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Thai restaurant perceptions of Service Quality:

Evidence from Tripadvisor

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Abstract

Consumer review websites such as TripAdvisor allow postings of User Generated Content (UGC) that provide restaurant customers with the opportunity to share their experiences and record their satisfaction and dissatisfaction on a detailed scale. These activities represent and are an essential form of electronic word-of-mouth true to its core. These reviews can influence the decision process of other potential customers as it holds a lot of power to influence because of their sincerity. The paper investigates national and international consumers' perceptions of Thai restaurant satisfaction experiences as expressed in UGC on TripAdvisor. A list of Thai restaurants was considered, and UGC narratives written by tourists on TripAdvisor for each of the restaurants were collected. Data collected is undertaken via the Leximancer software. The results are reported, implications are discussed, limitations are noted, and directions for future research are indicated.

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Background

Service quality is a major part of the restaurant industry, as being involved with the customers is the main interaction and transaction that happens daily in the business. This interaction is the key to accurately measuring and researching its success. This study analyzes the main factors of online reviews left by national and international customers that have visited Thai restaurants in Stavanger. All relevant Thai restaurants were chosen to be part of this study. The goal is to pinpoint the service quality experiential perceptions of restaurants' customers regarding their higher and lower value for ratings.

1 Introduction

With the age of e-commerce, every industry is involved in online sales, and the hospitality and tourism industry is no exception. Hotels, be they luxury or best value, use online travel agents (OTAs) or booking platforms, and online sales form the biggest part of their revenue (Buhalis & Law, 2008). After consumption, customers give feedback online and such online reviews have become increasingly important. The hospitality industry has fierce competitiveness and is reliant on efficient customer relations management both online and offline in order to maintain customer satisfaction. Neglecting these parts of the management can hinder the business to generate future revenue. Online reviews are fast, up-to-date, and available everywhere on multiple review sites. It is accessible from anywhere and anytime as long as there is an internet connection. They have become a word-of-mouth (WOM) version of the digital space (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). These reviews are considered to have a high priority both for the potential consumer, owners, and associations, as they are valuable data. Customer feedback in particular is vital since it acts as a medium between the consumer and

the company. Reviewing sites exist as a way for customers to communicate with each other without knowing who the other party is. The anonymous aspect of this serves as a safeguard for the customers to write their honest reviews. Therefore, these reviews are often perceived as trustworthy, helpful, and authentic and can also be highly influential (Li & Hitt, 2008). Online reviews play a critical role in the online sales of the hospitality and tourism industry, which for the most part mainly offers services and focuses on customer satisfaction. Potential customers spend a lot of their time reading online reviews to assist their decision-making (Zhu & Zhang, 2010). This is because they want the most value out of their time, experience, and money when visiting a place (Payne, Bettman, & Johnson, 1993). The feedback and reviews also act as a catalyst for corporate growth, performance, and reputation as well as for the enhancement of the passenger experience. The restaurant industry must satisfy their consumer and convert this contentment into behavioral commitment both online and offline to remain competitive against their competitors in the area that might provide the same or similar service (Graves, 2022).

1.2 Research question and aim

Social media platforms have a lot of potential in the restaurant field, especially in consumer-generated reviews of the dining experience. I have been a participant in the gastronomic field, both as a professional restaurant co-worker, and as an amateur reviewer throughout the years prior to that, as well as a local living in Stavanger city. I have consumed some of the services directly, I am thus fundamentally interested in this field of culture for professional, academic, and identity-based reasons. The data I observed in the practice of restaurant reviewing and critical discourse around Thai cuisine in Stavanger, was the impetus for this research. I have detected the importance of WOM from the digital world, however, there has not been a lot of research on restaurant attendees' perception on TripAdvisor for

Norwegians and international tourists specifically in Stavanger. Stavanger/Sandnes is one of the biggest cities in Norway, yet there is a limited scholarly investigation into this specific area of the country. The motivation for the research presented in this dissertation was borne of my observation. I have devised the following research question in order to investigate these themes:

“Thai restaurants Perceptions of Service Quality in Stavanger, Evidence from Tripadvisor Sites”

The research conducted for this dissertation has a primary aim to investigate locals' and international consumers' perceptions of Thai restaurant service quality through the usage of Tripadvisor. Their perceptions can be deciphered through key themes such as visitors' civil status, the region of visitors, and lastly, the satisfaction and dissatisfaction factors.

1.3 Research process

The topic of this thesis is broadly discussed in many journal articles from google scholar and academic books both online Ebooks and physical books from the campus library. The authors study the influence of WOM and eWOM on customers buying behavior. In addition, Customer decision-making and customer satisfaction were also the main factors customers consider when making a restaurant choice. For researchers' to comprehensively answer the stated research question of this thesis and fill out the research gap a quantitative research approach was applied. A bulk of data was collected through TripAdvisor and the thesis is structured as follows; a broad overview of already existing academic literature from google scholar, combined with key definitions of the important concepts related to the thesis topic.

Furthermore, the appropriate type of methodology for this research is elaborated as well as the design of online reviews. Moreover, data collection and data analysis are also identified in the section on methodology. In the next section, the results of the online survey are presented.

2 Literature review

2.1 Restaurant industry in the world

The restaurant industry has become one of the most profitable industries in the world. The industry is large, ubiquitous, and is always growing. The industry provides services both local and international that satisfy the customers' demand with a variety of products and services. Globalization and the advancement of the social media world is shrinking in terms of culture and habits. Consequently, fashions, as well as eating patterns, are also being opted all over the world. This is the reason for such a huge spread in the restaurant industry (Levitt, 1983). Reflecting on the size of the industry, the full-service restaurant market in the U.S. is estimated at 334.8 Billion dollars in 2020, followed by China, the world's second-largest economy is forecast to reach a projected market size of 345 Billion U.S. dollars by the year 2027 having a trailing Compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 7.2% over the analysis period 2020 to 2027 (Cision, 2020). Among the other noteworthy geographic markets are countries such as Japan and Canada, each forecast to grow at 2.6% and 4.2% respectively over the 2020-2027 period. Within Europe, Germany is forecast to grow at approximately 2.9% CAGR (Cision, 2020).

2.2 Restaurant industry in Stavanger

Restaurants and food ingredients in Stavanger have received excellent reviews from national food critics, as well as from the Michelin guide. Stavanger became the second Norwegian

city to receive a Michelin star back in 2016 (Fjordnorway, 2022). and the city is one of the four cities in the whole country that has restaurants with Michelin stars. There are over a hundred restaurants in the Stavanger location that people can experience. Everything from local Norwegian food to Asia, middle-eastern, and other European dishes to choose from. The city has a vast pool of cultures to experience. Although the restaurant industry and culture are vast in Stavanger, the scholarly studies done within the hotel and restaurant industry are limited.

2.3 Service quality (What is it? Importance of it)

Measuring and improving the service quality can increase your organization's profits and reputation which in turn can grow your business and overall revenue. Regardless of which service industry, service quality can have a direct impact on your company's ability to satisfy customer needs while remaining competitive. Being able to improve and fine-tune your service quality is a valuable skill to possess. To ensure a consistently high level of service quality, and consequently gain high profit, requires research, expertise, and proper understanding of what service quality is. The definition of service quality is not to be confused with customer satisfaction. There does appear to be a consensus that the two are conceptually distinct yet empirically overlapping constructs (Schneider & White, 2004, p.51). The separability of the constructs demonstrates that service quality is only one component of a customer's level of satisfaction, for example, price, location, the restaurant's exteriors, etc. are likely to have a direct effect on satisfaction, but it is less likely to directly affect a customer's report of overall service quality. This is the distinctive factor that separates them. The definitions of service quality typically do not refer to assessments on specified service quality dimensions, but rather are framed in terms of global and overall evaluations (Schneider & White, 2004, p.46). Service quality is the judgment of the service's overall

excellence or superiority when the individual is there to experience the service itself. A similar definition holds that *“The sum total of the customer’s perception of the service is at the center of service quality research”* (Schneider & White, 2004, p.51). However, the question that arises from these definitions is, what are these overall judgments of service quality based on? People's overall evaluations of service quality are typically thought to be based on their assessments of service quality dimensions like tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. In addition, whether expectations for service are met or not met determines the overall service quality evaluations.

Service quality’s importance comes from managing customer orientation and service quality. This method is commonly identified as being one of the effective ways of building a competitive position in a service industry and improving organizational performance. Investing in service quality and building and maintenance of customer relationships is justified when the results show improved profitability (Ennew & Binks, 1996, p.220). Consequently, the main reason why service quality is important for any business or industry that interacts with services is that higher service quality offers result in more repeat purchases and market-share improvements, which in return can grow the business.

2.4 Service quality in the restaurant industry

The service quality in the restaurant industry in today’s standard has to be on top of its game as more and more restaurants open up and competition is getting stiffer. To stay competitive in this industry, restaurants have to take strides towards perfection and create a loyal customer base in the long term. Restaurants should be able to deliver quality service to their

consumers continually regardless of the circumstances. Service quality is a complex of many contacts between consumers and restaurant employees, as well as anything else that may influence customers' views.

2.5 What is an online review

Online reviews are the most prevalent type of user-generated content (UGC) and have enabled travelers to express their preferences for tourism services and share their tourism experiences through different means such as sharing pictures, comments, and a rating scale utilizing a star glyph or similar typographical symbols. The scale is usually measured from one to five stars or a similar system (Arasli, Saydam & Sulu, 2022). Online consumer review sites in today's day and age are widely used and influential tools accessible to the majority of the population (Littlechild, 2020, p.1). It is the most prevalent type of user-generated content (UGC) and has enabled travelers to express their preferences for tourism services and share their experiences. Furthermore, this is the reason why reviews play a critical role in the hospitality and tourism industry. Potential customers spend a significant amount of time reading online reviews to assist their decision-making (Zhu & Zhang, 2010). Customers like to search for objective opinions and they prefer reviews, which are mostly delivered through large review platforms and consumer-centric sites such as TripAdvisor, Yelp, Google, Amazon, Facebook, etc. Studies show that 93% of consumers stated that online reviews impact their purchasing decisions, and 86% say that their buying decisions are influenced by negative online reviews. The age range from 18-34 olds trusts online reviews as much as personal recommendations (Littlechild, 2020, p.2). This age range covers the majority of

gen-z and Millennials who are the generations that grew up with access to the internet. Customers are 31% more willing to spend on business with excellent reviews. The data also suggested that businesses with a rating of 3.3 out of 5 stars is the minimum rating that consumers would engage with, and only 13% of consumers will consider using a business with lower ratings (Littlechild, 2020, p.2). There is a growing academic examination of online review sites. The rating of online user reviews has no significant impact on a business, however, the volume of online postings did have a significant impact. This statement suggests that review volume increases awareness. This is why it is advantageous to maintain and manage a company's reputation through review sites that could later benefit the business.

2.6 TripAdvisor

Tripadvisor.com was founded in 2000 and is part of the American electronic-commerce company named Expedia. It has since then become the largest and most popular online guidance platform site in the world for travelers and residents (Tripadvisor, 2022). . Over the past two decades, the platform has grown exponentially and spread its service all over the world in many different languages. TripAdvisor has performed well against its review site competitors and has shown a constant increase in user-generated reviews. In 2022 TripAdvisor reached 1 billion reviews and opinions shared on the website. As well as 463 million monthly active users who have the option to visit over 8.6 million sites within the service industry (Tripadvisor, 2022). TripAdvisor has a similar layout and functions to other well-known review sites such as google, yelp, and Facebook, where online users have contributed a large number of reviews to evaluate a wide range of services. On TripAdvisor, the online reviews are mainly about accommodations, restaurants, experiences, airlines, bars,

and cruises. The purpose of TripAdvisor is to collect and distribute the content created by customers about hotel and restaurant experiences. Besides collecting reviews, TripAdvisor also aims at targeting customers and constantly improving its features to satisfy the needs and requirements of both travelers and citizens globally (Tripadvisor, 2022). The website also serves as a platform for the restaurants, hotels, etc. to reply to the reviews to clear up any misunderstandings or offer extra information to the customers. The platform is available for customers' usage as an application for smartphones, as well as regular website browsers. TripAdvisor exists for anyone to use at any given moment. It is easily accessible and the layout is simple. Reading reviews, discovering new places, and comparing prices and other locations has never been the selling point of TripAdvisor. In addition, TripAdvisor enables customers the most current information regarding the restaurants' location, contact information, opening and closing hours, as well as multimedia elements such as photos of the place and the food. This platform contains an option to reserve tables online and restaurants' rating is classified into four categories, food, service, value, and atmosphere. The rating scale consists of 1 to 5 categories, where 1 rating star stands for unsatisfied, and 5 stands for an amazing experience. All of the above-mentioned features classify TripAdvisor as a blog, social network, and virtual community (O'Connor, 2008).

2.7 Customer's decision making

The internet brings many benefits, such as newer and more efficient ways of connecting and communicating, distributing information, and doing business. This method of communication is very different from traditional-offline communication. With the ever-evolving world of technology marketing and consumer behavior are adjusting to the new online environment and the previous pattern of offline communication and methods are taking a back seat. One of

the key advantages of the internet has been the incredible access to information reviewing websites provides to consumers. In today's difficult global competitiveness in the restaurant industry, having a competitive advantage and creating a loyal customer base in the long term should be a priority. Restaurants should follow review sites closely and respond to the reviews accordingly to deliver quality service to their consumers on- and offline continually (Arasli, et al. 2022). Managing eWOM this way can increase the probability of a customer's decision to consume your service instead of your competitors. Customer choices and decision-making are tied and intertwined with the restaurant's reputation and the reputation is heavily influenced by eWOM.

Among many different topics, travel, tourism, and restaurants appeared to be among the most popular in discussions online (Miguèn, Baggio & Costa, 2008, p.1). The customer's decision-making is highly dependent on what they are being presented with. They are faced with a particular decision task. Choosing from a set of options is defined by multiple attributes (Payne, Bettman, & Johnson, 1993, s34-35). These attributes are the different customization that the review sites have to offer such as review comments, stars, pictures, etc. During the decision-making process, the users are in control of the information they seek, however, they can be heavily influenced by what they see. As evidence of the importance of online search on travel behaviors, a survey of the hotel and restaurant industry in Europe in 2007 concluded that 80% of UK consumers are researching online before making any decision on where they want to stay. Half of them maintained to have refrained from booking a specific hotel as a consequence of negative reviews or anything that might not be preferable for them from online guidance platforms such as TripAdvisor (Miguèn, Baggio & Costa, 2008, p.2)

Many different factors play a large role when it comes to the decision-making of choosing which restaurant consumer wants to explore. Exterior factors outside of review websites such as TripAdvisor can be nearby hotels, rent-a-car options, sightseeing, tour guides, transport, weather, or time of the year. Even if a certain restaurant is a good choice, it may require different elements from those strictly connected with the restaurants as the destination is seen as a single product by the tourist (Miguèn, Baggio & Costa, 2008, p.4)

2.8 Word of mouth (WOM) and Electronic word of mouth (eWOM)

Word of mouth (WOM) is a process that can happen between any individuals who want to share information and opinions about a specific product, brand, service, experience, etc to direct other individuals towards or away from the product depending on the circumstances.

WOM is defined as “informal, person to person communication between a perceived non-commercial communicator and a receiver regarding a brand, product, organization or a service” Similarly, the term is also defined as “face to face communication about products or companies between people who were not commercial entities” The definition was written decades apart suggestion that the term has been settled in academics and practitioners (Jeong & Jang, 2011, p.357).

With the ever-evolving advancement of modern technology, the internet has been able to increase the numbers of consumers and they are using the internet to seek information about a product, service, or company. eWOM has emerged as a result of this new age technology and conceptually functions as WOM but on a significantly higher scale (Jeong & Jang, 2011, p.357). A broad definition of eWOM can be defined as “All informal communications

directed at consumers through internet-based technology related to the usage or characteristic of particular goods and services.” A more focused definition limiting the extent of the eWOM category and specifying the term can be 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 the people and institutes via internet’” This version is more correlated and specific to the service industry (Jeong & Jang, 2011, p.357).

The evident differences between WOM and eWOM are found primarily in the media used aspects of things. WOM is typically face-to-face with family and friends, it's more intimate, but on a much smaller scale, while in contrast, eWOM is online. With the advancement of technology, the typical communication method of WOM is being sidelined by cyberspace (Jeong & Jang, 2011, p.357). This change of medium underscores the distinct difference between traditional WOM and eWOM which has to do with speed and scope. The value of WOM is not less important or being removed as a whole, but rather a less used method globally when it comes to further recommendations to another user. This is due to the high accessibility of eWOM, and this means that this method of communication can reach millions of people, it will exist for a longer period and can be found by virtually anyone. Furthermore, due to the distinctive characteristics of eWOM, it allows web users to develop virtual relationships and communities as well as united groupings of critics as it offers a more detailed description of the place, such as pictures, menu, opening, and closing hours. However, eWOM is sometimes posted anonymously online, and traditional WOM communication becomes more credible. The credibility is significantly more trustworthy as the information that is being shared happens face-to-face and with familiar groups such as family, friends, coworkers, or acquaintances. EWOM's credibility lies in the quantity of the

shared information. Repetition of positive comments will ensure retention while the repetition of negative comments or reviews will have the opposite effect (Jeong & Jang, 2011, p.357).

2.9 Customer's satisfaction and dissatisfaction

Customer satisfaction is defined along the lines of; a consumer's fulfillment response, it is a judgment that a product or service feature, or the product or service itself, provides a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfillment (Nyer, 2000). It is the overall level of contentment that a customer experiences with a service or a product.

Customer satisfaction is the main component of a successful service. The ability to satisfy customers' needs and please them is vital for many reasons. For example, studies show that customers that are dissatisfied with the service experience tend to complain to the establishment because it gives consumers the chance to vent their unhappiness (Nyer, 2000).

The most common reason for complaining in social interactions was to vent negative emotions (Nyer, 2000). Service providers have the opportunity to properly address customers' dissatisfaction and clear up misunderstanding or provide compensation if needed. However, if not done correctly, customer behavior can cause ramifications. A lot of dissatisfaction is being vented both through WOM and eWOM, such as giving bad ratings on a restaurant or leaving a negative comment (Nyer, 2000). Disgruntled customers can become a saboteur keeping other potential customers from visiting a place.

Although a dissatisfied customer holds a lot of power within WOM and eWOM, researchers have also found a strong relationship between satisfaction and loyalty (Nyer, 2000). This can lead to a positive outcome, similar to dissatisfied customers leaving bad ratings and negative reviews. Satisfied visitors can do the opposite.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research design

One of the most important stages in the research process is choosing the suitable method for the specific study that will best answer your research question. The methodology represents the procedures that lead the study and research design to investigate the stated research question. The research method is usually classified into two types, quantitative and qualitative methods (Davies & Hughes, 2014, p.8). Regardless of what field of study I am working on, I will be following one of the two distinct paths. However, it is also possible to have a mixed-method between the two. Both paths use some of the same research skills, although not always in the same order. Both methods can deliver useful and informative results that are sought after when they are well done, but each serves a rather different purpose (Davies & Hughes, 2014, p.8).

Quantitative research methods objectively test theories by statistically investigating large amounts of data and the relationship between quantifiable variables (Johannessen, Tufte & Christofferson, 2016, p.95). This method is numbers-based, countable, or measurable. In

addition, bigger sample pools tend to create more accurate and reliable results. The qualitative research method aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the concept, as well as give extra details about the topic at hand (Johannessen, Tufte & Christofferson, 2016, p.95). This method focuses more on the feelings, interpretation-based, descriptive, and relating to language as well as focusing more on the social patterns outside delimited areas (Johannessen, Tufte & Christofferson, 2016, p.95). The mixed-method is a combination of the quantitative and qualitative research approaches. In mixed methods research, the researcher collects both quantitative and qualitative data and information to answer the research question.

The appropriate method that was chosen to solve this study was the quantitative research method. As it enables researchers to test the relationship between predefined variables and answers to the research question. I've used secondary analysis of data because this method of analysis is of available statistics from government or commercial sources (Davies & Hughes, 2014, p.32). The clear advantage of these databases is the size and accessibility that is available for me to use. They include a large volume of cases, far more than is possible from the average research project (Davies & Hughes, 2014, p.32).

In the social sciences, a distinction is made between soft and hard data. Broadly said, we can say that hard data is data that can be quantified with the help of using numbers. Examples of this are gender, age, and income, while soft data is available in the form of text, possibly sound, or images (Johannessen, Tufte & Christofferson, 2016, p.33). I have used a combination of hard data and soft data to answer my research paper. The quantity of reviews, gender, and occupations that were collected represents hard data, while the comment text from the reviews is more personable and represents soft data.

3.2 Data collection

The data for this study were obtained from TripAdvisor.com, the website was last accessed on 17th April 2022. While selecting reviews to scrape, reviews written in English and Norwegian were considered regardless of whether it was brief or longer comments. However, longer reviews were favored in all situations as they offered more precise insight and they gave extra information. I gathered online reviews from Thai Isan, Daran Thai, Thai Dinner Asia, Original Thai Food, and Wanna Sushi & Thai mat. The reason justifying the choice of the aforesaid five Thai restaurants is that those restaurants were the only Thai restaurants in all of Stavanger that was present on TripAdvisor with a reasonable amount of reviews. There were other Thai restaurants on TripAdvisor as well. However, they were usually a mix of Thai-Chinese cuisine, or Thai-Asia combinations which made it hard to pinpoint exactly which food or culture the reviewers were commenting about. Other Thai restaurants that were left out of the research were Thai restaurants that only had takeaways, as the research thesis requires customers to at least be able to have a longer visitation inside of the restaurant itself. However, Wanna Sushi & Thai mat was chosen to be part of the research paper and was the only exception. Wanna Sushi & Thai mat is a Thai-Japan combo restaurant that serves Thai food and only sushi. It was clear whether customers were talking about sushi or Thai food.

The method that was used to collect data was a quantitative method, where I collected 145 positive- and 54 negative reviews from TripAdvisor. A total of 199 usable consumer reviews were taken into consideration for further analysis. The data that were chosen also showed whether the reviews were left by a male or female, as well as their civil statuses such as

family, business visitors, couple, friends, or solo. In addition, I've chosen to pick both local reviews and international reviews to see and compare the data. Local reviews were written in Norwegian and international reviews were written in English. Other languages were present as well but were deemed to be a deficit and unusable, even with the use of translation tools, some of the comments did not translate well enough. Judgemental sampling was used during the sample collection to ensure the number of reviews needed to use Leximancer software. This type of sampling is where participants were selected at random from the accessible population. This sampling approach is appropriate when the population under this study is difficult to identify, as well as some of the members are deemed more passionate with longer reviews in contrast to casual reviews who left one or two-sentence reviews. To determine whether the reviewers were male or female; names, profile pictures, and visiting profiles to look for a clear indication of their identity was taken into consideration. I skipped out on taking any anonymous reviews. These types of reviews had no indication of which sex or gender they belonged to. I also avoided collecting data from profiles that had unisex names or unclear profile pictures.

Table 1. The profile of review contributors

Variable	Category	Number (N = 199)	%
Gender	Male	119	59.8
	Female	80	40.2
Region	National	101	50.75
	International	98	49.25

Civil status	Family	73	36.6
	Couple	66	33.1
	Solo	29	14.5
	Friends	9	4.5
	Business	8	4.01

According to the data that was gathered through TripAdvisor, 119 reviews were written by males (59.8%) and 80 were written by females (40.2%). The reviews that were collected from national and international are 50.75% and 49.25% respectively. The data also shows that the majority of the visitors were family (36.6%) followed by couples (33.1%), then solo visitors (14.5%), friends (4.5%), and lastly business reviewers at 4.01%. A total of 199 web reviews were collected.

3.3 Data analysis tools

The data collection represents restaurant visitors' experiences using the Leximancer text analytics program (Version 5.0). This program is based on Bayesian statistical theory (Arsli, Saydam & Sulu, 2022). and assembles fragments of evidence from the 199 data collected. It will represent the best of the text that is under investigation and give us precise insight into customers' perceptions. Broadly speaking, Leximancer is a program that creates a thesaurus and then uses a machine-learning algorithm that has an automatic coding technique to

evaluate and find the best thesaurus of words extracted from the review text input, arranging them according to themes, and showing the results in a concept map with text and colors.

Leximancer is sensitive to what file can be uploaded into the program. The wrong file will cause the program to become an error. The file that was used for this research paper was a Microsoft Excel file saved as .CSV file. Leximancer will not accept any other file otherwise.

The program uses a three-part procedure that forms a diagram that allows scholars to understand information that is hidden in the big bulk of data (Figure 1). In addition, the software extracted semantic pattern information that enabled us to identify the key concepts and themes underlying restaurants' consumers' experiences in a concept map composed of concepts represented by gray dots that are then grouped into themes, represented by colored spherical shapes. The theme colors and the size signify the significance of each theme, with the themes heat-mapped from hottest to coolest. Ranging from red-orange signifying "hottest" or most noticeable and repeated theme, to yellow and green that falls somewhere in between, and pink-purple is the "coolest" or least connected theme. The brightness of a concept label reflects its frequency in the text. The brighter a concept label means the more repeated concept is found in the script. The size of each bubble does not denote the significance of each theme but rather the significance of the relationship. The map also showcases gray lines connecting to each of the themes to show the relationship between them. By clicking on these words within the bubbles, extra information will be provided to the researcher, such as present, amount of words mentioned, and most common comments.

For the analysis, I used the Gaussian cluster algorithm of Leximancer and created concept clouds. Leximancer does not need prepositions or conjunctions, any related to unnecessary words. To get interpretable results from the analysis, extraneous grammatical particles, such

as “an,” “the,” “as,” and “I’m,” as well as emojis that were used were excluded. These words were filtered out during the excel file converted phase. I then composed a data file for the numerical ratings corresponding to the two user-defined tags that correspond to two types of reviews, including “Rate: Excellent, nice, amazing and good,” associated with positive experiences, and “Rate: Poor, bad, disappointed and terrible,” which were linked to negative experiences.

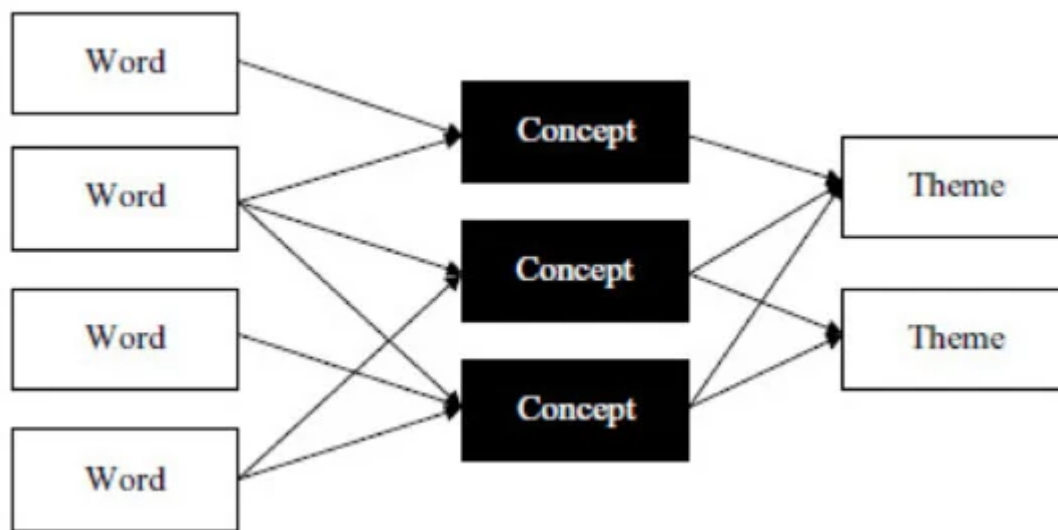


Figure 1. A basic representation of semantic pattern extraction. Adopted from Leximancer.

The program Leximancer is highly reliable due to the program's automagic algorithm which avoids bias and allows researchers to interpret textual information. That analysis is carried out automatically, and the visual results are presented in the form of concept maps that resemble clustered bubbles.

4 Analysis question

4.1 Questions

The questions I've chosen to investigate are the themes, satisfactions, and dissatisfactions, national and international, and the differences between civil group perceptions.

Research question (RQ)1: ‘‘What are the main themes in online narratives shared by the visitors at Thai restaurants in Stavanger’’.

RQ2: ‘‘What are the most prominent conversational topics discussed among the different civil statuses?’’

RQ3: ‘‘What are the dominant themes between national and international reviewers’’ and

RQ4: ‘‘What satisfied and dissatisfied the customers’’

The questions were chosen due to their relevance to understanding and answering the thesis as best as possible.

5 Analysis and result

The results showed that 78 of the male were satisfied while 41 were dissatisfied. 69 of the females were satisfied while 11 were dissatisfied. This shows at the basic level that male visitors were more likely to leave a review than females. However, this also shows that, even though the females are less likely to leave a review, they are also less likely to leave a negative review. This result is interesting as it contradicts previous studies done by Gorkana (Gorkana, 2016). Where it states that women are more likely to leave a review. However, it is important to note that this study is done on a much bigger scale than my research paper.

5.1 RQ1

The qualitative approach of the 199 reviews was conducted using a qualitative method and the results are reported in this section. The software started doing a ‘‘qualitative content

analysis” to determine the primary themes and concepts that are relevant to the RQ1.

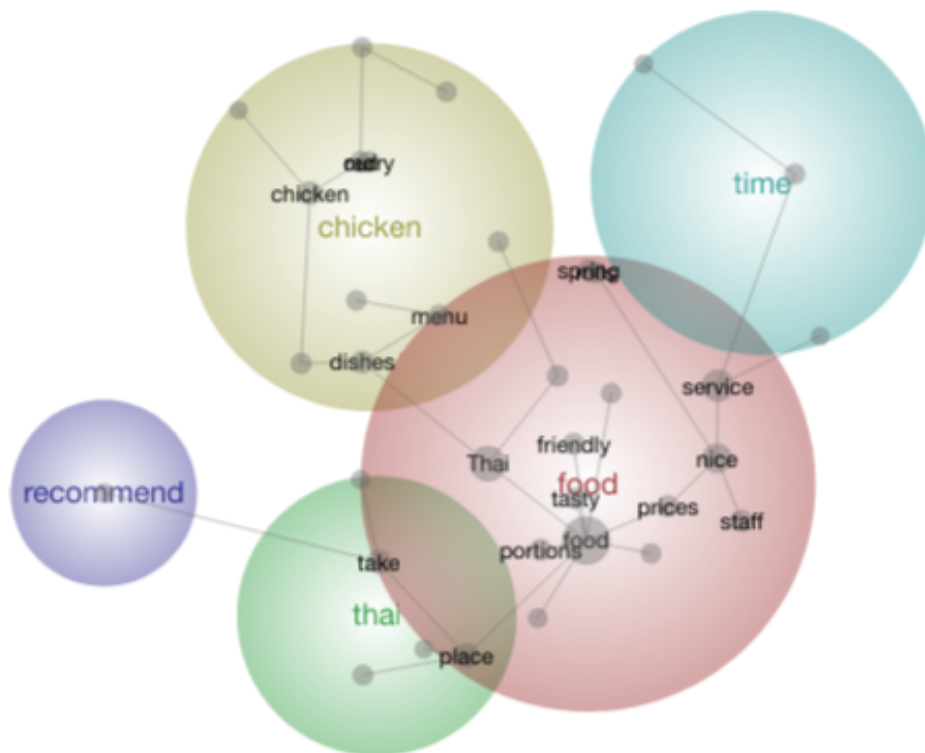


Figure 2. Concept map

After the software has been generated. The results show that the main narrative description was “food,” “time,” “thai,” “chicken,” and “recommended” and that they are the primary topics identified (Figure 2). The food theme that contains concepts of food (283; relevance = 100%), service (135; 42%), nice (95; 34%), take (57; 20%), portions (31; 11%), delicious (28; 10%), tasty (26; 9%). A typical reviews that was gather often reads, *“Food was tasty, a little spicy, and had large portions for the cost,”* a couple wrote *“the food is really tasty and good, the service is also really good and the food comes fast, the quality of the food is very good, and portions are big enough, definitely a place I would come back to”* another wrote *“... Big portions, very nice and smiley service, good prices and excellent quality”*. Other comments that were left also stated *“You feel that the food is really Thai food. And the service is top notch”* Another comment added *“...the food didn't take too long. And there are*

tables where you can sit and wait. The food is always fantastic". The overall consensus is that the food is really good and the visitors also talk about the portions of the food as well.

The second most prevalent theme was chicken in the meal (44; 16%), dishes (41; 14%), menu (35; 12%), curry (23; 8%). These are the most common comments left by reviewers about the chicken dish. Surprisingly enough, a typical review describes some of the chicken dishes as; *"Deepfried chicken almost without chicken. The chicken pieces were microscopic, dry and tasteless, mostly deepfried flour."* Other dissatisfied reviewers said; *"Meal was less than average. Main course of Satay Chicken Skewers consisted of 4 tiny pieces of chicken on skewers with a small salad."*, followed by another negative review *"...Chicken crumbled when I held it in my fingers"* One guest sarcastically added *"Do you like chicken with jelly texture and canned vegetables? Then this is perfect for you"* Although chicken along with pork is one of the main proteins in Thai dishes. It seems that chicken is the meat that most of the visitors have significantly more problems with even though chicken along with pork is the most common meat used in Thai dishes (Royal Thai Embassy, u.d).

The theme of Thai comprised concepts such as place (67; 24%) and take (57; 20%), a typical review reads *"this is ok if you want to get a quick take away Thai meal. We actually sat down. Not a good place to sit"* another reviewer commented something similar *"This place is a typical takeaway place but have seats inside as well. The food is not 'real' thai but ok if you're not very familiar with authentic thai food."* Another customer commented with a similar situation *"We went there yesterday and wanted to eat there but we were advised to do take away as he would need to charge more if we ate there very helpful to know :). So we had take away chicken sweet & sour"* last guest also commented *"This is probably the best Thai food in Stavanger area. Its fresh and tasty. The service is great! Good value for money. Not a*

place I would go and sit down to have a meal though. Its better as a take away.” “Thai” being among one of the bigger themes of this study makes sense as Thai food is at the center of this research paper.

The theme of time was another noticeable concept mentioned by customers. A customer online shared *‘It was full there, but they saw that they could call me if someone left early because it was only 1 hour until closing time’* Other customers added *‘Stop by for the first time. Ate beef in basil sauce. A visitor shared ‘Our waitress was very sweet A lot of take away so it took some time, but she informed about this in advance’* Most of the “time” concept came from visitors who visited the place for the first time or wanting to return or not return for another time. However, there were also comments about the waiting time as well, such as; *‘Had to wait a long time for ordering, long until drinks arrived and very long until appetizer and main course arrived’* Another wrote *‘The service took about 20-30 minutes before someone came to take an order.’* Although there were comments complaining about the waiting time, the dominant comments were not related to service or order time. The time theme is heavily influenced by satisfaction and dissatisfaction factors of the research paper.

That last noticeable theme was “recommend”. Customers in this theme had similar reviews and comments such as *‘Highly recommended. Not so easy to find’*, *‘Highly recommended!’* another wrote *‘Good value for money. Would recommend booking’* and *‘Fantastic Thai cuisine. Highly recommended.’* Similar to the theme of time, the recommend theme is heavily influenced by customers' satisfaction and dissatisfaction factors.

5.2 RQ2

“What are the most prominent conversational topics discussed among the different civil statuses?” The paper’s next objective was to identify what the biggest themes are among the visitors depending on their civil status when they visit a Thai restaurant in Stavanger. To answer this question, five tags were composed that describe the guests' civil status.

Leximancer generated the most common themes for each of the five civil statuses that were entered into the software. The civil status was family, friends, solo, couple, and business.

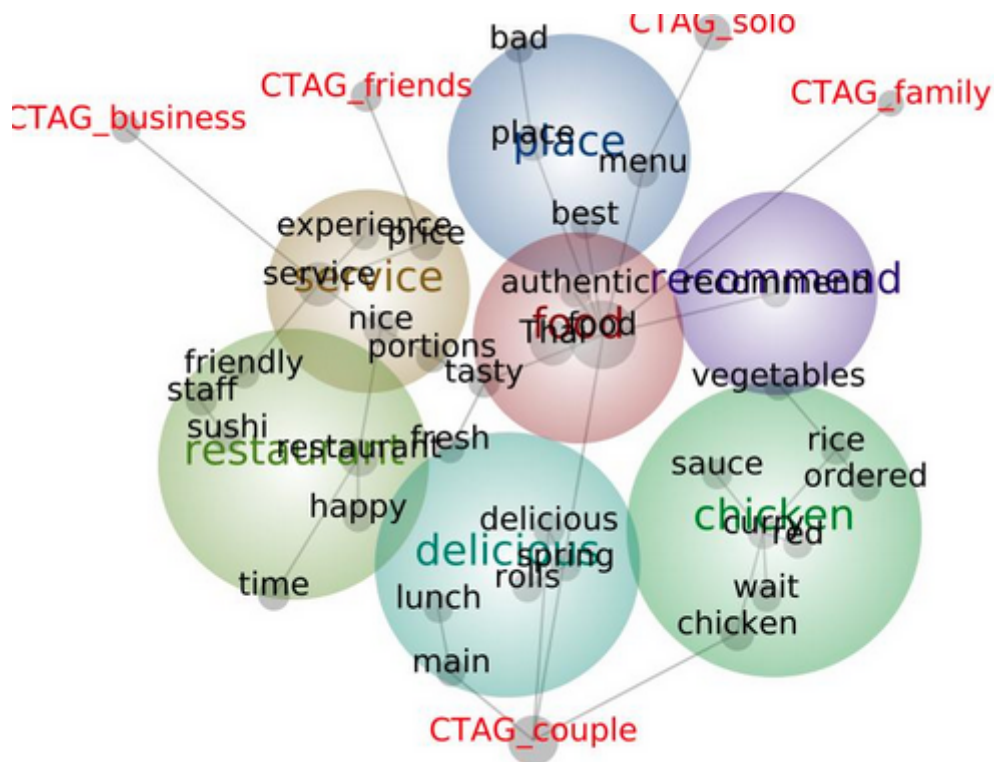


Figure 3. Concept map.

The research shows that families talked more about the food, while solo talked more about the place itself. Couples had more focus on the flavor and the meat (chicken), while business and friends talked about service and the restaurants. The result also shows that business and

friends were the only main tags that shared the same theme. The study also shows that families and couples were more likely to recommend a place on TripAdvisor as shown in the figure above (Figure 3). Although in the WOM and eWOM theory done by Jeong et al. (2011). stated that WOM is often done between family, friends and coworkers, this theory partially carries through to eWOM, as family is also more likely to be engaging in recommendation with WOM as well as eWOM. While friends and coworkers are less likely to be recommending their visit to anyone.

5.3 RQ3

‘‘What are the dominant themes between national and international reviewers’’

The next research question shows a study between national and international visitors' comments and where their main focus is.

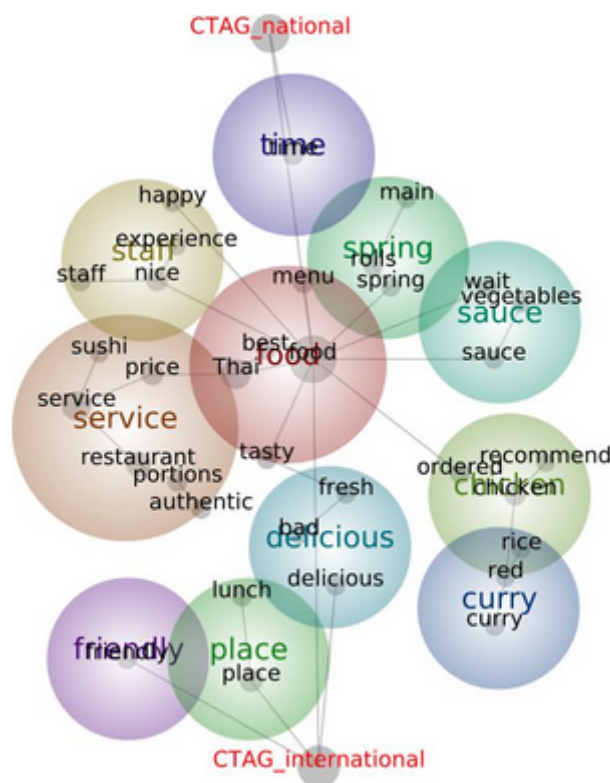


Figure 4. Concept map.

The study shows that national visitors' main comments were about "time". As mentioned earlier, this is about whether or not a visitor would return to the specific restaurants or not. While international visitors were more focused on "place" and "friendly". Outside of "time", "place", and "friendly" national and international share the theme of "food" and "service" the most.

5.4 RQ4

"What satisfied and dissatisfied the customers". The aim of this last RQ study was to find the differences between satisfied and dissatisfied customers based on perceived quality. The research revealed which perceived quality factors more strongly affect satisfied and dissatisfied customers in Thai restaurants in Stavanger. Similar to previous figure 4. Two tags are being presented with the tags stating "satisfied" and "dissatisfied"

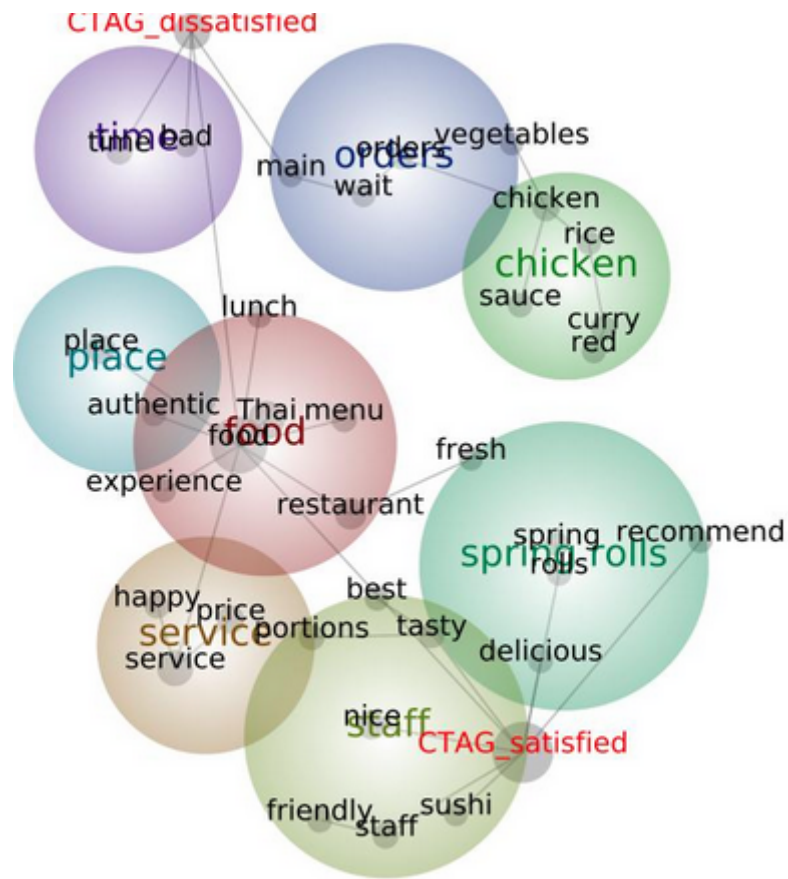


Figure 5. Concept map.

The results show that the overall consensual satisfaction factor with all the guests regardless of their civil status or guest origins group shows that the ‘‘staff’’ theme and a food item ‘‘spring rolls’’ were the most satisfying themes. Staff service attitudes towards customers seem to be what's making the customer satisfied. Spring rolls are a food item that was mentioned and is most satisfied and is being recommended the most. The most dissatisfied themes were ‘‘time’’ and ‘‘order’’. The negative connection between ‘‘time’’ is the customer’s oppositeness to return to the restaurant for the second time. In addition, the dissatisfaction comes from the ‘‘orders’’ where the wait time is far too long and both vegetables and chicken are the main ingredients that are constantly having issues with visitors throughout this research paper, specifically chicken.

6 Discussion

The present study aimed to achieve four major goals, the first being determining the critical motifs in online reviews regarding the Thai restaurant experiences. Content analyses found five themes in descriptions of Thai restaurants in Stavanger and the experiences by including and containing reviews of five restaurants' content posted via the social media platform TripAdvisor. The five most significant themes generated by Leximancer 5.0, ranked in descending order to their relative importance were "food", "chicken", "time", "Thai", and, "recommend" (Figure 2). The theme of "food" was found as the dominating theme in all research questions from RQ1 to RQ4. This is indicated by the color of the sphere being red. These findings are congruent with those of Cessar et al. (2020), who revealed that "food" is the most commonly stated theme among visitors. Other studies (Gebbers et al. 2021). has the same findings where "food" was the main theme in the study as well. This result is expected due to the natural circumstance of the study paper being about restaurants where the food is usually the main focal point. In my study, "chicken" was another important theme that kept being referenced throughout the study and is one of the biggest themes of this research paper. This was also found in another research by Meek et al. (2021). In this study, other big themes such as "staff" are predominantly utilized positively and most of the comments that were found were linked to staff being friendly and living up to the service standard. This result is corroborating with the recent study conducted by Sulu et al. (2022) as well as Arsali et al. (2021). This is also an expected result due to the articles and literature that were found during the literature reviews phase. Customer satisfaction, customer decision-making, and service quality are intertwined with one another and were sure to make an appearance sometime during the research study.

The paper's next objective was to find the visitors' most prominent conversational topics discussed among the different civil statuses. Among the results, research revealed that the family's most important and often mentioned theme was food. Although “food” was the most common nominator among all visitors regardless of their civil statuses. The family seems to have a straight line connecting to the food, which can be explained and understood by the children of the family. The visitors who are families will most likely come with children and other family members, who will usually have a bigger focus on the food of the restaurants, rather than on the other themes shown (Figure 3). This is also true due to the previous studies done by Labreque, et al. (2001). In addition, parents will often bring their children out to eat to mainly satisfy their need for the actual food, compared to other needs shown in adults; being social and looking for good service. Family is also more likely to recommend the restaurants than any other category.

Visitors that visit Thai restaurants alone (solo) commented on the destination or the place itself the most. This can be explained by understanding why people chose to eat out alone in the first place. There is a significant difference between eating out solo, compared to having company. Solo dining happens either by choice or by circumstances, for example, one of the comments wrote *“Restaurant was not far from the hotel I was staying and located on the same street”* Solo dining for the consumer can provide a greater value concerning retaining the immediate food temperature and taste, ambiance and cordial service from staff. Solo dining is also relatively close to the “service”

Couples who went to these restaurants seem to be mentioning the words “delicious” and “chicken” more often than any other visitor. The clear attention toward the food of the different restaurants might be normal for couples to talk about. Couple/partner encounters at

restaurants are associated with dates. Even though the conversation about what a good date looks like is quite subjective, it is not uncommon for it to include a restaurant with good food, which can explain why couples left remarks regarding the word “food” and “chicken”. One of the main conversations that take the center of the conversation is what they are eating and drinking, this is also supported by Marshall, et al. (2002). The taste of the food can have an impact on the interaction between the couple, both negatively and positively. Better food can lead to couples having better conversations during the restaurant visit, which can also lead them to eat at the same place again. Furthermore, the comments about the food of the restaurants can be explained through the partners being more likely to have a conversation regarding the food, compared to being solo at a restaurant, where you would not have the same opportunity to discuss the food with someone else.

Lastly, friends and businesses who visited the different restaurants were both more focused on the service that was provided to them. The similarity of the response can be explained by understanding the values of how businesses are built. No matter what kind of business is involved, it is important to understand that it will include a group of people who work with each other, meaning they spend significantly more time together. This can cause stronger bonds to occur, such as friendships. With this analysis as a foundation, we can create a better understanding of why friend groups and businesses would share the same theme, which was "service". Friend groups are social groups, thus the attention to the provided service along with everything else is gonna be put under a microscope as although one individual might not notice an eye roll or bad attitude, someone else in the group might. A social group will be more talkative and open to discussion and reflection, giving the provided service more room to be opinionated. This in turn can be the main reason why both business and friends have left reviews about the service.

The third objective of this paper was to find out the ‘‘dominant theme’’ shared through different nationalities and what national and international people frequently wrote the most about. The most common word that was left by national visitors had the word ‘‘time’’ in it. Comments that were left stated as such; ‘‘...next time I'll go elsewhere’’, ‘‘This was the third time at my favourite restaurant in Stavanger’’, another reviewer wrote ‘‘Maybe takeaway next time?’’ ‘‘We have been coming here many times now.’’ These comments all indicate their willingness to return or not return for another time, as well as express how many times they have visited the place already. ‘‘Time’’ as a theme is not about the "wait time" for service or the wait time for the arrival of the food as one would assume about a restaurant operation. Although previous research was done by (Lahap et al, 2018). suggest that waiting time in restaurants is one of the main factors for customer satisfaction, which is true. However, in this research paper ‘‘time’’ is not specifically correlated to the waiting time.

The findings continue to show that ‘‘place’’ as well as ‘‘friendly’’ was the most common word that international visitors used to describe the restaurants that they visit. This factor seems to line up as the attitude of Thai people towards visitors has been commonly acknowledged as friendly and service-focused. These attitudes have been profoundly embedded in the culture of Thai people (Hiomsak & Ruangkanjanases, 2016). This is one of the key attractions that could have been the reason why these international visitors visit Thai restaurants in Stavanger. Thai people’s image to international tourists could be portrayed as ‘‘friendliness’’. Common reviews left by the visitors included ‘‘...Friendly staff and nice atmosphere’’ as well as ‘‘...And their service was great. Staff was very friendly’’.

The last objective of this paper was to find what the overall visitors were most satisfied with or dissatisfied with Thai restaurants in Stavanger. The findings show that “Staff” and “Spring rolls” were the most satisfactory themes. “Staff” being the most talked-about theme could also be a direct correlation to previous findings of this paper such as, “friendly” being the most mentioned by international visitors. However, an interesting finding shows that “spring roll” was also among the most satisfying themes that were talked about. Similar to the theme “chicken”, “spring roll” is also a surprising theme that was heavily focused on by visitors. Specific food dishes or ingredients are also mentioned by other studies (Saydam, et al, 2022). such as "wine". The result that was found during this phase of the research allows the restaurants to improve in an area where the customers have been dissatisfied with. This allows the restaurants to improve just like how Nyer (2000). stated in his theory.

7 Conclusion

This study aimed to accomplish four research objectives with the main overall theme being; customers' perceptions of the service quality of Thai restaurants in Stavanger. Content analysis of a sample of UGC of five most relevant restaurants identified five distinct themes: “food”, “time”, “chicken”, “thai”, “recommend” were the most dominant themes representing customers’ dining out experiences in Stavanger. With “food” and “chicken” being the only two themes that kept showing up in all of the concept maps.

The second research objective of this research paper was to determine customers’ perceptions of their visit to the Thai restaurants in Stavanger based on their civil status. Briefly

mentioned, the study reveals that all visitors under “family”, “couple”, and “solo” had different focuses while “Business” and “Friends” shared similar interests.

The third purpose of our study was to ascertain the most dominant themes expressed by passengers of various nationalities while discussing their Thai restaurant experiences. The national visitors were found to be the most expressive about recommending the place or not. This was shown due to the “time” theme being mentioned the most for national visitors. However, the international visitors didn’t focus on recommending the place but rather commented more about the place, and how friendly and delicious the food was.

The last objective of this paper was to determine whether customers who rate their restaurant experiences as satisfactory (excellent and good) or unsatisfactory (poor and terrible) use distinct descriptions in their narratives about their experiences and thus share distinct content in online reviews during their visit. The analysis findings indicate that customers who rate the Thai restaurants as 5 - 4 stars (Satisfied) are satisfied with the narrative of “service”, “spring rolls”, and “staff”. In contrast, an assessment of the concepts associated with the visitors who rated the restaurant 1 - 3 stars (Dissatisfied) are dissatisfied with “order” and “chicken”. As well as them not wanting to return for another time, as depicted in figure 5.

8 Theoretical implication

The topic of these local Thai restaurants has rarely been researched in the field of hospitality research, notably those based within Norway, and even less when it is based in Stavanger. As such, based on interview reviews that were collected, this research paper provides useful insight into how guests perceive services given by Thai restaurants in Stavanger. First, the analytical capabilities in Leximancer aided the researcher in identifying relevant data in a mountain of information as well as offering a new perspective on guests' overall experiences with minimal human intervention. Given the positive and negative reviews about the Thai restaurants in Stavanger, my study also provides empirical support to the local labor force in the restaurant industry. This research has a further theoretical significance that online restaurant reviews etc. TripAdvisor shows that it is one of the predominant roles when consumers make their decisions.

9 Limitations and Future research

There are various limitations to this study that must be taken into consideration. The first factor that needs to be mentioned is that the findings of the Thai restaurants are only based on restaurants in Stavanger. Therefore, consumers' perceptions of other Thai restaurants may be different such as restaurants in Sandnes which is relatively close to Stavanger, or other Thai restaurants spread across Norway. As a result, any generalization or interference must be drawn with caution. The findings are also based purely on TripAdvisor reviews, therefore other online restaurant review platforms e.g. google reviews, yelp, booking.com, and zomato, might generate other results or even contrasting perspectives on Thai restaurants in

Stavanger. With further use of the review platform TripAdvisor, limitations of the website started to become prevalent. Although a reviewer provides qualitative feedback about the dining experience, the quality of some of the comments is very limited as the comments quality fluctuate between long detailed description of the visit or simple and straight to the point. In addition, some of the comments left by the users were completely anonymous, this resulted in a significant lost amount of valuable data during the research and data collecting phase of the paper. It is important to note that although "family" left the most comments on TripAdvisor (See table 1.). Family reviews only represent the individual that writes it. This is also relevant to visitors who are "Business" and "friends" as some of the comments from these categories stated that the visit consisted of eight to fourteen people. "Couple" and "Solo" are excluded from this as it clearly states in those reviews that they were left by one or two people. The data collected from family, business, and friends were taken as bulk where the opinion of the reviewer spoke for the entire party. This means that although thirteen people could have had an amazing time during their visit, all it took was one person to write a bad review and the rest of the visitors are taken under the same comment. Another limitation that I was faced with during the research was some of the Thai restaurants in Stavanger did not have a presence on TripAdvisor. Although there were more than five Thai restaurants in the city, the others were not on the website. The majority of the data was lost, and the lost data could have influenced the outcome of this paper depending on its size.

With the limitations that were mentioned, future research needs to have extra steps to fill out the gap and area that was lacking. To begin, new study avenues might be identified by examining and comparing reviews, evaluations, and textual views of visitors expressed in other languages, places, and settings. Second, another study can compare online ratings and

textual opinions of national and international visitors and divide them up to Europe, America, Africa, Asia, the middle east, and Australia customers to be more specific. This could provide useful results for the restaurant industry in terms of contrasting which areas of visitors' satisfaction and dissatisfaction, and finding out which region says what about the restaurants in Norway. This again can lead to even more research done on why these visitors left the review the way that they did. This could be because of the cultures. Etc. Asian visitors might find that Thai food in Norway is less authentic while middle eastern visitors might think otherwise. Thirdly, more data should be collected from another platform. Another study might incorporate data from more portals, and can be compared to each other to measure results.

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