Brand Management:
Dealing with negative eWOM by restaurants

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to find out how restaurants can deal with negative e-WOM. Online reviews are becoming a larger part of the expression of a customer's experience. Customer experiences are based on the offerings of a company and the experience that a customer has with these offerings. For restaurants, these experiences of the customer are based on food quality, service quality and atmosphere of a restaurant. When a customer expresses its customer experience online, it can influence a restaurant either positively or negatively. The effects of negative online reviews on the number of sales and the image of the restaurant are well known. Thus, it should also be clear how a restaurant can handle these negative online reviews in order to minimize the consequences. Therefore, different response strategies are explained and examined. By conducting an experimental survey, an analysis can be done about different response strategies. By randomly showing respondents a response strategy to a negative online review, a significant difference might be found. The strategies that are used in this research are: not responding, giving an excuse, and apologizing. To analyse the reactions to the scenarios, dependent variables are measured by giving the respondent statements to answer. Besides a survey, previous research is useful for this research to come up with a view on response strategies and compare it with the findings of this research. Within the conclusion, a recommendation for restaurants will be given in order to handle negative online reviews as best as possible.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Concept Identification

Nowadays, companies have to deal with customers leaving negative online reviews. These reviews are based on the experience that a customer has. The customer experience is the total of all experiences a customer has with a company (Meyer & Schwager, 2007). These experiences are based on the aspects of a company's offering (Meyer & Schwager, 2007). Traditionally, people made use of Word-of-Mouth (WOM) in order to express their experience with a brand. Since the introduction of online platforms, customers have been able to express themselves via online reviews as well. This is also known as electronic Word-Of-Mouth (eWOM) (Huete-Alcocer, 2017). Online reviews can be given in many ways, for example via the website of the restaurant or via sites like TripAdvisor, Yelp, and Google. These reviews are not only used by customers to express the experiences they have with a restaurant but it can also be seen as a recommendation or warning for potential customers. When potential customers have to decide on where to go or what to buy, they are likely to use online reviews to base their decision on (Ghose & Ipeirotis, 2010; Chatterjee, 2001).

1.2 Problem Statement

The reviews that are given to a company online, can be either positive or negative. The psychological effects of negative information outweigh those of positive information. This means that more attention will be given to bad news than to good news. Moreover, criticism gets taken more seriously (Wu, 2013). This is called the negativity bias (Fiske, 1980; Rozin, & Royzman, 2001). Besides, consumers confirm their attitudes toward eWOM. When someone gives a negative eWOM, a rather negative attitude towards the product or service of a company will be formed. This conformation increases when the amount of negative eWOM increases. Thus, more negative reviews will deteriorate the attitude of potential and current customers.

It is already well established that negative eWOM affects the product sales (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Duan, Gu, & Whinston, 2008; Ye, Rob, Bin, & Wei, 2011). Although it is better to make sure that a company gets as little negative eWOM as possible, there is no research found that shows how a company can prevent itself against negative online reviews. For the restaurant branch, customers are one of the most likely to give a negative review after they have had a negative experience with the restaurant (ReviewTrackers, 2018). In addition, restaurant customers are increasingly basing their dining decision on online reviews (Gunden, 2017). To help restaurants handle the negative online reviews they retrieve, the best solution needs to be found for dealing with negative eWOM.

Therefore, the research question that will be answered is: *'How can restaurants deal with negative eWOM?'*

1.3 Research Project Motivation

Since the effects of negative eWOM are larger than the effects of positive eWOM, there should be more known about what restaurants have to do when they are getting negative eWOM. The focus will be on negative eWOM towards restaurants because restaurant visitors are one of the most likely consumers to give a review after a negative experience (ReviewTrackers, 2018). Therefore, restaurants need to know how to deal with these negative reviews. Another reason to focus this research on the restaurant branch is that previous research is mainly focused on the hotel branch. It cannot be assumed that the effects on one branch are the same for all branches, therefore, research should be established which is focused on the restaurant branch. Since negative eWOM affects product sales, it is important for restaurants to be aware of the consequences. In addition to any consequences, a restaurant should also be able to handle negative eWOM properly. Thus, this research will give restaurants knowledge about the possible strategies to follow when receiving negative eWOM. Hopefully, a recommendation can be given to restaurants as a result of this research. In this case, all the restaurants that have to deal with negative eWOM can use these findings.

1.4 Research Objectives

The different respond strategies and its effects need to become clear. This way, restaurants will know how they can deal with negative eWOM and what the effects of different response strategies are. The effects of not responding, giving excuses or apologizing to negative eWOM will be compared with each other via an experimental survey. A significant difference is searched for, in order to establish a conclusion. After doing this research, it will become clear how a company should deal with negative eWOM in the best way possible.

1.5 Outline of This Paper

This paper will start with literature that first helps to understand what eWOM is. Further literature goes in dept about specifically negative eWOM regarding restaurants and the possible response strategies. Then, a theory used for the methodology will be explained. When this is clear, the methodology is elaborated upon. The method is used for the data collection and afterwards, an analysis of the data is done. When the results are known, a conclusion on the research questions will be made. To finish the research, the limitations are explained and a recommendation for further research is given.

2. LITERATURE

2.1 Definitions of WOM and eWOM

Word-of-Mouth (WOM) is given or done by people talking about something or telling people about something (Dictionary Cambridge). This can be in a positive or a negative way. Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) means that the message has been sent and received via an electronic device. eWOM is defined as "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet" (Henning-Trurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Grembler, 2004, p. 39). Traditionally, WOM is shared face-to-face between people who are familiar with each other. While eWOM communication occurs among people who are familiar with each other as well as between people who do not know each other (Meuter, McCabe & Curran, 2013). This is due to a greater degree of variability of familiarity among friends in electronic networks (Meuter, McCabe & Curran, 2013). Consequently, eWOM has the potential to reach a lot more people compared to WOM. The internet network is used worldwide and there are 4,38 billion Internet users in the world as of March 2019 (Internet World Stats). The

user amount is still increasing and as a result, the potential reach of eWOM increases as well. TripAdvisor, the platform where the response examples of restaurants are retrieved from, gets monthly on average 390 million unique visitors and has 4.3 million restaurants on its website (TripAdvisor). This means that one review has to potential to research 390 million different people around the world. On the other hand, the broader reach of eWOM has also a downside. The level of sensitivity to eWOM can be found as lower compared to WOM. (Meuter et al., 2013). This is a result of the relationship that someone has with the reviewer. (Meuter et al., 2013). With eWOM it is more likely that someone does not know a reviewer and therefore does not have a relationship with this person. When there is no relationship with a person, the sensitivity to a review is weaker (Meuter et al., 2013). Especially on TripAdvisor, most of the time, there is no relationship with the person writing the review and the person reading the review. This relation between the sender and receiver is the communicator aspect of eWOM (Li, Xue, Yang, & Li, 2016). Other aspects that influence the effects of eWOM are the characteristics of eWOM. These can be divided between the source, the volume, and the valence (Li, Xue, Yang, & Li, 2016). The source determines whether the eWOM is persuasive or not and how big the volume is. The volume of eWOM reflects the extent of the popularity of the goods or services in the consumer market. The last characteristic, valence, refers to whether a review is rating the product or service as positive or negative (Li, Xue, Yang, & Li, 2016). This research will focus on negative rating reviews. One of the effects that eWOM has is on the number of sales. An increase in the average star rating over time results in higher relative sales (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006). Moreover, the information that can be found online about companies is used for both offline and online purchases (Chatterjee, 2001). When focussing on positive eWOM, the effects are favourable in terms of the number of sales. Though, when talking about the negative reviews, it might be assumed that this works the other way around as well.

2.2 Negative eWOM

The negativity bias shows that more attention is given to bad news than to good news and the fact that criticism gets taken more seriously (Wu, 2013). Therefore, the effects of negative eWOM are larger than the effects of positive eWOM. Consumers are likely to conform their attitudes to eWOM. This makes that a negative review can create a rather negative attitude towards a product or service of a company. The degree of confirmation increases when the amount of negative eWOM increases (Lee, Park, & Han, 2007). So, there is a positive relationship between the two. An increase in negative online reviews about a specific company could result in greater effects on the sales of this company. Moreover, "firms offering 'the absolute lowest price' are more susceptible to negative WOM activity because consumers find negative WOM to be more credible and likely to recur in their case" (Chatterjee, 2001, p. 19). Another positive relation is found between the subjectivity of a review and the sales for products (Lee et al., 2007). Thus, when a review is seen as subjective, the number of sales for the product is higher compared to a review that is seen as objective. When a review is giving subjective and objective information, this review will be considered more informative by customers (Lee et al., 2007). The quality level of a review and the influence on high-involved customers are also positively related with each other. The greater the quality of a review, the higher the influence on high-involved customers. With low-involved customers, this relation is less strong (Lee et al., 2007).

Prior research from Chatterjee shows the processes involved when consumers assess WOM information. First, the extent of WOM information is predicted based on the retailer choice. Then, the impact of negative WOM on purchase intentions is examined (Chatterjee, 2001). Customers choosing a company based on price are more likely to believe negative reviews compared to customers basing their choice on familiarity (Chatterjee, 2001). Thus, for companies that want to attract new customers, it is highly important to have positive reviews. While regular customers will not leave suddenly after reading a negative review (Chatterjee, 2001). TripAdvisor gets used by current customers as well as potential customers. Those who write a review are mostly customers who want to share their experience. It can be assumed that those who are reading the reviews mostly consist of potential customers. They have never visited the restaurant before and therefore it is likely that their decision to visit this restaurant will be based on the reviews given on TripAdvisor (Ghose & Ipeirotis, 2010; Chatterjee, 2001).

Therefore, not getting many negative online reviews on TripAdvisor is really important.

2.3 Restaurants and eWOM

When looking at restaurants in particular, the majority's opinion relies heavily on the determination of the customer's own evaluation (Purnawirawan, Dens, & De Pelsmacker, 2012). Additionally, a review from an expert that is not corresponding with the rest of the reviews is more likely to be discounted (Purnawirawan, Dens, & De Pelsmacker, 2012). Thus, the majority's opinion is of higher importance than the deviant opinion of an expert. According to research, restaurant visitors are one of the most likely consumers to give a review after a negative experience (ReviewTrackers, 2018). Negative eWOM towards restaurants are mainly formed by the quality of the food served, the service quality or the atmosphere in the restaurant (Ha & Jang, 2010). The online reviews on restaurants display the aspects stated above, and the restaurant consumers perceive the quality of a restaurant by reading these online reviews (Zhang, Ye, Law, & Li, 2010). The food quality is the most influential aspect from a consumer's perspective, while the service quality is the least important aspect. (Chaves, Laurel, Sacramento, & Pedron, 2014). Thus, the most important factor that influences consumer selection is food quality, with the greatest impact on the market share as well. While the overall rating of a restaurant is the fourth most important aspect, it has a large impact on the market share (Gunden, 2017). Consumers are more likely to look for information ahead of time when they only have limited information about the quality of a service or product until they purchased it (Parikh, Behnke, Vorvoreanu, Almanza, & Nelson, 2014). For this reason, restaurant reviews present the information that helps a consumer to decide beforehand on which restaurant to visit based on the presented information (Titz, Lanza-Abbott, & Cruz, 2004). The reliance of restaurant consumers on online reviews to make their dining choices is increasing (Gunden, 2017). The popularity of a

restaurant is based on the number of reviews that it has (Zhang et al., 2010). A positive relation is found between the two, thus more online reviews on a restaurant could increase the chance of online users to click on the restaurants' webpage (Zhang et al., 2010). Also, having a high ranking could mean that a restaurant attracts more consumers (Tran, 2015). The overall rating has a large impact on the revenue of a restaurant (Luca & Zervas, 2016). When the ratings are based on stars, a one-star increase in rating of a restaurant is associated with an increase in revenue for this restaurant of 19% (Luca & Zervas, 2016). Although, a positive appreciation is the central attitude type in online restaurant reviews, reviews about service responsiveness tend to be negative. (Chaves et al., 2014). However, high ratings reviews may also contain negative information (Chaves et al., 2014).

2.4 Response Strategies

When a restaurant gets a negative review on an online platform, there are a few possible reactions. The most essential response component that can be used is apologizing (Mattila & Cranage, 2005). Another option is a causal explanation, in which a company offers an explanation in response to negative eWOM (Mattila, 2006). According to prior research, there is a distinction made between the processing of negative eWOM, which consists of the external attribution of negative eWOM and a change in attitude due to negative eWOM (Lee & Cranage, 2012). Furthermore, a distinction is made between the high and low consensus of negative eWOM. In the case of low consensus, for both external attribution and attitude change, the possibilities are to respond defensively, to not respond, or to give an accommodating response. With a high consensus, these types of response strategies are only applicable to attitude change (Lee & Cranage, 2012). For this research, further elaboration will be on the strategies: 'no response', 'apologizing', and 'excuses'. The restaurant can choose to not respond at all and ignore the review of the customer. When the restaurant decides to respond, this can be via apologizing and thereby taking the responsibility of the negative experience (Lee & Cranage, 2012). Another option is that the restaurant gives its customers an excuse for why it happened in the first place. In this case, giving an excuse will be seen as an explanation without taking any responsibility, but placing it by someone else. In this case, it will blame something or someone else for the incident (Collins Dictionary, 2019).

The importance of responding to reviews is researched upon by TripAdvisor themselves. Their findings show that responding to a bad review improves the impression. Besides, it gives the idea that the company cares more about its customers (TripAdvisor, 2017). TripAdvisor users are more likely to take a visit to a company that responds to its customers compared to a company that does not respond (TripAdvisor, 2017).

Research that has already been done about the effects of response strategies of hotels shows that the image of a hotel increases when providing a service recovery response to negative eWOM (Avant, 2013). Next to this, the intent to stay and the intent to return increase as well (Avant, 2013). The comparison between the scenarios of 'no response' and 'negative response', shows the largest difference in the mean. The 'no response' scenario gets rated the lowest in terms of hotel image (Avant, 2013). Moreover, the hotel image still increases when responding by saying to "ignore the review". When looking at the intent to return, this was the highest for the 'service recovery' scenario (Avant, 2013). The overall perception of the hotel was the lowest in the 'no response' scenario (Avant, 2013). Research that mainly focused on potential customers' evaluations, also shows that a response from a hotel is more favourable in terms of concern and trust compared to getting no response (Sparks, So, & Bradley, 2016). Besides, research shows that a response posted after 30 days, results in a lessened reliability of receiving a favourable customer evaluation (Sparks et al., 2016). The recommendation in responding to online criticisms is that organizations should focus on posting responses quickly and using a conversational human voice (Sparks et al., 2016). What can be concluded for prior research is that any response to a negative online review is better than no response regarding the image of a hotel (Avant, 2013; Sparks et al., 2016).

3. THEORY

To determine the information that will be answered in the research, the Six Dimensions of eWOM can be used (Saremi, 2014). By taking the most important dimensions and factors of this model, a well-established questionnaire for this research can be made. The figure makes sure that there is ample attention to each and every aspect of eWOM. The model divides eWOM between the receivers, the source, the focal service, platform type, recommendation forms, and responses (Saremi, 2014). The total figure of the Six Dimensions can be found in Appendix A. The dimensions usable to conduct questions for the survey are 'Receiver of eWOM Recommendations' and 'Responses' since these two dimensions are in line with the theme of this research. Both of these dimensions consist of a number of factors. Out of those, the most important factors for this research were chosen to base the questions on. The first dimension consists of:

<u>Receiver of the eWOM Recommendation</u>

- Consumer's Prior Knowledge
- Consumer's Need for Cognition
- Consumer's Involvement
- Consumer's Demographics

For the receiver dimension, a few questions regarding demographics are asked to determine if age and gender make a difference in response preferences. Besides, in terms of ethics, it is important that the respondent is older than 16. As an example, the results could show a relation between people of ages 16 till 21 and the preference of not getting a response from a restaurant. The prior knowledge of the consumer about the restaurant will not be tested. Naming a restaurant could harm this specific restaurant, which is definitely not the intention of this research. Besides, prior knowledge could also influence the results. The consumer's involvement will consist of questions regarding the respondent's restaurant visits. The need for cognition will be assessed in a question regarding restaurant visits and usage of online reviews. The second dimension consists of:

<u>Responses</u>

- Perceived Usefulness of the Service
- Perceived Ease-of-Use of the Service
- Trust in the Online Provider
- Perceived Enjoyment of Adopting Service

- Attitude Towards the Service
- Intention to Purchase Service
- Actual Purchase of the Service
- Willingness to Recommend the Service
- Adoption of the eWOM
- Intention to Adopt the eWOM
- Perceived Helpfulness of the eWOM
- Perceived Credibility of the eWOM
- Extent of Elaboration on the eWOM
- Confirmation of Prior Beliefs

The response dimensions are needed to determine how a respondent sees eWOM. So, is this specific person making use of eWOM? If someone does use eWOM, in what frequency are they making use of eWOM, by writing or reading online reviews? This is in overlap with the aspect of the need for cognition. Thus, it will be assessed simultaneously. These questions about making use of eWOM and the need for cognition will be asked at the beginning of the survey, to introduce the subject as well. The adoption of the eWOM, the intention to adopt the eWOM, the intention to purchase the service and the actual purchase of the service will be tested by giving several statements about the restaurant after showing a negative review with one of the three response strategies.

4. RESEARCH METHODS

4.1 The Method

The research will be performed via an experimental survey. When looking at prior research with a comparable subject, surveys are mainly used (Avant, 2013; Sparks, So, & Bradley, 2016). Another option could be establishing a simulation of the scenarios and analysing these results. However, due to the scope of this research and the time restrictions attached to it, this was impossible to conduct for this research. A different option could be to create functions to calculate an overall value of the scenarios (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006). However, this is done when comparing two sites, which makes it inapplicable in this research. Consequently, establishing a survey seems the best option. The survey is on an experimental base to be able to expose respondents to only one of the three response strategies. As a result, the answers given on the statements will be only based on that specific strategy. This will eliminate the risk of the respondents comparing the strategies with each other before answering the statements.
The questions for this survey are conducted with the help of the Six Dimensions of eWOM (Saremi, 2014).
The sections about the receiver and the responses are used for developing suitable questions, as also explained in the theory section in Chapter 3. The survey starts with a short introduction that describes what the survey entails and it clarifies that the respondent stays anonymous. This introduction is important to make a possible respondent aware of the subject of the survey. It has to convince a possible respondent to fill in the survey and finish it. The short message that introduces the survey goes as follows:

"This survey is about response strategies to negative online reviews and will serve to inform restaurants.
You, as the respondent, will stay anonymous.
If you have any questions about this survey or what the results are going to be, feel free to contact me:
l.j.s.schabbink@student.utwente.nl
It would be really helpful if you could take a little bit of your time to fill in this survey.
Thank you in advance!"

This introduction has to make the respondent feel comfortable with the research, without having doubts. If interested, he or she can ask further questions about this research. This introduction is important to get a significant number of respondents for this research.
The respondent must use internet, since the questions are about eWOM. Therefore, the survey will be spread via the online platforms Facebook and LinkedIn. Besides, some people will be reached via groups on WhatsApp.
According to SurveyMonkey, the number of respondents needed can be calculated via their sample size calculator. Since the population consist of all the people in the world visiting a restaurant and reading reviews by forehand, this number is unknown. Taking the number of restaurants on TripAdvisor, which is 4.3 million, results in a sample size of 385 respondents (SurveyMonkey), with a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5%. The expectation is that this number will not be reached when comparing other researches that made a survey regarding a similar subject. The number of respondents varied between 50 and 150 (Avant, 2013; Tran, 2015). Therefore, the expectations for the number of respondents for this survey will also be between these numbers. A sample size of 68 gives a margin of error of 10% with a confidence level of 10% (SurveyMonkey). Thus, the goal is to have at least this number of respondents. The formula for the calculation of the sample size can be found under Appendix B.

4.2 The General Questions

To introduce the respondent about the subject of the survey, some questions about their restaurant visits and the number of reviews that he or she writes and reads are asked.
The specific questions asked, with the possible answers as in the survey are:

- How often do you go out for dinner?
  - Never
  - 1-4 times each year
  - 5-8 times each year
  - 8-12 times each year
  - More than 12 times a year
- How often do you write reviews?
  - Never
  - Sometimes
  - About half the time
  - Most of the time
  - Always
- How many reviews do you typically read when you check a restaurant online?
  - None
  - 1 or 2
  - 3 or 4
  - At least 5

These questions, besides introducing the subject, can also determine the reliability of the differences in the scenarios. This will be further explained in the data collection section discussed in Chapter 5.
After the experimental part and the statements, which will be described below, the survey ends with two demographic questions. These questions are asking about age and gender. The question about age is important to make sure that all respondents are above the age of 16.

The gender of the respondent is asked to get a view on a possible diversity between male and female and to make sure that the division of gender is not too large. After all the questions are asked, the respondent will see a screen to thank him or her for participating. The whole survey can be found in the Appendix under section C.

4.3 The Experimental Part

In the experimental part, different scenarios are exposed to the respondent. The scenarios used are all retrieved from TripAdvisor. The restaurants how retrieved these reviews were randomly picked. The only similarity lies in the number of stars that the reviewer gave, since all of the reviews of the scenarios have a one-star rating. The restaurant names are deleted from the scenarios to let them stay anonymous. Which is for privacy purposes and to make sure that this survey will not do them any harm. There are three different response strategies of which only one is randomly shown to a respondent. The fact that not all the respondents get exactly the same survey makes that it is an experimental survey. One of the scenarios that is shown to the respondent consists of the restaurant giving no response. The respondent will thus only see a negative online review from a customer. The second scenario shows a negative online review on which a restaurant gives an excuse, so the responder, in this case, gives a reason to the reviewer for why the incident happened. In the last scenario, the restaurant apologizes to the reviewer for the negative experience and wants to solve the problem. To make sure that everything will be read carefully and nothing is skipped, a text is placed above the scenario part. The respondents will be aware of the importance of the specific part coming. In addition, this makes sure that the respondent reads the negative online review with the response clearly. So, regardless of which one of the scenarios show up to the respondent, the text above stays the same. The text goes as follows:

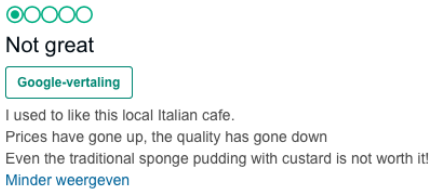
Below, a review can be found that was recently written. Read this carefully and make sure that you have read everything before continuing with this survey.

The specific scenarios for 'no response', 'excuses', and 'apologizing' that are used in this research can be found below in figure 1 till 3.

<u>No response</u>

Figure 1. Scenario: No response

<u>Excuses</u>



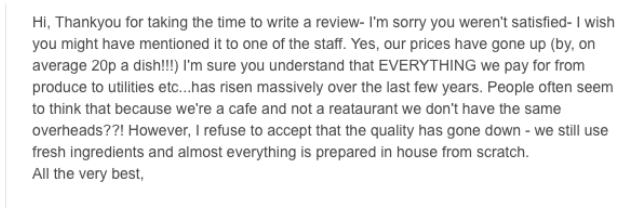


Figure 2. Scenario: Excuses

<u>Apologizing</u>

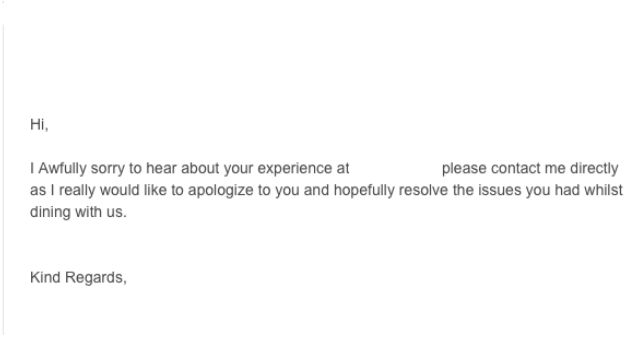


Figure 3. Scenario: Apologizing

4.4 The Statements

After one of the scenarios will be exposed to the respondent, he or she has to augment five statements. The statements that can be found below in Figure 4. These statements had to be augmented using the five-point Likert scale format (1=Positive, 2=Somewhat Negative, 3=Neutral, 4=Somewhat Positive, 5=Positive). The Likert Scale format is changed to a seven-point scale with (1=Strongly agree, 2=Agree, 3=Somewhat agree, 4=Neither agree nor disagree, 5=Somewhat disagree, 6=Disagree, 7=Strongly disagree). The reason for changing this format from a five-point scale to a seven-point scale is that it gives the respondent the possibility to give a more detailed opinion. Therefore, the results are also more specific. Furthermore, the positive and negative terms are changed to agree and disagree to make the answers more argumentative with the statements. Some of the statements end with positive, because ending with negative in this context might influence the respondent by filling in rather negative answers about the restaurant. Besides, the statements make more sense when scaling the answers in terms of positivity and negativity.

The statements include the variables: the image of the restaurant, the feeling with a restaurant and the intent to go to this restaurant. The answers on these statements are dependent for determining which one of the scenarios is received the best. By giving all of the respondents the same statements, the research is rather consistent and thus more reliable. All the scenarios are compared with each other by analysing the answers on the statements. The statements thus determine whether there is a significant difference between the three scenarios of response strategies. For example, the difference in feeling that someone gets from a restaurant when the restaurant gives an excuse compared to the restaurant that apologizes.

5. DATA COLLECTION

The survey went online from May 27, 2019 till June 5, 2019. The number of people that filled in all the questions is 106. From these people, 30 did not complete the survey completely. A part of this amount, 16 people did not fill in all of the questions due to an error in the survey system. These respondents could not see all of the questions and therefore they were not able to finish the survey. Thus, 76 respondents finished the survey. This means that the margin of error and the confidence level are both 10% when taking the number of restaurants on TripAdvisor as a population (SurveyMonkey). Although, a larger population does not mean that the margin of error and the confidence level increase with this number of respondents (SurveyMonkey). Thus, it can be assumed that it is safe to take a margin of error and a confidence level of both 10% in this case. After all the data is received, it needs to be analysed. This analysis is done via Microsoft Excel. This decision was made due to issues with SPSS. This research aims to find a relationship between the overall perception of a restaurant and the response strategy it uses. Due to the fact that the Likert Scale is used, the data is ordinal. There is only one sample of the population who fills in the survey. This survey tests three scores, or earlier stated as scenarios. Besides, the purpose is to find a relationship. Taking all these aspects in consideration, the Chi-square test or the regression analysis fit best to this research. Though, the Chi-square test cannot be used for the analysis, because more than 20% of the expected values for one statement would be below 5. Since ANOVA is useful for either categorical variables as well as continues variables, the one-way ANOVA without replication runs. First, all the data has to be translated to amounts on the Likert Scale. This means that an answer given on strongly disagree is translated to number 1, while strongly agree is translated to number 7.

The run of ANOVA can determine if there is any statistical significance between the scenarios shown and the completion of the statements. Getting a result of $F > F\ crit$, means there is a significant different between the groups. Also, a p-value of $p < 0.05$ shows a significant difference. If a significant difference is found, the ANOVA test does not show were this difference lays. Therefore, if a significant difference is found for one or more statements, the t-test will be used to determine between which one of the scenarios this difference lays.

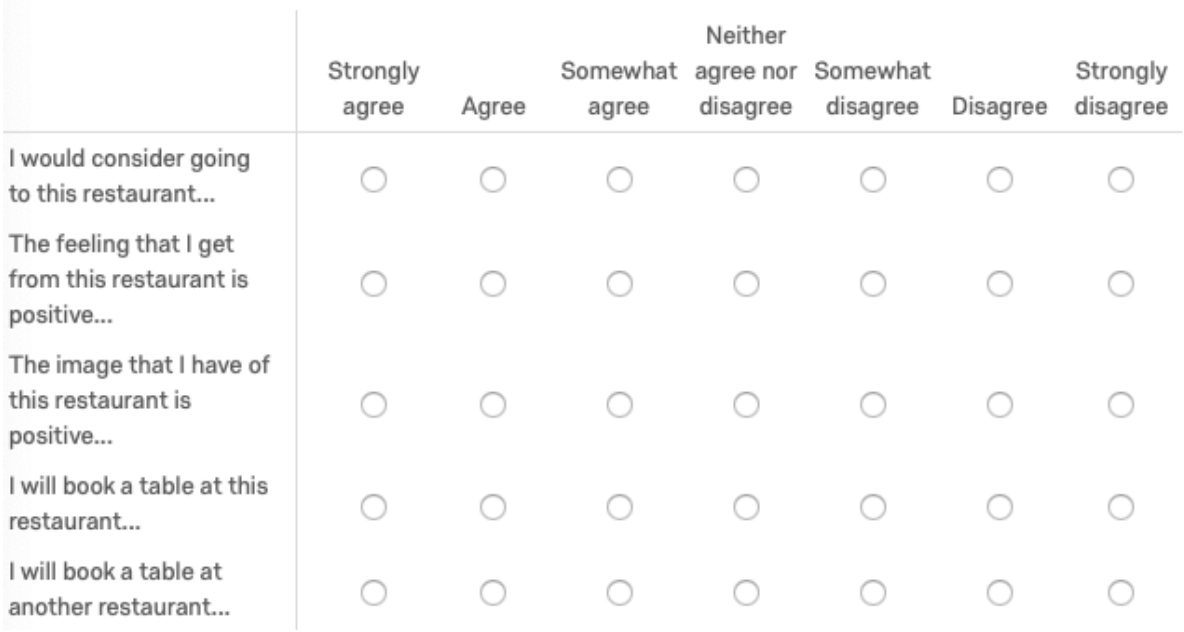


Figure 4. Statements from the survey

The internal consistency between the answers for each scenario can be analysed using the Cronbach's Alpha. This analysis determines whether the survey questions were useful and in line with the other questions. Only the first four questions will be put in the analysis, since the last question is asked from an opposite point of view. This would affect the analysis and therefore it is eliminated.
An alpha of ≥ 0,9 means an excellent internal consistency and when alpha is > 0,8 a high rate of reliability is found. When a rate is < 0.5, it indicates an insufficient reliability (De Vocht, 2009). For the scenarios, a low consistency can possible show a redundancy for some questions. For the first three questions of the survey, the Cronbach's Alpha analysis can possibly exclude an unequal distribution between, for example, restaurant visits and type of scenario shown. Applying this analysis helps to determine whether there are major differences between the scenario someone got exposed to and the general answers about their restaurant visits. For example, someone who reads more than 5 reviews before going out for dinner might react in another way to the scenario compared to someone who never reads reviews before going out for dinner. In the case of an overall equal distribution, the answers given by the respondents are more reliable in terms of the image and visits of a restaurant in relation to the response strategy of this restaurant.

6. DATA ANALYSIS

6.1 First Glance

All the data of the survey was put on a page in Microsoft Excel, dividing the answers under the different scenarios. The scenarios 'no response' and 'apologizing' got shown 26 times, while 'excuses' was exposed 24 times to someone. Then the number of times one answer was chosen was counted. For example, the number of times that some saw an 'excuses' scenario and answered the question about gender with female was 14.
When viewing the results, a few things can already be noticed without doing analysis.
The number of respondents is 76, of which 33 were male and 43 were female. The age of the respondents is mostly between 22 and 65, since 45 of the respondents filled this in. Additionally, 30 respondents are between 16 and 21 and one of the respondents is older than 65. None of the respondents were younger than 16. The circle diagrams of age and gender can be found in section D of the Appendix.
The results show that most people go out for dinner more than 12 times a year. This confirms the idea that it is really important for restaurants to have a positive overall image and satisfied customers. The results also show that almost nobody writes reviews, only a few stated that they sometimes write a review but nobody answered with always. The amount of reviews that gets read before going out for dinner is really spread out. While definitely most of the people read 3 or 4 reviews before going out for dinner, there are also people who do not read any reviews and others read at least 5. These answers show that most people do read reviews before going out for dinner. This is in line with previous research, that also showed a lower percentage of people giving feedback compared to the percentage of customer reviews read (Tran, 2015). This confirms the idea that positive reviews are important for a restaurant to receive customers. The graphics of all the answers on the three questions can be found in Appendix E.
When comparing the statements for the different scenarios, the scenario of 'no response' shows for every statement the most answers as 'disagree'. As expected, the last question was mostly filled in as 'agree'. Thus, what can be concluded for the scenario 'no response' is that most people are not positive about this restaurant. This similarity in answers displays validity. For the other two scenarios, validity in the answers can also be found. Nevertheless, the scenario 'excuses' has the widest spread in answers. Furthermore, the scenario 'excuses' seems to be responded to mostly positive, while 'apologizing' seems to be more negative. These first conclusions about the scenarios are formed by making graphs of all the scenarios. These graphs can be found in the Appendix section part F.

6.2 Analysis

To determine if the differences in the scenarios are significant, ANOVA single factor test in Microsoft Excel is used. For each of the scenarios, the answers about the statements afterwards got tested with ANOVA. The first statement, "I would consider going to this restaurant" gives an F-value of 0,49 and an F-crit of 3,55. Which means, F < Fcrit. Besides, the ANOVA test gives a p-value of P = 0,62 when comparing the three scenarios on the first statement. For almost all the other statements, the results are not distinctive from the first statement. Only the last statement has smaller F and a larger P-value. Besides, the smallest P-value of 0,55 can be found for the statement about the image of the restaurant. This means that the restaurant image is mostly affected by the difference in response strategies. Still, for all the statements no significant difference can be found between the three scenarios. This also eliminates the necessity of investigating each statement with the t-test. This will only add value to the research when one or more of the statements show a significant difference between the three scenarios and it will become clear between which scenarios this can be found.
All the values that resulted from the ANOVA test can be found in Appendix G. Besides, a summary of the results of the ANOVA test for each statement can be found in Table 1.

Table 1. Results of the ANOVA test

Question	**ANOVA F – Fcrit**	**P-value**
1. Consider going	0,4916 < 3,5546	0,6196
2. Feeling	0,4487 < 3,5546	0,6454
3. Image	0,6259 < 3,5546	0,5460
4. Book table	0,4161 < 3,5546	0,6658
5. Book table at another	0,0454 < 3,5546	0,9557

After performing an analysis about the statement, the reliability of the scenarios is testified. Besides, the first three questions of the survey will be analysed using the same coefficient of reliability. The reliability of the scenarios and the first three questions is determined by Cronbach's Alpha. For the scenarios, the variance of each statement on the answers (scaled from 1 till 7) is calculated. Then, the total variance score per respondent is calculated. As aforementioned, the analysis for reliability will be only done for the first four statements.

The formula used in Excel is ((number of statements / (number of statements – 1) * (1 – sum of variance per statement / total scores of variances). The numbers used for these calculations are stated at Appendix H. For the three questions, first ANOVAs multifactor analysis without repetition is done. Then the formula 1 - (MS Error / MS Rows) is applied to calculate the Cronbach's Alpha. The whole output of this analysis can be found under Appendix I. A Cronbach's Alpha of > 0,8 means a high rate of reliability (De Vocht, 2009). Applying this analysis helps to determine whether there is internal consistency between the answers on the statements or if there are surplus statements within the survey. For the first three questions, it examines whether there are major differences between the scenario someone got exposed to and the answers given on the first three questions. For example, someone who reads more than 5 reviews before going out for dinner might react in another way to the scenario than someone who never reads reviews before going out for dinner. The results for this analysis on the scenarios give a Cronbach's Alpha of 0,4799 for 'excuses', while the scenario 'apologizing' shows a Cronbach's Alpha of 0,7875. This means that there is a really low internal consistency for the scenario 'excuses' and an acceptable score for 'apologizing' (De Vocht, 2009). For the scenario 'no response' the analysis gives a score of 0,5568. A summary of the scores is given in Table 2.

For the analysis of the questions, the first question 'How often do you go out for dinner?', shows a Cronbach's Alpha of 0,7347. The question 'How often do you write reviews?' has a Cronbach's Alpha of 0,9898. The last question 'How many reviews do you read before going out for dinner?' has a result of 0,4632. This can be found in Table 3. The results show that only the second question has a high reliability score of above 0,8 while the other two questions are below 0,8. It can be concluded that the number of reviews written correspond for each scenario. This is not the case for 'How often do you go out for dinner?' and 'How many reviews do you read before going out for dinner?'. Especially the last question has a low reliability level, which might ensure an error in the reliability of the research.

Table 2. Results of the Cronbach's Alpha: scenarios

	Cronbach's Alpha
1. No Response	0,55677
2. Excuses	0,47986
3. Apologizing	0,78753

Table 3. Results of the Cronbach's Alpha: questions

	Cronbach's Alpha
1. Going out for dinner	0,734694
2. Writing reviews	0,989815
3. Reading reviews	0,463235

7. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the research shows that there is no significant difference between the answers to the statements for the different scenarios. Only the statement about the image of a restaurant shows a somewhat larger difference for the three scenarios. Besides, the statement about booking a table at another restaurant shows the least difference for each of the three scenarios. When looking at the tables and the means of the scenarios, it can be found that the scenario 'excuses' comes forward as the most favourable option in terms of response strategy. Besides, the scenario of giving no response to the reviewer is the least favourable option. When also comparing 'no response' with 'apologizing' in the tables and by looking at the means of the rates, most of the times, the respondent preferred 'apologizing' over 'no response'. Nevertheless, this cannot be concluded for all the statements. Furthermore, the analysis shows that the internal consistency of the survey was not sufficient for all of the questions. This will be further discussed in the limitations of this research under Chapter 8.

Previous research gives evidence that taking the time to respond to negative online reviews has a more positive effect on potential and current customers (Avant, 2013; Sparks et al., 2016). In terms of hotel responses, a 'service recovery response' is the most favourable option (Avant, 2013). This scenario might be compared to the 'apologizing' scenario in this research, since both of the scenarios aim to recover the incident. The results of this research are not fully in line with the case stated above. This can be explained by the fact that the scenarios of both researches are not the same.

As an answer to the research question, a preference in strategy was found for 'excuses' compared to 'no response' and 'apologizing'. A recommendation for restaurants is to always respond to negative online reviews. When also comparing the results with other previous research, it can be found that this research is in line with the idea that giving a response is better than no response (Sparks et al., 2016). The best strategy, using the results of this research, is providing the customer with an excuse. This excuse can be complemented by giving a clear explanation to the customer for why something happened, while apologizing to the reviewer as well. Thus, a combination can be made between 'excuses' and 'apologizing'. Since no significant difference is found, no absolute preference can be given by only making use of the results of this research.

8. LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

One of the limitations of this research is that it is focused on restaurants only. For further research, an idea would be to focus on a wider scope then one branch. Since the reviews for restaurants can be different compared to reviews on for example electronics.

The survey got filled in by only 106 respondents, of which 76 finished it. Therefore, the external validity of this research could be questioned. This external validity is about the population, a sample size of 76 does not represent the whole population. Besides, this research is only based on restaurant reviews which were all retrieved from TripAdvisor. It could be the case that reviews on the website of the company itself are different and that responses to these reviews are different as well.

Although it is all about restaurants and the reviews are all from the same website, the research is only making use of three negative online reviews. The limitation comes from the fact that the reviews were not the same. This makes that respondents could have based their answer more on the negativity of the online review compared to the response of the restaurant. Another limitation of the survey is that not all the scenarios are shown as often. Although it is an experimental survey and the scenarios

show randomly, an undividable number of respondents results in an unequal number of respondents for the different scenarios. Moreover, it cannot be stated that there is an internal consistency between the statements asked in the scenarios. This might be due to surplus or unsuitable questions. Therefore, in further research, it is important that all the questions asked in the survey are in internal consistency with each other. Another limitation, as already described above, is that the amount of reviews read by people before going out for dinner is not divided equally over the scenarios. Consequently, a respondent that reads a lot of reviews might react differently to a scenario compared to those who do not read any reviews. This does not necessarily cause an error, but there is a possibility. Thus, for further research it might be an idea to take a specific group of people or to be sure that the people participating in research are divided proportionally.

A general recommendation for further research is to do research on a larger scope that is not only focused on restaurants but on reviews in general. Due to the restricted time available, this would be out of scope for this research. Besides, a larger group of respondents would be necessary to increase the validity of the research. The respondent should be exposed to different responses strategies on the same reviews or the research might expose the respondent to multiple reviews with the same type of response strategy and compare the reactions on these reviews. The number of response strategies could be increased in further research as well.

Besides, further research can establish new research based on the comparison of the results from this research with the results from the research based on hotel responses. A comparison can also be made between research with a larger scope and the more focused researches. All in all, the following research can be set up broader, to investigate if the researches that are already done also apply to a broader set of branches.

9. RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION

The research contribution of this thesis is helping restaurants by deciding whether or not to respond to negative online reviews. First it gives some background information about eWOM and why it is so important to know how to deal with negative eWOM. Then it will specifically continue on restaurants and eWOM and the possible respond strategies will be explained and afterwards examined in the data analysis. The consequences of each strategy are known and therefore, dealing with negative online reviews will be easier and quicker with the given information. Using the given knowledge could help restaurants in creating a better image and increasing their number of customers. Resulting in higher revenues and probably an increasing profit. All in all, using this research can be of great benefit to a restaurant.

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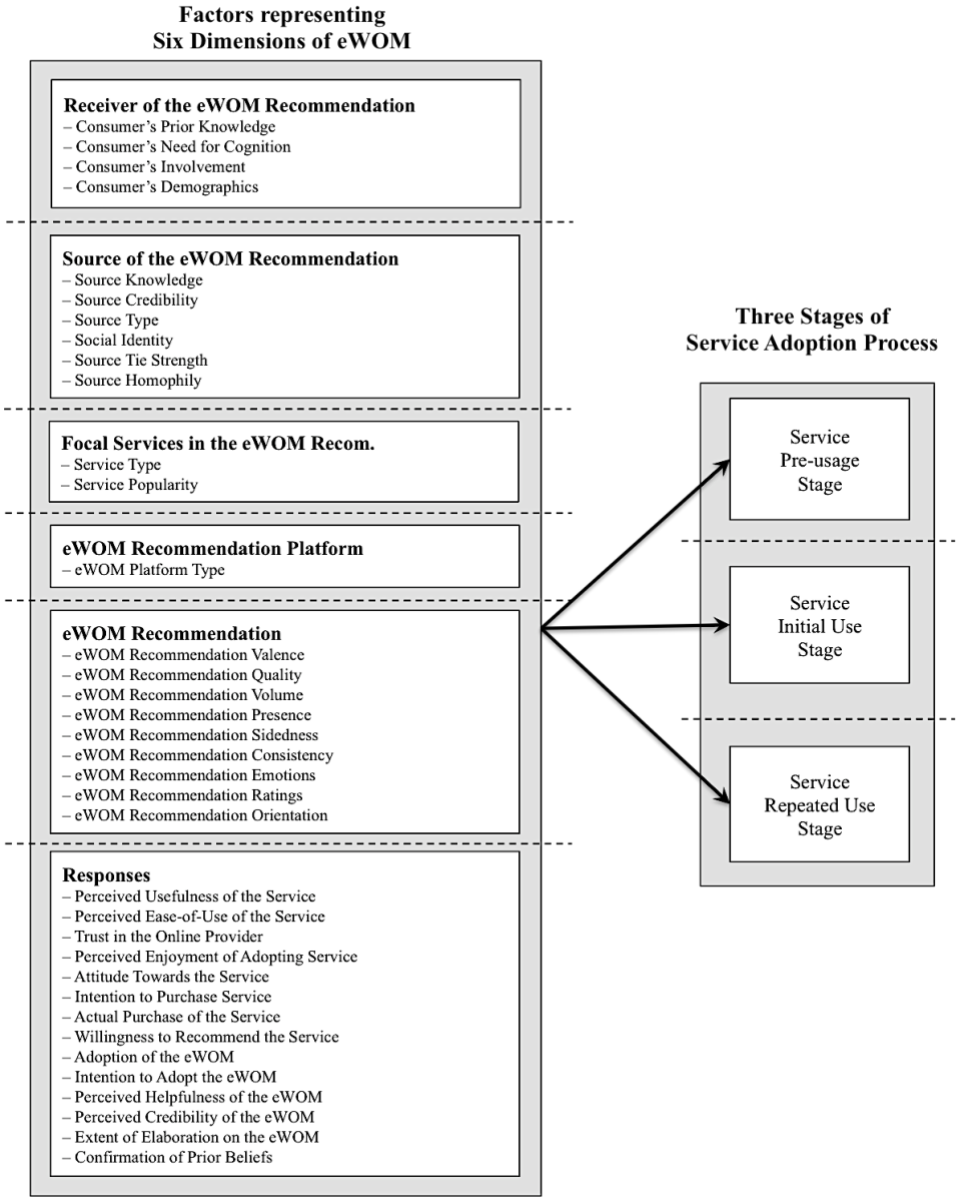
11. APPENDIX

Appendix A

Figure of the Six Dimensions of eWOM (Saremi, 2014)



Appendix B

Sample size calculator (SurveyMonkey)

$$\frac{\frac{z^2 \times p\,(1-p)}{e^2}}{1 + \left(\frac{z^2 \times p\,(1-p)}{e^2 N}\right)}$$

Appendix C
The experimental survey as shown to respondents

This survey is about response strategies to negative online reviews and will serve to inform restaurants.
You, as the respondent, will stay anonymous.
If you have any questions about this survey or what the results are going to be, feel free to contact me:
l.j.s.schabbink@student.utwente.nl
It would be really helpful if you could take a little bit of your time to fill in this survey.

Thank you in advance!

How often do you go out for dinner?

- ○ Never
- ○ 1-4 times each year
- ○ 5-8 times each year
- ○ 8-12 times each year
- ○ More than 12 times a year

How often do you write reviews?

- ○ Never
- ○ Sometimes
- ○ About half the time
- ○ Most of the time
- ○ Always

How many reviews do you typically read when you check a restaurant online?

- ○ None
- ○ 1 or 2
- ○ 3 or 4
- ○ At least 5

Below, a review can be found that was recently written for a restaurant.
Read this carefully and make sure that you have read everything before continuing this survey.

Small, pricey and tastless pizzas!

As Italian, I think Apulia's pizza is probably one of the worst that I have tried in my life. My pizza came full of water of buffalo mozzarella and it was barely impossible to eat. Bad food, small portions and high prices. Avoid, avoid, avoid!

Overall image of the restaurant

	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I would consider going to this restaurant...	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The feeling that I get from this restaurant is positive...	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The image that I have of this restaurant is positive...	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I will book a table at this restaurant...	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I will book a table at another restaurant...	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

What is your age?

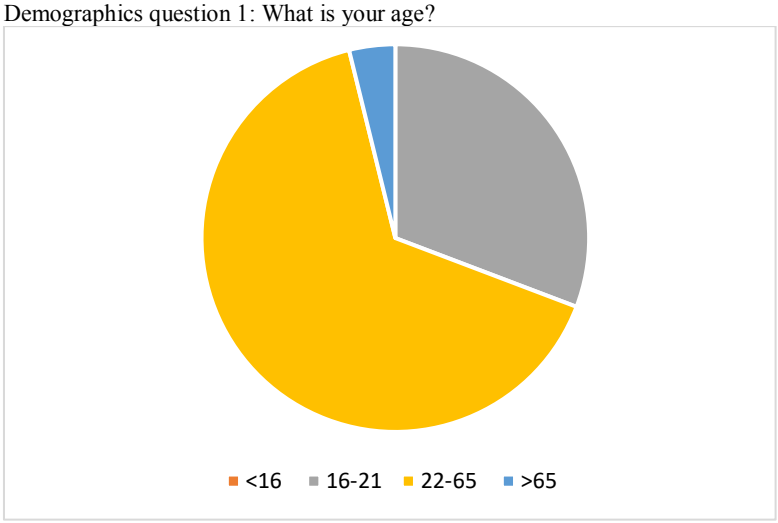
- ○ <16
- ○ 16-21
- ○ 22-65
- ○ >65

What is your gender?

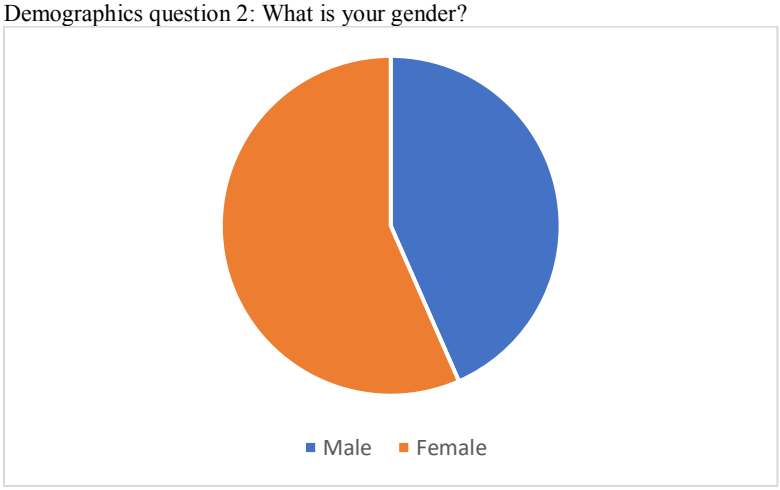
- ○ Male
- ○ Female
- ○ Other

Appendix D

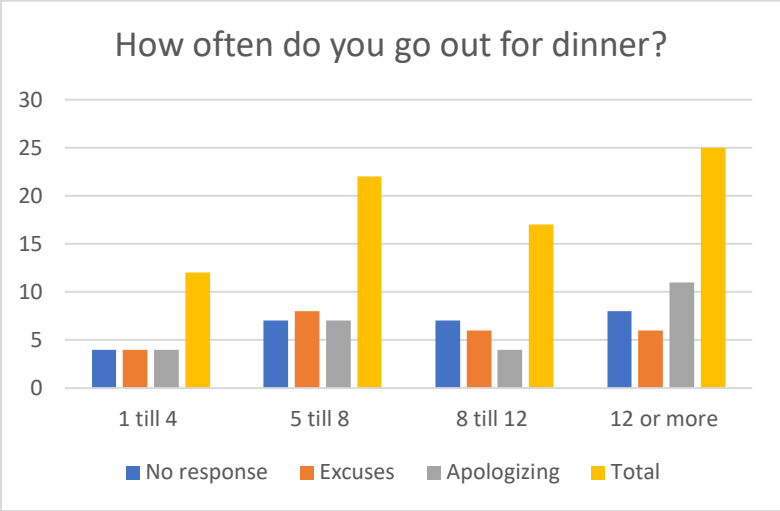
Demographics question 1: What is your age?

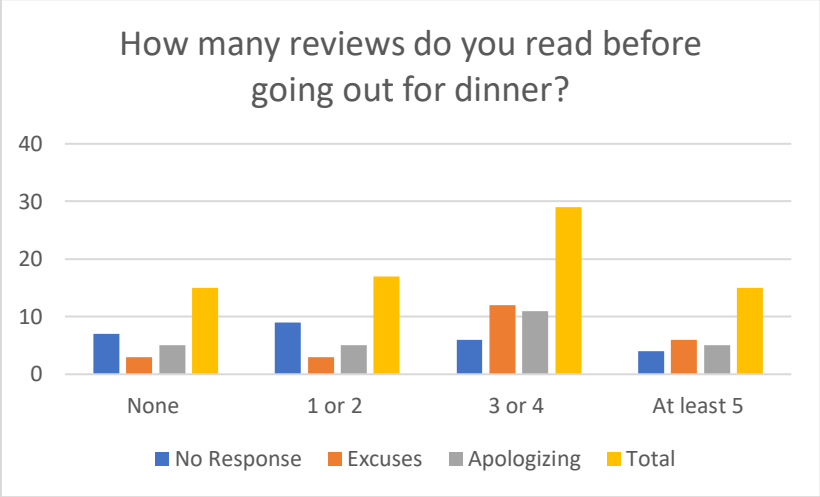


Demographics question 2: What is your gender?

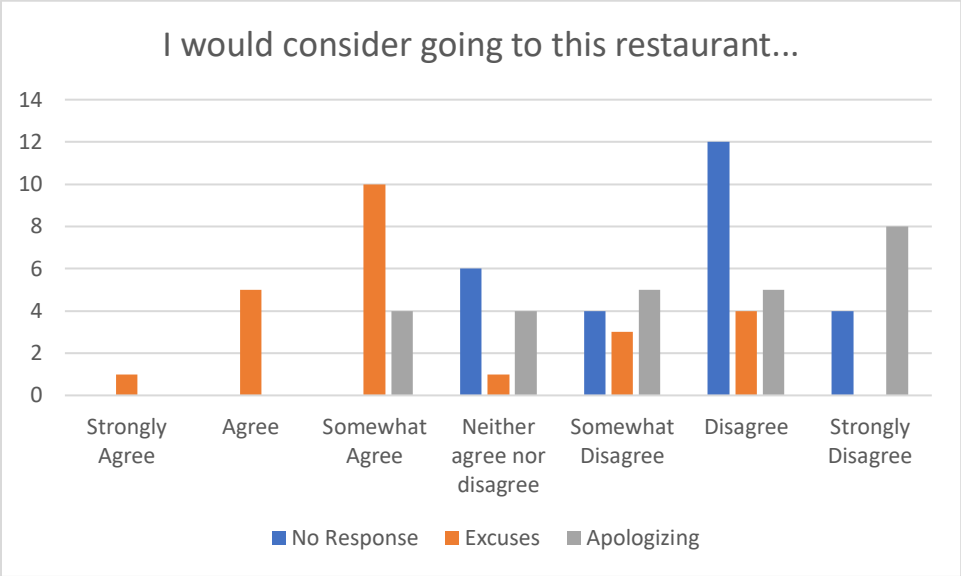


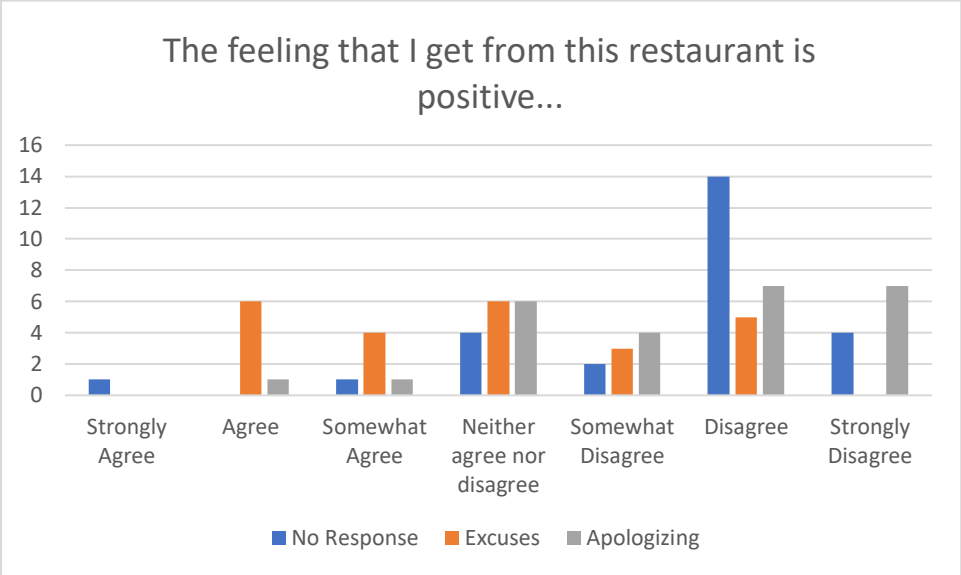
Appendix E
Charts of the first three questions of the survey

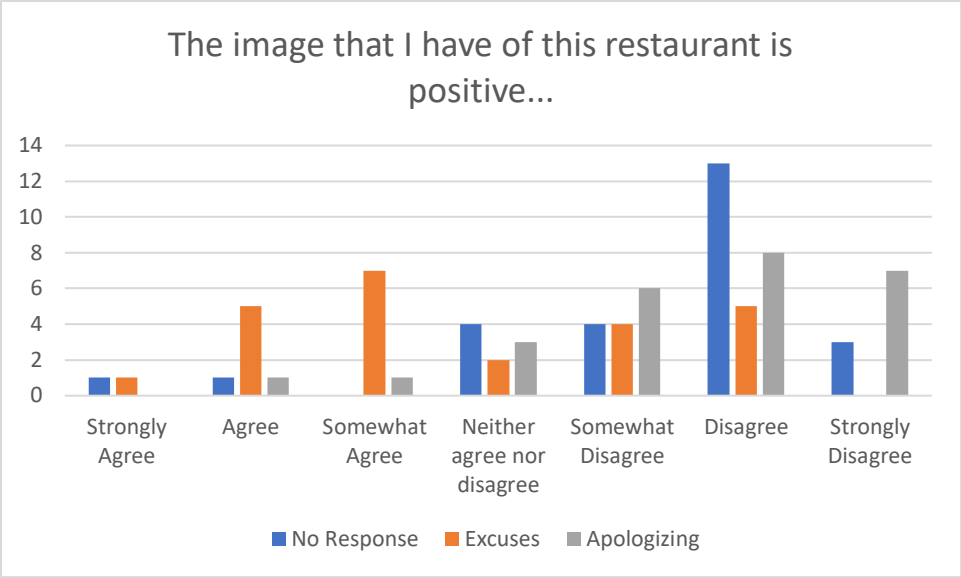


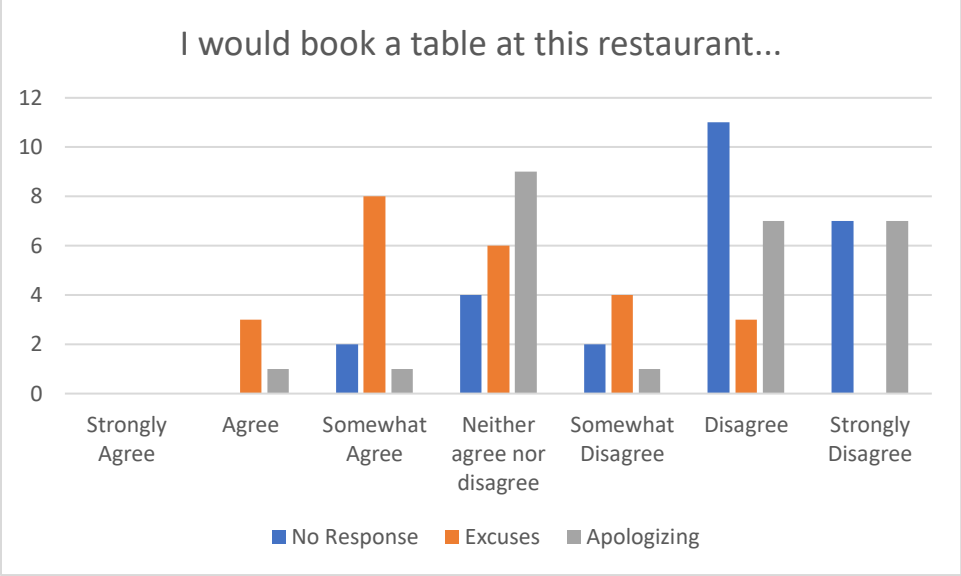


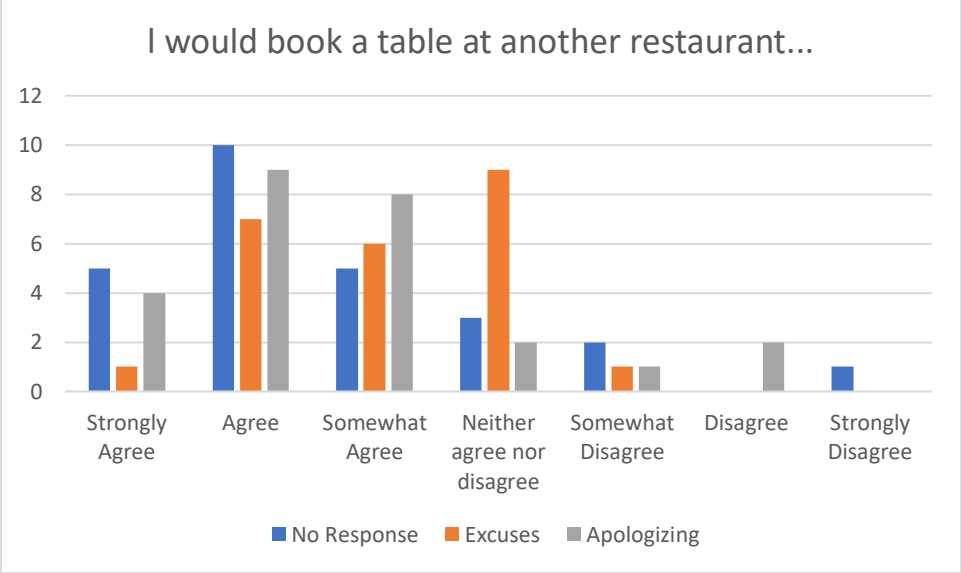
Appendix F
Charts of the answers on the dependent variables






The image that I have of this restaurant is positive...
14
12
10
8
6
4
2
0
Strongly Agree
Agree
Somewhat Agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Somewhat Disagree
Disagree
Strongly Disagree
No Response
Excuses
Apologizing


I would book a table at this restaurant...
12
10
8
6
4
2
0
Strongly Agree
Agree
Somewhat Agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Somewhat Disagree
Disagree
Strongly Disagree
No Response
Excuses
Apologizing


I would book a table at another restaurant...
12
10
8
6
4
2
0
Strongly Agree
Agree
Somewhat Agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Somewhat Disagree
Disagree
Strongly Disagree
No Response
Excuses
Apologizing

Appendix G

1: I would consider going to this restaurant…

Unifactoriële variantie-analyse

SAMENVATTING

Groepen	*Aantal*	*Som*	*Gemiddelde*	*Variantie*
No respponse	7	64	9,14285714	121,142857
Excuses	7	108	15,4285714	323,952381
Apologizing	7	69	9,85714286	60,8095238

Variantie-analyse

Bron van variatie	*Kwadratensom*	*Vrijheidsgraden*	*Gemiddelde kwadraten*	*F*	*P-waarde*	*Kritische gebied van F-toets*
Tussen groepen	165,809524	2	82,9047619	0,49162274	0,61960993	3,55455715
Binnen groepen	3035,42857	18	168,634921			
Totaal	3201,2381	20				

2: The feeling that I get from this restaurant is positive…

Unifactoriële variantie-analyse

SAMENVATTING

Groepen	*Aantal*	*Som*	*Gemiddelde*	*Variantie*
No respponse	7	66	9,42857143	90,6190476
Excuses	7	99	14,1428571	175,47619
Apologizing	7	68	9,71428571	60,9047619

Variantie-analyse

Bron van variatie	*Kwadratensom*	*Vrijheidsgraden*	*Gemiddelde kwadraten*	*F*	*P-waarde*	*Kritische gebied van F-toets*
Tussen groepen	97,8095238	2	48,9047619	0,44866754	0,64542751	3,55455715
Binnen groepen	1962	18	109			
Totaal	2059,80952	20				

3: The image that I have of this restaurant is positive…

Unifactoriële variantie-analyse

SAMENVATTING

Groepen	*Aantal*	*Som*	*Gemiddelde*	*Variantie*
No respponse	7	70	10	78,3333333
Excuses	7	102	14,5714286	165,952381
Apologizing	7	64	9,14285714	41,4761905

Variantie-analyse

Bron van variatie	*Kwadratensom*	*Vrijheidsgraden*	*Gemiddelde kwadraten*	*F*	*P-waarde*	*Kritische gebied van F-toets*
Tussen groepen	119,238095	2	59,6190476	0,62589568	0,54602462	3,55455715
Binnen groepen	1714,57143	18	95,2539683			
Totaal	1833,80952	20				

4: I would book a table at this restaurant…

Unifactoriële variantie-analyse

SAMENVATTING

Groepen	*Aantal*	*Som*	*Gemiddelde*	*Variantie*
No respponse	7	61	8,71428571	65,5714286
Excuses	7	100	14,2857143	208,571429
Apologizing	7	71	10,1428571	148,47619

Variantie-analyse

Bron van variatie	*Kwadratensom*	*Vrijheidsgraden*	*Gemiddelde kwadraten*	*F*	*P-waarde*	*Kritische gebied van F-toets*
Tussen groepen	117,238095	2	58,6190476	0,41611268	0,66579076	3,55455715
Binnen groepen	2535,71429	18	140,873016			
Totaal	2652,95238	20				

5: I would book a table at another restaurant…

Unifactoriële variantie-analyse

SAMENVATTING

Groepen	*Aantal*	*Som*	*Gemiddelde*	*Variantie*
No respponse	7	139	19,8571429	478,47619
Excuses	7	118	16,8571429	338,142857
Apologizing	7	137	19,5714286	451,285714

Variantie-analyse

Bron van variatie	*Kwadratensom*	*Vrijheidsgraden*	*Gemiddelde kwadraten*	*F*	*P-waarde*	*Kritische gebied van F-toets*
Tussen groepen	38,3809524	2	19,1904762	0,04540675	0,95571781	3,55455715
Binnen groepen	7607,42857	18	422,634921			
Totaal	7645,80952	20				

Appendix H

Analysis of Cronbach's Alpha for the three scenarios with the scores used.

No response	
Number of questions	4
Sum of variance	10,0769231
Total scores	17,3017751
Cronbach's alpha	0,55677155
Excuses	
Number of questions	4
Sum of variance	17,0416667
Total scores	26,6232639
Cronbach's alpha	0,47986088
Apologizing	
Number of questions	4
Sum of variance	10,4615385
Total scores	25,556213
Cronbach's alpha	0,78752798

Appendix I

Question 1: How often do you go out for dinner?

Cronbach's Alpha = 0,73469388 -> 1- (Error MS / Rows MS)

Multifactoriële analyse zonder herhaling

SAMENVATTING	*Aantal*	*Som*	*Gemiddelde*	*Variantie*
Rij 1	3	12	4	0
Rij 2	3	22	7,33333333	0,33333333
Rij 3	3	17	5,66666667	2,33333333
Rij 4	3	25	8,33333333	6,33333333
Kolom 1	4	26	6,5	3
Kolom 2	4	24	6	2,66666667
Kolom 3	4	26	6,5	11

Variantie-analyse

Bron van variatie	*Kwadratensom*	*Vrijheidsgraden*	*Gemiddelde kwadraten*	*F*	*P-waarde*	*Kritische gebied van F-toets*
Rijen	32,6666667	3	10,8888889	3,76923077	0,07831906	4,75706266
Kolommen	0,66666667	2	0,33333333	0,11538462	0,89295331	5,14325285
Fout	17,3333333	6	2,88888889			
Totaal	50,6666667	11				

Question 2: How often do you write reviews?
Cronbach's Alpha = 0,98981525 -> 1- (Error MS / Rows MS)

Multifactoriële analyse zonder herhaling

SAMENVATTING	*Aantal*	*Som*	*Gemiddelde*	*Variantie*
Rij 1	3	47	15,6666667	0,33333333
Rij 2	3	25	8,33333333	4,33333333
Rij 3	3	3	1	1
Rij 4	3	1	0,33333333	0,33333333
Rij 5	3	0	0	0
Kolom 1	5	26	5,2	55,2
Kolom 2	5	24	4,8	37,7
Kolom 3	5	26	5,2	50,7

Variantie-analyse

Bron van variatie	*Kwadratensom*	*Vrijheidsgraden*	*Gemiddelde kwadraten*	*F*	*P-waarde*	*Kritische gebied van F-toets*
Rijen	562,933333	4	140,733333	98,1860465	7,8139E-07	3,83785335
Kolommen	0,53333333	2	0,26666667	0,18604651	0,83372681	4,45897011
Fout	11,4666667	8	1,43333333			
Totaal	574,933333	14				

Questions 3: How many reviews read before going?
Cronbach's Alpha = 0,46323529 -> 1- (Error MS / Rows MS)

Multifactoriële analyse zonder herhaling

SAMENVATTING	*Aantal*	*Som*	*Gemiddelde*	*Variantie*
Rij 1	3	15	5	4
Rij 2	3	17	5,66666667	9,33333333
Rij 3	3	29	9,66666667	10,3333333
Rij 4	3	15	5	1
Kolom 1	4	26	6,5	4,33333333
Kolom 2	4	24	6	18
Kolom 3	4	26	6,5	9

Variantie-analyse

Bron van variatie	*Kwadratensom*	*Vrijheidsgraden*	*Gemiddelde kwadraten*	*F*	*P-waarde*	*Kritische gebied van F-toets*
Rijen	45,3333333	3	15,1111111	1,8630137	0,2366683	4,75706266
Kolommen	0,66666667	2	0,33333333	0,04109589	0,96000484	5,14325285
Fout	48,6666667	6	8,11111111			
Totaal	94,6666667	11				