

Identification of vegan restaurant customers' experiences using text analysis

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Abstract:

Founded on a practice of abstaining from all animal-related food and products, veganism is becoming a popular trend, especially in developed regions, increasing the consumption of vegan diets and establishment of vegan restaurants in many regions (Janssen, Busch, Rodiger & Hamm, 2016). These specialized restaurants provide plant-based diets to satisfy the physiological needs and enhance the experiences of its patrons. That notwithstanding, little is known about the “delighters” and “frustrators” of vegan restaurant customers' experience. Besides, there is little effort to analyze big data containing vegan restaurant customers' experience using semantic network analysis. Meanwhile, vegan restaurants customer experiences could elicit different meanings and interpretation from other restaurants, and cater to a market niche with health and ethical motives. Moreover, the theme, ambience, and equipment used in most vegan restaurants are distinct and more sustainable. To fill these gaps, this study seeks to (a) examine the “delighters” and “frustrators” of vegan restaurant experience and (b) examine responses of vegan restaurant patrons after their experience. Outcomes of this study will improve our knowledge on an overlooked area in veganism – vegan food restaurants – and the factors that inform customers' dining experiences and post-tasting responses.

The data was collected through online reviews on Tripadvisor.com using the automated parsing software (Webharvy) from May 25 to June 13, 2019. As of the data collection period, 1,020 vegan restaurants were listed on TripAdvisor.com with average rating score of 4.45 (SD=.303) out of 5.00. A total of 215, 218 reviews in English language were used in identifying the delighters and frustrators of vegan restaurant experience. This study used reviews with the highest score of 5 and lowest score of 1 with 118, 649 reviews rated 5 whilst 4, 079 had a rating score of 1. Semantic network analysis was used to enable the researchers to examine the power and meaning of words that are commonly used by patrons when sharing their experiences.

The study identified five main delight factors of the vegan restaurant experience including organic ingredients and novel menus, slow food and acceptance of dietary restrictions, and guilt-free/allergy-free food. Frustrators were, however, related to overpriced vegan foods, rude and slow service, and insanitary eating conditions, among others. These results suggest that while vegan restaurant customers find some experiences as delightful, they however identify some pertinent aspects as frustrating thereby affecting their propensity to make positive pronouncements and recommendations. The study, thus, presents some novel findings while lending some support to previous studies (e.g. Canny, 2014; Goolaup & Mossberg, 2017; Ha & Jang, 2013; Kim et al., 2020; Pantelidis, 2010; Ryu & Han, 2010; Ryu, Lee & Kim, 2012).

This study expands the range of studies on vegan foods and sheds light on the factors that delight and frustrate customers' experiences. Practically, the results can help improve product quality and services through knowledge of the delighters and frustrators of customers' experiences. Vegan restaurant managers can also use knowledge of this study to enhance competitive advantage, and aid in marketing strategies to attract potential customers and retain existing ones.

Keywords: Vegan food; Vegan restaurant; experiences; delighters and frustrators; semantic network analysis

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