

Online Reviews Encourage Customers to Write Online Reviews

Subjects: Business

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The impact of online reviews on customer satisfaction, trust, and consumer intent to write a review decreases or dilutes over time. More specifically, the effect of online reviews in $T + 1$ diminishes as consumers experience a particular restaurant compared to when they initially encountered the review. The impacts of online reviews on satisfaction and trust gradually decrease over time. However, the relationship between online reviews and trust is only significant in $T + 1$. Additionally, the effect of trust on customer intent to write a review initially increases (T) and then, gradually drops over time ($T + 1$).

Keywords: online reviews ; satisfaction ; trust ; customer intent to write a review

1. Introduction

"Even with restaurants possibly being the easiest industry to acquire for, over 50% of guests still never write a review" ^[1].

This quote highlights a direction for research on how consumers accept online reviews and how they write and share their experiences. Despite the importance of online reviews, potential consumers are often hesitant to write their actual experiences. However, reviewers are also information providers for potential customers. For example, shoppers often revisit a particular website to check reviews as part of their product or service evaluation journey ^[2]. This activity is considered one of the influential expressions of customer engagement ^{[3][4]} and plays an important role in facilitating sustainable business. In terms of sustainability, after the COVID-19 pandemic, online reviews not only expanded the concept of social sharing but also promoted social culture and economic growth to young consumers. This effect was enormously observed on websites such as TripAdvisor, Yelp, and Instagram.

Research demonstrates that customer perceptions change over time ^[5]. Since online reviews in the hospitality industry are critical for reducing uncertainty ^{[6][7][8]}, it remains unclear how the evolution of online reviews affects its outcomes and what dynamics of change are significant. Thus, a complete understanding of the dynamic nature of constructs is essential ^{[9][10]}.

Hu et al.'s study ^[11] using transaction cost economics and uncertainty reduction theories presents a possible example where the temporal effect of online reviews has been critical. They demonstrated that consumers vary in their acceptance of e-WOM (or online reviews) because the evaluation of online reviews evolves over time. Although online reviews play an important role in triggering customer engagement, to the best of our knowledge, there have been relatively few studies on temporal effects, particularly in the hospitality sector. This lack of temporal dynamics suggests a requirement for new knowledge to enhance the sustainability of the hospitality literature.

2. Online Reviews Encourage Customers to Write Online Reviews

After the COVID-19 pandemic, Koreans are significantly interested in online reviews of restaurant choices. The most important reason for the increase in online reviews is the sharp decrease in the number of customers visiting restaurants compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, the increase in non-face-to-face ordering has been perceived to protect customer safety. Thus, online reviews from users who have used the restaurant help to resolve uncertainty and understand restaurant selection attributes. Moreover, restaurants' sales have been gradually increasing since the summer of 2021 ^[12]. In addition, a growing number of young Koreans are visiting restaurants and sharing their experiences through Instagram or TripAdvisor ^[13]. In other words, online reviews are closely related to Korean restaurant consumption experiences.

The consumption-system approach that addresses the rational and emotional changes in consumer behavior suggests that intention and its antecedents are dynamic. Fanselow ^[14] demonstrated that emotion is a function of motivating behavior. In particular, a stimulus to achieve an emotional state can facilitate behavioral intentions, suggesting the emotion–behavior linkage ^{[14][15]}. Furthermore, information processing can capture a consumer's emotional state ^[16]. For instance, if consumers search for e-WOM, this information processing on online reviews should influence their affective evaluation, and then, behavioral intentions. Regarding the latter, online reviews of a particular object follow a person's psychological beliefs about the behavior ^[17].

Regarding the cognition–affection–behavior link, **Figure 1** describes the mechanism from an evolutionary perspective. The affect theory demonstrates that when a consumer is satisfied (or dissatisfied) with an information cue, a positive (or negative) emotion will be generated ^[18]. The cycle of satisfaction highlights that subsequent information perception, emotional state, and behavioral intention depend on each initial level, indicating that consumers' subsequent behaviors should be adjusted by their prior evaluations ^[19]. Therefore, online review, satisfaction, trust, and the intention to write a review at time $T + 1$ are revised by the evaluation of each construct at time T . This logic is supported by the experience-based performance in the subsequent consumption phase ^[20].

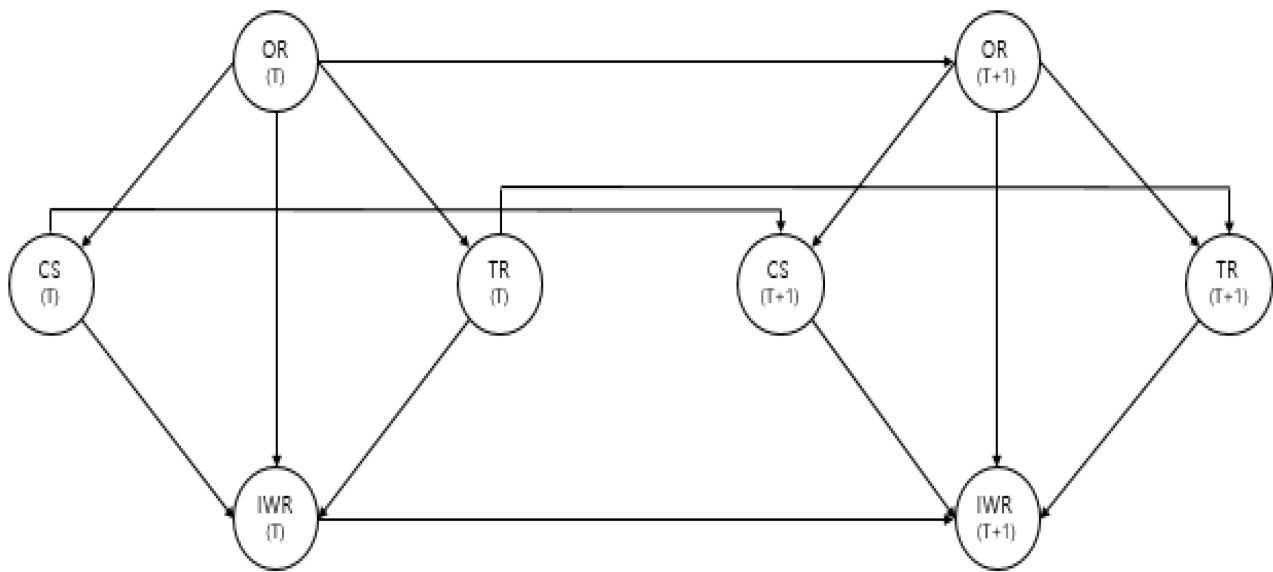


Figure 1. Conceptual model. Note: OR: online reviews; CS: customer satisfaction with the restaurant; TR: trust with the restaurant; IWR: consumer intent to write a review.

The proposed model (T and $T + 1$) consists of two phases of a consumption-system approach, namely, from online review processing to subsequent behavioral formation that draws on theoretical justifications. In particular, this model highlights the importance of construct evolution, indicating that marketing constructs improve, decrease, or remain unchanged ^[10]. Thus, changes in online reviews must eventually be translated into satisfaction, trust, and intentions.

2.1. Online Reviews

Customers are likely to use online reviewers to make their decisions about restaurant selection ^[21]. Online reviews are typically defined as an evaluation of a specific object made by a person with real experience ^[22]. This definition emphasizes the importance of sharing people's experiences with other customers or relevant people, resulting in an improvement in sales and attitudinal change ^[23]. As the hospitality sector is primarily intangible, customers seek online reviews from well-known experienced sources (e.g., Yelp.com, Tripadvisor.com, Catchtable.com, etc.) to reduce uncertainty and risk. Once customers have visited a particular restaurant, online reviews often play an important role in enhancing restaurant satisfaction and leading to initial trust ^[24].

Theoretically, a consumption system in consumer behavior emphasizes the subsequent evaluation of a particular service that is consumed during multiple consumption periods ^[20]. For example, if consumers visit a particular restaurant based on online reviews and their experiences with the restaurant do not match online reviews at time T , dissatisfaction or distrust of online reviews will appear at time $T + 1$, resulting in them no longer visiting the restaurant. This behavior is consistent with the goal-driven behavior theory ^[25] because consumers search for online reviews to achieve positive goals, which in turn motivate certain behaviors. In contrast, if the consumption experience of a particular restaurant is positive, the outcomes of online reviews will positively evolve over time. Similarly, online reviews are consistent with their experiences (T), and then, they should influence the perception of existing reviews in subsequent restaurant visits ($T + 1$),

indicating that there is a carryover effect. Therefore, this study is critical for a complete understanding of behavioral dynamics during subsequent restaurant revisits.

2.2. Satisfaction with the Restaurant

Since satisfied customers are likely to choose the same brand of service, the concept of customer satisfaction is popular in service literature [26] because satisfaction is likely to enhance a consumer's repeated behavioral intentions [19]. In particular, when researchers conceptualize customer satisfaction, there are two common formulations of satisfaction, namely, transaction and cumulative satisfaction. The former focuses on the evaluation of a single transaction at a particular service, whereas the latter focuses on multiple subjective comparison standards that reflect a subsequent evaluative judgment of the service purchase occasion [27]. This study accepts a cumulative perspective of satisfaction because behavioral researchers have especially highlighted the mediating role of satisfaction between its antecedents and outcomes. It is consistent with the appraisal–emotional response–coping framework [28]. This framework suggests that the initial evaluation of online reviews leads to an emotional response, resulting in the triggering of behavioral intention.

2.3. Trust toward a Restaurant

Trust is important for the longitudinal relationship between customers and service providers [28][29]. In the hospitality sector, trust is quite important because consumers are likely to avoid uncertainty and risks if they are not familiar with a particular restaurant, resulting in hesitation about further actions [30]. Trust serves as the fundamental cornerstone of the initial relationship between the two parties and then bridges the relationship between its antecedents and outcomes [31][32].

From a customer–brand relationship perspective, trust is defined as the willingness of the average consumer to rely on the ability of a particular restaurant (or brand) to perform its stated function [33]. Although this definition mainly focuses on the cognitive perspective, the majority of researchers do not agree with the definition of trust [34][35]. To overcome this issue, researchers have adopted the expectancy-disconfirmation theory to define trust as follows: “an attitude of confident expectation in a particular situation of risk that one's vulnerabilities will not be exploited” [36] (p. 860). Additionally, trust should generate a positive feeling of trust formation through the service exchange process between customers and service providers [37]. The definition of trust should be related to the rational and affective aspects of trust [38].

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