an individual comes from a social class with higher income, they could suffer less economic constraints on food choice.

In a nutshell, the association between restaurant reviews and reviewers' and audiences' social identities has been identified in terms of two main aspects. Firstly, food

consumption habits represent people's social and cultural identities (Ashley, 2004; Hupkens et al., 2000; Warde, 1997). Secondly, the different income level of different social classes limit people's food choices (Ashley, 2004; Palma et al., 2017; Warde, 1997). The literature reviewed above provides a foundation for understanding the different criteria applied in online and published restaurant reviews. However, the reasons underlying the criteria are further discussed in this study, with reference to the results of the content analysis.

2.3.4 Summary

According to Parikh et al. (2016), professional restaurant reviews are significantly different from user-generated ones, but there is a commonality between them as well. Food, service and atmosphere are the common concern of both online and professional reviewers. Despite the quality of user-generated reviews being perceived as lower, their trustworthiness is perceived as better (Mudambi & Schuff, 2010; Smith, Menon, & Sivakumar, 2005); therefore, the dining experiences reflected in both types of review are valuable information for restaurant practitioners seeking to improve service. Besides, the differences in language style and underlying structure could also be analysed by researchers.

2.4 Restaurant measurement

Before defining good service, it is important to understand the criteria for customers evaluating it (Stevens, 1995). According to Cousins et al. (2013), food and beverage, service, hygiene and price fairness were listed in the dining experience model proposed

by Campbell-Smith and Nailon (1967), who built the foundation of restaurant evaluation. In the decades since then, food quality, service quality and atmosphere have become been widely accepted as measurements for the quality of restaurant experience generally (Kim et al., 2016). Among these three factors, the pre-eminence of food quality as a major influence on customer intentions, such as intention to post online reviews, has been confirmed by several studies in different restaurant segments (Liu & Jang, 2009; Namkung & Jang, 2007; Ryu & Han, 2010; Wu & Liang, 2009). According to Namkung and Jang (2007), food quality should be the primary concern for restaurants to enhance customer satisfaction. In more detail, the study reveals that food presentation and taste are the main contributors of a quality experience. The key triggers of satisfaction could be put into two categories: physical quality and staff behaviour (Marinkovic, Senic, Ivkov, Dimitrovski, & Bjelic, 2014). To gain a complete understanding of customers' evaluation of restaurants, a more comprehensive measure will be introduced.

2.4.1 SERVQUAL and DINESERV scales

The factors of customers' evaluation of restaurant service quality have been studied by numerous researchers. Different models have been proposed to shed light on the customers' criteria for restaurant quality. Aligned with the expectancy-disconfirmation theory, the SERVQUAL scale is a generic tool for assessing if there is a gap between customer expectancy and perceived services. In other words, the SERVQUAL scale is used to identify if the service supplier provides customers with services exceeding or below their expectations. This scale is designed to measure the five dimensions of

service quality: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy (see Table 2) .

Table 2. SERVQUAL scale

SERVQUAL	
Assurance	Employees' knowledge, courtesy and ability to convey trust and confidence
Empathy	Caring and individualised attention that the firm provides to its customers
Reliability	Ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately
Responsiveness	Willingness and promptitude to help and serve customers
Tangibles	Physical facilities; equipment; appearance of personnel

(Parasuraman, Berry, & Zeithaml, 1991)

Several studies have applied the SERVQUAL scale to investigate the measurement of restaurant services (Bojanic & Rosen, 1994; Lee & Hing, 1995; Soriano, 2002).

The SERVQUAL scale applies to all service-related quality evaluations, and its validity is evidenced by abundant related research; yet Babakus and Boller's (1992) empirical assessment failed to prove its validity and reliability. They tried to replicate its five-dimensional factor structure, but did not succeed. This study cautions that the SERVQUAL scale still needs to be modified in future studies.

Since the SERVQUAL scale is quite general and available for all service-related industries, Knutson, Stevens and Patton (1996) tested whether it was appropriate for restaurant service and eventually proposed the DINESERV scale, based on the SERVQUAL scale but especially relating to restaurant service. The process of confirming the validity of the SERVQUAL scale in the restaurant industry involved 598 participants who had dined out at least six times during the past six months. Given the huge sample size, the DINESERV scale drafted by Knutson et al. (1996) was confirmed; therefore, a theoretical foundation of customers evaluating restaurant quality has been built. During the past decades, numerous studies have employed the DINESERV scale in order to measure restaurant quality and provide evidence for the validity of the scale in the context of middle- and upper-echelon restaurants (Kim, McCahon, & Miller, 2003; Kim, & Kim, 2009; Marković, Raspor, & Šegarić, 2010). The DINESERV scale has a great similarity with the SERVQUAL one in that it covers the same dimension (tangibles, reliability, assurance, responsiveness and empathy) but can especially be used for restaurant evaluation (see Table 3).

Table 3. DINESERV scale

DINESERV	
Tangibles	Quality of physical facilities
Reliability	Providing the right service on time
Responsiveness	Staff deployment so as to provide quick service
Assurance	Well-trained staff
Empathy	Staff sensitivity to customers' needs

(Knutson et al., 1996)

The SERVQUAL and DINESERV scales have been modified in several studies to investigate what factors influence customers' evaluation of restaurants in different market segments. Chow, Lau, Lo, Sha and Yun (2007) measured the service quality in the context of full-service restaurants in terms of three dimensions: interaction quality, physical quality and outcome quality. Several studies conducted in this context reveal that the key factors affecting customer satisfaction and intention to post online reviews can be summarised as the quality of food, quality of service and physical setting (Gupta, 2013; Andaleeb & Conway, 2006; Sulek & Hensley, 2004). Sulek and Hensley (2004), using regression analysis, showed that these three factors (food, service and physical setting) could determine customer satisfaction.

Other potential influential factors have been identified by researchers as well. Jang and Namkung (2009) added atmospherics as an important element when measuring restaurant service quality, so the three dimensions of their study were food, atmospherics and service. Ryu and Han (2010) adopted a similar service quality measurement, where food, service and physical environment were the three main

dimensions. Their study was conducted in the context of quick-casual restaurants; therefore, they also included price as a factor for restaurant measurement. Cost is an important measure in full-service restaurants as well. Andaleeb and Conway (2006) recognised the price and quality of food, along with the responsiveness of frontline employees, as measures of quality.

Previous studies provide a foundation for the conceptual framework for this study. It is a foundation of understanding what factors might affect customers' evaluation of restaurants on online review websites. However, the specific categories for data analysis will be developed according to the textual data. The following model is based on the DINESERV scale and previous studies. The factors that have been shown influence customers' evaluation of restaurant services are included in Table 4.

Table 4. Conceptual model

Physical facilities	<i>Decoration</i>
	<i>Layout</i>
	<i>Seating</i>
Food	<i>Quality of ingredients</i>
	<i>Cooking technique</i>
	<i>Appearance</i>
	<i>Menu variety</i>
Service	<i>Reservation</i>
	<i>Waiting time</i>
	<i>Staff</i>
Ambience	

(Knutson et al., 1996; Parasuraman et al., 1991)

2.5 Summary of literature review

As mentioned above, this study was conducted against the backdrop of review websites providing internet users with a new channel for customer-to-customer communication, which gives rise to the new issue of how to interpret and manage UGC for both business and academic purposes. The literature on professional and online restaurant reviews has been carefully reviewed with a view to the research questions of this study and for the purpose of laying a solid foundation for the next sections, in which the data will be analysed and the results presented.

In reviewing the existing literature, major gaps were noticed, and will be summarised here. Firstly, the use of UGC to investigate academic issues is rare in the context of the restaurant industry. Schuckert et al. (2015) reviewed articles applying UGC to solve academic questions on the hospitality and tourism industries, and found that little such research had been done on the restaurant industry. This gap for the restaurant industry could be filled a little by this study. Secondly, standardised restaurant evaluation criteria remain unfixed (Hsu et al., 2012). According to Titz, Lanza-Abbott and Cruz (2004), the criteria adopted by professional restaurant reviewers vary individually. The gap regarding these criteria leaves no standardised way to follow when evaluating a restaurant (Sietsema, 2010; Titz et al., 2004). Also, after reviewing much literature, the researcher did not find that comprehensive criteria for online reviewers had even been proposed. The third gap is lack of comparison between the criteria adopted by online and professional reviewers (Parikh et al., 2016). However, the importance of understanding the differences between these two types of review has been highlighted by Parikh et al. (2016). Their findings indicate that restaurants could achieve a balance between understanding what customers expect and differentiating themselves in the world of published reviews.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the research foundation of this dissertation is explained. Firstly, terms for research paradigms are defined. Then the paradigm choice is outlined, highlighting the suitability for the context of this study. In the latter half of this chapter, the detailed research design of this dissertation is outlined. Given the research paradigm, qualitative content analysis and the coding process is outlined with reference to the context of this study in order to show the study's reliability and validity.

3.2 Research question

The purpose of this study is to investigate the underlying criteria of online restaurant reviews on review websites such as TripAdvisor and to then compare these criteria with those of professional restaurant reviewers, whose work is normally published in magazines and newspapers. From the comparison, the difference between these two types of restaurant reviews can be discerned.

- Research Question 1: What criteria measuring restaurant quality do online reviewers emphasise?
- Research Question 2: How are the criteria adopted by online reviewers different from those emphasised by professional restaurant reviewers?
- Research Question 3: How is the writing used in online reviews different to that of published reviews?

- Research Question 4: How are the criteria adopted by both types of restaurant reviewers associated with the social identity?

The data will be collected from TripAdvisor, since it contains a relatively large amount of data. Moreover, this study targets the New Zealand restaurant industry, so all the restaurant reviews drawn on are of restaurants in New Zealand. The absence of standardised criteria for restaurant reviews has been identified in the last chapter, as has the contribution and importance of this study.

3.3 Research paradigms in social science

Denzin and Lincoln (2011b) state that the net comprising a researcher's ontological, epistemological and methodological positions can be called a paradigm. The research paradigm is the philosophical foundation of a study, and is representative of the research approach. It indicates the underpinning beliefs about the nature of reality, the relationship between people and knowledge and the method adopted by researcher. Since one's research paradigms should be introduced in the order of ontology, then epistemology, then methodology (Gray, 2014), the ontological and epistemological positions of this study will be justified before its methodology is introduced.

The fundamental role of a researchers' ontological position has been highlighted by Crotty (1998): it places constraints on their epistemological and methodological positions. The ontological position is about the questions "What is the nature of reality?" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013) and "How do people view the world and reality?" (Gray, 2014). On the other hand, epistemology is the study of how people gain

knowledge from the world. In other words, as Grant and Giddings (2002) argue, “Having a particular ontological position constrains the epistemological position you can logically hold. Methodologies, in turn, express ontology and epistemology” (p. 12). “Essentially, ontology is “reality”, epistemology is the relationship between that reality and the researcher, and methodology is the techniques used by the researcher to discover that reality” (Sobh & Perry, 2006, p. 194). Given the importance of the internal logic among ontological, epistemological and methodological positions, the paradigm of this study will be justified below.

3.3.1 Definition of paradigms

There are two opposite ontological positions: relativism and realism. Relativists view this world as always changing, and believe that the underlying patterns can be revealed by observation. However, realism is a purely objective view, affirming a permanent world and pre-existent truth that cannot be interrupted by human activities. Aligning the elements of research paradigms for consistency, academics who believe in a changeable world also believe in multiple realities. On the other hand, academics who believe in a permanent world believe that universal laws exist and cannot be changed by human activities.

Epistemology is the study of how people gain knowledge from the world. Given the alignment between a researcher’s ontological and epistemological positions, there are three stances: objectivism, constructivism and subjectivism, each representing different ontological positions. Objectivism aligns with the ontological position of realism (Crotty, 1998). Gray (2014) says that, according to objectivism, the truth exists

independently in the outside world, which requires researchers to scientifically inquire and take the objective approach to reveal it. On the other hand, constructivism and subjectivism originate from the relativists' view.

Constructivists try to make sense of the world based on their own culture, experience and history (Weber, 2004). Crotty (1988) states that, in constructivism, "meaning is not discovered, but constructed" (p. 9). Given that constructivists gain knowledge through their own interaction with the external world, their perceived worlds are different from each other's. Subjectivism bears a similarity to constructivism in that both deny the purely objective view.

3.3.2 Positivist paradigm

The positivist paradigm was developed based on the ontological position of realism and the purely objective epistemological view. Hence, Gray (2014) claims that the core argument of positivism is that this world can be measured by observation and experimental inquiry in general. Positivist researchers believe that universal truth can be observed by different observers in various contexts by applying similar research methods. Grant and Giddings (2002) specify that the positivist paradigm is the premise for the quantitative research method. By conducting experiments and observation, positivists believe that they can achieve a full understanding of reality (Ryan, 2006). In addition, positivist researchers view themselves as detached from their research, and, by presenting their findings quantitatively, seek to let the numbers speak for themselves (Mutch, 2005).

However, in the field of social science, positivism has been challenged due to its insistence on objective, value-free research. The term *post-positivism* has been proposed, which seriously questions the objectivity of positivist research and suggests the possibility of multiple versions of the truth (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008b; Grant & Giddings, 2002; Gray, 2014). Positivism and post-positivism both work within a realist and critical-realist ontology and objectivist epistemology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008a), and both suit quantitative research methods.

3.3.3 Interpretivist paradigm

The interpretivist paradigm is held with relativist ontology and constructivist epistemology. Interpretivists believe that reality is socially constructed and treat participants as people with their own perceived social realities (Tuli, 2011). The relationship between the researcher and participants is that the “researcher [acts] as a listener and interpreter of the data ‘given’ by the participant” (Grant & Giddings, 2002, p. 17). Schwandt (1994) suggests that the interpretive approach provides deeper insights for researchers as they investigate the complicated world from the point of view of those who live it. Interpretivist researchers have to interact with their participants in order to understand the meaning they ascribe to them. Inter-subjectivity in the research process could be viewed as the basis of researchers’ understanding and interpretations (Crawford, Kippax, Onyx, Gault, & Benton, 1992). Therefore, the role played by the researcher is that of an “acting, feeling, thinking, and influencing force in the collection and interpretation of the data” (Daly, 1995, p. 1).

Inherent in the idea of multiple realities and in the interactive relationship between researchers and participants, the qualitative method is a common tool for research investigating and interpreting reality (Bassey, 1995). Furthermore, the findings are normally presented in descriptive words, unlike the numbers used to present the results of studies under the positivist paradigm.

3.4 Paradigm choice and justification

Taking into consideration the above philosophical assumptions, this study can be identified as an interpretive research. One of the purposes of this study is to investigate the criteria applied in the customer behaviour of posting online restaurant reviews in the context of the New Zealand market. Then the criteria will be compared with those adopted by professional restaurant reviewers in order to tell the differences. Given that this study involves analysing and systematising texts to reveal underlying meanings and patterns in the text data (Holsti, 1969), the interpretive paradigm will be the appropriate approach. It is consistent with relativist ontology and constructivist epistemology (Grant & Giddings, 2002; Weber, 2004). In the relativist view of ontology, the criteria adopted by online reviewers do not exist independently in the outside world, but rather need to be observed in an underlying pattern. Accordingly, constructivist epistemology recognises the multiple realities of each reviewer, each with their own criteria for evaluating restaurants. Taking the interpretive approach allows the researcher to capture such multiple views of online reviewers evaluating restaurant quality. Certain criteria could be revealed by understanding various elements that online reviewers are

concerned with. The interpretivist paradigm recognises the existence of multiple meanings, and the feasibility of gaining knowledge from human interaction (Grant & Giddings, 2002; Weber, 2004).

Aligning the internal logic between ontology, epistemology and methodology, this research applies qualitative methodology consistent with the interpretive paradigm (Creswell, 2012; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008b). Therefore, the restaurant reviews collected from review website will be analysed qualitatively in order to reveal specific criteria that is appropriate for restaurant evaluation.

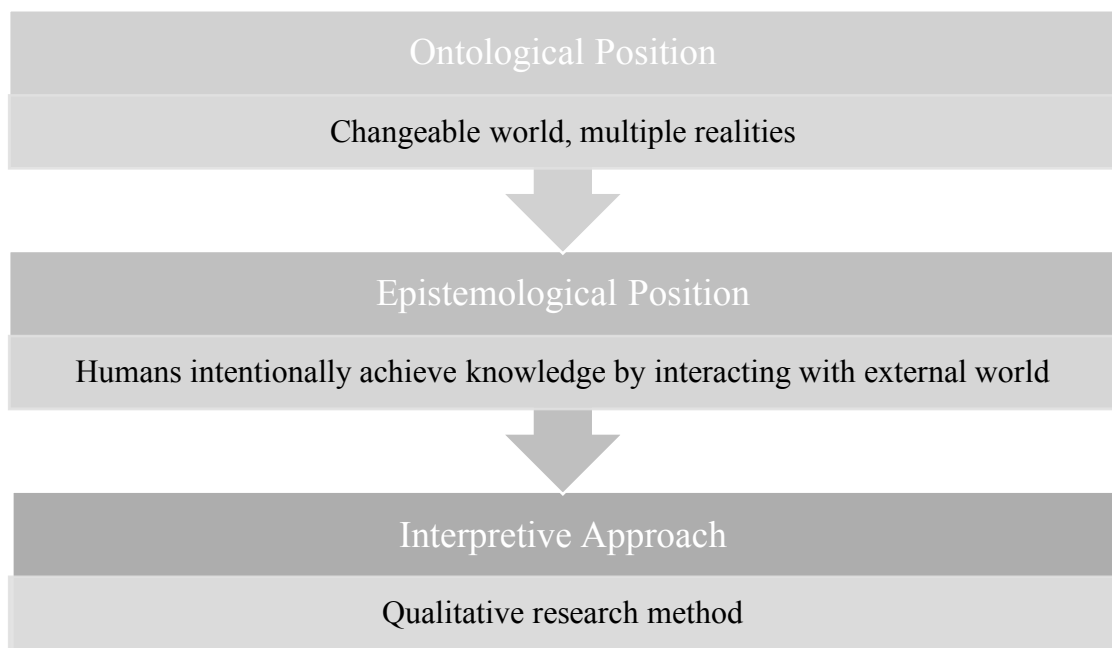


Figure 1. Paradigm choice of this study

(Grant & Giddings, 2002)

3.5 The researcher's position and place

To ensure the validity of this study, besides the above internal logic, the position and place for the researcher conducting it needs to be considered. In the context of this

research, it would be difficult to position myself as an outsider in the process of data analysis. I am inherently an insider due to my professional knowledge and experience in the hospitality industry. I have held two roles in it. Firstly, I am a postgraduate student majoring in international hospitality management. This identity means that I have professional knowledge and support for conducting this research. Secondly, as an internet user who writes online reviews, the patterns underlying such reviews of restaurant quality arouse my interest.

This interpretive perspective also allows me to present and interpret the results in a way that reflects the multiple realities implied by the interpretive paradigm. In addition, it provide me with the position to accurately capture the patterns underlying the content of online reviews. The experience of being a reviewing customer provides me with deeper understanding of what truths are said by online reviewers. Besides this, the professional knowledge I have gained during my study has laid a solid foundation for conducting this study. At the same time, this study builds on an existing restaurant evaluation scale, and (since the theoretical model needed to be modified during the process of this study) I drew on professional knowledge and experienced mentoring. For all these reasons, I believe it is appropriate that the text data was analysed from an insider perspective.

3.6 Qualitative research method

Shedding light on the qualitative research method, Teddlie and Tashakkori (2003) provide helpful information on the historical background. At the beginning, qualitative studies were widely advised against by positivists who believed that it was not real

science. Due to the complex history of the development, Denzin and Lincoln (2011b) argue that the definition of qualitative research must work within its historical background. Therefore, they propose that—

“Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3).

From the perspective of methodology, qualitative research includes phenomenological, grounded-theory, hermeneutical, socio-linguistic and feminist research. Some of the qualitative approaches have specific sets of guidelines for data collection and analysis, while others are very flexible. According to Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2013), all qualitative research has the following common features: firstly, it is conducted in a real-life setting where the researcher interacts with participants. Secondly, the pattern emerging from the data can reinforce the validity of the hypothesis proposed. Thirdly, qualitative research is mainly focused on the purpose that underlies people’s actions.

The difference between qualitative and quantitative research methods also concerns the position of the researchers. Qualitative research methods require interaction between the researcher and the context studied. The qualitative researcher views the world as changeable, and uses interaction as the way to gain knowledge in it. Compared with quantitative research, which collects mainly statistical data, the sources and types of qualitative data are different as well. According to Gray (2014), qualitative data collection often involves “the use of semi-structured interviews, observation, focus

groups and the analysis of materials such as documents, photographs, video recordings and other media” (p. 138).

However, limitations of qualitative methods have been pointed out by scholars as well. During the period when the qualitative method was widely opposed by quantitative scholars, qualitative researchers were called “journalists or ‘soft scientists’” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011b, p. 6) Because their data is relatively subjective and lacks the support of statistics, qualitative scholars’ work was widely viewed as unscientific and only exploratory. Eventually, this criticism faded and quantitative and qualitative methods became recognised as compatible, and now sometimes both are used at the same time.

3.6.1 Qualitative content analysis

Since qualitative content analysis is used in this study, its definition will be presented. Berelson (1952) describes it as “a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication” (p. 19). Aligned with Berelson’s definition, Holsti (1969) states that “content analysis is any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of the message” (p. 14). Furthermore, Weber (1990) describes content analysis as “a research method that uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text” (p. 1). Qualitative content analysis requires researchers to not only count the frequency of certain words but also to identify their underlying meaning (Catanzaro, 1988; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Content analysis requires classification of all the data into summative categories that represent certain meanings (Weber, 1990). In this regard, qualitative content analysis can be defined as a research method of analysing textual data by interpreting its meaning (Schreier, 2012). Three main phases of conducting qualitative content analysis have been identified by numerous studies: preparation, analysis and reporting (Bos & Tarnai, 1999; Cole, 1988).

Content analysis is often used by scholars to process a large amount of textual information for the purpose of discovering its underlying structure and patterns. The common analytical methods include word frequency counting and ranking words (or key words) in the textual content. The key approach for analysing large amounts of data is systematic or thematic coding, which requires researchers to build a clear framework prior to the study. According to Grbich (2007), there are several concerns to address before conducting a content analysis:

1 Is there enough data for conducting content analysis?

2 What kind of sampling approach will be adopted?

3 Is the coding structure created by researchers valid?

After confirming that the textual data can sustain a content analysis, further steps are building the coding frame, classifying the material for coding, double-checking the coding frame, then fitting all the material within it.

3.7 Method

To gain a reliable comparison between the criteria of online reviews and published reviews, these two types of data will be both applied for content analysis. Compared with edited reviews, online reviews are relatively unstructured, therefore requiring researchers to put more effort into interpreting the reviews left by online reviewers (Robson et al., 2013). Referring to the understanding of qualitative content analysis above, the plan for this study will be presented next.

3.7.1 Data collection

Online reviews from customers reflect their experience and their evaluation of restaurant services. In this study, online reviews were collected from a website to analyse the factors that influence customers' evaluations and their different expectations of full-service restaurants. Due to TripAdvisor being one of the largest online travel communities collecting reviews exclusively from customers, it is a suitable data source for this study. Furthermore, in the chapter of finding and discussion, online reviewers will be referred to users who post restaurant reviews on this platform. Moreover, restaurant reviews published in a New Zealand magazine and newspaper were collected for comparison between the online and the published types. In this study, *Cuisine* magazine and the newspaper *New Zealand Herald* were chosen as the data sources. *Cuisine* has become a dominant voice in New Zealand's food industry, given that it has been published since 1987. The *New Zealand Herald*, a daily published newspaper circulated mainly in the Auckland region, contains many reviews of full-service restaurants in that region (New Zealand Herald, n.d.). Elo and Kyngäs (2008) advise

that the date of the content collected for most content analyses is unstructured. Also, Neuendorf (2002) advises that a codebook which explains all data categories is necessary for the following phase, when the data is analysed.

3.7.2 Sample selection

Purposive sampling applied in this study, as Elo and Kyngäs (2008) suggest that it is the most popular method for content analysis. This type of sampling enables researchers to select the samples that they deem appropriate (Neuendorf, 2002). Because the purpose of this study is compare online and published reviews, such reviews – of full-service restaurants – were the target for data collection.

The sampling method must be introduced. Because this study is on content about the Auckland restaurant industry, restaurants in Auckland were chosen for data collection. 20 restaurants have been selected randomly with the sole require of being full-service restaurant. Considering that Trip Advisor is a huge database of user-generated restaurant reviews, only top-ranked reviews of the 20 restaurants dated within the last six months were collected. However, the sample size for published restaurant reviews was comparatively small. Because the database for online reviews was significantly bigger than that for published reviews, the sample size for the two kinds of review is asymmetrical in this study.

100 qualifying published reviews on the target restaurants were collected, and 200 online reviews were randomly selected, all produced during the same period. The asymmetrical quantities of data might raise concerns about the validity of this study;

however, the same situation (comparison using different sample sizes) has arisen in previous studies. Song and Chang (2012) conducted a content analysis comparing daily newspapers in China and the USA using different sample sizes, which could back up the validity of this study. Furthermore, Krippendorff (2013) argues that the ideal size of samples is a question of cost-benefit, which means that researchers must consider both effectiveness and efficiency when deciding the sample size. In this regard, given the limited time and budget, the sample size of this study avoided an unmanageable amount of data and ensured reasonable validity.

Since content analysis is about fitting all the material into appropriate categories (Rustemeyer, 1992; Shapiro & Markoff, 1997), it requires a systematic process (Schreier, 2012); otherwise, some part of the data might be overlooked or put into the wrong category. Therefore, the process of data analysis will be discussed in the next section.

3.7.3 Data analysis

After the data collection phase, the textual data was carefully reviewed with the purpose of organising it into categories according to the underlying meanings of the content. Given NVivo has been the most used software in terms of qualitative study. In this study, Nvivo has been adopted as the analytic software. Due to the exploratory nature of the study, keywords in restaurant reviews were coded into related categories to identify the factors influencing customers' evaluations of restaurant service quality. Categories were initially established on the basis on the framework proposed in the previous literature. Categories for the coding process then emerged along with the data reviewing

(Neuendorf, 2002). Specifically, the following measures identified in previous literature were included: *Food, Service, Ambience, Location* and *Physical Facilities*. The categories for the coding process were built on this foundation, but modified as new themes emerged from the textual data.

Carrying out data analysis with an appropriate process reinforces the reliability of a study. Given that content analysis is a systematic yet flexible research method, its process requires care (Krippendorff, 2013). As Weber (1990) argues, “there is no simple right way to do a content analysis” (p. 13). Researchers must regularly judge whether the current method is appropriate for investigating the research questions, and, if it is not, change it accordingly. Hence, the coding categories were checked regularly during the coding process. The conceptual model proposed in the literature review has *Food, Service, Ambience* and *Physical Facility* as the key measures for restaurant assessment, which were confirmed in terms of reliability. Besides, newly emerged themes will be removed if the frequency of their appearance was not significant. For this study, there was only one coder analysing the data. This required the researcher to put more effort into confirming the stability and consistency of the data analysis.

3.7.4 Coding process

In this study, the coding frame built on the existing criteria for evaluating restaurant quality. Given that there is no standardised criteria of online reviewers in existing literature, the coding frame for online reviews was developed using the SERVQUAL and DINEQUAL scales alongside the findings of relevant literature. For a coding frame for professional reviews, a model was adopted from Goodsir et al. (2014) and

Williamson et al. (2009). However, it was kept in mind that new categories might emerge during this process, and change the original coding frame; when this happened, the categories will be modified as the I read online reviews. The process was as follows:

- Selecting the appropriate model for measuring restaurant quality
- Structuring the coding frame according to the SERVQUAL and DINEQUAL scales
- Coding all the textual materials into categories
- Revising and expanding the coding frame

3.7.5 Presenting the result

For the sake of validity, the results of the coding process should be appropriately presented. These results are shown in tables in the following chapter, which include the wordcount and percentage for each theme. In light of the word count allocated to each, the main criteria of the restaurant reviewers is revealed. The tables present the main criteria adopted by restaurant reviewers separately, as each theme is explained in detail. After identifying the main dimensions for restaurant evaluation, this study goes further, exploring the more detailed criteria adopted by restaurant reviewers. For this purpose, sub-categories are identified within the themes that draw the most attention. For example, when *Food* was identified as a key measure for restaurant assessment, sub-categories were created under this main theme. Thus, the specific criteria adopted by restaurant reviewers to evaluate food are discovered. According to the previous research, the sub-categories under *Food* might be *Appearance*, *Cooking Technique*, *Menu Variety* and *Quality of Ingredients*. This process of manual coding can reveal

specific criteria in each category, thus fleshing out the criteria adopted by online and professional restaurant reviewers.

According to Schreier (2012), the validity of this study will be confirmed only if the well-designed coding frame can capture what the researcher means it to capture. The coding frame is also important as a context in which to assess validity. The coding frame is important because there are no clear criteria for assessing the validity of content analysis, and because the content analysis has to be assessed in the context of the coding frame – and the research environment. With this in mind, the content of online and published restaurant reviews will be interpreted and identified by the researcher.

3.7.6 Limitations

The concept of qualitative content analysis has been widely criticised, as many scholars view it as a quantitative research method. As there is no sharp line dividing content analysis from the quantitative research method, in numerous communication studies it has been defined as a quantitative approach (Schreier, 2012). Numbers indeed play an important role in content analysis, especially in the coding process and the measurement of the frequency of key words; however, this does not make content analysis a quantitative method. The fundamental activity of content analysis is interpreting the underlying meaning and structure of the textual data.

Besides content analysis being counted as perhaps a quantitative method, there are arguably other limitations of this approach too. The subjectivity involved in data

analysis has been viewed as the main limitation of content analysis (Bos & Tarnai, 1999; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Gray, 2014).

3.7.7 Ethical issues

The source of the data does not raise privacy issues, as there was no direct contact between the participants and the researcher. Although all reviews contribute to this study, their identities have not been involved. Given the data used was secondary, ethical issues were not a concern.

Chapter 4 Findings

The theoretical foundation of content analysis and the specific instrument designed for this study have been outlined in the previous chapter. In answer to the research questions proposed, this chapter presents the results of the analysis of two types of data: online reviews archived from TripAdvisor and published professional reviews collected from *Cuisine* magazine and *The New Zealand Herald*. Comparison is made of these two kinds of review in terms of the reviewers' main focus and more detailed criteria.

Firstly, tables are used to present the key dimensions of the criteria by which professional and online restaurant reviewers make their evaluations. Then the factors they describe most frequently are investigated in further detail. For instance, if *Service* is identified as a main element of restaurant assessment, the time waiting for the meal, the attentiveness of service staff and the reliability of booking might be the detailed criteria for reviewers assessing the service quality of a place.

Second, in order to compare the criteria adopted by the two types of reviewer, the differences and similarities between the results on both are discussed. The investigation of each type follows the same process. Finally, the key focus of restaurant reviewers and their detailed criteria are presented in order to show the differences between online and published restaurant reviewers.

Given that the analysis of data involved fitting review content into categories, an effort was made to ensure that the categories covered the most common factors for both

restaurant reviewers. Therefore, the categories were built on the service evaluation scale and on the findings of previous literature.

4.1 Results

This section is aimed at revealing the key dimensions for both online and professional reviewers as they evaluate the quality of restaurants, and the specific criteria underlying their content. From reading the online reviews, nine key dimensions were identified from 200 reviews. Since word count can be an important indicator of how much an evaluating factor matters, the importance of each dimension for the reviewers is measured by how many words they spent on it. The validity of using word count to measure the importance of influential factors has been confirmed in previous studies. Therefore, word count is used to allocate the importance of factors in restaurant assessment. For the comparison, 100 published restaurant reviews were also collected and reviewed. The coding process aligned with that for the online review analysis: it involved identifying main categories that illustrated the focal points for professional reviewers. In addition, the establishment of subcategories under the main ones allowed the articulation of professional reviewers' detailed criteria.

The findings are presented in the following order. Firstly, the word count percentage of each main thematic category of both online and published reviews will be revealed. The themes within these two kinds of review will be presented separately, in two tables, for the purpose of comparison. *Food* and *Service*, as the focal themes emerging from the coding process, will receive further investigation. In order to gain a better understanding

of how online and professional reviewers assess these focal aspects of restaurants' quality, detailed criteria will be identified under sub-categories.

4.1.1 Main focal points in the restaurant reviews

This section will lay out all the themes identified from both kinds of restaurant review and the percentages allocated to each theme, thus revealing the importance of each theme. The overlap and difference between the two kinds of review will be discussed based on the comparison. Then the focus will turn to the important themes and the significant differences between two kinds of review. The sub-categories of the themes that receive most attention will be presented in order to gain a further understanding of the details of how restaurant reviewers evaluate restaurants' quality.

4.1.1.1 Online reviewers

For the online reviews, the results of the coding process are presented as follows. The word count on each theme underlying the content is presented in Table 5. The main categories in the coding process were *Food, Service, Wine, Physical Condition, Price Fairness, Ambience, Recommendation, Companions* and *Location*.

Table 5. Online reviewers' criteria

Theme	Word Count	Percentage
Food	7,405	39.6%
Service	3,967	21.2%
Wine	1,361	7.2%
Physical Condition	1,246	6.7%
Price Fairness	1,192	6.4%
Ambience	1,145	6.1%
Recommendation	959	5.1%
Companions	799	4.2%
Location	620	3.3%

The themes studied in this research will be explained in more detail for the reader to gain a better understanding of how reviewers evaluate restaurants' quality. Firstly, *Food*, *Service*, *Wine*, *Ambience* and *Location* refer to the assessment made by reviewers in terms of food, service, wine, restaurant ambience and convenience of location, respectively. *Physical Condition* refers to the physical facilities, space and layout. Under this theme, reviewers talk about the space and layout of the dining area, besides the comfort and privacy of the seating. That is, reviewers tell the audience if a restaurant would make customers physically feel comfortable. *Price Fairness* is about the cost and value of the bill received by reviewers at the end of the dining experience. Regarding the tendency of some reviewers to tell the audience about the companions of their

dining experiences, *Companions* refers to the person or people dining out with reviewers. *Recommendation* refers to the comments made by reviewers about whether this place is worth a visit.

Table 5 shows the word count assigned to each dimension in the online reviewers' evaluation. *Food* clearly predominates, accounting for 39.6% of all words, almost twice as much as the nearest factor. *Service* comes second at 21.2%. The percentage of words on food and service together predominate the content of online reviews even more, which catches attention for further investigation. Wine comes a fairly distant third with 7.2%. Besides the top three themes, the words spent on describing the physical condition of a restaurant account for 6.7% of the total. (Normally, under this heading is covered the restaurant's physical layout, seating and other facilities.) The next dimension is *Price Fairness* at 6.4%. *Ambience* accounts for a slightly lower percentage, 6.1%. *Recommendation* (5.1%) represents online reviews' repurchasing intention: whether they recommend the restaurant to others. In addition, online reviewers spend some words on their *Companions* during their dining experience. The findings show them spending 4.2% of the word count telling audiences about those who dined out with them. The *Location* came last, accounting for 3.3%. At this stage, some characteristics come into view that could be of interest for further discussion. Firstly, restaurant reviewers' companions have rarely been discussed in previous studies. Secondly, it was unexpected that *Ambience*, recognised as a key criterion for restaurant evaluation in many studies (Jeong & Jang, 2011; Kim et al., 2003; Titz et al., 2004; Yang, 2013) comes in sixth out of nine dimensions. Further investigation could cover

these two issues. Furthermore, the detailed criteria adopted by online reviewers will be explored in the next section through manual identification of the various aspects of the main categories (food and service).

The word count on food and service in total accounts for more than half the content (60.8%). Given such a large portion, these two factors are clearly the key criteria for reviewers evaluating restaurant quality on the review website. It is for this reason that further investigation will be conducted on online reviewers' detailed criteria within these areas. Specifically, in following sections, the content under the food and service categories will be carefully reviewed, and the various aspects within them identified.

4.1.1.2 Published reviews

In regard to published restaurant reviews, the main themes identified are presented below: *Food, Service, Ambience, Physical Condition, Operation, Price Fairness, Owner, Chef, Location and Wine.*

Table 6. Professional reviewers' criteria

Theme	Word Count	Percentage
Food	27,308	54.8%
Service	6,180	12.4%
Ambience	3,875	7.8%
Wine	2,867	5.8%
Physical Condition	2,758	5.5%
Location	1,720	3.5%
Operation	1,541	3.1%
Chef	1,382	2.8%
Price Fairness	1,379	2.8%
Owner	827	1.7%

The themes of published restaurant reviews bear great similarity to those of online reviews, so only those which do not appear in the latter will be explained.

Descriptions of *Operation* can include brand history, business model and management team. The *Chef* and *Owner* themes involve introduction of and comment on the performance of the chef and owner of the restaurant.

As Table 6 shows, *Food*, *Service* and *Ambience* account for a large portion of the total word count, taking up 54.8%, 12.4% and 7.8% respectively. These percentages show professional reviewers' tendency to primarily tell audiences about these themes. They could be viewed as the major concerns, while information on the *Location*, *Operation*, *Price Fairness*, *Owner* and *Chef*

accounts for much smaller portions (3.5%, 3.1%, 2.8%, 2.8% and 1.7%, respectively). *Physical Condition* and *Wine* each account for about 6% of the word count. The content on *Physical Condition* concerns the layout and seating.

4.1.1.3 Comparison between the main themes

From comparing the above tabulations of the key items in online and published restaurant reviews, differences and similarities between the criteria are revealed. Firstly, *Food* and *Service* are the top two items for both. Food accounts for 54.8% of the word count in the published reviews and 39.6% in the online reviews, and service, 12.4% in the published reviews and 21.2% in the online reviews. There are other themes identified in these two kinds of review (*Physical Condition*, *Price Fairness* and *Location*) which draw moderate attention from both. However, for the purpose of revealing the differences, items only emphasised by one side will be highlighted. The themes which draw attention only from online reviewers include *Recommendation* and *Companions*. *Recommendation* concerns online reviewers' intention of participating in positive electronic word-of-mouth; the practice of introducing their dining companions shows their social relationships and identities. On the other hand, the measures that only appear in published reviews but are absent from online reviews are those of *Owner*, *Chef* and *Operation*. This kind of information might require reviewers to have specialised industry knowledge, and to be able to gain further such knowledge – to find out about owners, chefs and restaurants' operation situations.

In summary, it is clear that the dimensions which receive most attention from online and professional restaurant reviewers remain very similar. *Food* and *Service* can be seen as

the primary concerns for all. Other items of concern in both online and published reviews are *Ambience*, *Physical Condition*, *Price Fairness* and *Location*. However, online reviewers also comment on whether the restaurant is worth visiting and tell of the companions of their dining experience. By contrast, instead of talking about their personal social relationships, professional reviewers provide information not accessible to reviewing customers.

Having identified focal themes and differences between the two kinds of review, *Food* and *Service*, as the themes which receive the most attention, will be analysed in the next section.

4.1.2 Food

Based on surveying all the content under the *Food* category, the table below shows the criteria of restaurant evaluation in this area.

Table 7. Comparison of online and professional reviewers' criteria for food

Online		Published	
Course Description	25%	Taste	31%
Taste	24.4%	Ingredients	17.3%
Menu Variety	7.6%	Course Description	13.4%
Appearance	5.4%	Appearance	12.7%
Ingredients	5.1%	Menu Variety	9%
Cooking Technique	4.9%	Cooking Technique	7%
Portion	4.4%	Portion	4.8%
		Special Options	4.8%

The themes in the coding program will be explained here. Firstly, *Course Description* refers to the statement of which meal the reviewer ordered. *Taste* refers to description and assessment of the food. *Menu Variety* represents the length and variety of the restaurant's menu. *Ingredients* relates to evaluation of the materials involved in the preparation of the food. *Cooking Technique* refers to the professionalism of the kitchen staff. *Appearance* is about how the meal was presented. *Portion* refers to the quantity of food on the plate. A theme that exclusively appears in published reviews, *Special Options* refers to the availability of gluten-free and vegetarian meals.

The seven items in the first column of Table 7 are the focal points of the archived online reviews from TripAdvisor in terms of food evaluation. *Course Description* is the top element, accounting for 25%: online reviewers spent the most words (within their word count on food) telling audiences what they ordered in their dining experience. Taste

comes in second, with 24.4%. The percentages for *Course description* and *Taste* indicates that these two aspects draw the most attention from online reviewers when they talk about the food.

The second column shows the aspects of food evaluation that draw professional reviewers' attention. *Taste* is apparently the primary measure, with 31% of the food-related word count spent on it. *Ingredients*, *Course Description* and *Appearance* follow, also accounting for a relatively large portion. However, professional restaurant reviewers spent less words on the portions. Also, unlike online reviewers, they discussed *Special Options* (such as vegetarian and gluten-free options).

As *Food* is the primary concern for restaurant reviewers, further investigation is conducted on the detailed criteria for its evaluation. From the table comparing the main themes, it is clear that *Taste* and *Course Description* both account for a relatively large portion in both online and published reviews (24.4% and 25% in the former and 31% and 13.4% in the latter). In contrast to the small word count of *Ingredients* in online reviews (5.1% of the total), it came up second in the published restaurant reviews (17.3% of the total). Hence, *Taste*, *Course Description* and *Ingredients* are investigated for further information.

4.1.2.1 Taste

Given that *Taste* is the top concern for professional and the second for online reviewers (with 31% in the published and 24.4% in the online reviews), the attention it draws is

worth careful investigation. The content and style of both kinds of reviewers' description of taste is overviewed here based on careful review. One online reviewer wrote about taste as follows:

"The flavours were delicate and amazing."

Online reviewers' descriptors of food included *good, great, delicious, amazing, wonderful* and *excellent*. Metaphors were rarely used to describe the taste. The descriptions of taste indicate that the expressions adopted by online reviewers are relatively straightforward.

Regarding published restaurant reviews, words described flavour and texture. As one wrote:

"A big, fat, nicely-browned groper fillet was matched with the light aniseed flavours of a fennel purée, caperberries and more nuts again for texture, this time almonds. The fish was meaty and sweet enough to carry it off."

Compared with the style of online reviewers, professional reviewers' work seemed more literary, with more complicated descriptions of taste. It stands out that reviewers tended to note the combination of several flavours of different ingredients. Besides this, exotic flavours drew attention. Descriptions such as *"the sour-sweet-salty-spicy flavours of Southeast Asia"* could be understood only by people who already know about particular exotic cuisines. The words used to describe taste, such as *"an overpowering eucalyptus flavour in the kawakawa jelly"* or *"garlanded, none too lavishly, with shiso, the dainty, delicious herb"* indicate the complexity of the professional reviewers'

language style. Therefore, professional reviewers' style is different from online reviewers' in that the latter is easier to understand and requires less specialised knowledge.

4.1.2.2 Course description

Here, another overlap between the criteria adopted by professional and online restaurant reviewers was noticed (the word count amounting to 13.4% and 25.0% respectively).

Online reviewers tended to introduce what food they ordered, and professional reviewers likewise shared their personal dining experiences. As one online reviewer wrote:

We decided to share 2 starters, the wagyu carpaccio and the burrata (figs, walnuts and mozzarella), both highly recommended. My wife chose the crayfish tortello, whilst I settled for the lamb.

Language used to describe courses involved detailed descriptions of the meal ordered, from the snacking plates to the mains and sides. As course description is a top element among online reviews, the strength of their tendency to share the experience of what they ordered is apparent. In fact, saying what food they ate accounts for the largest percentage. The tendency to deal with this topic was found among professional reviewers, too, in their own style. One reviewer wrote:

I ordered parmesan gnocchi with blue cheese, pumpkin, hazelnuts and brown butter – perhaps too heavy an option following my starter, but I had been put on the back foot a little by the last-minute unavailability of

the mozzarella – plus a saffron pappardelle with prawns, clams and snapper.

By comparing the content under *Course Description* in online and published restaurant reviews, the similar styles of the two types of reviewers saying what they ate can be recognised. Both online and professional reviewers list in detail the meal they ordered. As in the examples presented above, the meals ordered by both kinds of reviewer could usually be easily identified: the online reviewer had “*wagyu carpaccio and the burrata*” for starters and “*crayfish tortello and lamb*” for mains, while the professional reviewer had “*parmesan gnocchi*” and “*saffron pappardelle*” for the side and main.

4.1.2.3 Ingredients

Within the comparatively small proportion of words which online reviewers spent on *Ingredients* (only 5.1% of the total), the aspect that they noted most frequently was *freshness*. *Vegetables* and *seafood* were the main targets for the assessment. However, *Ingredients* is the item that came second in published restaurant reviews. Food was assessed in terms of how the ingredients were involved in its preparation. As one professional reviewer wrote:

“Of the rest, the less the said the better. This place’s website twice describes its ingredients as ‘New Zealand’s freshest’, which would be a meaningless boast even if it were true, which it was not that night. The hapuku was far from newly landed – perhaps it had been badly stored. The broad beans and asparagus, neither of which are in season, had a

speckled, mottled appearance and the gnocchi, which had been pan-fried, were slightly greasier than the chips, and tasted of nothing at all.”

By reviewing the reviews with regard to *Food*, two main focuses were identified. One criterion of high-quality food was the freshness of the ingredients. Reviewers appreciated organic vegetables and dairy products, and restaurants with their own farmers or suppliers were highlighted as well. Another main focus was the ingredients, the exotic and rare ones being emphasised by professional reviewers. The ingredients listed by reviewers, like the exotic food tastes, require specialised knowledge.

4.1.2.4 Summary of *Food*

The overlap between online and professional restaurant reviewers in assessing the quality of food can be seen in their common choice of *Taste* and *Course Description* as key measures of evaluation. However, taste is where the language styles are markedly different. The published reviews seem to adopt a more literary writing style, with complicated descriptions of taste and journalistic words, while the online reviewers use a language style easier to understand and perhaps more friendly for people without higher education. Besides the difference in language style, the taste descriptions show other differences as well. Exotic and rare ingredients account for a large portion only in professional reviewers' evaluations; online reviewers do not spend many words on it. As the descriptions “*the sour-sweet-salty-spicy flavours*” or “*overpowering eucalyptus flavor*” represent how the published reviews require specialised knowledge to understand. Finally, as *Course Description* has been identified as a criterion

common to both kinds of reviewer, this, too, counts as a similarity: telling audiences what specific food they ordered.

In sum, in regard to *Food*, published restaurant reviews involve more literary writing and refer to more exotic flavours. Another aspect that fewer online reviewers pay attention to is whether restaurants provide gluten-free or vegetarian options; the theme of special options was only identified in the published reviews.

4.1.3 Service

Given that service is the item that came second in both online and published reviews, further investigation will be conducted on detailed criteria for it.

Table 8. Comparison of online and professional reviewers' criteria for service

Online		Published	
Staff	42.7%	Staff	71.1%
Waiting Time	12.7%	Waiting Time	18.2%
Booking	10.1%	Booking	10.6%
Special	4.5%		
Requirements			
Dining Pace	2.4%		

Explanation of the themes identified in the content related to restaurant service evaluation will be presented as follows. *Staff* were the subject of the top criterion adopted by restaurant reviewers, which is about the attentiveness and knowledge of the service staff. *Waiting Time* is about the time that customers spent waiting for the service staff or their meals. As for *Booking*, reviewers assessed the reliability of the booking system by whether they could get the table on time. *Special Requirements* was focused on fulfilment of the requests of reviewers with group reservations or babies. In addition, *Dining Pace* is about whether the pace between each course is appropriate.

The first column of Table 8 shows that *Staff* were talked about by online reviewers most frequently: in 42.7% of the total word count on service. The nearest item was *Waiting Time*, which accounted for 12.7%. 10.1% was spent on the *Booking*. *Special Requirements* and *Dining Pace* drew less attention, with 4.5% and 2.4% respectively.

The second column shows the priority of items identified in published restaurant reviews, *Staff* being the primary concern, taking up 71.1% of the total word count on service. This percentage shows that the behaviour of service staff can dominate their impression of a restaurant. *Waiting Time* and *Booking* came after *Staff* as other focal points of service assessment. *Waiting Time* refers to service efficiency, in which regard reviewers often talked about how long it took to get the food they ordered. In comments on *Booking*, professional reviewers told the audience about the reliability or necessity of booking in advance – *necessity*, here, refers to whether the booking is essential, while reliability is about whether customers get tables on time. For the purposes of

articulating the detailed criteria adopted by online and professional reviewers, the results of a careful review will be presented next.

As the table shows that *Staff* drew the most attention from both online and professional restaurant reviewers (with 42.7% and 71.1% respectively), the language style that these two kinds of reviewers use to discuss it will be investigated in more detail. In addition, the fulfilment of online reviewers' special requests has been identified as one measure for the quality of service. Hence, in the next section, *Staff* and *Special Requirements* will be carefully investigated.

4.1.3.1 Staff

The position of staff as the top element in the service dimension demonstrates that they are an important measure of a restaurant's service quality for both kinds of reviewer. Servers play an important role connecting the kitchen and front house; therefore, the bottom line is that reviewers expect that they can get the right food – the food that they ordered. Reviewers' evaluation of restaurant staff includes various aspects of their interaction. One online reviewer wrote:

Our server, Ben, clearly knew his food and could carry the chef's message. He was very charming/friendly/accessible, as opposed to the pretentious waiters that are sometimes found in such high-end restaurants. The sommelier was also top-notch and talked us through the wine pairings throughout the meal.

—and a review by a professional reviewer described the staff thus:

Our waiter was friendly but he lacked menu knowledge. He didn't know what our pickles were and didn't know where the eel came from (brought in from Japan, he finally found out), but he did manage that trick of memorising the orders correctly without writing anything down.

Two main measures can be observed from the reviews' references to staff. One is the attentiveness of service staff and the other is their knowledge. Positive traits of the staff were frequently described with words such as *attentive*, *friendly*, *polite*, *effectively* and *professional*, which indicate the attitudes appreciated by reviewers. Reviewers also tended to give positive reviews in terms of service if the service staff were familiar with the menu and could make helpful recommendations. However, alongside these similarities, there was a difference in assessment between online and professional reviewers. *Knowledgeable* and *professional* were the most common words for positive traits of service staff used by professional reviewers, while the online reviewers tended to talk about the “*friendly*” and “*attentive*” staff. Hence, the content of online reviews shows a focus on the attentiveness of service staff more than their knowledge, while professional reviewers had higher standards for knowledge. Appreciation of enthusiastic staff could be found in published restaurant reviews; however, the criticism circled back to whether they could serve food or wine properly, or knew about the restaurant's menu.

4.1.3.2 Special requirements

The fulfilment of special requirements was mentioned by online reviewers in a modest 4.5% of the total word count. These requirements included large group bookings and dining with babies. One online reviewer wrote:

Nothing was too much trouble; we had a number of people who had special dietary requirements and there was never a moment when they could not accommodate our wishes, right down to making non-alcoholic.

From reviewing the content under the theme of special requirements, it is clear that, when online reviewers dined out with large groups or babies, accommodation of needs and extra attention was appreciated and merited mention.

In the next section, a difference between online and professional restaurant reviewers talking about *Price Fairness* was identified during the coding and is presented below.

4.2 The different focal points of the two types of reviewer

As for similarity, *Food* and *Service* are the primary and secondary themes respectively in both published restaurant reviews (with 54.8% and 12.4% of the total word count) and online reviews (with 39.6% and 21.2%). However, the differences observed through coding the two types of review requires further discussion. Besides the overlap of criteria, the themes only emerging in one type of review will be discussed. *Companions* and *Recommendation* were the themes only identified in online reviews and *Chef*, *Owner* and *Operation* were those only identified in published reviews; all were

analysed, as discussed below. Furthermore, because online and professional reviewers used different language style and measurements for price fairness, the criteria for that will be discussed as well. In sum, the themes covered in the following section are *Price Fairness, Operation, Chef, Owner, Companions* and *Recommendation*.

4.2.1 Price fairness

Despite the theme of *Price Fairness* being identified in both online and published restaurant reviews, the ways each kind of reviewer talked about the cost of the dining experience were different. Professional reviewers were less interested in talking about the cost in general. Moreover, they displayed less tendency to express personal judgment on the cost. Instead of commenting on whether the price matched the service and food they received, they preferred to directly present the price without such comment. They often wrote in this manner:

“Small plates \$8-18; mains \$27-\$35; desserts \$14.”

“Starters \$18-\$28; salads \$15-\$35 (crayfish); mains \$28-\$56; desserts \$16.50.”

The peremptory tone of professional reviewers telling their audience about the price hints that they view this action as their obligation as a source of information on a restaurant or an indicator of its level.

In online restaurant reviews, the specific number of dollars charged might be absent, but these reviewers normally preferred to express their personal feelings by judging the prices as expensive or not. As online reviewers wrote:

“Somewhat expensive, but worth it for the whole dinner package.”

“It's one of those fancy places where you have to get something else to eat afterwards because there's simply not enough on your plate to justify \$40 for half a fish.”

It is noticeable that the fairness of the price largely depended on reviewers' judgment, which, in turn, was determined by their satisfaction or otherwise with the services and food. A high price might result in reviewers feeling either that *“it was worth every cent”* or that *“it was overpriced”* depending whether they were satisfied with their dining experience. Objective criteria generally could not be discerned in the online reviews. In this regard, besides the objective number on the bill and the tangible product (the quality of food), service also heavily affected online reviewers' judgment about price fairness.

Comparing the way online reviewers measured cost with the way professional reviewers did, the findings show that the former tend to comment emotively on the bill they paid, while the latter pay less attention to such judgment.

While *Price Fairness* is a focus common to the two kinds of reviewers but talked about in different ways, other focal points which are only emphasised by one type of reviewer will be presented in the following sections. Specifically, as mentioned above, *Operation*, *Chef* and *Owner* are the criteria only talked of by professional reviewers, while only online reviewers tell about their *Dining Companions* and *Recommendations*.

4.2.2 Operation, chef and owner

It is noticeable that professional reviewers tend to spend some of their limited words introducing the restaurant's operational background, current owner and chef, while such information was not identified in online restaurant reviews. One professional reviewer wrote about a fine dining restaurant:

“It opened last winter, and our experience suggests Allen and his team are on the right track. There were, in amongst the truly standout dishes, a couple of minor miss-hits, but this was predominantly an experience we would unhesitatingly repeat.”

Providing information about a restaurant's operational situation requires specialised knowledge in the restaurant industry which might not be accessible by online reviewers: specialised information on, for example, the history of the restaurant brand, the current management team and the chain which the restaurant is part of. From reviewing published reviews, it can be seen the writers have more chance to get in touch with the restaurant owner or chef, which, furthermore, gives them a better understanding of the influence of the staff's personal experience on the restaurant. In light of this, for professional reviewers, the assessment of restaurants not only involves their current situation but also where they have come from (their operational changes) and their strategy or plans for the future.

The exclusive information provided by professional restaurant reviewers on *Operation*, *Owner* and *Chef* has been identified above; the next section presents

the themes (*Companions* and *Recommendation*) which only appear in the online reviews.

4.2.3 Companions and recommendations

Companions and *Recommendations* are themes identified in online restaurant reviews but absent from the published ones. Online reviewers tend to start a review by introducing the companion of their dining experience. The companions include family members, friends and colleagues. As one online reviewer wrote:

“I went there with my husband for his birthday.”

This distinctive feature shows the willingness of online reviewers to share information about their companions and their purposes for dining out. Online reviewers not only introduce their companions, but also proceed to related discussion, for instance, on the ambience of the restaurant for a date or a family. Consequently, words representing social relationships such as “*parent*”, “*friend*”, “*girl/boy friend*” and “*colleague*” frequently appeared in the content. This finding has rarely been mentioned in previous literature on the criteria of online restaurant reviewers. Hence, the underlying meaning of online reviewers’ willingness to share about their dining companions would bear further investigation.

Recommendations is the other theme only identified in online restaurant reviews.

The expression of recommendations is simple and straightforward, as the reviewers are saying whether the restaurant is worth a visit.

4.3 Summary

The results of the content analysis have been presented to answer the research question of how online and published restaurant reviews compare. The main focal points of restaurant reviewers have been demonstrated in the course of this comparison. Generally, the criteria adopted by both kinds of reviewer share the same elements. *Food* and *Service* account for more than a half of the word count in both kinds of review (39.6% and 21.2% in online restaurant reviews and 54.8% and 12.4% in published restaurant reviews respectively); it is noticeable that these priorities of attention are shared. It can be concluded that reviewers evaluate restaurants primarily based on food and service. For the purpose of disclosing restaurant reviewers' specific criteria, further investigation was conducted within these themes. The results show that the word count on *Course Description* and *Taste* is significantly higher than on other themes in the online reviews (25% and 24.4% respectively). As for published reviews, *Taste* and *Ingredients* together account for nearly a half the total word count (31% and 17.3% respectively). Hence, investigation was conducted under the three themes of *Course Description*, *Taste* and *Ingredients*. As regards the different ways of describing taste, more literary language was identified in the work of professional reviewers, as well as their tendency to mention exotic and rare flavours and ingredients. By contrast, online reviewers adopt a language style that is relatively friendly for all kinds of audiences by using comparatively

simple words and mentioning less rare ingredients. Further comparing the food themes of the two kinds of review, it is clear that *Special Options* is one only identified in published reviews, indicating that, generally, only professional reviewers would talk about whether restaurants provide gluten-free or vegetarian meals.

Besides *Food* and *Service*, several other themes were identified that appear in both kinds of review: *Physical Condition*, *Price Fairness*, *Ambience* and *Location*. However, although there is so much evaluation of the same aspects, the manner of evaluation differs. For example, in regard to price fairness, a more objective tone is used in published reviews, together with the exact price on the bill. However, online reviewers spend more words on their personal judgement about whether the price matches their dining experience.

Besides the common themes adopted by all reviewers, themes that only appeared in online restaurant reviews differentiate this type from its published counterpart. By comparing the main coding categories of the two types, it was discovered that *Companions* and *Recommendation* were themes only mentioned by online reviewers. Online reviewers tended to introduce their dining companions and give personal judgments about whether the restaurant was worth a visit. Certain other themes were only identified in published reviews. Information on the *Chef*, *Owner* and *Operation* was rarely talked about by online reviewers, but all three areas were identified as measures for professional reviewers as they assessed restaurants' current and future operational situations.

Hence, it is clear that online restaurant reviews are more influenced by personal feelings, and professional restaurant reviews involve specialised industry knowledge.

Chapter 5 Discussion

Before discussing the meaning underlying the research results, the answer to the research question should be reviewed first. Again, the research questions of this study are as follows:

- Research Question 1: What criteria measuring restaurant quality do online reviewers emphasise?
- Research Question 2: How are the criteria adopted by online reviewers different from those emphasised by professional restaurant reviewers?
- Research Question 3: How is the writing used in online reviews different to that of published reviews?
- Research Question 4: How are the criteria adopted by both types of restaurant reviewers associated with social identity?

This study uses word count as a scale for assessing the importance of each theme to restaurant reviewers. The main criteria adopted by online reviewers are *Food, Service, Wine, Physical Condition, Price Fairness, Ambience, Recommendation, Companions* and *Location*. On the other hand, the main criteria for professional reviewers are *Food, Service, Ambience, Physical Condition, Operation, Price Fairness, Owner, Chef, Location* and *Wine*.

Given that the most attention is drawn by *Food* and *Service*, the investigation of these two themes revealed detailed criteria under each. For online reviewers assessing the quality of *Food*, seven measures were identified based on their reviews archived on the internet: *Course Description, Taste, Menu, Appearance, Ingredients, Cooking*

Technique and Portion. By reviewing the criteria adopted by professional reviewers, a different set of themes was identified: *Taste, Ingredients, Course Description, Appearance, Menu Variety, Cooking Technique* and *Special Options*. The order of these lists is based on the word count allocated to each theme; thus, the focal points of the two kinds of reviewer are disclosed.

Comparison of the online and published restaurant reviews also more broadly disclosed the difference between the criteria adopted by each. *Price Fairness* was talked about by both kinds of reviewer, but in different language styles, and online reviewers tended to comment on it more. Only online reviewers talked about their dining companions; *Companions* and *Recommendation*, in fact, were themes only talked about by online reviewers, while only professional reviewers provided information related to *Chef, Owner* and *Operations*.

Besides the different themes identified in the writing of the two sides, the language styles were compared as well. Professional reviewers tend to adopt more literary styles and describe rare and exotic ingredients; reading published restaurant reviews requires audiences to be familiar with such rare ingredients and to have specialised food knowledge. In contrast, online reviewers preferred to adopt relatively simple and frank language. The low barrier for reading online restaurant reviews enlarges their potential audience.

The first two research questions can be answered by presenting the results, but the third requires further discussion about the association between, on one hand, the language

style and assessment criteria adopted by the two types of reviewer and, on the other hand, their social identity.

The findings presented above largely support the research of Jeong and Jang (2011), Williamson et al. (2009) and Yang (2013). These studies indicate that, first of all, *Food*, then *Service* and *Ambience*, are the primary considerations of both online and professional restaurant reviewers. In this regard, the results of this study broadly support those of previous research. *Food* and *Service*, the themes recognised by several researchers as important criteria, have been revealed as the predominant objects of attention from online and professional restaurant reviewers in this study as well. As for *Ambience*, it drew more attention from professional reviewers, while online reviewers spent less words talking about it.

Restaurant reviewers' criteria not only reflects their preferences regarding the restaurants' food and service but also their own social and cultural identities (Ashley, 2004). Specifically, as Ashley (2004) recognises, the food people eat and how they eat it does not simply represent individual taste but is also related to their social class and identity. In other words, cultural and social constraints might also constrain freedom in terms of food habits (Warde & Martens, 2000).

For the purpose of answering the fourth research question, criteria adopted by the restaurant reviewers will be investigated to discover associations with their social and cultural identities. As Warde (1997) points out, individuals' food consumption can be viewed as the basis of their social identity. Food consumption habits locate them in certain social classes. For instance, in Charles and Kerr's study (1988) on the content of

British families' food consumption, some participants expressed their distaste for certain foods because they viewed them as representing low social class from moral and aesthetic perspectives. Their study indicates that the social and cultural identity of certain social classes is associated with their habits of food consumption.

Therefore, the discussion section will begin by introducing the association between food consumption habits and social identity. Then, further discussion will address the specific criteria adopted by different restaurant reviewers in order to disclose the different characteristics of their social identities.

5.1 Social identity and differentiation in restaurant reviews

Customers' consumption decisions, including those about which restaurant to dine in, are based on criteria such as convenience, food quality, personal habits and, as this study deals with, electronic word-of-mouth. Besides these criteria, the sociology of food has been investigated by previous scholars, whose results show that food consumption habits can be viewed as a representation of which social class an individual comes from: in other words, their social identity (Ashley, 2004). Restaurant reviews, as articles assessing restaurant quality and attracting potential customers, could reflect the social identity of the reviewers and audiences (Warde, 1997). As Williamson et al. (2009) found, restaurant reviewers cultivate an exclusive language style to single out their target audience, thus creating social differentiation. In this vein, the ways in which restaurant reviews can reflect people's food consumption and social identity will be discussed in this chapter. From reviewing previous studies on the association between

restaurant reviews and social identities, it is clear that many of the studies address the content of published reviews, but less attention has been paid to the social identities of online reviewers and their audiences.

For the published restaurant reviews, Wood (1996) suggests that, because of the high standards that magazines and newspapers set for them, the reviewers assume that their audiences come from higher social classes and have higher education and somewhat professional knowledge about food. This assumption that Wood points out is supported by this research, given the relatively complicated language style used to describe food without further explanation. For example (see p. 68), the descriptions of tastes written by professional reviewers was recognised in this content analysis as more complicated than in online restaurant reviews, requiring the audience to be able to understand more complicated writing. In addition, the frequent mentions of exotic ingredients found during the coding process further implies that professional restaurant reviewers tend to think that their audiences are already familiar with those ingredients. With the sentences *“garlanded, none too lavishly, with shiso, the dainty, delicious herb”* and *“an overpowering eucalyptus flavour in the kawakawa jelly”* (identified in Chapter 4), no further explanation was provided about these relatively rare flavours and ingredient. Another difference between online and published restaurant reviews revealed in Chapter 4 is that professional reviewers provide information on the history of business operation and changes within the kitchen and management team. This kind of information is hard to access for online reviewers, but it aligns with the “mission to inform” identified by Wood (1996, p. 7). This means a mission (of published restaurant reviewers) to assess restaurants in terms of professional aspects; this agrees with the finding of this study

that specialised information about the restaurant operation and management team is only found in published, not online reviews. Therefore, the agreement between this study and previous research could be summarised as follows.

Professional restaurant reviewers are well-trained journalists who might assume that their audiences are mainly members of the middle class, quite well educated and familiar with food-related professional knowledge. Williamson et al's (2009) study draws conclusions on a more profound level. Based on findings similar to those above, they argue that one purpose of restaurant reviewers is to create a social separatism by adopting an exclusive language style. Given that different individuals come from various social classes, social separatism refers to the goal of professional reviewers to distinguish their targeted and potential audiences by using a language style exclusive to them and their audiences. Furthermore, the mention of specialised food ingredients and cooking techniques are barriers for people who, due to their social identities, are not expected to be concerned. As professional restaurant reviewers only focus on the middle class lifestyle, they can assume that their audiences are well-educated and have special knowledge about exotic flavours and rare ingredients due to their passion for food.

Since there are not many studies investigating the social identity of the audiences and writers of online restaurant reviews, the findings mentioned above have been presented with reference to the features of published restaurant reviews. As Williamson et al. (2009, p. 60) point out, professional reviewers use "excessively refined notions" to describe food. Their reviews involved the most literary vocabulary and exclusive style as they told audiences about the taste, appearance and preparation process of the

restaurants' food. By comparison, the language style that online reviewers used to describe food was frank and simple. For compliments, they frequently used words such as "*excellent*", "*great*" and "*delicious*". Given this ease of understanding, it seems that the target audience of online restaurant reviews might include a wider range of social classes. Besides, the ingredients mentioned are typically more common than the rare ones mentioned by professional reviewers. As the findings chapter indicates, ingredients such as "*eucalyptus*", "*kawakawa jelly*" and "*shiso*" are only identified in published reviews, while the ingredients mentioned in online reviews are relatively common, such as "*lamb*", "*beef*", "*seafood*" or common vegetables.

In order to gain a better understanding of the social classes related to different types of review, it is first necessary to discuss social differentiation through food consumption habits. Although there is a broad historical background, two of the main factors are the development of the food industry and increased income; because of these, people have more choices of food. As Mennell (1996) states, the difference between people's food consumption is diminishing due to modernisation, as increased incomes make a wider range of food affordable. However, Warde (1997) argues that, with the development of the food industry, although people have many choices of food, they still feel pressure to play their sociological role when making these choices. This pressure leads them to choose food that aligns with their social and cultural identity. Furthermore, research on food choice and social identity shows that there are significant differences between different social classes (Ashley, 2004; Bourdieu, 1984; Hupkens et al., 2000; Palma et al., 2017).

Bourdieu's (1984) research, for which he investigated 7,265 households in the UK, reveals distinct food consumption patterns in different social classes. Bourdieu's theory (1984) became a starting point for later scholars, as it proposed that social class plays a major role in food habits. Ashley (2004) suggests that food writing can be viewed as a reflection of people's food habits from a cultural and domestic perspective. In this regard, restaurant reviews, as articles assessing and promoting certain restaurants' food, can be viewed as representations of people's food habits. To focus on this issue, the next section will discuss how the differences between social classes' food patterns influence restaurant reviews. Specifically, the difference in the criteria of online and professional reviewers will be discussed from a social class perspective. For the purpose of answering the third research question, the social identity of online restaurant reviewers and their audiences will also be discussed.

5.1.1 From the perspective of food consumption habits

The *Food* of a restaurant has been identified as the most important measure for its assessment in both online and published restaurant reviews. To be more specific, themes that were coded most frequently were *Course description*, *Taste* and *Ingredients*. Hence, it appears that reviewers tend to talk a great deal about the food choices they made in a restaurant and how it tasted. Given that food choice can be viewed as a representation of people's social identity (Hupkens et al., 2000; Tomlinson, 1994), and given that reviewers perform a function of social separation (Williamson et al., 2009), the tendency of reviewers to tell audiences about their food choices can be identified as an action of highlighting their social identity.

By looking at the differences identified between how online and published restaurant reviewers tell their audiences about the food they ordered, the different social identities of reviewers and their audiences might be disclosed. As the findings presented previously show, *Course Description* (the theme of telling the audience what they ordered) accounted for 25% of online reviews, making it the top theme, and 13.4% of published reviews, making it third. On *Taste*, the words spent by online and professional reviewers accounted for 24.4% and 31% of their reviews respectively. Ashley (2004) states that the emphasis on the taste of food and the way people eat it represents people's social class. The social and cultural identity of an individual can be discerned by noting what kind of food they choose. Therefore, in this study, the descriptions written in both online and published restaurant reviews of which courses the reviewers ordered are viewed as indicators of their social identity. For instance, restaurant reviewers detailing meals with exotic flavours might indicate that they are familiar with and have knowledge of foreign food. In contrast, reviewers talking about the frequently consumed food in the daily life suggests they might have less knowledge of foreign food.

As noted above, online reviews contain many relatively simple words to evaluate food, such as "*great*", "*excellent*" and "*delicious*". The explanation could be posited that online restaurant reviews mainly address audiences unable or unwilling to read reviews written in complicated and over-refined style. It could also be that online reviewers are not willing to write in a literary style. This fits with the fact that, with one of their main focal points, *Food*, both types of reviewer not only offer information on restaurants'

food but also give away their social identity. Compared with the style of professional reviewers' language, which aims at the middle class with higher income and education, online restaurant reviews might target a wider range of social groups. Their relatively simple language allows more people to access the information and assess restaurants. The ease of understanding in the online content makes it a source of information for both lower and higher social groups.

5.1.2 From the economic perspective

Price Fairness is a theme of both online and published restaurant reviews, but the difference in how it appears in each is noticeable. This study finds that professional reviewers show less concern for a restaurant's price fairness, while online reviewers talk more about their personal feelings about whether the price matched their dining experience. This result supports those of a previous study conducted by Williamson et al. (2009), which showed that the cost of meals did not draw much attention from professional reviewers. This lower level of interest indicates that they are less concerned about the cost. Warde (1997) suggests that the different level of concern about food cost can be explained mainly from an economic perspective.

Warde (1997) argues that the absence of concern with cost in published restaurant reviews "is like [the way a] women's magazine does not dwell on agricultural production, the wages of farm labourers for these are not sources of the pleasures sought by readers" (p. 97). From surveying the restaurant reviews published in magazines and newspapers, it was observed that professional reviewers spent more words describing the exotic flavours or rare ingredients than the price of the meals.

Audiences of such restaurant reviews are assumed to be more interested in the origins of ingredients than the number on the bill. The scarcity of comment on price fairness in these reviews indicates that there is less economic constraint on the social group who reads them in magazines and newspapers. By contrast, online reviewers show a tendency to comment on whether they think a meal “*is over charged*” or “*worth every cent.*”

Warde (1997) argues that the different economical ability of social classes to access certain foods can explain the lower level of concern with cost. Given that professional restaurant reviewers locate their audience as middle class with a decent income and higher education, they accordingly assume that their audience is less concerned with economic constraints. It is for this reason that, as this study shows, how professional reviewers talk about *Price Fairness* is so different from how online reviewers do.

Besides professional reviewers’ scarcity of mentions of cost, even when they do include information about it in their reviews, it is normally only presented as a number, without comment on its fairness. However, online reviewers tend to comment on whether their experience justified the price. This difference between the two types of reviewer indicates the different social classes that each target.

Besides the fact that the two types of reviewer talk about cost in different ways, their different economic ability and social identity can be discerned in another aspect. Veblen and Banta (2009) suggest that people create a sense of social superiority by purchasing and displaying expensive goods. In the context of restaurant assessment, when reviewers present expensive ingredients, it is associated with higher social class. Given

that *Ingredients* was identified as a key criteria for professional reviewers, it is also interesting that the origins of the ingredients in the meal were sometimes mentioned as symbolic of an organic and healthy lifestyle. Professional reviewers put more emphasis on self-owned farms or organic food sources if the restaurant advertised the quality and freshness of the ingredients it used. This finding also aligns with discussion in previous research, which makes the point that professional reviewers tend to put more emphasis on food preferred by higher social classes (Ashley, 2004; First & Brozina, 2009; Warde, 1997; Williamson et al., 2009); for instance, healthy and organic ingredients were identified in this study as more popular among people of the middle class (Hupkens et al., 2000; Plessz & Gojard, 2015). In addition, in those frequent mentions of rare and exotic ingredients, professional reviewers typically did not emphasise the high price, which reflects the potential audiences of their reviews having more liberty in terms of food consumption.

5.1.3 From the social relationship perspective

The theme of *Companions*, talked about exclusively by online restaurant reviewers, signifies the establishment of social relationships by sharing dining experiences (Ashley, 2004). As online reviewers told audiences about their dining companions, social relationships were revealed. In addition, it has been argued that reviewers can choose restaurants and meals based on their dining companions. This proposition is confirmed in this study, as online reviewers chose different meals depending on their dining companions. Ashley (2004) suggests that diners choose domestic food when trying to create a pleasant experience in a family group, while fine dining would be

chosen for formal occasions. Thus, the food consumption varies depending on the social relationships between the diners. As the theme of *Companions* was not identified in the published restaurant reviews, it seems that professional restaurant reviewers have less intention of exposing their personal social relationships. However, no previous study was found investigating the difference between online and professional reviewers in terms of intention of telling audiences about their personal social relationships.

Therefore, only a hypothesis can be proposed here. Schroeder's (1985) study on restaurant reviewers' principles during their work reveals that they try to simply focus on the restaurant and avoid letting personal relationships come into play during their work. Although the study only mentions the exclusiveness of restaurant reviewers (and owners), a tendency to avoid personal relationships is nevertheless shown.

As Schroeder (1985) suggests in his study, restaurant reviewers would avoid contact with restaurant owners who have the intention of manipulating them. The lack of relationships between professional restaurant reviewers and practitioners has been identified in a study on the content of Auckland's restaurant industry. By interviewing popular professional restaurant reviewers, Goodsir et al. (2014) revealed that such relational distance in review writing could be viewed as being responsible to the audience. In contrast with the intention of professional reviewers to exclude personal social relationships during their work, online reviewers liked to introduce their dining companions to their audiences. Relevant here is Ashley's (2004) suggestion that people may select different restaurants to dine in depending on their social relationship with fellow diners. Therefore, if professional reviewers wrote about their companions, they

could thereby provide advice (such as online audiences would appreciate) about whether the restaurant was appropriate for a given type of occasion. Besides, they would also be reflecting on the ambience and physical environment of the restaurant from another perspective.

Furthermore, findings of online restaurant reviewers sharing about their dining companions align with previous studies on people's behaviour on social media websites. In research conducted by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) and Xiang and Gretzel (2010), the intentions of internet users to share thoughts, experiences, information and social relationships have been identified and widely agreed on. Now, review websites are a kind of social media and online reviewers are internet users. In this light, the tendency of online restaurant reviewers to share information related to their personal lives can be explained. As Goffman (1978) argues, people have the desire to control the impression others have of them in any kind of social interaction. This desire comes from an even deeper desire: to create an image that aligns with their social identity. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) suggest that wearing clothes according to certain fashions can be viewed as a behaviour of creating an image of youth and familiarity with trends. Online reviewers' decisions to create accounts to share their dining experiences and assessments of restaurants is driven by the wish of presenting themselves on the online platform (Schau & Gilly, 2003). The desire of self-presentation would prompt them to unconsciously or even consciously expose information related to their personal lives (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Hence, the behaviour of online restaurant reviewers telling about their dining companions can be viewed as originating from the desire to create an image consistent with social identity as well. Furthermore, providing such information helps online audiences to choose the appropriate restaurant depending on their companions.

5.2 Summary

The difference in criteria and language style adopted by online and professional reviewers has been explored in this research. For the purpose of answering the last research question, the findings have been compared with those of previous studies, and a picture of what underlies the writing and reading restaurant reviews is thus outlined. The proposed reasons for the difference between the criteria are identified as threefold: Firstly, given that the association between people's social identities and eating habits is confirmed by several scholars (Ashley, 2004; Mennell, 1996; Tomlinson, 1994; Warde & Martens, 2000), the eating habits of different restaurant reviewers and audiences has been proposed as an underlying reason of the differences between the kinds of review. Secondly, online and professional reviewers' income levels give them different economic ability, which might be viewed as another reason for different assessment criteria. Thirdly, the different attitudes of online and professional reviewers toward covering social relationships in their articles could be one of the reasons as well.

To take the first reason, the sub-themes of *Course Description*, *Taste* and *Ingredients* appear most prominently in the assessment of restaurant food, indicating that food choices based on taste and ingredients arouse the most interest in reviewers. To gain a better understanding of the difference in criteria between the two kinds of reviewer from

the perspective of social differentiation, people's perceived social identities and their eating habits have been discussed. As Ashley (2004) suggests, individuals' food habits could be viewed as a representation of their social identities. The investigation conducted in Bourdieu's study (1984) demonstrated how eating patterns are distinct in various social classes. Certain foods that are viewed as representative of lower social classes might be distasteful to individuals belonging to higher social groups. Hence, the intention of telling people what one has ordered could be viewed as a behaviour of showing social identity.

Secondly, the influence of reviewers' economic ability has been highlighted by the assessment of the *Price Fairness* theme. The difference between the two kinds of restaurant review indicates that online reviewers express strong personal feelings about the fairness of the bill, while professional reviewers talk less about the price and in a more objective tone. Williamson et al. (2009) suggest that the lack of concern with cost makes it simpler for professional reviewers to assess the quality of restaurants: it excludes the consideration of price fairness ("Is a \$300 bottle of wine discernibly five times better than a \$50 bottle?" (p. 60)). Besides, Warde (1997) suggests that the difference between the target audiences of online and published restaurant reviews – different social groups with different economical ability – might explain the different levels of concern with cost. In addition, Veblen and Banta's (2009) study indicates that professional restaurant reviews could create a sense of social superiority through the display of expensive ingredients in order to distinguish their audiences from lower social classes.

The third argument regards the different attitudes toward matters like personal relationships in restaurant reviews. Given that no previous study has investigated the online restaurant reviewers' distinctive tendency to mention their dining companions, possible reasons for this tendency have been proposed in this chapter. Since, as Ashley (2004) states, people's selection of restaurants might depend on their social relationships with fellow diners, online reviewers may be telling audiences about their dining companions for the purpose of advising the audience how to suit their choice of restaurant to their companions. In addition, online users' intention to share their social relationships on social media websites has been confirmed by previous research (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). The fact that review websites are social media platforms – places where internet users typically share information and personal experience – could also help to explain the intention of showing personal social relationships. By contrast, several studies on professional restaurant reviewers disclose that they avoid involving personal relationships in their work, and especially avoid commercial relationships with restaurant owners (Goodsir et al., 2014; Schroeder, 1985).

In summary, for the purpose of gaining a better understanding of the association between the way individuals socially differentiate and their review reading and writing habits, this study interprets the findings of the content analysis from three main perspectives: eating habits, economical ability and intention to show personal social relationships. Hence, this study reveals that the relevance of food to the eater's social identity could be the reason why both online and professional reviewers spend so much

of their word count telling audiences their food choices and how they taste. Economical ability explains the finding that mentions of rare and expensive ingredients are included only in published restaurant reviews, whereas online reviewers talk more about common foods and ingredients (see p. 70). Furthermore, the difference between online and professional reviewers when it comes to involving personal social relationships in their reviews is also significant; the finding in this study is that only online reviewers tell their audiences about their companions. In brief, in this study, the differences in criteria have been explained based on social identities, economical ability and intention of sharing personal life. Moreover, the more literary language of professional reviewers might indicate that reading the magazines and newspapers which publish their reviews requires higher education. Hence, the conclusion can be drawn that, compared with published restaurant reviews targeting higher social classes, online reviews can attract audiences from a wider range of social classes due to their ease of understanding.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

Online restaurant reviews have been widely used by customers looking for the appropriate restaurant (Yang, 2013). However, they have received little attention in the academic field (Xiang et al., 2015). Granted, published restaurant reviews by professionals have been investigated by previous scholars in regard to the criteria and language style. This study conducts content analysis comparing professional and online restaurant reviews, hoping to find associations between the two. Restaurants involved in the review collection are in the Auckland region. *Cuisine* magazine and the newspaper *New Zealand Herald* were chosen as the data sources for this study.

6.1 Summary of main findings

The results show that online reviewers' criteria are *Food, Service, Wine, Physical Condition, Price Fairness, Ambience, Recommendation, Companions* and *Location*, while professional reviewers comment on restaurants' *Food, Service, Ambience, Physical Condition, Operation, Price Fairness, Owner, Chef, Location* and *Wine*. In terms of the attention allocated to each element, *Food* and *Service* are the primary concerns for both. Hence, further investigation was conducted on these two themes. Taking the criteria adopted by online and professional reviewers revealed in the study, comparison was made of the two kinds of review. The comparison shows that online reviewers alone talk about their dining companions and make comments with strong

personal feelings, while only professional reviewers provide specialised information about the chef, owner and management team.

The fourth research question required investigation of the association between social differentiation and the reviewers' different criteria. Furthermore, the social identity of the two types of reviewer and their target audiences could be revealed as well. As the behaviour of restaurant reviewers can consciously or unconsciously reflect their social identity, this study reveals that the professional reviewers might locate themselves in the middle or higher social classes and harbour the wish that their audiences are the same. In contrast, the online reviewers might cover a broader range and face audiences ranging from lower to higher classes.

This study broadly supports the findings of previous literature; however, some new findings have emerged. Specifically, online reviewers' tendency to tell audiences about their personal social relationships has been discussed. In this regard, internet users' general willingness to express their thoughts, experiences and social relationships on online platforms can also be found in the behaviour of posting online restaurant reviews.

6.2 Implications

6.2.1 Theoretical implications

This study supports the idea that people's food consumption habits can reveal their social identities. Calnan and Cant's (1990) study suggests that attention to healthy food

choices might indicate that an individual comes from higher social classes. Since this study indicates that professional restaurant reviewers pay more attention to the healthiness of ingredients and act on intentions of talking more about restaurant-owned farms or other organic food sources, the association between choice of healthy food and higher social classes is affirmed.

The different language styles of online and professional restaurant reviewers have also been discussed in this study. Compared with the relatively simple style adopted by online reviewers, the published restaurant reviews involved many literary descriptions and mentions of rare ingredients. This finding is consistent with Williamson et al's (2009) study, which found that professional reviewers try to create social separatism by adopting an exclusive language style. The same argument is proposed by Goffman (1959 and Kaplan and Haenlein (2010): that any form of interaction between people serves to create a social image consistent with their social identity. In this way, professional restaurant reviewers aim at articulating the image of the well-trained journalist with a passion for and professional knowledge of food (Schroeder, 1985). Hence, the audiences have been assumed to come from middle-class backgrounds and to have a passion for food. They know about rare and exotic ingredients and flavours and are under less economic constraint. Conversely, the relatively simple expressions of online restaurant reviewers indicate that they are facing audiences from a wider range of social classes.

Besides supporting the above argument, the findings also revealed that it was characteristic of online reviewers to tell audiences about their dining companions; this

has been explained in terms of individuals' sharing intentions on social media websites. In the literature reviewed on the association between food consumption and social identity, it was apparent that the relevant research was relatively old. However, this study provides up-to-date evidence for this academic topic, in fact, involving online restaurant reviews, a newer form, as one of the objects.

6.2.2 Practical implications

As online restaurant reviews play an important role in customers' decision making, the management of reputation in that area would benefit restaurant practitioners. The criteria adopted by online reviewers revealed in this study helps to inform restaurant operators' strategy design.

Firstly, the fact that *Food* and *Service* are the primary criteria for both online and professional reviewers serves as a reminder for restaurant operators that, no matter how exquisite or stylish the restaurant is, well-cooked food and attentive service are always the primary criteria for customers. To be more specific, the *Taste* and *Ingredients* of the meals are the key criteria of restaurant reviewers. Moreover, in the context of service assessment, the reliability of the booking system and efficiency of the service staff tended to enhance reviewers' satisfaction.

Along other lines, given the association between individuals' social identity and food habits, restaurant practitioners could gather information on the social images reflected in reviews. Collecting and reflecting on the reviews of a certain restaurant could disclose its perceived social image, which gives the restaurant practitioner a chance to

check whether this image is consistent with the social identity of their target customers. To this end, regularly reading restaurant reviews posted on websites and published in magazines and newspapers could help the practitioner to design and adjust their managerial and marketing strategies.

6.3 Limitations and further investigation

The noteworthy limitations to this study include the limited time span covered by the data and the possibility of personal insights affecting the coding process too much. Due to the restrictions on time available for this dissertation, the data collection for this study only involves the restaurant review posted in the past 6 months. This gives rise to the possibility of insights being missed, which could be identified as limitation of the study alongside the converse limitation of personal insights involved in the coding process, both of which could reduce the reliability of this study. As it is inevitable that a qualitative study involves an individual's insight, the different perspectives of researchers might affect the result (Patton, 2002). For this study, the fact that the content analysis was conducted by a single researcher might make it quite highly influenced by personal judgment.

In regard to further investigation building on this study, the limitations detailed above suggest directions. Given that the data collection only targeted full-service restaurants in Auckland, further studies could adopt a larger sample size to find out more generalised criteria for reviewers' restaurant evaluation.

In addition, the suggestion of previous research that published food-related writing is associated with people's social identities (Ashley, 2004) is, in this study, confirmed and even applied to a comparatively new form of food writing, online restaurant reviews. This form which is recognised as a data source in this study has rarely been considered in academic study (Xiang et al., 2015); therefore, online reviews could be applied to further research in the hospitality field.

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