What Motivates Guests to Leave Reviews in Restaurants? E-WOM in Evaluating Fine-Dining and Cheap-Eats Restaurants in Dubrovnik

Pergjoni, Anita

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What Motivates Guests to Leave Reviews in Restaurants?

E-WOM in Evaluating Fine-Dining and Cheap-Eats Restaurants in Dubrovnik

RIT Croatia

Student: Anita Pergjoni

Professor: Zrinka Friganović Sain

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to investigate what are primary reasons to motivate guests to leave on-line comments. The first part of the research tries to define how much impact traditional word of mouth and electronic word of mouth have on guests in hospitality industry according to the previous research and literature. The paper then focuses on explaining positive and negative sides of leaving comments and it seeks to answer the question: What motivates guests to leave a comment about their overall experiences? The second section of the paper defines what methods and materials were used to make this descriptive type of research and what is the possible answer to the research question according to the author's interpretation. It is author's desire that the results from research might give readers a better insight into what are the factors that influence a guest to leave a comment and how this type of marketing tool works in restaurant industry.

Key words: WOM, e-WOM in restaurant industry, fine dining restaurants, cheap eats, TripAdvisor, positive and negative reviews,

Introduction

Differences between traditional WOM and e-WOM

Word of mouth is one of the oldest and the easiest ways of advertising according to Dellarocas (2003) that includes sharing information and opinions between two or more consumers about food, products, brand, service and etc. It can be separated in two parts; traditional word of mouth and electronic word of mouth. Although E-WoM was originated from traditional word of mouth they still are considered to be very distinct. Unlike traditional word of mouth, where it can be only person to person in real-time communication, E-WoM can be found in a variety of ways such as emails, messages, blogs, websites, social networks, online reviews and etc.

According to Cheung and Thadani (2012) in Huete-Alcocer (2017) word of mouth is more reliable than electronic word of mouth and, as Lee and Youn (2009) in Huete-Alcocer (2017), stated "It is thus considered one of the most influential sources of information about products and services" because of face to face communication. This leads to credibility of information which is very important since it can highly influence the opinion of consumers. In traditional word of mouth, the person who receives information knows the person who is giving it and this fact creates positive influence on credibility. In electronic word of mouth there is anonymity between a person who receives and a person who gives information, which can potentially create negative influence on credibility because of the lack of personal knowledge about the person giving the information.

Another advantage of electronic word of mouth is that this way has become more popular and it is much faster than traditional word of mouth. E-WoM shares information through social media where people spend lot of time as opposed to traditional word of mouth where messages are spread slowly. When it comes to privacy in traditional word of mouth, information that someone receives

are kept private and personal, and they happen in real time unlike electronic word of mouth where information are not private. This type of information shared on-line can be seen by anyone at any time. There is also a possibility that the information could be false. It is evident also that it is much easier to have access to electronic word of mouth than it is to traditional word of mouth, because information is written where many potential consumers can see it and as the author said "they persist over time" (Huete-Alcocer, 2017). While many customers nowadays rely a lot on online reviews, other users leave reviews only for the particular product or service. Social media and other blogs that people leave comments on are giving owners big opportunities for spreading their brand in an easier way and for free. E-WOM is triggered most by motivations of customers, and the experience they had with the certain product or service (X. Yang, 2013).

Positive and negative reviews

Reviews that customers and/or guests leave can be both: positive and negative. If consumers are satisfied with the product and service they were offered, they will almost assuredly leave a positive comment or will spread positive word of mouth, but, it is also true that even if they are not, they might be leaving negative comments or spread negative word of mouth, which, in consequence, is considered to be bad for a reputation of the restaurant in question.

It needs to be stated that negative word of mouth is not as simple as it might be perceived on the first look. According to one author, there are two outputs when people say negative comments about a restaurant. Sometimes guests want to give an example of "taking revenge on a service provider" and "warning other persons for having a similar negative experience" (Wetzer, Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2007). The same research also states that customers or guests will rather

leave a negative comment and express dissatisfaction than they will write how satisfied they were and leave a positive comment. On the other side, there are also different ways of trying to get positive comments from the costumers. According to Al Saadi and Al Haider, there are many effective ways of spreading traditional word of mouth and electronic word of mouth such as: family, friends' blogs, social media (Instagram, Facebook), magazines, and websites. (Al Saadi and Al Haider, 2014).

Impacts of WOM and e-WOM on customers' decision making process

It is surprising how big an impact WOM or e-WOM can have when it comes to decision making process when buying something, visiting restaurant for the first time and/or choosing to go somewhere. Companies or, in this case, most specifically restaurants, in this way don't keep only the old and loyal customers, but can also attract new ones. According to previous research, consumer reviews are more likely to be more convincing, trustworthy and user oriented rather than when seller makes advertisement of his own product or service. (Bickart and Schindler, 2001 in Chen and Xie, 2008). Customers or consumers speak a lot when it comes to choosing restaurant to eat, but things that they focus most on are food and drink quality, service quality, cleanliness, value for money and atmosphere. (Cousins et al, 2002 in Longart, 2010).

What Motivates Guests to Leave a Comment about an Overall Experience?

According to Jalilvand, Salimipour, Elyasi & Mohammedi (2017) there are several factors that influence guests to leave any kind of comments which are "food quality, personal interaction quality, and physical environment quality." Apart from these factors, there are others that also

motivate guests to leave comments such as: "extreme satisfaction and dissatisfaction, commitment to the firm, length of the relationship with the firm, novelty of the product." (Jalilvand, Esfahani, Samiei, 2011). Nevertheless, it seems clear that the factors that most motivate them to leave a comment, are service quality, cleanliness, atmosphere, location, and if they got what they paid for (Lei, Law, 2015).

When it comes to food quality, it is clear that especially in the restaurant industry guests want to experience this. In other words, they mostly want to experience something new, unique and healthy, and not something that they can find on every other restaurant's menu. The food that is offered to them should come in appropriate portions, should be served with the right temperature, and presented in an outstanding way. Guests want to get the value for the money that they have paid for that meal, and they will not mind paying more if the taste and the food quality meets their expectations.

On the other hand, there also should be a professional and friendly relationship between the guests and the employees, so guests will keep coming and become loyal guests, which is in the main interest of the restaurant. (Harker and Egan, 2006 in Jalilvand, Salimipour, Elyasi & Mohammedi, 2017). The importance of good relationship quality is stated also in another research, because as Henning-Thurau, Gwinner, and Gremler (2002) and Han, Ryu (2012) said it is "combining satisfaction and trust into one." Physical environment quality is one of the "indicators of restaurant image", which means that restaurants should try to meet customers' needs and desires at some point, which will make them to return back and have the same experience or even spread a positive WOM or e-WOM. (Stevens et al., 1995 in Jalilvand, Salimipour, Elyasi & Mohammedi, 2017).

Another thing that is perceived as important in this matter is the atmosphere. Atmosphere and ambiance play an important role in the restaurant's evaluation, even if managers and owners do

not perceive this as that important and believe that guests notice these kind of things (noise, music, décor …) (Ladhari, Brun, Morales,2008). As the competition is really very big when it comes to this part of hospitality industry, restaurant industry, it becomes clear that restaurant owners should really try harder and give the best of themselves to try to satisfy their guests in order to create the WOW effect. According to previous research, guests nowadays are more complex than ever, and managers of the restaurants should really carefully choose their staff because many things depend on the quality of employees working there. The first thing that guests notice are staff's attitude and their knowledge of the product or service, because most guests will want a learning experience, and they would like to gain knowledge of the product or service. If the guests are satisfied this might potentially lead to their becoming loyal guests of the restaurant, thus spreading the positive WOM or e-WOM, and they will be ready to pay more because of their satisfaction and experience at the restaurant. (Ladhari, Brun, Morales, 2008).

E-WOM in hospitality

 E-WOM can be easily connected to hospitality and tourism management. Social networking has helped to improve a lot when it comes to promoting marketing. In this way companies want to make easier for them to keep loyal customers returning back and attracting new customers with decreasing costs, and it is spreading very fast. One of the examples for this type of marketing and promotion tool would be TripAdvisor where people share there their overall experience about the specific product or service (Litvin, Goldsmith and Pan, 2008). According to the same source, TripAdvisor is seen as "the largest site for unbiased travel reviews (which) gives you the real story about, hotels, attractions, and restaurants around the world. It boasts more than 1,926,031 unbiased

reviews and it is updated every minute and every day by real travelers" (tripadvisor.com, 2005 in Litvin, Goldsmith and Pan, 2008).

Differences between fine dining and cheap eats restaurants

Restaurant industry recognizes many different types of restaurants like fast casual, fine dining, fast food, bistros, family style and etc. and all these restaurants are somewhat different from each other. The focus of this paper is the difference between the two types of restaurants: fine dining and fast food (or cheap eats) restaurants. The main difference between fine dining and fast food restaurants is definitively the price of the products offered, but with a certain level of price comes also the expectation of a higher quality of food, atmosphere, and customer service, as opposed to fast food restaurants where food is perceived generally as unhealthy with lower quality. (Bhagwandin, 2017).

According to Mealey (2017) when it comes to fine dining restaurants clientele those kind of guests tend to pay attention at every detail, as the author stated herself: from "music to the lightning, art on the walls, atmosphere" and other. It is clear that not everyone can afford to go to a fancy restaurant and at fine dining restaurants it is all about perfection and the clientele is usually of a very high ranking. Another difference would be the perception and the usage of time, since when customers are in a fine dining restaurant it is needed to wait longer in order to get the food due to the fact that it takes more time to prepare the food and that their service is valued much more, and speed is not that relevant. As the Mealey (2017) stated "No matter what your restaurant concept is, your servers should be at their best". In fast food restaurants that is not the case, those types of restaurants also value the service, but this is not perceived as such an important factor as in fine

dining restaurants. The taste of fast food, on the other hand, seems to be carefully controlled and people can get addicted to that taste. That is one more reason why people go to fast food restaurants despite the fact that there are healthier and more nutritious foods to eat (Clark, 2017).

Method

Research

This is a descriptive type of research and the chosen method for the collection of data is observation. The author observed comments from restaurant customers of fine dining and cheap eats on TripAdvisor, and the probability was choosing 5 and 4 star reviews for positive reviews and 1 and 2 star reviews for negative reviews that were left on the restaurant sites on TripAdvisor, the most recent ones, not older than 12 months.

Purpose and participants

The purpose of this research paper was to investigate the factors influencing restaurant guests to leave comments on TripAdvisor since it is important for restaurant owners and managers to make their restaurants more attractive to the guests so that they could decide to eat there.

Material

The observation was done on 17 dining restaurants and 17 cheap eats (fast food) restaurants. The majority of these reviews were from tourists that came to visit Dubrovnik, and only a small number of reviews was left by domestic people. Some of the reviews were not considered as valid because restaurant customers left a comment on TripAdvisor even though they didn't eat in that specific restaurant, but, they would leave a comment because they have waited too long in a line to get in

the restaurant, or because the staff was not polite and they left the restaurant without eating there. Restaurants with less than 40 reviews left on TripAdvisor were excluded from the research because there were not enough valid reviews to look at. There were 4 categories which were important for getting results, which are: food quality, service quality, value for money and atmosphere.

Results

Observation

As mentioned before, in order to collect the relevant data, the focus was given on 5 positive and 5 negative comments and/or reviews for 17 dining restaurants on 4 categories mentioned before and 5 positive and 5 negative reviews for 17 cheap eats restaurants located in Dubrovnik. Overall, there are 170 positive and negative reviews analyzed for fine dining restaurants, and 170 positive and negative reviews analyzed for cheap eats (fast food) restaurants.

Fine dining restaurants ($$$$ + $$$)

For all 34 restaurants (17 dining and 17 cheap eats restaurants) there was observation on 85 positive and 85 negative reviews. When it comes to **positive reviews** that were analyzed **for fine dining restaurants ($$$$+$$$)** the following offers an analysis of some statistics and results.

Firstly, these results are about food quality. 78 out of 85 reviews (91.77%) were positive about the food quality in certain restaurants. 6 out of 85 reviews (7.06%) were negative about the food (food portions, presentation, taste).

The relevance of service quality was surprising; it was better than expecting. It came out that 69 out of 85 reviews (81.17%) were positive about the service they got. 3 out of 85 reviews (3.53%)

were negative about the service they got in certain restaurants, while 12 out of 85 reviews (14,12%) didn't mention service quality at all, which means that the service for those customers was not so important. Some customers were not satisfied with the food they got, but they were really happy with the service they got so they left a 5-star review because of the polite and welcoming staff there. This means that they would rather forgive bad food than bad service, which is proven by this observation.

When it comes to value for money only 13 out of 85 reviews (15.29%) were positive or satisfied with the bill they got at the end. 20 out of 85 reviews (23.53%) were negative for about the value, and which is very interesting 52 out of 85 reviews (61.18%) didn't mention the pricing at all. This brings to fact that customers don't mind and they are ready to pay more if restaurants are going to offer high food and service quality.

Atmosphere resulted as having big influence when customers are leaving comments on TripAdvisor. 66 out of 85 reviews (77.65%) were positive about the atmosphere in the restaurant, majority of them very satisfied with the magnificent view they had from the restaurant.

Negative reviews for fine dining restaurants were also analyzed**.** 16 out of 85 reviews (18.82%) were positive about the food quality, but 67 out of 85 reviews (78.82%) were negative about the food quality, which is really high. Only 2 out of 85 reviews (2.35%) didn't mention food quality at all.

When it comes to service quality 10 out of 85 reviews (11.76%) were positive about the service they got in the restaurant. 65 out of 85 reviews (76.47%) were negative about service quality, while 11 out of 85 reviews (12.94%) didn't mention service at all.

It is interesting that in this category, value for money, 0 out of 85 reviews, which means none of them were positive or satisfied with matching the money they give with the food and service quality they got. 59 out of 85 reviews (69.41%) were negative about the value of the money, while 26 out of 85 reviews (30.59%) didn't mention value of the money at all, and customers were more focusing on food and service quality.

In the negative reviews customers were giving nice words for the atmosphere, and here are some statistics. 43 out of 85 reviews (50.59%) were positive about the atmosphere which includes nice view, design of the interior of the restaurant, décor. Only 10 out of 85 reviews (11.76%) were negative about the atmosphere, and 32 out of 85 reviews (37.65%) didn't mention atmosphere at all, because their concern was on food and service quality.

From these results it is proved that even though there is a nice view, and nice atmosphere in the restaurant, customers will ignore that and still give the bad review because of some other factors that are more important to customers.

Cheap eats (fast food) restaurants – ($)

As for the fine dining restaurants the same categories were observed. Firstly, here are presented **positive reviews** that have been analyzed. The first factor is food quality. 83 out of 85 reviews (97.65%) were positive about food quality. 2 reviews out of 85 reviews (2.35%) were negative about food quality.

When it comes to service quality, 67 out of 85 reviews (78%) were positive on service quality, while 2 out of 85 reviews (2.35%) were negative on service quality. 16 out of 85 reviews (18%) didn't mention service quality in their review at all.

The next factor is value for money. 55 out of 85 reviews (64.70%) were positive on value for money, while 3 out of 85 reviews (3.53%) were negative on value for money. 27 out of 85 reviews (31.76%) didn't mention pricing at all.

The last factor is atmosphere. 28 out of 85 reviews (32.94%) were positive about the atmosphere in the restaurant. 9 out of 85 reviews (10.59%) were negative on atmosphere (bad smell, air condition not working). 48 out of 85 reviews (56.47%) didn't mention atmosphere at all.

Secondly, here are **negative reviews** that have been analyzed. First factor is food quality. 10 out of 85 (11.76%) reviews were positive about the food quality, while 73 out of 85 (85.88%) reviews were negative about the food quality. 2 out of 85 (2.35%) reviews didn't mention food quality at all.

The second factor is service quality. 19 out of 85 reviews (22.35%) were positive about service quality. 56 out of 85 reviews (65.88%) were negative about the service quality (slow service, rude and unfriendly staff), while 10 out of 85 (11.76%) reviews didn't mention service in their reviews at all.

The third factor is value for money. 7 out of 85 reviews (8.23%) were positive about value for money, while 38 out of 85 reviews (44.70%) were negative about value for money they got. 40 out of 85 reviews (47.05%) which is a high percentage, didn't mention price at all, which brings to conclusion that in cheap eats (fast food) restaurant even though the service was ok, and even it is cheap, the most important factor is food quality.

The last factor is atmosphere. 12 out of 85 reviews (14.11%) were positive about the atmosphere in the restaurant. 12 out of 85 reviews (14.11%) were negative about the atmosphere and 61 out of 85 reviews (71.76%) didn't mention atmosphere at all.

Discussion

Based on the obtained results of the observation of reviews and comments on TripAdvisor, it is obvious that there are differences about what do customers expect in fine dining restaurants as opposed to what are their expectation of cheap eats (fast food) restaurants. What it works in fine dining restaurant, it doesn't seem to work in cheap eats restaurants as well, or to the same extent. On the other hand, there seems to be no major distinction between what makes people write reviews. It is clear that certain factors are as important in evaluation in both: cheap eats and fine dining restaurants.

Fine dining restaurants

If considering positive results for fine dining restaurants, their guests are mostly satisfied with food and service quality. This comes as not a surprise sine fine dining restaurants educate their employees about local food and wines and they even they organize professional trainings and educate them to prepare them for the job. Those positive reviews mentioned atmosphere as well, but didn't mention value for money as a relevant factor which in itself could be explained with already existing perceptions on fine dining restaurants. If guests choose to go and eat in a fine dining restaurant, they already have certain expectations about the pricing and they are not surprised about it.

On the other hand, negative results showed again the importance of food and service quality, but it did prove value for money, which was very low. Guests very dissatisfied with pricing, but it makes sense. If the food is not good, and the service is slow they won't get value for money, but a frustration.

It is obvious that the owners of fine dining restaurants should be aware of more things because they have to give that extra of something for the difference in their pricing. They shouldn't fear to put higher prices if the food and service quality is high, especially if the guest's needs are met, then it is clear that they won't mind even if the are paying more.

Cheap eats (fast food) restaurants

On the other hand, positive reviews for the cheap eats proved that their guests and customers need less to be satisfied. Food quality, as expected, is still regarded as the most important indicator and it is surprisingly followed by the service quality. This finding was somewhat surprising since guests usually don't seem to be going to cheap eats expecting excellent service, but rather because they're interested in the experience of eating fast and satisfying their needs quickly, since they can even choose to take their food away. This result might be explained by experience economy: every person expects to be given a good service, and it becomes clear that even owners of cheap eats have already realized that and it has become a must. On the other hand, value for money and atmosphere were not mentioned that much in those reviews, which proves how you need less compared to fine dining.

Negative reviews showed again that food quality is considered to be at the major factor of relevance, followed by service quality and value for money. Atmosphere proved again to be the least important for both positive and negative reviews.

To conclude, it appears that owners of cheap eats should keep food quality as the most relevant factor if they want to get good and positive reviews, and also not to forget the importance of good and quality service. In other words, it is important for them as well to educate their employees

about the food and the preparation of the food, but also about marketing and selling techniques which can ultimately bring major satisfaction to their guests.

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Appendix

Figure captions

Figure. 1 Positive reviews for fine dining restaurants

*Figure 2.*Negative reviews for fine dining restaurants

Figure 3. Positive reviews for cheap eats restaurants
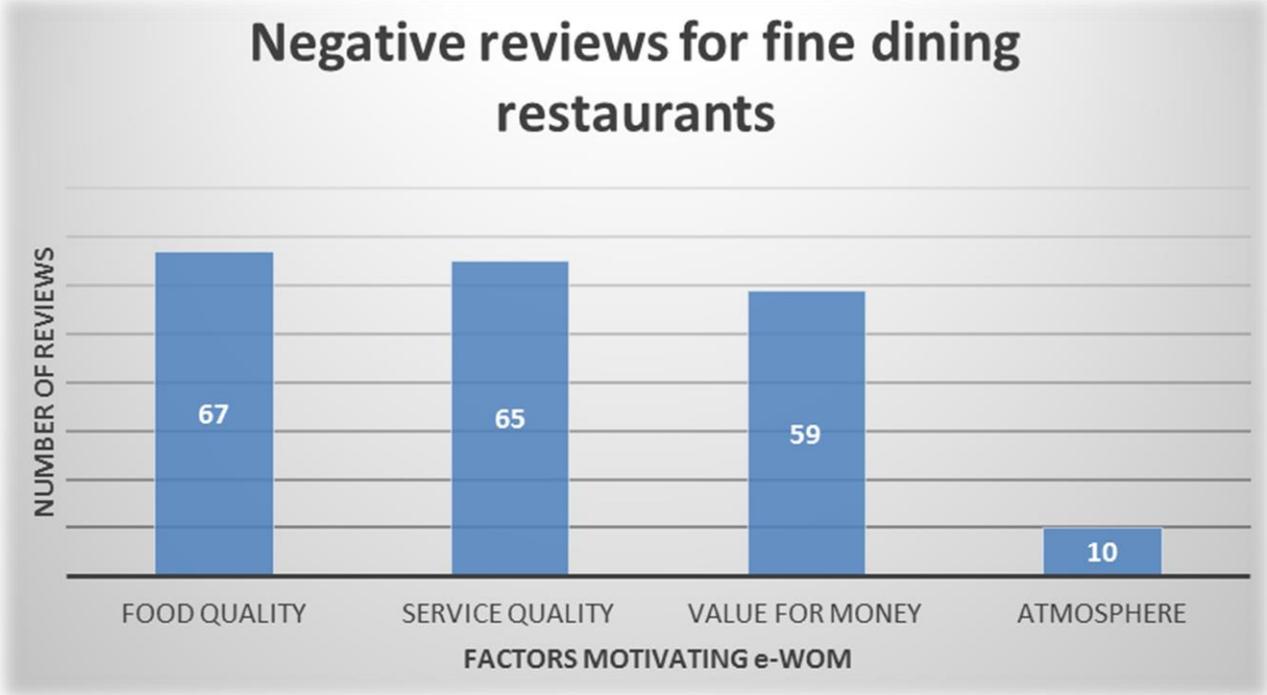
Figure 4. Negative reviews for cheap eats restaurants

Figure 1. Number or positive reviews for each category in fine dining restaurants (total 85 reviews)

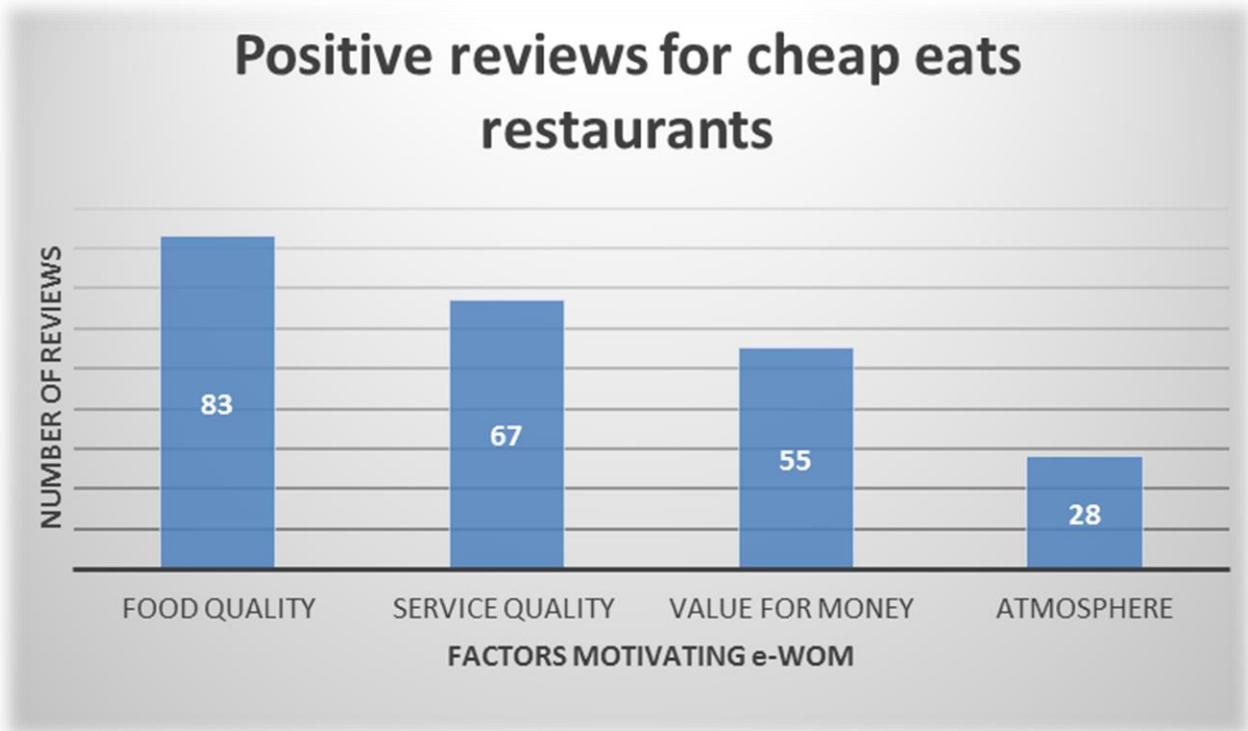Figure 2. Number of negative reviews for each category in fine dining restaurants (total 85 reviews)

Figure 3. Number of positive reviews for each category in cheap eats restaurants (total 85 reviews)

Figure 4. Number of negative reviews for each category in cheap eats restaurants (total 85 reviews)