Diners' Perceptions of Food Quality: TripAdvisor Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Although the importance of Michelin starred restaurants has been consistently growing, it has not gained much attention in research (Ottenbacher & Harrington, 2007). It is not yet known what customers in this segment consider when evaluating the food quality dimension of their meal experience. The purpose of this study was therefore to analyse food quality attributes that Michelin starred restaurants diners reflect on when evaluating their meal experience on TripAdvisor. The paper specifically analysed 120 TripAdvisor reviews of all four Michelin starred restaurants in Birmingham, UK. Content analysis technique was applied. Emergent themes were identified and a word frequency count of food quality attributes of the dining experiences was performed. The results of the study suggest that most diners of Michelin starred restaurants mention the food quality dimension when evaluating their dining experiences. Most diners respond positively towards the quality of food in Michelin starred restaurants. The study further showed that the taste of food, food presentation, innovativeness of menu items, drinks selection, and food and wine pairing, in that order, are the most salient attributes in diners' evaluation of the food quality of Michelin starred restaurants. This study contributed to the literature on food quality in the context of Michelin starred restaurants. It gives managers a better understanding of diners' perceptions which can be used as a basis for formulation of food quality management and recovery strategies. This research is however limited to analysing TripAdvisor reviews of Michelin starred restaurants in Birmingham, UK only. Future studies may include bigger sample sizes, explore other restaurant segments and geographical locations, and consider other review sites in order to provide more insights into this discussion.

Keywords: Perceived food quality; TripAdvisor; Electronic Word of Mouth; User generated content; Michelin Starred restaurants

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of Web 2.0 technologies attached with the high rate of internet access, advanced mobile technologies and increased usage of Apps has expanded the power of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) (Amaral, Tiago & Tiago., 2014). This technological advancement has enabled consumers to post their opinions or reviews about products and services experienced (Bradley, Sparks & Weber, 2016). The literature indicates the importance of online reviews in the current marketplace (Amaral *et al*., 2014). Harrington*,* Fauser, Ottenbatcher and Kruse (2013) contend that WOM information sources are key decision making tools for Michelin restaurant selection. As an important referral strategy, there is a need to understand what restaurant patrons discuss about their dining experiences in the cyberspace. Even more important is an understanding of what diners communicate about food as it is the core aspect of the restaurant experience (Namkung & Jang, 2007).

Despite the importance of eWOM, little attention has been paid to analysing online content generated by restaurant patrons. Majority of researchers in the hospitality sector focused on analysing TripAdvisor commentary on hotels not restaurants (for example, Barreda & Bilgihan, 2013; Dinçer & Alrawadieh, 2017; Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan, 2008). Of the few studies with focus on restaurants, Pantelidis (2010) analysed online restaurant comments with a focus on full-service restaurants based in London. On another study conducted by Park, Jang and Ok (2016), Twitter comments were analysed to explore the perceptions of patrons on Asian restaurants. Recently in Botswana, Chatibura and Siya (2018) analysed online reviews on service performance of restaurants in Botswana. The limitation of this study is that it focused on negative reviews only.

Although the importance of Michelin starred restaurants has been consistently growing, it has not gained much attention in research (Ottenbacher & Harrington, 2007). It is not yet known what customers in this segment consider when evaluating the food quality dimension of their meal experience. Understanding perceptions of diners of Michelin starred restaurants is an important element that may help restaurateurs to keep up with expectations of diners and address their complaints hence customer satisfaction. Michelin starred restaurants are particularly known for their quality, an attribute that has a strong influence on customers' choice (Ottenbacher & Harrington, 2007). This clearly indicates the importance of maintaining quality standards in Michelin starred restaurants. Additionally, an understanding of Michelin starred restaurants diners' perceptions is important as research indicates that diners of these restaurants rarely give feedback on their meal experience during dining but often voice out their experiences on online platforms such as TripAdvisor (Vásquez & Chik, 2015). Previous studies measuring food quality as part of the dining experience (Harrington *et al*., 2012; Jani & Han, 2011; Jeong & Jang, 2011; Kim, Ng and Kim, 2009; Liu and Jang, 2009; Namkung and Jang, 2008 Pantelidis, 2010) have focused on restaurant segments including quick service restaurants, casual restaurants and full service restaurants overlooking the Michelin starred restaurant segment. To fill this research gap, the current study focused on food quality attributes as part of the meal experience in the context of Michelin starred restaurants.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Researchers in the restaurant service industry have long recognised the need to measure the quality of restaurant experiences (Campbell-Smith, 1970; Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1985; Stevens, Knutsson & Patton, 1995). As early as the 1970s, Campbell-Smith (1970) suggested key attributes which can be used to measure restaurant experiences and these included food and beverage, hygiene, value for money and ambience. Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988) created a generic service quality scale, SERVQUAL, which has been widely used to measure restaurant experiences. The model measures quality based on five dimensions; tangibles, reliability, assurance, responsiveness and empathy (Parasuraman *et al*., 1988). Even though SERVQUAL is widely accepted as a valid and reliable instrument, its generic approach limits evaluation of a restaurant in detail (Kincaid, Baloglu, Mao & Busser, 2010). To fill this gap, Stevens *et al*. (1995) developed a specific quality measurement application for the restaurant industry; DINESERV, which uses dimensions similar to SERVQUAL's. Researchers (Kim *et al*., 2009; Ladhari *et al*., 2008; Liu & Jang, 2009) have embraced the use of DINESERV and utilised the measure in a variety of restaurant settings. Despite valuable contributions made by DINESERV, some of the key components of restaurant quality, for example; food quality has been overlooked (Namkung & Jang, 2008; Ryu & Jang, 2008). Further to that, a review of relevant literature reveals that certain aspects of quality have not been represented by DINESERV developers, for instance; the ambience construct (Raajpoot, 2002, Ryu & Jang, 2008).

In light of these limitations, scholars developed quality measurement scales to capture the overlooked constructs. Drawing from the physical environment frameworks, Raajpoot (2002) explored the domain of tangible quality and developed the TANGSERV scale. The scale captures such constructs as ambient factors, design factors, and product and service factors (Raajpoot, 2002). Despite contributions made by Raajpoot's (2002) study, there are criticisms about the reliability and validity of the findings (Ryu & Jang, 2008). Ryu and Jang (2008) proposed a scale for measuring quality of the physical environment for upscale restaurants, DINESCAPE. DINESCAPE captures factors such as facility aesthetics, ambience, lighting, table settings, layout and service staff (Ryu &Jang, 2008). The scale highlights the importance of table settings as a crucial construct of restaurant atmospherics, an element that has been overlooked by other restaurant quality models developers. However, DINESCAPE is limited in generalisability as it focused on upscale restaurants thus may not apply to other restaurant segments (Ryu & Jang, 2008).

An important issue emerging from theoretical frameworks related to restaurant experiences is that food quality, service quality and atmospherics are used to measure restaurant experiences. Barber *et al*. (2011), Ryu *et al*. (2012) and Susskind and Chan (2000) also show that these are the commonly agreed categories used to evaluate restaurant experiences. Additionally, Campbell-Smith (1970) and Jeong and Jang (2011) posit that perceived value is an important part of the restaurant experience.

Based on the discussion of various quality models applied in the restaurant industry and specific attributes evaluated, the theoretical framework in Figure 1 is proposed. The current study focused on one part of Figure 1; the food quality dimension since it is considered as the core aspect of the restaurant experience (Namkung & Jang, 2007).

Figure 1: Theoretical Framework of the Restaurant Quality
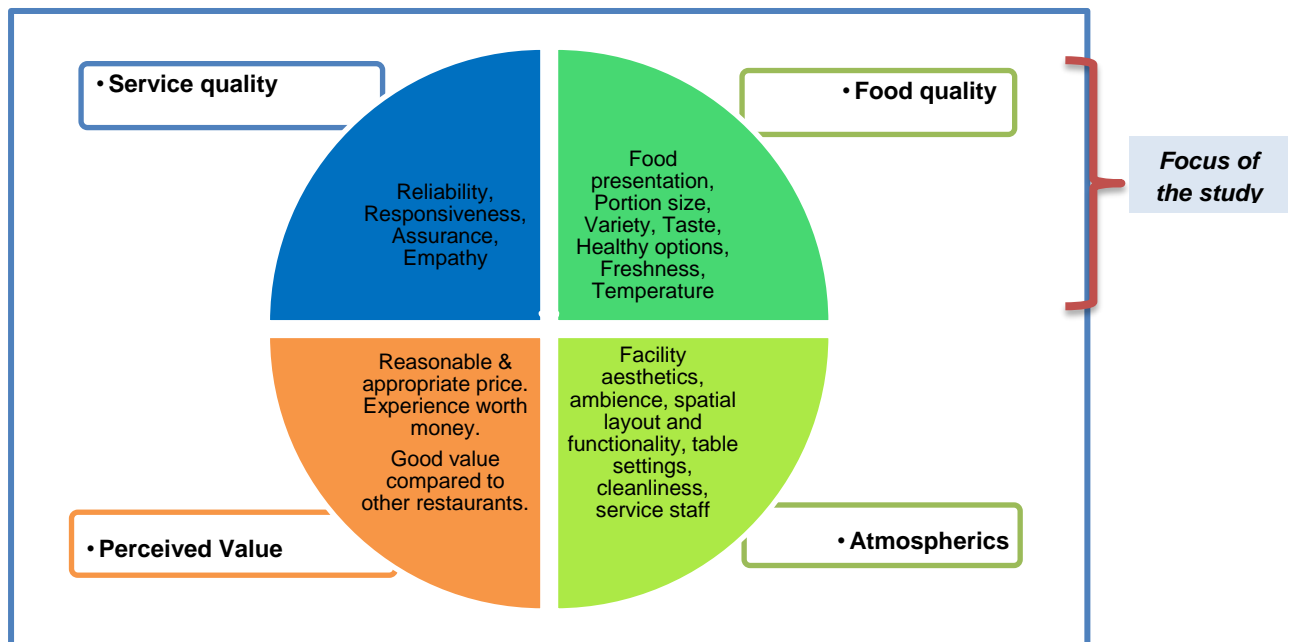
LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of the literature in this section focused on the main constructs of the study: perceived food quality, food quality attributes, electronic word of mouth and TripAdvisor.

Perceived Food Quality

There is a general agreement in the literature that perceived food quality is the most important element of the overall restaurant experience (Jeong & Jang, 2011; Kincaid *et al.*, 2010; Liu & Jang, 2009; Namkung & Jang, 2007, Spielmann, Laroche & Borges, 2012). But really, what is perceived food quality? Perhaps to answer this question we first need to take a closer look at the definition of perceived quality from the marketing perspective. Researchers in the marketing field have mostly conceptualised perceived quality as the consumer's subjective evaluation about the overall excellence or superiority of a product or service (Zeithalm, 1987 cited in Namkung & Jang, 2007). According to the gap theory, perceived quality is the discrepancy between expected quality and actual or performance quality (Groonroos, 1984; Parasuraman, Zeithalm & Berry, 1985). Along the same lines, the expectancy-disconfirmation theory conceptualises perceived quality as the difference between the actual service performance and customers' expectations (Johns & Howard, 1998). In the context of restaurants, we understand that throughout the dining experience, diners make a subjective comparison of expected quality against actual or performed quality. In essence, perceived food quality can be viewed as a diner's subjective evaluation process that entails comparing expectations and the actual food performance. It is the judgment of the excellence or superiority of the restaurant's food attributes.

Perceived Food Quality Attributes

The importance of food quality in the restaurant industry has long been recognised; as such, previous literature has attempted to examine diverse food quality attributes. As early as the 1970s, Campbell-Smith (1970) suggested key attributes which can be used to measure the meal experience. To measure the food quality aspect, such attributes as taste, temperature and menu variety were suggested (Campbell-Smith, 1970). Ha and Jang (2010) agree that food quality is one of the critical dimensions of restaurant experience but they failed to single out attributes that make up food quality. According to Raajpoot (2002) food quality factors include food presentation, food portion size and food variety. Kincaid *et al*. (2010) also suggested that food presentation and food variety are the most significant attributes influencing customers' perceptions about the dining experiences. On another study, Andaleeb and Conway (2006) claimed that food freshness and temperature are the important food quality attributes. In the study to identify key quality attributes that distinguish highly satisfied diners from non-highly satisfied diners, Namkung and Jang (2008) asserted that appealing food presentation and taste of food are the most critical food quality attributes. Kim, Ng and Kim (2009) support the claim that food presentation and taste are important food quality attributes. Other attributes such as healthy options, freshness and temperature had a marginal to low significance on customer quality perceptions (Namkung & Jang, 2008). Contrary to these results, Kim, Ng and Kim (2009) showed that freshness is one of the important food quality aspects that most diners reflected on about their dining experience.

Jeong and Jang (2011) examined which restaurant experiences trigger customers to engage in positive eWOM, for the food quality dimension, taste of food, food presentation and food temperature were important antecedents of diners' eWOM communication. This study explored quality dimensions surfacing from positive eWOM only which may limit comprehensive understanding of the subject as distinct attributes may be found from negative eWOM (Jeong & Jang, 2011). Pantelidis (2010) analysed the content of online restaurant comments in an effort to identify factors that are most salient in a guest's evaluation of a restaurant. This research suggests that food is the most considered factor when reflecting on

dining experiences (Pantelidis, 2010). However, the study did not mention the specific food quality attributes that diners reflect on.

Table 1: Summary of Food Quality Attributes Evaluated by Restaurant Patrons

Food Quality Attributes	Justification
Food Presentation	Jeong and Jang (2011), Johns and Howard (1998), Kim, Ng and Kim (2009), Kincaid *et al.* (2010), Namkung and Jang (2008), Raajpoot (2002)
Portion Size	Johns and Howard (1998), Kim *et al.* (2009), Raajpoot (2002), Sulek and Hesley (2004)
Food Variety	Johns and Howard (1998), Kincaid *et al.* (2010), Liu & Jang (2009), Qi and Prybutok (2009), Raajpoot (2002)
Taste	Ha and Jang (2010), Hyun and Kang (2014), Johns and Howard (1998), Keith and Simmers (2011), Kim *et al.* (2009), Liu and Jang (2009), Namkung and Jang (2008), Sulek and Hensley (2004)
Healthy Options	Giritlioglu, Jones and Avcikurt (2014), Ha and Jang (2010), Hyun and Kang (2014), Namkung and Jang (2008)
Freshness	Andaleeb and Conway (2006), Jeong and Jang (2011), Johns and Howard (1998), Namkung and Jang (2008)
Temperature	Andaleeb and Conway (2006), Hyun and Kang (2014), Jeong and Jang (2011), Johns and Howard (1998), Keith and Simmers (2014), Kim Kim (2011), Liu and Jang (2009), Namkung and Jang (2008), Sulek and Hensley (2004)

In summation, the literature revealed that attributes tabulated in Table 1 below are used to evaluate food quality across different restaurant segments. The following section defines and elaborately discusses individual food quality attributes.

Food Presentation

Food presentation can be defined as the art of decorating or garnishing, carefully arranging and plating food so as to create aesthetic appeal. It is a key tangible cue of quality (Raajpoot, 2002) that often creates the first impressions of a meal. According to Bennion and Scheule (2009), food presentation is a combination of such attributes as colour, form, consistency, size and arrangement. The artistic presentation of food makes first impressions hence the popular notion that "before we eat with our mouths, we eat with our eyes". Bennion and Scheule (2009) contend that the appearance of food may produce a psychological prejudgment of its quality.

Portion Size

Portion size can be viewed as the amount of food served at a restaurant. In Raajpoot's (2002) study, portion size is termed as food serving. It can be expected that portion size

contributes substantially to building a favorable quality image (Raajpoot, 2002). Whatsoever, what appears to be missing in the literature is; what portion size is appropriate to diners across different restaurant segments?

Food Variety

Food variety usually refers to having different food items combined to expand the variety in the menu. Previous studies (Liu & Jang, 2009; Qi & Prybutok, 2009; Raajpoot, 2002) highlight the importance of variety of food and beverage as a tangible clue of quality. The notable thing is that many restaurant patrons are interested in restaurants that offer considerable variety as this broadens dining pleasures (Sulek & Hensley, 2004).

Taste

Taste is another key attribute of food quality (Ha & Jang, 2010; Hulek & Hensley, 2004; Hyun & Kang, 2014; Keith & Simmers, 2011; Kim *et al*., 2009; Liu & Jang, 2009). A good meal requires that a variety of flavors from delicate to intense be included to excite the palate (McWilliams, 2009). A meal that combines similar flavors or lack of flavor highlights loses interest due to a lack of variety of flavors (McWilliams, 2009). It is important to bear in mind that a variety of compatible flavors lead to an exciting dining experience (McWilliams, 2009).

Healthy Options

A number of studies (Hyun & Kang, 2014; Namkung & Jang, 2008) show that food quality may be evaluated on the basis of whether healthy options are offered. Healthy options refer to offering menu items that are considered nutritious and healthy (Namkung & Jang, 2008). Patrons with different physiological problems and health agendas may expect a restaurant to offer nutritious meals with carefully considered caloric content, organic foods as well as alternative menu items that respond to individuals' dietary requirements (Giritlioglu *et al.,* 2014). There is no consensus on the relative importance of the element of healthy options as a food quality cue. A study conducted by Namkung and Jang (2008) shows that the availability of healthy options was not considered as highly important. However, a study carried out by Giritlioglu *et al.* (2014) revealed that offering healthy options was one of the most important dimensions. This difference may be due to the difference in the type and setting of restaurants used for these studies.

Freshness

The term freshness suggests that the food has been recently prepared, it is in its fresh state and free from any form of spoilage (Namkung & Jang, 2008). The literature indicates that freshness of food is an important intrinsic quality cue of food (Namkung & Jang, 2007). Depending on the specific food item, various determinants such as crispiness, juiciness, flavor and aroma may be used to evaluate the freshness of food from the diner's perspective (Namkung & Jang, 2008). Food procurement, storage, production and service as practiced by restaurant operators have an influence on the freshness of food. For example, a restaurant operation that employs the 'cook to order' method is more likely to offer food that is fresher.

Food Temperature

The literature shows that restaurant patrons may evaluate food quality on the basis of whether food was served at the appropriate temperature (Andaleeb & Conway, 2006; Hyun &Kang, 2014; Jeong & Jang, 2011; Keith & Simmers, 2014; Kim *et al*., 2011; Liu & Jang, 2009; Namkung & Jang, 2008; Sulek & Hensley, 2004). Temperature refers to the degree of hotness or coldness at which food is served. Serving food at the appropriate temperature as well as temperature variations in a meal add interest in mouth feel (McWilliams, 2009). To achieve that maximum effect of temperature that foods can provide, hot items should be served on hot plates and cold one on chilled dishes (McWilliams, 2009). Additionally, temperature affects the intensity of the primary tastes thus contributing to flavor (Bennion & Scheule, 2009). Temperature may thus influence the diner's perception of flavor.

Food Quality in the Context of Michelin Starred Restaurants

The restaurant industry has a broad range of restaurants which include Michelin starred restaurants segment. These are high end fine dining establishments with a mark of distinction awarded by the Michelin travel guides in recognition of the high quality of cooking (Edelheim *et al*. 2011; Lane, 2010; Ottenbacher & Harrington, 2007). Research indicates that food quality is an important stimuli in luxury restaurants such as Michelin starred restautants, which influence diners' emotions and in turn affect their brand loyalty (Lim, Machado, Iglesias, Peng, & Chen, 2015). Despite the importance attached to food quality in Michelin starred restaurants, there is limited empirical research on what constitutes food quality in this context.

In the context of Michelin travel guides, the quality of food in Michelin starred restaurants is evaluated on the basis of the quality of cooking, innovation and mastering flavors (Ottenbacher & Harrington, 2007). The reviews made by Birmingham Post (2013) revealed that taste, texture, presentation, degree of doneness, food and wine pairings, food combinations and portion size are used to evaluate food quality in Michelin starred restaurants. To evaluate the meal experience of Michelin starred restaurants, the Birmingham Food Critic Richard McComb (2014) also relied on food quality attributes including flavor, presentation, food combinations, wine selection, food and wine pairings.

The information gathered from reviews by independent newspapers and food critics is valuable, but it is not validated and it is based on subjective comments of a very few individuals. Further to that, the above cited articles only offer insight about dining experiences from professional's perspectives not customers' perspectives. Based on this, the need emerged to investigate this under-researched area.

Electronic Word of Mouth

Word of mouth has always been viewed as the most influential source of information to consumers (Jalilvand, Esfahani & Samiei, 2011). With the advancement of technology, emerged online platforms in which consumers share information about products and services hence electronic word of mouth (Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan, 2008). eWOM can be defined as the informal practice of posting positive or negative messages on internet based media by potential, actual or former consumers about the usage or features of a product, service or brand (Cheung, Lee & Rabjohn, 2008; Jeong &, Jang, 2011; Litvin *et al.,* 2008). For this study and in the context of restaurants, eWOM is conceptualised as the informal communication between diners about their meal experience on internet based media.

It is perhaps vital to discuss the relative importance of eWOM so that restaurateurs can appreciate the role played by eWOM in the current marketplace. The literature clearly shows

that eWOM has an interpersonal influence on consumer buying behaviour (Amaral *et al*., 2014). Black and Kelley (2009) contend that consumers primarily rely on online reviews when making purchasing decisions. In line with this, Harrington *et al*. (2013) examined the importance rankings of sources of information used by consumers making Michelin restaurant selections in Germany and found that word-of-mouth information sources are viewed as key decision making tools for high end restaurant selection. eWOM especially plays an important role in the restaurant industry since goods offered are experience goods which are intangible; they can only be evaluated once consumed (Litvin *et al*., 2008; Murray, 1991, cited in Zhang, Law & Li, 2010). Consumers therefore tend to heavily rely on other consumers' recommendations to judge the hospitality products so as to reduce their level of perceived risk and uncertainty (Litvin *et al*., 2008). Additionally, making a decision about which restaurant to dine at may be viewed as high risk; there is an emotional risk associated with the purchase of restaurant products and services, as well as the financial risk therefore this propels consumers to seek information from external sources of information including eWOM (Jeong & Jang, 2011; Litvin *et al*., 2008).

eWOM can be viewed as an important marketing strategy in the restaurant industry. The strategic use of eWOM may provide important competitive advantage (Litvin *et al*., 2008). Litvin *et al*. (2004) cited in Litvin *et al*, (2008) revealed that tourists' restaurant selections are predominantly based on eWOM recommendations therefore this shows the potential usefulness of eWOM in marketing restaurants at a low cost to the restaurant (Dipietro *et al*., 2012). Research (Barreda & Bilgihan, 2013; Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009) has also made efforts to establish the impact of eWOM on brand image; the general consensus is that eWOM has both positive and negative impacts on the brand image. Positive eWOM is associated with creation of favorable brand image which result in customer brand value perceptions and purchasing intentions (Barreda & Bilgihan, 2013; Jeong & Jang, 2011; Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009). This can eventually result in increased sales and reduction in marketing expenditure (Jeong & Jang, 2011; Zhang *et al*., 2010). Even though the benefits of positive eWOM are clear, it can however increase consumer expectations which may be much more difficult to meet hence resulting in customer dissatisfaction (Litvin *et al*, 2008). This further indicates the importance of restaurateurs' engagement on eWOM communications, if they do not know what diners communicate about they will not know their expectations which will challenge meeting or even exceeding diners' expectations. Negative online reviews are commonly linked with potential damage to the brand image. However, Vermeulen and Seegers (2009) argue that both positive and negative online reviews increase brand awareness. Zhang *et al*. (2010) also studied the impact of eWOM on the online popularity of restaurants and found that consumer generated ratings and restaurant quality reviews are positively associated to the online popularity of restaurants.

eWOM provides feedback that can possibly help managers better understand customers' needs as well as common elements that crop from comments hence develop strategies accordingly (Barreda & Bilgihan, 2013). Monitoring online consumer comments can help managers enhance brand image through responding to negative reviews (Barreda & Bilgihan, 2013; Levy, Duan & Boo, 2013). This clearly indicates that eWOM can be a good strategy to manage service recovery and customer retention.

TripAdvisor

TripAdvisor is a travel review site about hotels, restaurants and attractions around the world, which enables actual and potential consumers to review products and services as well as to read reviews posted by users (Litvin *et al*., 2008). It is considered to be the largest and most popular review website for hospitality (Ekiz, Khoo-Lattimore & Memarzadeh, 2012). The

analysis of consumer reviews from different review sites and other online consumer communication platforms has gained popularity in hospitality and tourism research. Several scholars including Barreda and Bilgihan (2013), Chatibura and Siya (2018), Ekiz *et al.* (2012), Lee and Hu (2005), Lee *at al.* (2016), Levy *et al.* (2013), Pantelidis (2010) and Park *et al.* (2016) have content analysed online comments. This indicates the growth in the importance of review sites.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach with a quantitative strand was applied in this research using a content analysis technique on 120 reviews posted to TripAdvisor regarding the meal experience at all Michelin starred restaurants at Birmingham, UK. This section discusses the sampling procedure, data collection approach and data analysis applied in this study. The methodological approach followed is illustrated on Figure 2

Figure 2: The methodological approach followed for the study
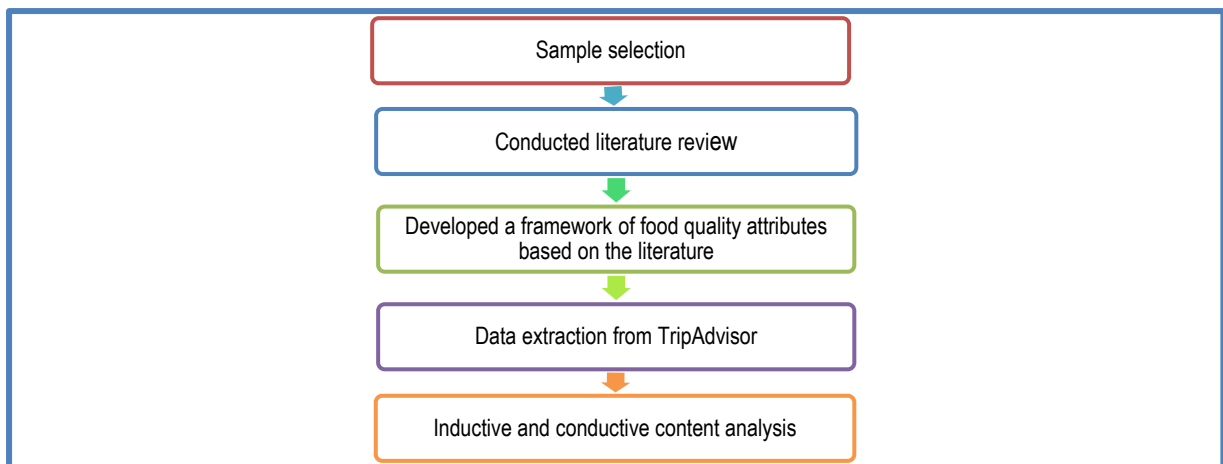
Sampling

From the early 1980s onwards, a Michelin-starred restaurant sector gained critical mass in UK (Lane, 2015). UK has thus been sampled based on its incredible growth in this area. Birmingham, a major city in the West Midlands, England and the second-largest city in England, was chosen for this study for being UK's foodiest city and the finest dining destination (Lindsey, 2012). Birmingham has four Michelin-starred restaurants - more than any other English city apart from London (Lumb, 2015). A homogenous sample of all Michelin starred restaurants in Birmingham was included for this study. These restaurants share the same attribute – their cooking has been recognised by Michelin inspectors and awarded one Michelin star (Michelin, 2014). A total of all 120 reviews posted between May and October 2014 were content analysed. This timeframe was the most recent during the time of data collection. Additionally, the focus was specifically on May to October as these represented the normal period outside holidays and peak periods in UK.

Data Collection Procedure

Reviews were retrieved from TripAdvisor, because 'it is the largest User Generated Content (UGC) website in terms of posted reviews and number of users, and it is the most predominant site used by researchers in the hospitality area', (Dinçer & Alrawadieh, 2017). As

a screening process, only reviews that rated the experience on all dimensions, and further commented on food quality were considered for the purpose of the study. Both negative and positive reviews were considered in order to give a balanced discussion of the phenomenon investigated. To prepare data for analysis, the reviews were copied and pasted from the TripAdvisor website to Word document for analysis.

4.3 Data Analysis

This study adopted a hybrid approach of inductive (thematic) and conductive content analysis approaches. The same approach has been applied by similar studies in the hospitality area, for example, Dinçer and Alrawadieh (2017) applied this approach to analyse negative online reviews on luxury hotels in Jordan. An in-depth review of the literature was conducted to identify food quality attributes mentioned by diners when evaluating their meal experiences from which a priori coding framework was developed. After familirisation with themes from the literature, data (online reviews) were analysed, additional codes identified were added and this resulted in the coding framework annexed on Appendix 1. Themes were developed and a word count of the themes was performed. Two coders (the Principal Investigator - PI and Research Assistant - RA) followed the data analysis process illustrated in Figure 3 to analyse the data. Consistent with the data analysis approach followed by Dinçer and Alrawadieh (2017), coding was done independently by the PI and RA and inferences were discussed to reach a consensus on themes. Areas of disagreements were examined several times until consensus was reached. The traditional (manual) content analysis approach was adopted as opposed to the application of qualitative data analysis softwares – QDAS. Coding data manually was chosen as qualitative data analysis soft-wares such as Atlas.ti, Nudist and others are criticized for ignoring the context and prevent understating of the hidden meaning (Dinçer & Alrawadieh, 2017).

**Figure 3: Data analysis process followed (Creswell, 2014:197)**
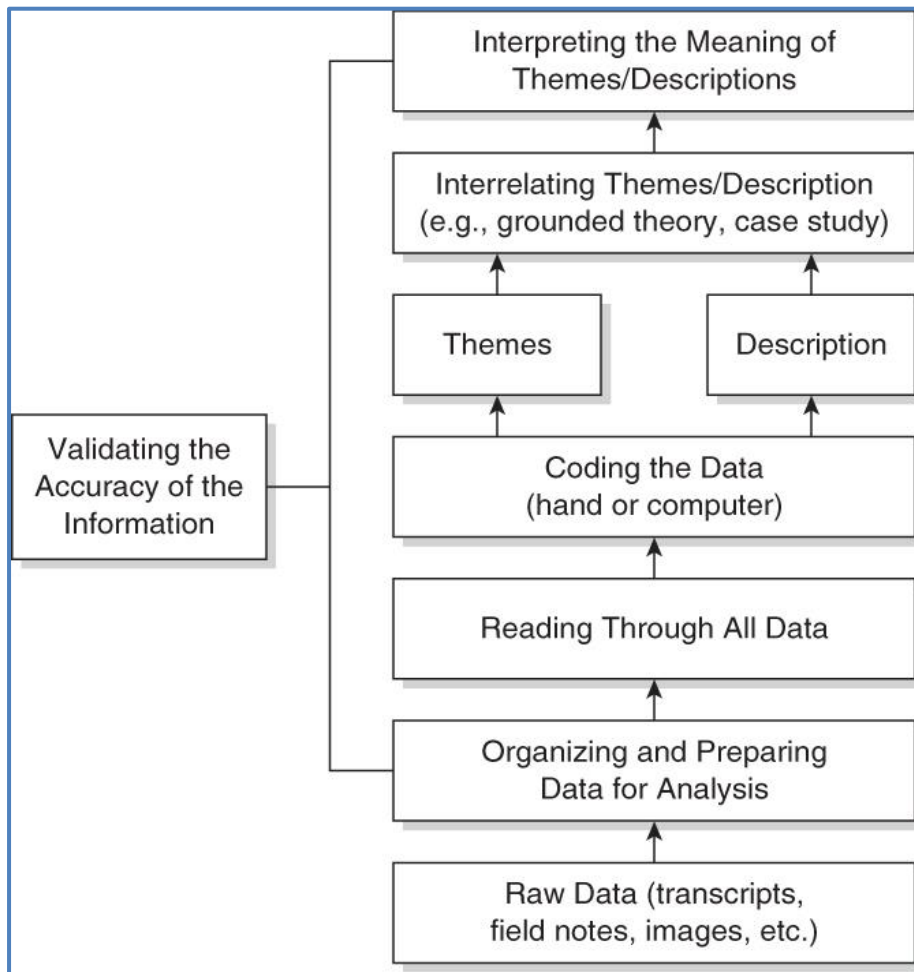
Reliability and Validity

To ensure the reliability and validity of the theme generation and word frequency count, an external researcher was engaged to carefully examine themes extracted. The coders and the external researcher discussed emergent themes and agreed on a final index (Dinçer & Alrawadieh, 2017).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study identified the most salient food quality attributes of diners' considerations in online restaurants reviews. As illustrated in Figure 4, the study revealed that majority (86 %) of reviews posted on TripAdvisor about the meal experience at Michelin starred restaurants were positive, 10 % had a neutral connotation and only 4 % were negative.

Figure 4: Nature of Food Quality Comments on TripAdvisor
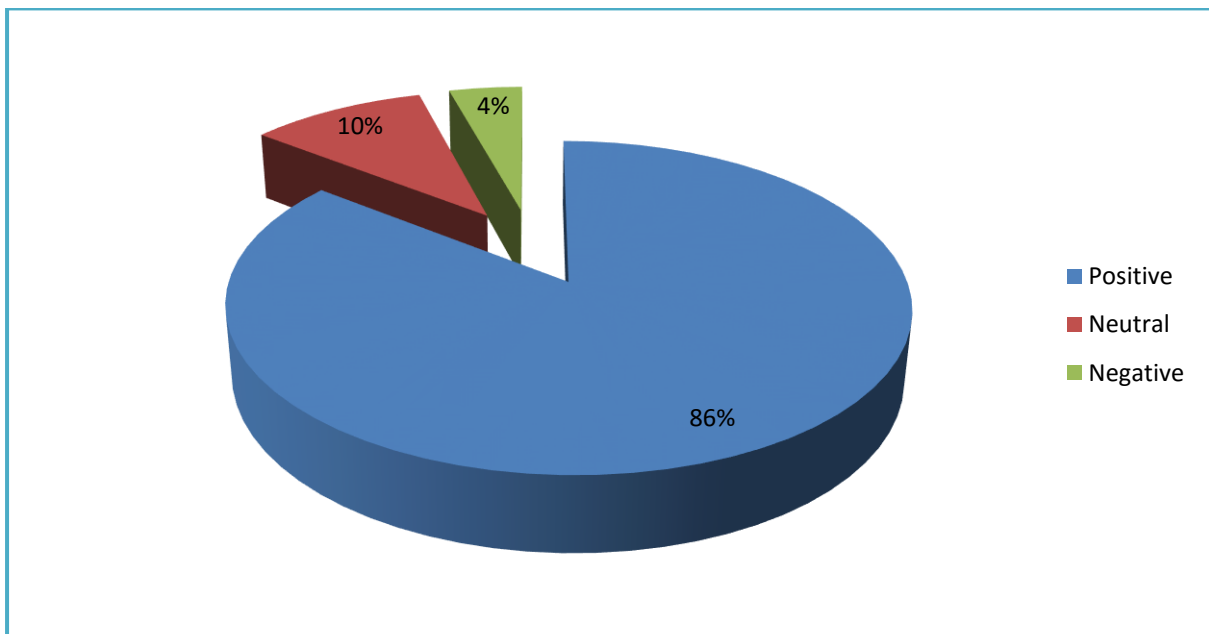
As shown on Table II below the study further identified specific food quality attributes mentioned by diners when reviewing their meal experiences.

Table 2: Food Quality Attributes Mentioned when Evaluating Meal Experiences

Rank	Theme	Frequency	% of 120
1	Taste	60	50
2	Food presentation	35	29.2
3	Innovativeness of menu items	28	23.3
4	Beverage selection	22	18.3
5	Food and wine pairing	20	16.7
6	Portion size	20	16.7
7	Food variety	19	15.8
8	Degree of doneness	16	13.3
9	Complimentary food combinations	14	11.7

Taste

The results of this study revealed that the taste of food was the mostly mentioned food quality attribute in TripAdvisor commentary with 50 % of the sample commenting on food taste. This aligns with the findings of Namkung and Jang (2008) who showed that taste is amongst the most critical food quality attributes. Diners specifically commented on spice combinations, intensity of flavours and how well the flavours complemented each other. Below are examples of comments made regarding the taste of food:

'The first course, the L & M's favourite, was truly delicious, gently spiced, rainbow trout with a hit of smoke that stayed politely in the background with the tarragon and the sharp gherkin that provided contrast. The light lemony flavour in the next set off the glorious asparagus, and the pearl barley added a gentle chewy texture. The lamb sweetbread was nice but I didn't need it. The duck with coriander spiced lentils included perfectly cooked breast, giving flavours with minuscule differences that gave a freshness each mouthful. The spice on the duck sat well with the lentils and the very good mushrooms were much enjoyed by the L & M who had them with his excellent chicken with slivers of halibut. For me the star was the raspberries with lemon verbena. Raspberries, raspberry meringue and sorbet gave sharp, sweet and sherbet tastes that was softened with a perfect amount of rich cream'. [R18]

Other reviewers were not satisfied with the taste of food, specifically failure to provide food with complementing flavours. This is indicated in the negative comment below:

'The main course of bream was cooked well enough but the orange flavour of the buckwheat did not really harmonize with the fish, the sea vegetables were bland and the brown shrimps seemed irrelevant'. [R101]

Food presentation

Reviews related to food presentation constituted 29.2 % of the total number of reviews analysed. Other studies in the hospitality field have indicated the importance of food presentation to diners. Raajpoot's (2002) TANGSERV model emphasised that diners consider food presentation as an important tangible quality cue. In agreement to these findings, Namkung and Jang (2008) also showed that food presentation is a critical element that diners consider in their evaluation of restaurant quality. Diners of the sampled Michelin starred restaurants positively reflected on the beautiful presentation of food. Some diners commented as follows:

'Every dish was presented beautifully and the ingredients and flavours were explained to us each time a course was served'. [R29]

"Cosmetically, all dishes looked like little works of art". [R11]

"The food is indeed exquisitely presented". [R72]

Innovativeness of menu items

From the analysis in Table 2, innovativeness of menu items represents a critical aspect of the food quality attributes explored, accounting for 23.3 % of the total evaluation of food quality. Consistent to this, Harrington *et al.* (2012) tested key drivers of restaurant experiences leading to customer satisfaction and found that some diners considered innovativeness of menu items. According to Johnson *et al.* (2005) innovativeness of food items is important in Michelin starred restaurants, as chefs themselves see the need to create innovative culinary combinations in order to retain Michelin stars. Reviewers in this study positively commented on innovativeness of food served at the studied Michelin starred restaurants. Examples of their commentary as follows:

'Each course served was absolutely stunning in both taste and presentation and we were amazed by how innovative each creation was and how well it all worked with each serving of Jacquart champagne that accompanied it. The amuse bouche was inventive and delightful and left us feeling excited about what was to come next'. [R9]

'One of the desserts we had was a crème brulee style dessert served in an egg shell presented in an Easter basket – very inventive'. [R22]

Beverage selection

The results also indicated that 18.3 % of Michelin starred restaurant patrons commented on the beverage selection in the menu, more especially wines. The finding is similar with Pantelidis's (2010) findings for London, UK based restaurants. Charters and Pettigrew (2005) further support that diners associate drinking wine with food consumption, whereas a weaker association appears between food and beer. This may explain why in the current study wines were frequently mentioned than any other drinks. The implication is that wines are an important part of a dining experience, ensuring their variety and availability on the menu can be a good selling point for Michelin starred restaurants. Some of the comments on the beverage selection offered by Michelin starred restaurants are as follows:

'The wine list is not massive but is big enough for most people and contains some very nice wines. We had a first rate Gewurtztramminer, very good Chablis Premier Cru and a fine St Emilion'. [R83]

'The wine selection offers a glass of wine with each course and this further added to the experience'. [R62]

The diners commented on how expansive the beverage menu was, the variety and quality of beverages offered, implying that beverage selection is a critical element that enhances the overall meal experience.

Food and wine pairing

The findings of this study further showed that diners evaluated food-wine pairings (16.7 % of the sample). Wines that complement each of the courses served represents an important

aspect in Michelin starred restaurant dining. Diners commented positively about the food and wine pairings as indicated in the following extracts of reviews:

'The sommelier was extremely knowledgeable and the wines were an amazing compliment to the meal'. [R56]

'9 courses of interesting flavours and textures, with perfectly matched wines'. [R98]

'We had the matching wines which had been well chosen to highlight the flavours of the dishes'. [R75]

The implication for restaurateurs is that offering complimentary food and wine pairings can satisfy diners hence can be used as a selling point which can help them marginalize profits since wines generally increase sales (Wansink *et al.* 2006).

Food portion size

The findings revealed that 16.7 % of the diners who commented on TripAdvisor mentioned the portion sizes. Food portion size is commonly viewed as an important element of quality perception (Raajpoot, 2002). The results revealed different propositions – some diners considered the portion sizes served in Michelin starred restaurants as too small, some as an appropriate and satisfying portion size. This may be explained by different factors such as the number of courses in the menu the diner chose, eating habits as well as individual preferences. Below is a set of commentary on portion sizes:

'Each serving was perfectly sized and by the end of the evening we were all pleasantly satisfied after our meal'. [R49]

'The 3rd course was pearl barley with 4 pieces of carrot and 4 pieces of cabbage. My partner had had trout, chicken, lamb and halibut by this point. I asked for more bread as I was still hungry and had finished eating before my partner had even finished one piece of chicken'. [R68]

Food variety

The findings of the study showed that 15.8 % of the diners of Michelin starred restaurants consider food variety when evaluating their meal experiences on TripAdvisor. Consistent with this finding, numerous empirical studies (Kincaid *et al.*, 2010; Liu & Jang, 2009; Namkung &Jang, 2007; Qin & Prybutok, 2009; Raajpoot, 2002) posit that providing variety of food in the restaurant industry is an important food quality attribute. A restaurant that offers a variety of menu items stands a good chance of satisfying diners and satisfied diners are likely to spread positive eWOM (Qin & Prybutok, 2009). Below are extracts of reviews on food variety:

'The restaurant, for dinner, offers two tasting menus – we opted for the 5 course but finished up having about 8. The meal starts with three different amuse bouches – all small but beautifully formed. A beetroot meringue and goat's cheese mousse woke up the palate; this was followed by a beautiful tuna tartare and then by a lollipop of roast

chicken which was a real delight. There were two types of sour dough bread on offer – both warm. The first main course was a smoked rainbow trout – lovely but the star of the plate was the tarragon which merged with the main flavours to wonderful effect. A second course of asparagus and lamb sweetbread provided a good contrast. The third – and most substantial course - was a chicken dish accompanied by smoked halibut. The chicken was succulent and flavoursome. Prior to the desserts we took a cheeseboard. This comprised of 6 different cheeses and was a very pleasing selection. The first dessert was raspberries with lemon and almonds – excellent – and was followed by a delicious dark chocolate course'. [R_{27}]

'The menu both vegetarian and non-vegetarian flowed extremely well with great attention to detail, presentation and most of all an excellent blend of flavours. The vegetarian options surpassed those of any Michelin starred restaurant we have been too'. [R_{109}]

Degree of doneness

Moreover, the results of this study revealed that 13.3 % of the diners commented on the degree of doneness of food when evaluating their meal experience on TripAdvisor. Qin and Prybutok (2009) assert that how well cooked food is, is an essential component of food quality. Both positive and negative comments were observed on the reviews analysed, as indicated on the comments below:

"A pork dish was beautifully cooked and nicely pink". [R_{54}]

"Unfortunately part of fish was raw, although others in our party had perfectly cooked fish". [R_2]

'The asparagus was cooked to perfection, and with the addition of tiny grapefruit segments which cut through the rich egg yolk the combination was sublime'. [R_{23}]

Complimentary food combinations

The results further suggest that diners judge the extent at which food items served complement each other. 11.7 % of the reviewers commented on complimentary food combinations. Positive comments were observed regarding how food complimented each other (examples shown below). Specifically, diners evaluated how food items complemented each other in the same course, and how different courses complemented each other across the meal experience.

'We started with the native Scottish lobster served with asparagus, which was exquisite, tender and full of taste. The textures in this dish are superb together and it was a fantastic dish to start. Next we had line caught Poole monkfish served with ox cheek, sweet pickle and red onion. This combination provided some surprising flavours which was creative and all worked amazingly together. We then had Reg Johnson corn fed chicken served with truffle, wye valley smoked halibut and sorrel. This dish was presented beautifully and bursting with so many flavours which all complimented each other wonderfully. [R_{49}]

'Excellent balance between courses which "flowed" together and complimented each other'. [R₄₉]

Other food quality attributes including healthy options, freshness, temperature, texture, aroma, availability of menu items, and use of seasonal ingredients were mentioned to a less extent.

CONCLUSION

Research clearly shows that user generated content is increasingly gaining attention by consumers in the hospitality sector including restaurants (Bradley *et al.,* 2016). Given this, it is important for restaurateurs to understand content posted by diners in order to meet or exceed their expectations hence customer satisfaction. Since food quality is the core product offering of restaurants and the most considered dimension to Michelin starred restaurant patrons, efforts should be made to make sure that high quality food is delivered at all times. Food quality attributes discussed on TripAdvisor can make opinion seekers to have certain expectations about food quality. This research has analysed comments posted by Michelin starred restaurants' diners and found out that taste, food presentation, and innovativeness of menu items are most talked about food quality attributes on TripAdvisor. Therefore to meet or even exceed expectations of diners, Michelin starred restaurants should consistently provide meals of the standard that make diners comment positively about. Negative comments should be used as feedback to improve on areas negatively mentioned on the reviews.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Despite the valuable contributions of this study, it has some limitations. In this study, the aim was to analyse eWOM content of Michelin starred restaurants therefore the results cannot be generalised to other restaurant segments. It would be interesting for future research to replicate the present research objectives in other restaurant segments. The present study location is Birmingham (UK) therefore the results cannot be generalised to other geographical locations. Spielmann *et al*. (2012) show that customers' service perceptions differ with countries and cultural settings. Thus, future research can examine food experience attributes in other geographical locations. In addition, this study's focus was on TripAdvisor comments. Future studies may focus on other online review sites such as OpenTable and Yelp to establish if the same food quality attributes will be identified.

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APPENDIX 1: CODING FRAMEWORK

Codes	Food quality attributes
FQ1	Food presentation
FQ2	Portion size
FQ3	Food variety
FQ4	Taste
FQ5	Healthy options
FQ6	Freshness
FQ7	Temperature
FQ8	Texture
FQ9	Innovativeness of menu items
FQ10	Complimentary food combinations
FQ11	Degree of doneness
FQ12	Aroma
FQ13	Availability of menu items
FQ14	Use of seasonal ingredients
FQ15	Drinks selection
FQ16	Food and wine pairings