

Opinion Aggregator Platforms In The Restaurant Sector

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Abstract: This work intends to understand to what level consumers collect information before going to a restaurant and if they know and use online Apps for gathering information and restaurants reservation, and above all, what if they trust in these Apps. To understand consumer trust in online platforms, a set of variables was established with emphasis on consumer happiness with the experience, consumer satisfaction, online brand relationship, online brand experience, and time availability. We used a quantitative methodology – PLS-SEM - and data was gathering by an online survey collected in May 2021, for Portuguese consumers. The direct effect of the relations hypothesizes are conforming; however, the moderate effect of time availability only has effect on the relation between online brand experience and consumer’s happiness with the Apps. This study contributes to fulfill the gap existing in the research on consumer rating foods Apps.

Keywords: Online Brand Experience, Online Apps, Drivers of online platforms use

1. Introduction

The Internet has changed the configuration of consumption globally. Consumers have become more enlightened and have more resources to find the necessary information for their choice process. By 2022 the world population is expected to be close to 8 billion (World Bank 2021), of which approximately 4.7 billion are internet users (Johnson 2021) and 3.8 billion are smartphone users (Galov 2022). Approximately 230 billion app downloads were recorded in 2020 (Ceci 2021).

This study is contextualized in Portugal, where approximately 80% of the population is an internet user (World Bank 2021) and 56% of the population uses the internet as a mean to purchase online, values historically lower than the European average 95% and 73% respectively (Lone et al. 2021).

This work aims to know to what extent consumers collect information before going to a restaurant and if they know and use online Apps for information collection and reservation of restaurants, and above all, what influences their trust in these Apps.

To understand consumer trust in online platforms, a set of variables was established with emphasis on consumer happiness with the experience, consumer satisfaction, online brand relationship, online brand experience, and time availability.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Consumer Opinion Aggregator Platforms

With the diffusion of mobile apps and online interactive platforms, the number of user reviews on websites such as Tripadvisor has increased, becoming one of the most important ways for consumers to express their opinion about products and services (Minkwitz 2018; Yan et al. 2021). The growth of these platforms has allowed online reviews to become one of the main sources of recommendations constituting an aid for consumers in their online purchasing process, such as when booking hotels, buying products, ordering meals, among others (Huang et al. 2020; Yan et al. 2021). Thus, the feedback expressed by these consumers can influence the final decisions of other users (Ukpabi and Karjaluoto 2018), in line with the growing importance of the concept of user generated content and its impact on modern marketing (Ray and Bala 2021).

At the same time, these platforms can also be useful for companies. Monitoring post-purchase attitudes is of great importance to marketers and management professionals. Consumer behavior has become easier to track allowing companies to monitor consumer feedback, obtain information and concerns that allow them to improve their products and services (Yan et al. 2021; Mondo, et al. 2022).

Applications and platforms such as TripAdvisor and Yelp have demonstrated their importance for both consumers and managers (Lu and Stepchenkova 2015). These platforms act as references, as authentic brands, to which consumers and managers turn for information (Minkwitz 2018). Their use can consequently provide an experience, enable a trusting relationship, enjoyable use, and overall satisfaction.

2.2 Online Brand Experience - OBE

In relating to and searching for a brand, consumers seek satisfaction of their experiential needs (Schmitt et al. 2015). Brand experience involves cognitions, sensations, feelings, and behavioral responses that are generated by brand-related stimuli, such as design and communication (Brakus et al. 2009; Budi et al. 2021).

Consumers can have experiences with the brand through various means, including the Internet. In the digital context, these experiences may involve a diversity of stimuli and situations such as the search for products/services, their evaluation, and their purchase (Brakus et al. 2009). In this process, brand experience can be considered a way to differentiate products and services and form perceptions about a brand (Moreira et al. 2017).

A positive brand experience can have several consequences. First, this experience can have a positive effect on customer satisfaction (Ha and Perks 2005), information sharing, recommendation to other consumers, repeat purchase (Park 2017) and brand loyalty (Budi et al. 2021).

2.3 Online Brand Relationship - OBR

By interacting with a brand online, and experiencing it, the consumer is creating a relationship and a connection with it (Christodoulides et al. 2006). This relationship can be understood as a construct composed of functional and affective connections with the brand. Some authors (Park et al. 2010; MacInnis and Folkes 2017) advance the concept of brand attachment, that is, the connection between the consumer and the brand.

This relationship grows stronger as customer-brand interactions increase in both frequency and duration. Therefore, the more frequent the interaction between consumer and brand and the longer the time elapses, the stronger the relationship may become (Christodoulides et al. 2006).

The relationship with the brand has a positive effect on customer satisfaction (Budi et al 2021), and can increase the intention to repeat purchase and generate loyalty (Park et al. 2013).

2.4 Consumers' time availability

The consumer's time availability may eventually condition consumption experience. In fact, this availability may be one of the main factors influencing the selection of shopping channels. Kim and Park (2007) argue that consumers who value their time tend to shop online, while consumers who have time available shop more offline. In fact, nowadays, convenience and time saving are key reasons for shopping online (Khalil 2014).

Understandably, in general, people feel more positive emotions when they invest their time in positive experiences. In fact, time is one of the precious resources that matter for happiness. Thus, to promote happiness people should consider spending more time engaged in activities and experiences that give them pleasure (Mogilner et al. 2018).

2.5 Happiness with the Experience - HE

Research in the field of digital marketing has paid particular attention to customer satisfaction (Ertemel et al. 2021). In the context of consumption, the concept of happiness emerges as a higher level of customer satisfaction (Alexander 2010), which can improve people's quality of life and lead to repeat experience (Gong and Yi 2018).

In general, happiness constitutes a positive judgment, from a subjective point of view, of an individual who feels satisfied with a certain situation. Consequently, consumer happiness refers to the emotions that are related to consumption activities that are satisfying (Zhong and Moon 2020). In some studies, the practice of consumption has been shown to increase people's happiness (Dunn et al. 2011; Kim and Lee 2020). Thus, the shopping experience, or a particular consumption-related experience, can bring happiness to customers, and to achieve greater happiness, customers may repeatedly engage in such activities (Zhong and Moon 2020). In this sense, making a consumer happier can be a good marketing strategy for a company (Baumeister et al. 2013).

2.6 Consumer Satisfaction - CS

Satisfaction is the measure of how well a product or service provided by a company meets or exceeds customer expectations (Budi et al. 2021). It can be defined as the difference between expectations before consumption of the product and the attitude toward the product's performance after consumption (Giao et al. 2020).

Therefore, on the consumer's part, satisfaction constitutes a positive reaction regarding the results of previous experience (Chinomona 2013; Budi et al. 2021).

Previous research has shown that satisfaction is often considered as an important determinant of intention to repeat purchase (Liao et al. 2009). It is thus considered that if a company can satisfy its customers' needs better than its competitors, it will be easier to achieve their loyalty (Moreira et al. 2015). In this sense, customer satisfaction is one of the most important aspects for the success of a business (Nguyen et al. 2021) and is the main goal of every brand (Budi et al. 2021).

3. Research Hypotheses

Based on the literature review, the following hypotheses were designed:

H1: "Online brand relationship" has a positive and significant influence on "consumer happiness with the experience".

H2: "Online brand experience" has a positive and significant influence on "consumer happiness with the experience".

H3: "Consumer happiness with the experience" has a positive and significant influence on "Consumer satisfaction".

H4: "Consumer time availability" has a moderating effect on the relationship between online brand relationship and online brand experience and consumer happiness with the experience.

4. Methods

Four hypotheses were tested using an online survey collected in May 2021. A convenience sampling method was used, and respondents were invited to complete a link from the google forms platform.

All constructs were measured in a response format of a five-point Likert scale ranging 1 from (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) and adapted from previous studies: online brand relationship (Veloutsou (2007), online brand experience (Christodoulides, De Chernatony, Furrer, Shiu, and Abimbola (2006); Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Malhotra (2005), happiness with the experience (Bhattacharjee and Mogilner (2013), consumer satisfaction (Rose, Clark, Samouel, and Hair (2012), and time availability (Etkin, Evangelidis, and Aaker (2015).

PLS-SEM using Smart PLS was used to carry out data analysis. PLS-SEM is a robust modeling technique, with few identification issues and well-suited for testing the strength of relationships between latent variables and when the sample size ($n = 123$) is relatively small (Hair, Black, Anderson, & Babin, 2018). It followed a two-step approach: (1) the reliability and validity of the measurement model was assessed, and (2) the structural model was evaluated (structural relations among the latent factors) (Wynne W Chin, 2010).

5. Principal Results

Most of the respondents is female (67.5%) and between 18 and 25 years old (64.2%). When the respondents were asked their preferred online platform for restaurant information/booking, the most popular was Tripadvisor (30%), followed by Google (23.6%).

Online brand relationship ($\beta = 0.229, p < 0.05$) and online brand experience ($\beta = 0.384, p < 0.001$) show a significant and positive influence on consumer's happiness with the experience, respectively, supporting hypotheses 1 and 2. Moreover, happiness with the experience was seen to have a positive and significant effect on consumer satisfaction ($\beta = 0.499, p < 0.001$), supporting hypothesis 3.

To test H4, we assessed the moderating effect of consumers' time availability on the relationship between online brand relationship and online brand experience and consumers' happiness with the experience, using the product indicator approach (W. W. Chin, Marcolin, & Newsted, 2003). Findings show that consumer's time availability has a moderating effect on the relationship between online brand experience and consumer's happiness with the experience, partially supporting hypothesis 4.

6. Conclusions and Discussion

In the literature it has been found that a positive experience with a brand can have several consequences which are also positive. The relationship with the brand can also involve positive outcomes. In this study consumer

commenting platforms such as Tripadvisor were assumed as brands. And so, the experience and relationship that can be established with these platforms was analyzed.

The results showed that the online brand experience and the online brand relationship had a positive effect on online happiness experience with the online platform and that lead to a positive consumer satisfaction. In this context, a brand experience, and a relationship with the brand, both positive, can result in a feeling, also positive, or happiness, because it is associated with a satisfactory use of these platforms (Zhong and Moon 2020).

It was also possible to prove that happiness with the experience had a positive influence on consumer satisfaction. Since the concept of happiness is a higher level of customer satisfaction (Alexander 2010), it is natural that this positive feeling results in a feeling of consumer satisfaction.

Other interesting result was the moderate effect of the time availability that in the absence of time can negative effect the relation the online brand experience and the online brand happiness with the food app.

Although indirectly, it is possible to resume the perspective of other researchers who argue that the experience can have a positive effect on customer satisfaction (Ha and Perks 2005), and that the relationship with the brand can also have a positive effect on that satisfaction (Budi et al 2021).

6.1 Theoretical Implications

Despite the numerous studies that have been conducted on online consumer behavior, research on consumer rating platforms is scarce. In this context, the present study contributes to fill this gap by analyzing consumers' attitudes towards these platforms.

This study also addresses the concept of happiness in the context of brand experience and the relationship between brand and consumer, both of which are essential topics in the context of academic research.

6.2 Practical Implications

With the existence of a wide variety of apps available to collect information about restaurants and their reservation, it becomes essential to try to stand out by the ease of search, speed of delivery of information, variety of information available, content available, variety of available establishments, as well as the promotions that some of these platforms offer to attract their users trying to gain a competitive advantage.

Given this, it becomes necessary to know to what extent consumers know the online platforms available for collecting information and booking restaurants, and more, to what extent consumers trust the online platforms and what factors influence this trust (Cheng, Fu, Sun, Bilgihan, & Okumus, 2019; Xiao, Zhang, & Fu, 2019).

6.3 Limitations and Future Research

Despite the contribution of this study, some limitations should be pointed out, namely regarding the sample. In this context, we must point out the limitation of the sample in the number of individuals and in the diversity of age groups, since it was essentially composed of young people.

Future research should, firstly, use larger and more diverse samples in terms of age groups. Secondly, studies could be conducted on other countries in order to broaden the conclusions drawn.

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