An Investigation of the impact of online word of mouth on purchase intention in the Dublin Hospitality Sector (Bars and Restaurants)

Dissertation submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MBA in Information Systems at Dublin Business School

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Abstract

The world of marketing is one that is changing. Where advertisements through TV, radio and print had been the dominant method for marketing, word of mouth has become a front runner.

This paper looks specifically at the influence of word of mouth via user generated content on bar and restaurant customers in the Dublin hospitality market.

In part of this research previous academic literature has been drawn upon surrounding the subject of online word of mouth. The methodology is undertaken is quantitative in nature and with the use of questionnaires data has been collected from a sample population to determine the reactions of individuals to online reviews of bars and restaurants. The results of the primary research provide information to managers and marketers from bars and restaurants as to why there is a necessity to pay close attention to what is being said about them via online word of mouth and also why it is necessary to manage their online presence.
Chapter One:

Introduction
Chapter One: Introduction

1.0 Background

The world of marketing has changed drastically from focusing on advertising over TV, radio and written word to a wider picture. Word of mouth has become one of the strongest tools for marketers and the use of online word of mouth has become a stable. This paper explores how online word of mouth influences the customers of bars and restaurants in Dublin. The power of the Internet has drastically changed the way in which the world works. Its influence and growth over the last twenty years has had an effect on all business sectors. The internet has changed the way in which consumers search for goods and services. Many people now will simply type what they are looking for into the search engine and what they find will have an influence on their purchase decision. The internet has changed the way consumers will decide on a bar or restaurant to visit. Today social media platforms such as TripAdvisor and Yelp.com provide user-generated reviews of thousands of establishments worldwide. As stated by Ong (2012, p.464) “word-of-mouth communication and consumer knowledge sharing extend beyond a potential customers personal circle of friends and family network”. Reviews that are up to date will affect how potential future customers will see the establishment and the well rounded information provided will possibly convince the customer whether they should give the place a try or avoid it. According to Razorfish (2008; cited in Chen and Lurie, 2013, p.463) over 60% of consumers consult online review before making a purchase decision. The purpose of this research is to determine the impact these online review have on young customers aged 18 to 30 purchase intention in the bar and restaurant market of Dublin.

It is critical that as the method of word of mouth communication continues to grow that managers and marketers in hospitality react to the reviews posted on these open forums. However there seems to be uncertainty in how to respond to the reviews, perhaps partly because those responsible do not realise how consumers are reacting to the reviews of their peers on the establishment (Ong, 2012, p.464).

The purpose of this research project is to determine the impact of online word of mouth on the purchase intention of bar and restaurant customers in Dublin. The study was conducted via an analysis of young Irish consumers aged 18 to 30 years in the Dublin market. This sector is an area with a high volume of ratings on third party sites such as TripAdvisor, Yelp.com and Google Reviews.
Unlike tangible products such as books or games, bars and restaurants provide an intangible service that can change day to day (Ong, 2012, p.464). Therefore the review sites can be constantly updated. The objectives of this study are to:

- Assess the awareness levels of young Irish consumers within the bar/restaurant trade of popular user review sites (TripAdvisor, Yelp.com, Google Reviews etc.)
- Investigate the development of consumer attitudes to online word of mouth via user review sites
- Identify the characteristics of an individual who will likely post a review
- Assess the impact of online word of mouth on purchase intention of bar and restaurant customers in Dublin
- To determine if a bar or restaurants social media presence from the customers perspective will add to their online word of mouth portfolio.

1.1 Research Questions

1.1.1 Primary Question

Does Online Word of Mouth via user review sites have an impact on the purchase intentions of bar and restaurant customers in Dublin?

The purpose of this research is to provide evidence into the critical importance of the information provided by third party user review sites such as TripAdvisor, Yelp.com and Google Reviews. The analysis of young Irish consumers in the Dublin market will provide an insight on the impact of these sites on consumer’s decisions when choosing a restaurant or bar to visit. The research looks at how negative reviews or positive reviews have a different effect on customers. The effect they have on customers will in turn have an effect on the establishments. For example, if a restaurant is given one star out of five along with negative feedback, there is likelihood that most potential customers will be put off patronizing the establishment; whereas five stars reviews of an establishment will likely attract new customers as long as no negative reviews are provided.
Ong (2012) suggests that when reviewers provide some information about themselves, for example about their age and where they are from, the reader is more likely to trust the reviewer. From this information we can determine whether consumers who use third party review sites will look at the characteristics of reviewers in the Dublin market. For example a review provided by someone who has just turned 18 years old and is not originally from the Greater Dublin Region (Dublin, Meath, Louth, Kildare, Wicklow) will have different ideas than a 30 year old who has live in the area their entire life.

1.1.2 Sub Question

Do other social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter influence the power of Online Word of Mouth?

The rapid growth of social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, and in more recent years Instagram has encouraged more and more people to feel safe in having an online presence. Zhang and Daugherty (2009, p.53) described these sites as “user generated and user centred”. Although a source of word of mouth companies struggle to measure the effectiveness these types of social media have provided. Bunker, Rajendran and Corbin (2013, p.21) stated that the return on the investment on these social media is becoming an important issue. The objective here will be to determine whether young consumers in Dublin’s market are influenced by their peers who have “liked” a page or “re-tweeted” a post of a bar or restaurant. This can in turn aid marketers in the area in progressing with their social media campaign.

1.2 Approach to the Research

In order to achieve the objectives of this research the author has followed a positivism approach by using questionnaires to collect data about the target audience. Collecting the data in this way can give us an estimate of how the target audience react to user review sites and other forms of online word of mouth.
1.3 Justification for Research

1.3.1 Academic Justification

The literature reviewed in chapter two gives an insight into what previous authors have covered surrounding the subject of online word of mouth. The topic in question has become much more popular over the past few years. Of course the influence of user reviews has been discussed however this research paper focuses on the how individuals react in regards to positive or negative reviews. This fills a gap in the current research particularly in the Irish or Dublin market. There is little academic research that focuses on consumers attitudes to online word of mouth through user review sites or social media sites. The existing research has built a solid foundation to the topic of online word of mouth and this paper aims to add to it.

1.3.2 Market Justification

With the growth of the internet and the extended trust in which individuals have given to the internet has made it a powerful tool for all. The hospitality industry can benefit from the free marketing tools of which the internet provides. For the past decade social network sites have provided a platform for bars and restaurants to promote their business at no expense. In more recent year’s user generated review sites have become one of the biggest assets to online shopping and planning. The results of this research will be of particular benefit to bars and restaurants in Dublin as it aims to determine how influential the posts on sites such as TripAdvisor, Yelp.com and Google Reviews are to potential customers. The results will explain the need for restaurants and bars to pay close attention to their online presence on these user generated sites while not ignoring their own social network pages.

1.3.3 Personal Justification

As the author of this research paper I chose this direction of research as I have been working in hospitality industry for over a decade. For the past year, working for an establishment in the Docklands area of Dublin, I have been tasked with upgrading the company’s online presence. After updating the website and adding daily focus to social network sites I had turned my attention to user
generated review sites. Therefore while studying for my MBA, it was a logical decision to conduct research in the area which was not only of great interest to me but was also beneficial for my job.

1.4 Structure of Research Paper

The next chapter of this paper discusses the literature surrounding the area of Online Word of Mouth. The literature review begins with a basic overview of online word of mouth and concludes with a focus on research surrounding online word of mouth in hospitality. The third chapter of this paper is the research methodology. In this chapter the problem definition, research objectives, research design, research ethics, research sample and the limitations of the methodology are all discussed. Chapter four discusses the findings of the primary research followed by discussion of the findings in chapter five. Next chapter six explains the conclusions of the project. And finally chapter seven suggests recommendations for future research and to individuals in the market.
Chapter Two:

Literature Review
Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.0 Literature Review Introduction

This chapter focuses on the literature surrounding online word of mouth. The author has presented research previously published on the topic. Bryman (2008, p.81) states that the need for a literature review in any research project is to ensure that the researcher knows what is already known about the subject area so old ground is not being covered.

2.1 Content of the Literature Review

The first section of this literature review gives a basic overview of word of mouth, followed by a brief description of face to face word of mouth and then the differences between face to face word of mouth and online word of mouth are highlighted. To conclude this section the influences of positive versus negative word of mouth are discussed. The second section in this chapter studies the power of online word of mouth and discusses the research regarding this and the reach of online word of mouth. Thirdly the necessity of monitoring online word of mouth is explained backed by the research by many authors. The next section discusses user review sites such as TripAdvisor and Yelp.com to name a few. The author has focused on research regarding the content of user reviews and the attitudes towards these sites and the reviews found within. Section five of this chapter discusses online word of mouth via social networking sites such as Facebook or Twitter. And finally section six looks at online word of mouth’s effect on hospitality via user review sites and social networking sites.

2.2 Overview of Word of Mouth

Bronner and deHoog (2013, p.52) argue that information provide by suppliers of consumer goods is no longer the major factor in influencing consumers decisions. They state that these decisions are now being influenced by “opinions and experiences from other consumers”. Sigralla (2011) labelled this “prosumerism” (Bronner and deHoog, 2013, p.52). Word of mouth has become the most relevant marketing tool above the traditional advertising methods that controlled the marketing world in the twentieth century. As described by Lang and Hyde (2013, p.1) it is communication between a
communicator and a receiver both who are independent from the brand, product or service in which they are discussing. It is seen as a marketing tool generated in the most part through communication between consumers. Word of mouth has been recognised as being the most powerful influence on consumer’s behaviour for more than 60 years (Whyte, 1954; cited in Lang and Hyde, 2013, p.1).

Word of mouth communication can be through face-to-face, over the phone, text message and via the internet. The latter, i.e. online word of mouth is the most relevant to this paper and can be identified through online review sites, social networks and blogs (Berger and Iyengar, 2013, p.567). There has been a vast amount of research around the subject of Word of Mouth and opinions vary as to what form of word of mouth has the strongest influence (Kawakami, Kishiya and Parry, 2013; Berger and Iyengar, 2013; Keller and Fay, 2012; and Prendergast, Ko and Yeun, 2012). Sheng Chung (2012, p.190) cites the findings of research conducted by Berger and Schwartz (2011) to reflect that it is the interesting or more popular products that generate the higher levels of word of mouth. According to Chen (2011) the personality of the information provider is important in spreading of online word of mouth. Previous research by Chen found that consumers with an extrovert personality were more likely to share their experiences. On the side of the information receiver the degree of acceptance will the affect the shopping behaviour and decision. The better understanding the receiver has of the information provided increases the likelihood of the receiver making the same decision of the information provider. Furthermore certain factors affect the influential power of word of mouth. For instance culture and similar levels of interest create motivation to spread positive word of mouth (Sheng Chung, 2012, p.194).

2.2.1 Overview of Face to Face Word of Mouth

As debated in vast amounts of research word of mouth can hold a different power level depending on the medium in which information is exchanged. Kawakami, Kishiya and Parry (2013, p.17) identified the two major types as personal word of mouth (pWOM) and virtual word of mouth (vWOM) as the main force that can impact consumers. Personal word of mouth is communications through conversations. Keller and Fay (2012, p.459) argue that gauging the "expressions" of consumers witnessed through face to face word of mouth is a stronger tool for marketers than relying on opinions expressed through online written word of mouth. Prendergast, Ko and Yeun (2010, p.690) describe the spread of personal word of mouth as the situation where information passes through a chain of
correspondents. According to Lang and Hyde (2013, p.1) the vast majority of word of mouth communication (up to 90%) is through offline channels. Despite this fact there are many arguments against the power of this medium. One point argued by many researchers is that face to face word of mouth can be regarded as idle chit chat. Chen and Kirmani (2011) highlight discussions in order to fill the awkward silences found in social situations may result in talking about anything at all with no regards to how boring the topic it may be. Kawakami, Kishiya and Parry (2013) make the point that the strength of face to face word of mouth comes with the social relationships between the individuals.

### 2.2.2 Overview of Online Word of Mouth

Huamei (2013, p.2316) states the following:

> Online WOM means the consumers communicate information about product quality, service as well as good or bad consuming experience to other consumers in the form of text, voice, image, video or combination of them using online forum, email, search engine and other platforms.

With so much traffic over the internet and constant growth especially over the last decade understanding of this medium is crucial. According to Tirunillai and Tellis (2013, p.13) “in 2010, 131.4 million users were estimated to have read a product rating, review or other form of word of mouth while 95.3 million users had submitted product feedback.” The popularity of online review sites, social network sites and blogs as methods of communication continue to grow at a rapid speed thanks to the adoption of Web 2.0. As a result of this advertisers worldwide are seeing the need to adapt to this form of social marketing. As with face to face word of mouth researchers differ on opinions regarding its strength. When examining how the different mediums affect what people talk about Berger and Iyengar, 2013, p.568) found that written communication found in online word of mouth rather than face to face word of mouth can have more of an impact on brands as the individual reviewing has more time to construct their comments. Keller and Fey (2012, p.459) made the argument that only one tenth of consumer conversations about brands occur via online conservations and marketers should not rely on these comments as reactions to them cannot be determined. In contrast Prendergast, Ko and Yeun (2010) argued that the fact that most conversations take place face to face, does not take away from the fact that online word of mouth will likely grow increasingly more important as people are relying more on the internet as a source of information.
2.2.3 Positive versus negative Word of Mouth

Many researchers have distinguished between the power of positive word of mouth and negative word of mouth. Sheng Chung (2012, p.189) found that positive word of mouth leads to an increase in demand for a product and negative word of mouth leads to a reduction in demand. There is a large problem for marketers however in that consumers are more likely to share bad experiences than good experiences. One method marketers have tried in order to balance the levels is to use positive word of mouth as an advertising tool. Testimonials will often be derived from comments made on online forums. Sheng Chung (2012, p.192) reported that from the findings of Wang (2011) positive word of mouth has more influence on consumers. From this factor it appears that despite the higher levels of negative word of mouth to be found, individuals are likely to disregard a larger proportion and try out the product or service in question themselves. Furthermore Sheng Chung reported the findings of the study by Cheng et al (2011) where sales had been found to increase as a result of positive word of mouth but negative word of mouth had no significant effect.

2.3 Online word of mouth

2.3.1 The Power of Online Word of Mouth

A vast amount of research has been conducted in regards to the changing landscape of the marketing world, with word of mouth taking the higher seat above the traditional advertising that controlled marketing in the 20th Century. Online word of mouth, the central topic of this paper, no doubt has came vast steps forward and follows different rules to that of face to face word of mouth. It is apparent from research conducted by Chen and Li (2009, cited in Chen, 2011) that online word of mouth is becoming more and more influential and posts on shopping websites is influencing online customers trust in the sites. One reason online word of mouth is used by consumers is the high risk level involved in the virtual shopping world. Chen (2011, p.265) reports the four different types of online word of mouth as described by Kiecker and Cowles (2001), they are: Spontaneous; Quasi-Spontaneous; Independent- or Third Party; and Corporate Sponsored. Quasi-Spontaneous is the category that gathers the majority of interest in most of the literature. These are comments that are posted by individual consumers on bulletin sites and virtual shopping community pages, i.e. user
generated content. One distinguishing factor for online word of mouth is that information spreads at rapid speeds with hundreds or perhaps even millions of people reading and spreading a message (Prendergast, Ko and Yeun, 2010, p.690). Another important strength of online word of mouth is that where the fast majority of face to face conversations can be regarded as idle chit chat, the information being passed along over the online medium is deemed to be useful and interesting by the individual posting the comment. Sheng Chung (2012, p.190) cites the findings of research conducted by Berger and Schwartz (2011) to reflect that it is interesting or more popular products that generate higher levels of word of mouth.

The effect of social media on the power of online word of mouth can be discussed under a similar argument made by Bronner and deHoog (2013, p.53). They stated that “social media as an information source will increase when a product or service has several properties”. These properties are listed as; accessibility, relevance and experience. These points make it unlikely that information from social media will influence the purchase of low-involvement products but will influence buying products that will have a high-involvement and more risk (Bronner and deHoog, 2013, p.53).

2.3.2 The Reach of Online Word of Mouth

Zhang and Daugherty (2009, p.60) back up the argument regarding the changes that online word of mouth is causing to marketing strategies. They state that users of online review sites post messages on discussion boards for many to see. Prendergast, Ko and Yeun (2010, p.689) compared the power of online word of mouth against offline word of mouth, describing the intense speed of the latter with hundreds, thousands or millions of people possibly reviewing the content posted by user generated reviewers. These researchers also argue that online forums generate empathy and posters on user review sites are perhaps performing for other readers (Prendergast, Ko and Yeun, 2010, p.690). This may give some thought into whether customers trust online reviewers posts, leading into the suggestion that individuals will believe people similar to them will have similar needs. Ong (2012) backs up this suggestion arguing that when reviewers provide some information about themselves, for example about their family or occupation, the reader is more likely to trust the reviewer. The research of Zhang and Daugherty (2009) suggest that the third person effect with individuals perceiving media having a different effect on themselves than others. They made the statement that “individuals are inclined to think they are smarter, better off and more fortunate than most other people” (2009, p.54).
Applying this theory to the research question may alter the perceived notion that individuals will trust online word of mouth in regards to reviews of bars and restaurants by people that may be similar to them. They may in fact assume that each of the reviewers is entirely different to themselves.

The subject matter missing from research on this topic is the lasting effect of the posts on user review sites and the fact that over a lengthy period of time they will reach a wide audience. For instance, if you were to search for an establishment such as a restaurant or a bar using any method online it is likely that amongst the top pages will be an online review site such as TripAdvisor or Yelp.com. Once you have found this scrolling back through the pages of review you may find yourself reading posts from many years ago. The lasting effect will be how perhaps a negative review from a post that is over 5 years old will have on your desire to go to the restaurant. Now imagine the owner of the restaurant. He or she has seen this negative post and has made changes in their establishment to ensure the complaint has been corrected, however, due to reading this “old” post, customers are still avoiding it.

2.4 Necessity of Monitoring Online Word of Mouth

Ho-Dac, Carson and Moore (2013) found that the stronger the brand the less important the number of online customer reviews, however the more online customer reviews for a brand the stronger the brand will be. There has been many observations made that consumers will ignore the status of the brand name and will be influenced by the word of mouth from other consumers. For this reason, in particular for weaker brands and smaller companies, online customer reviews will have a strong impact. As stated by Kietzmann and Canhoto (2013, p.154) “attention is key to managing eWOM – it is a finite resource, and public affairs managers must increasingly prioritize what, were and when they read and respond to eWOM, and how much time to devote to any individual post”. In taking this advice into account managers of any company or establishment must know how they will deal with online word of mouth so as not to be oblivious to any sort of statement that is made by consumers online. As stated by Zhu and Zhang (2010, p.133) the growth of the internet has resulted in online word of mouth being an important source of information on the quality of products or services reviewed.
From the literature reviewed there is little doubt over the consensus that marketers need to know what is being said about the company and there is an evident need to understand the influence that online word of mouth has on consumer behaviour (Rosman and Stuhura, 2013; Prendergast, Ko and Yeun, 2010; Mardhiyah, Dharmmesta and Purwanto, 2013; Andrei, 2012; Tirunillai and Tellis, 2013).

Rosman and Stuhura (2013, p.18) highlight the need in the hospitality industry specifically for businesses to “take note and keep track” of user generated content so they are able to market themselves correctly. The reason given for this is that traditional methods for researching where to go, such as travel journalism and traditional media, have been trampled on by the internet as the premium information provider. Mardhiyah, Dharmmesta and Purwanto (2013, p.114) discuss dealing with consumers dissatisfaction. It is argued that complaints made directly to the firm are not a problem to the firm as they can be handled. However negative word of mouth can damage the reputation of the firm without them being aware of it. As negative word of mouth is so easily spread online and negative word of mouth can have such a strong impact on the firm it is imperative that businesses pay attention to it. Some of the reasons for engaging in this negative word of mouth are described by Mardhiyah, Dharmmesta and Purwanto (2013, pp.117-120) as consumer dissatisfaction in the product or service; service importance in that the customer believes they have paid more than what they believe the product to be worth what they have spent; self confidence of the customer who easily express their complaints and demand improvements; altruistic motivation to benefit others by sharing their opinions; and the retaliatory intention to punish the service provider for the consumers dissatisfaction. From the results of their research, Mardhiyah, Dharmmesta and Purwanto (2013, p.128) found that consumers where most likely to engage in online word of mouth if they believed that their direct complaints were not taken seriously. Tirunillai and Tellis (2013, p.17) stated that in regards to negative content in user reviews, those who ignore consumer opinion risk missing opportunities to detect problems before it is too late. They suggest the best way to react to negative reviews is: “Admission, apology and correction” rather than denial.

Cui, Ui and Guo (2012, p.39) stated that word of mouth can have a significant effect on the product or service in the early stages of development. For this reason it is crucial that businesses are monitoring what is being said about them. Negative feedback from customers can be an asset in this stage of business. The mistakes however minor they may be are much simpler to correct before the business, product or service has become established. Boo and Kim (2013, p.26) discuss complaint
management as being central is forming a relationship between the customer and the business. Therefore, acknowledging and responding to online customer reviews is important for customer retention.

2.5 User review sites

2.5.1 The Content of Reviews

Robson et al. (2013) wrote about how online forums for “eliciting and aggregating customer evaluations” have become paramount in organising user reviews and recommendations of everything from restaurants to doctors and many more. In taking this factor into account it appears to the researcher that user review sites such as TripAdvisor and Yelp.com will have a strong influence over the success of an establishment. In regards to these word of mouth recommendations Robson et al. (2013, p.3) cite Arndt (1967) in the explanation that these recommendations are generally more trustworthy than that of firms or advertisers. They also give the argument of Breazeale (2009) describing online word of mouth being so significant because it does not vanish and is not necessarily spontaneous. And given the point made by Zhu and Zhang (2010) that nearly one quarter of internet users consult online reviews before making a purchase a decision, it is apparent that this lasting opinion piece will most likely effect the decisions of potential customers. Added to the lasting presence of these online reviews are the major difficulties for consumers and marketers in the volume of reviews. It is difficult to form a “useful message” when there is a large number of different opinions to be considered (Robson et al., 2013, p.5).

2.5.2 The attitudes towards user review sites and user reviews

Sheng Chung (2012) cites the statement made by Prendergast et al (2010) that consumer’s attitudes towards online forums have a significant effect on the purchase intention of the consumers and has an indirect influence through the persuasiveness of the product. Online word of mouth can allow consumers to express their satisfaction or complaints with a product or service. As mentioned above there is the assumption that negative online word of mouth will have a stronger impact on consumers than positive. Mardhiyah, Dharmmesta and Purwanto (2013, p.114) have backed up this point citing Solomon (2007) saying that online word of mouth can spread a lot quicker. The point also arose in
this literature that people will react to negative word of mouth differently depending on the cost of the service. If a regular run of the mill bar where to receive a negative review the impact may be slightly smaller than a similar review on a high class establishment. As Mardhiyah, Dharmmesta and Purwanto (2013, p.117) stated “the greater the sacrifice, the greater the expectation of the product or service”.

In relation to online shopping Huamei (2013, p.2319) found that “consumers pay more attention to online comments, largely for the purpose of better use of products and reduced purchase-related risks”. The consumers are more convinced by previous user's comments than the traditionally advertising methods. Huamei (2013, p.2319) also points out that more comments posted about a good or service, the more reliable the description and hence there will be a greater impact on the consumers purchasing decision. Punj (2013, p.98) describes consumers evaluations of reviewers by their identity-descriptive information provided and the helpfulness rating of their review by other customers. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) cited in Punj (2013, p.98) found five primary motivations that individuals have for posting online reviews. They are:

“(1) a genuine concern for other consumers, (2) the consumer’s desire for social interaction, (3) the need to vent strongly positive or negative feelings, (4) potential to enhance self-worth by appearing to be a connoisseur or an expert, and (5) economic incentives.”

In regards to the social and economic background of those who post user reviews Punj (2013, p.99) gave the following statement: “consumers who are ‘time rich and income poor’ may have the time to post online reviews, while those who are ‘income rich and time poor’ may only have time to conduct online product research”. In taking this consensus into hand we can understand that the consumers who are posting online user reviews may doing it as a form of social recreation and enjoyment, where as the individuals on the other end of the spectrum find they have more important matters to fill their time with. Punj’s (2013, p. 103) research into the relationship between online research and review posting behaviour found that those who only conducted online research had higher income than those who posted online reviews, those who only conducted online research had a higher level of education than those who posted reviews, and younger consumers were less likely to post reviews than older consumers, while males were less likely to post reviews but more likely to conduct online research than females.
2.6 Online word of mouth via social networking sites

On the other side of online word of mouth are the social network sites that allow companies and individuals to personal profiles. Online WOM and expert reviews play a critical role in consumption behaviour in the age of the Internet and social media (Kim et al., 2013; cited in Huamei, 2013, p.2316). The full implied benefits of social networking sites for businesses may not have been realised by many companies. Kietzmann and Canhoto (2013, p.156) argue that consumers expect companies to pay attention to social media conversations. They make the following statement that: “Consumers pull firms into SM, not the other way around”. If a company is not present in the world of social media, their absence is easily recognised by customers and also competitors (Kietzmann and Canhoto, 2013, p.156). According to Güngör and Çadirci (2013, p.34) since 2003, social network sites have become so massive that in the 10 largest countries in the world Facebook’s audience has grown to 450 million users by January 2012. According to Kietzmann and Canhoto (2013, p.147) Facebook now has more than 900 million users, Twitter users generate over 300 million posts daily, added to this Yelp.com receives 61 million unique visitors per month over a span of 13 countries. There is no doubt that social networks play a large role in the day to day lives of a massive proportion of the world’s population.

Zhang and Daugherty (2009, p.53) describe these social networking sites as “user-generated and user centred”. They state that social network sites provide an environment where individuals can compare themselves with one and other, and basically enhance their self identity (2009, p.54). However they can be useful to businesses by being central in building customer relationships. Bunker, Rajendran and Corbin (2013, p.23) argued that online relationships must be carefully managed for the slightest discretion between one customer and the company can quickly damage the relationship with other customers. This is particularly important n the service industry as sites that allow discussions between customers and companies in a public forum are there for all potential customers to see. The results of the study by Bunker, Rajendran and Corbin (2013) showed that the people who “like” a company on Facebook are more likely to engage in word of mouth beyond this medium when they are satisfied and involved with the company. Involvement can come from the simple updates via status updates or tweets. As described by Bickert and Schlindler (2001; cited in Ho-Dac, Carson and Moore, 2013, p.37) online customer reviews can be seen as more trustworthy as
they do not come from within the company. Following this analogy it is possible that sites such as Facebook will have less affect on customers purchase intention as opposed to sites independent from the company may have. However, Güngör and Çadirci (2013, p.35) argue that electronic word of mouth via social networking sites may have a stronger impact on consumers because of the relationships built leading to a higher degree of trustworthiness.

Güngör and Çadirci (2013, p.46) found that “even consumers that don’t prefer to share information still keep track of eWOM messages created and shared through online SNS’s”. Kietzmann and Canhoto (2013) focused on how social media provides a platform for individuals to share their experiences of products and services. Along with many other researchers they have stated that positive reviews or messages can be a form of free advertising for the firm. This is an important point that managers should be aware of.

2.6.1 What platform was most popular

In completing their research, Kietzmann and Canhoto (2013, p.151) found that most people of their 58 respondents, half male and half female from a varying age group, were more likely to post eWOM on Facebook if they had an experience with the product or service that had exceeded their expectations and might post negative reviews on Twitter if the experience had been worse than they expected it to be. In regards to spreading advertising via Facebook, in order for most respondents to post an ad to their wall the wow factor was needed or some humour would need to be found with it. In regards to face to face interactions, most respondents expressed that they would post reviews of the experience if it was one the “either extreme side” of the good or bad spectrum. From their findings it appears that most people were willing to post positive experiences via Facebook where they have some control over who sees what they are posting and negative feedback via Twitter where it is much more public (Kietzmann and Canhoto, 2013, p.152).

Shu-Chuan and Yoojung (2011, p.49) state that advertising via social networking sites allows consumers to voluntarily display their brand preference and persona by commenting, sharing or liking a post. The influence the advertisement has will be measured by the number of potential consumers that engages with it. What needs to be determined is whether these individuals are legitimately interested in the product or are they “serial likers”.
2.7 Online Word of Mouth and Hospitality

O'Connor (2010, p.760) cited a study by the Pew Internet and American Life Project (2005) who stated that “searching for travel related information is know one of the most popular online activities.” In regards to travel agency sites, often user-generated reviews are built into the web pages influencing customers from the first point of contact. O’Connor (2010, p.760) sites studies by Gretzel, Hyan-Yoo and Purifoy (2007) and Harwood (2007) who found a high proportion of travellers consulted user-generated content when planning travels. Research showed that user-generated reviews were seen as being the up-to-date source of information. To further back up this Ong (2012, p.464) cites research by Gold (2005) and Sharkey (2008) who had found that “user review information tends to be up-to-date, immediate, and compiled by a large number of consumers”. The evidence suggested that the well rounded view of the establishment may provide potential customers of minor issues that may not affect most travellers’ opinions but may be crucial information to other potential customers.

O’Connor (2010, p.761) describes TripAdvisor’s primary function as “the collection and dissemination of user-generated content – reviews, ratings, photos, and videos – on travel.” The value adding features come from the user reviews that allow hospitality consumers to consult feedback on hotel, restaurant and attractions posted by other travellers. One point to be made about the consumer generated review sites was that there was a distinct possibility that many reviews posted were false, perhaps created by rivals to damage the establishment (O’Connor, 2010, p.769). According to Frumklin (2007, cited in Ong, 2012, p.464) the results of a study conducted by the National Restaurant Association in the United States showed that almost fifty percent of “adults between the ages of 18 and 34 used the Internet to find out about restaurants they had not patronized before. Further to this around one third of adults between the 45 and 64 years also used the internet when looking for a new establishment to visit.

Ong focused on how consumers searched through reviews of products with high service components. They chose to focus specifically on user reviews of hotels and restaurants because of the high volume of traffic on the third party review sites such as Yelp.com, Chowhound.com, TripAdvisor, Yahoo Travel and Priceline.com. These sites are well populated with reviews. They stated a difference with products such as gadgets is that in hotels and restaurants service quality can change from hour to hour were as physical products are unlikely to change at any stage (Ong, 2012, p.464).
The fact that service quality can change at such rapid speeds means there is the possibility that in one day a restaurant may receive a 5 star review or they may receive a one star review.

According to Rosman and Stuhura (2013, p.20) online word of mouth allows companies to learn more about their customers who are writing reviews. Restaurant or bar owners can use this information to improve the way in which things are run in their establishment. Rosman and Stuhura (2013, p.22) further state that according to a survey conducted by TimesOnline in 2007, 82% of the respondents trust reviews on sites such as TripAdvisor, therefore it is of great importance that owners and managers pay attention to what customers are saying about them. As has become obvious in the past number of years, restaurant and bar owners also need to be engaging with customers via social network sites. Kietzmann and Canhoto (2013, p.152) stated that “Facebook should be the tool of choice for engaging with positive experiences and Twitter should be monitored to detect early signs of negative sentiment toward the brand”.

2.8 Literature Review Conclusion

The above chapter has covered the majority of concepts involved with online word of mouth. The first section covers a basic overview of word of mouth. Many authors have explained how word of mouth has become the most relevant form of marketing. As it provides information directly from other consumers it is seen as more trustworthy than the information provided by suppliers (Bronner and deHoog, 2013; Lang and Hyde, 2013). Face to face word of mouth has been described as a stronger tool as consumers expressions can be witnessed and gauged. If marketers are present they can make assumptions based on these expressions (Keller and Fay, 2012). However other researchers pointed out that face to face word of mouth can be simply as a result of idle chit chat (Chen and Kirmani, 2011). Online word of mouth is expected to continuously grow with the internet. It is argued that online reviews are more powerful as individuals who write them put more time and effort into constructing them (Berger and Iyengar, 2013).

Online word of mouth has become majorly influential in the world of online shopping as it has led to much more trust in these websites (Chen and Li, 2009). Another major strength identified is the rapid speed in which it can spread (Prendergast, Ko and Yeun, 2010). With this power and speed online
word of mouth has the capacity to reach countless amounts of users or potential customers. What appears to be missing on this subject is how old a review will be before it loses its power.

Researchers have highlighted the need to monitor online word of mouth. Specifically in relation to hospitality, Rosman and Stuhura (2013) stated there is a necessity to “take note and keep track” so they can market themselves correctly.

The trustworthiness of online reviews will mean there will be a strong influence on the success of the business. However the volume of reviews makes an issue for consumers and marketers were a “useful message” can be difficult to form (Robson et al., 2013). The effect of reviews appears to depend on the class of the subject in question. Mardhiyah, Dharmmesta and Purwanto (2013) explained this through the statement: “the greater the sacrifice, the greater the expectation of the product or service”.

Social network sites for online word of mouth for businesses cannot be ignored. Kietzmann and Canhoto (2013) reported that Facebook now has 900 million users and Twitter generates over 300 million posts daily. These sites are “user generated and user centred” (Zhang and Daugherty, 2009) and have been described as central to building relationships with customers (Bunker, Rajendran and Corbin, 2013). The possibility of discussions between customers and businesses for all to see means customers expect replies when they make contact. A customer may post a negative report of the business on their social media site. The number of people this can reach who may be potential customers has a high level of influence. If ignored other customers may believe that the business does not care about opinions of consumers. The most popular social networking site for positive reviews is Facebook, where Twitter was likely to host reviews after negative experiences (Kietzmann and Canhoto, 2013).

TripAdvisor, Yelp.com and other sites similar to them can be extremely useful for businesses and consumers. In regards to hospitality user reviews are trusted as they tend to be up to date and are written by previous customers (O’Connor, 2010; Ong, 2012). The benefit to managers of bars or restaurants is the feedback. Of course negative feedback can be harmful but it allows the establishment to make adjustments to their business. There are a percentage of reviews that are expected to be false as negative reviews can be used as a tool against competitors (O’Connor, 2010).
Chapter Three:
Research Methodology
Chapter Three: Research Methodology

3.1 Methodology introduction

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012) define the research methodology as “the theory of how research should be undertaken, including the theoretical and philosophical assumptions upon which research is based and the implications of these for the method or methods adopted”. As they advise that there is no one best way to undertake research, they introduced the research onion as shown in Figure 3.1 below. This structure of research leads us to the explanation of why the researcher has chosen the method of data collection. By explaining the choice of research philosophies, research approaches, research strategies, choice of methods, time horizons and finally data collection and data analysis, the methods chosen to conduct the primary research will be justified. At this point it will be evident to others that the research should be taken seriously (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012, p.126).

![Figure 1 The Research Onion](source: Mark Saunders, Phillip Lewis and Adrian Thornhill, 2012, p.128)
The main purpose of this paper is to determine the impact that online word of mouth has on the purchase intention of consumers ages 18-30 in the Dublin hospitality sector, predominantly bars and restaurants. In the sections below the researcher first describes the research problem definition, followed by explanations for choosing critical realism above other philosophies; a deductive over and inductive approach; surveys as a strategy above experiments, case studies, grounded theory, ethnography or action research; and non probability snowball sampling above other methods. Some issues regarding access and ethical constraints are explained. The reasons for using questionnaires as the data collection instrument are explained and the data analysis procedure is touched upon. To conclude this chapter the limitations to the methodology are expressed.

3.2 Research Problem Definition

Zuber-Skerritt and Knight (1986, p.94) advise researchers to define the research problem at the very early stages in the research process. Without defining the research problem it will be difficult to go forward with the research and develop a structure. Research and note taking would lack focus and will be much more time consuming than necessary. The primary research question in this investigation is as follows:

“Does Online Word of Mouth via user review sites have an impact on the purchase intention of young bar and restaurant customers in Dublin?”

As the expansion of the Internet has led to the widespread expansion of social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram along with many others, their impact on online word of mouth will also be examined. Therefore the sub question in this investigation will be:

“Do other social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter influence the power of Online Word of Mouth?”
3.2.1 The research objectives

According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012, p.43) the research question can be used to generate a set of research objectives. These objectives are evidence of the researches sense of purpose and direction. The research objectives will help to identify how research process will answer the primary research question. In order to help add structure to this investigation the following research objectives have been identified:

1) Assess usage levels of young Irish consumers within the bar/restaurant trade of popular user review sites (TripAdvisor, Yelp.com, Google Reviews etc).

The purpose of this objective is to:

- Analyse consumer usage levels of user review sites.
- Determine which user review site is most popular.

2) Investigate the development of consumer attitudes to online word of mouth via user review sites.

This objective aims to identify:

- Consumers trust in online user generated content.
- Likelihood of consumer to be affected by an online review.
- Likelihood of consumer to post an online review.

3) Identify the characteristics of an individual who will likely post a review.

More specifically:

- Gender and Age of reviewer.
- If the reviewer is originally from Dublin.
- If not from Dublin then where they are from.
- How often individual who is likely post a review visit bars or restaurants.
4) Assess the impact of online word of mouth on purchase intention of bar and restaurant customers in Dublin.

This objective will identify:

- Whether consumers are affected by the posts on user review sites, i.e. are they likely to avoid an establishment that has received a negative review.

5) To determine if a bar or restaurants social media presence from the customers perspective will add to their online word of mouth portfolio.

This objective will be to:

- Determine the impact of numbers of likes an establishment has.
- Determine whether young consumers in Dublin’s market are influenced by their peers who have “liked” a page or “re-tweeted” a post of a bar or restaurant.

3.3 Research Design

This research project aims to determine via quantitative techniques how consumers in the Dublin Hospitality sector are impacted on by online word of mouth via user review websites and on a secondary level social network sites. As stated above the researcher will follow the steps outlined by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012, p.128) in their model of the research onion. The six different layers begin with research philosophies in the outside layer, followed by the research approaches, the research strategies, the research choices, the time horizons and finally the techniques and procedures that form the inner most circle of the “onion” with the data collection and data analysis.

3.3.1 Research Philosophy

The research philosophy is the outer most layer of the research onion. According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, (2012, p.127) this term relates to the development of knowledge and nature of that knowledge. The research philosophy transcribes as the world view of the researcher and the assumptions will underpin the research strategy and the methods chosen as part of that strategy (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012, p.128).
The research philosophy applied to this body of work will be the positivism approach. This philosophy relates to stance of the natural scientist. This stance on research is characterised as a preference to “collecting data about an observable reality and search for regularities and causal relationships in your data to create law like generalisations like those produced by scientists” (Gill and Johnson, 2012, cited in Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012, p.134). The existing theory will help the researcher to develop the hypotheses.

3.3.2 Research Approach

The next layer of the research onion is the research approach. There are two approaches that can be adopted which will provide reasoning for the design of the research project. They are deductive or inductive approaches. As stated by Ketokivi and Mantere (2010) as cited in Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012, p.143) deductive reasoning occurs when the conclusion is derived logically from a set of premises, the conclusion being true when all the premises are true. Inductive reasoning leaves a gap in the logic argument between the conclusion and premises observed, the observations made supporting the conclusion.

This research project will follow the deductive approach. As stated by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012, p.145) the deductive approach looks at the relationships between all variables, in the case of this project will be the customers and the establishments. We can find this information in the literature reviewed in that the previous theory looks at the effects of word of mouth on customers and companies. The research will also follow the structures methodology in obtaining and delivering the knowledge. In taking the deductive approach concepts need to be operationalised so that facts can be measured. Additionally in the deductive approach the sample must be carefully selected and to be of a sufficient size to allow for generalisation (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012, p.146).

3.3.3 Research Methodological choice

The third layer of the research onion is the methodological choice layer. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012, p.160) listed a number of different options for which method of research design will be followed. They are; mono method quantitative, mono method qualitative, multi method quantitative, multi method qualitative, mixed method simple and finally mixed method complex. Quantitative methods can be identified as numeric data and qualitative methods can be identified as non-numeric
data such as words, images, video clips etc (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012, p.161). In many business and management research designs can combine qualitative and quantitative methods.

This project will follow the quantitative research method. The positivism stance of the researcher justifies the quantitative selection of structured data collection and the research approach of the quantitative method is focused on using data to test theory as the deductive approach dictates (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012, p.162). As quantitative research uses statistical techniques to ensure the data collected is valid, the research questions must be expressed in the same way. This method of research is typically associated with experimental and survey research strategies such as questionnaires, structured interviews or structured observation. These techniques will be discussed in the following section.

The research conducted can be characterised as one of descriptive nature. The outcome of descriptive research is an accurate profile of events, persons of situations. Once all data is collected the researcher has a full picture regarding the implications on purchase intentions that online word of mouth places on consumers. The completion of this research leads the researcher to a conclusion on the above matter.

3.3.4 Research Strategies

In this section we look at the fourth layer of the research onion. This is the research strategy which is the plan of action to achieve the goal. According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012, p.173) the key to the researchers choice of research strategies is that “you achieve a reasonable level of coherence throughout your research design which will enable you to answer your particular research question(s) and meet your objectives”. There are a number of different options available in the research strategy choice. They are: experiment; survey; archival research; case study; ethnography; action research; grounded theory; and narrative inquiry.

As stated above the researcher will follow the quantitative methods of research. At this point the reasons are stated for choosing surveys/questionnaires above other strategies available.
3.3.4.1 Surveys/questionnaires

The strategy chose for this research project is to conduct a survey of the young consumers in the Dublin market for bars and restaurants. Usually associated with the deductive approach the survey strategy is one of the most popular in business and management research (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012, p.176). As there is a sizeable population in the market, surveys allow for the collection of a large amount of data at a low cost. As the market holds a population of people that are highly regarded as busy individuals, simple questionnaires will be the easiest way to engage with them. Surveys are something that is heard about in everyday lives with news reports giving us the result of a survey about how the population think or react to a situation.

This strategy allows for the collection of quantitative data. The data collected can be used to suggest possible reasons for the way in which variables react to each other. However analysing this data can be quite time consuming and may not be regarded as “wide-ranging” as the data which can be collected from other strategies (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012, p.178). Another factor that needs to be kept in mind is that surveys can be subject to a low response rate. Regarding this factor when producing the questionnaire, the sample in the topic, the layout and the length of the questionnaire, and the quality of the letter explaining the topic and relevance of the project need to be examined closely (Kumar, 2014, p.182). Kumar (2014, p.182) lists a number of other disadvantages such as: self-selecting bias; the opportunity to clarify issues; no opportunity for spontaneous responses; the response to a question may be influenced by other questions; others can influence the answers; and a response cannot be supplemented with other information.

The researcher has used questionnaires as the method for collecting the data. Questionnaires have many advantages:

- **Cheap to Implement:** They are cost effective in comparison to face to face interviews. For this project with such a large sample size they are the most efficient way to connect with the targeted individuals.

- **Easy to Analyse:** There are numerous software packages available for analysing the data compiled in the questionnaire. For this research paper SPSS was used.

- **Familiarity:** They hold a degree of familiarity as most people have completed some form of questionnaire at some stage in their life.
• Reductions in bias: There is a reduction in bias particularly because the researcher cannot influence the respondents with their own opinions.

• Less intrusive: They are less intrusive and allow individuals to respond at a time that is convenient to them. Face to face and phone interviews have to be scheduled at a time that suits both the researcher and the individual. Many conflicts can get in the way.

• Possibility to jog respondent's memory: By sending the questionnaire by the medium of the internet it may jog peoples memory to occasions when they have used the internet to do exactly what the questionnaire is asking.

• Anonymity: The questionnaire also provides a high level of anonymity which perhaps puts the individual at ease knowing that their name will not be mentioned in the report.

However there are risks involved with this method:

• Low response rates: Questionnaires can be subject to low response rates as people may not find the necessity of the project or have an interest in the topic. To act as a combat to this issue, a larger number of questionnaires may be distributed.

• Lower communication level: With the lower communication level involved than face-to-face or phone interviews attitudes to the topic may be severely affected. In most cases it is much easier to quickly describe a topic using spoken word than written word.

• Non targeted responders: There is the risk that the questionnaire received as responded may not have been completed by the person who the researcher intended it for. There is the chance the individual has passed it along or it may have been filled in by a child as a prank.

Due to the size of the sample the researcher found that interviews would be much too time consuming. And on the time scale for the research to be completed only a small fraction of the market could be reached. Observation was also deemed inappropriate as the research question is centred around the influence of online word of mouth on people purchase intention. It would not be feasible to conduct a project of this fashion using this technique as often people’s plans will come up last minute or spur of the moment and this is when these individuals will visit sites such as TripAdvisor and Yelp.com most often.
3.3.4.2 Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire was designed and distributed with the aid of surveymonkey.com. There are 18 questions in total all with an aim of supporting the objectives of the study. A copy of the survey can be found in the Appendix. Questions 1 to 5 were aimed at defining the characteristics of the respondents by gender, age and where they are from. These characteristics are of a benefit to each objective but obviously a main focus on the third objective which was to identify the people who were likely to post a review. Questions six and seven are also important in defining the characteristics. Question 8 and 9 were used to assess the respondent’s awareness to the user review sites as aimed for in objective one. Questions 10 to 15 were aimed at achieving objective two which was an investigation into consumer attitudes and objective four, which was to assess the impact of online word of mouth on purchase intention of bar and restaurant customers. And questions 16, 17 and 18 were aimed at achieving objective five, to determine the effects of bar and restaurants social media presence on customers.

3.3.5 Research time horizons

The next layer of the research onion is to choose the time horizon. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012, p.190) suggests that the researcher ask his or her self:

“Do I want my research to be a “snapshot” taken at a particular time or do I want it to be more akin to a diary or a series of snapshots and be a representation of events over a given period?”

This research paper will follow the “snapshot” time horizon, otherwise known as cross-sectional as opposed to the longitudinal diary perspective. Cross-sectional research is defined as “the study of a particular phenomenon at a particular time” (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012, p.190). As this paper is a research into the impact of online word of mouth on purchase intention, it can be directly related into this definition for cross-sectional research.
3.3.6 Secondary Research

Secondary data is the data compiled by others and collected by the researcher when considering how to answer the research question and meet the research objectives (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012, p.306). This data can be translated into a background of the topic area and is provided in the earlier chapters of this paper. The secondary research is predominantly academic journal articles or conference proceedings.

3.4 Research Ethics

As stated by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012, p.226) research ethics are the standards of behaviour that guide the researchers conduct in relation to those who are subjects of or affected by the finished work. Ethical principles have been developed in order to recognise any ethical issue that arise over different approaches to research. They are: Integrity and objectivity of the researcher; Respect for others; Avoidance of harm; Privacy of those taking part; Voluntary nature of participations and right to withdraw; Informed consent of those taking part; Ensuring confidentiality of data and maintenance of anonymity of those taking part; Responsibility in the analysis of data and reporting of findings; Compliance in the management of data; and Ensuring the safety of the researcher (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012, pp.231-232).

When planning this research gaining access was one issue the researcher saw as an obstacle. As advised by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012) the researcher was aware that individuals in the sample size may not have been willing to complete the surveys as it is additional workload for them and they may not have wished to expend the time required on it. Additionally the researcher was aware that it may not be of any interest to the individual who had received it. Added to this individuals may not want their own preferences to be public knowledge. This issue was rectified by ensuring all surveys were anonymous, i.e. no names where required for completion. Along with a short description of the study the research assured all participants in a short explanatory note that the data was to be used for academic purposes. After one week of releasing the survey the researcher sent out a reminder to participants. If there was still no reply from respondents they were considered missing from sample.
As the project at hand is one that involves a sector within Dublin that not all people are comfortable with, there was a concern that certain individuals may be offended by the topic, i.e. a person who does not drink may be uncomfortable answering questions regarding bars. There was also the possibility of the survey reaching individuals who are out of work and hence may be uncomfortable answering questions regarding a luxury (i.e. eating out) they cannot afford.

### 3.5 Selecting the Sample

As the target population in the Dublin market for young bar and restaurant customers is extremely large, sampling was a necessity for this project. Sampling allows the researcher to compromise with the restrictions in place i.e. time, money and access. The sampling technique that the researcher has used for this project is non probability sampling.

The population of young people aged 18-30 years is so large the researcher considered snowball sampling to be the most appropriate method. This form of sampling asks the participants to volunteer rather than be chosen to complete the survey (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012, p.289. Using the communities that the researcher was a member of, the survey was initially sent out via email to fellow students in the MBA course in Dublin Business School and the start up community in the Hive at the Liffey Trust Centre. The researcher asked volunteers to complete the survey and forward the link to other possible respondents. This continued until the target size of 60 responses was received representing a small portion of the population.

One of the problems with this method of sampling is bias. This will result as individuals are likely to identify people who are similar to themselves. The sample size for this project was identified by the number of people who received questionnaires before the link was destroyed.
3.6 Limitations of the Methodology

The researcher is aware that the population of the target market is quite large. In an effort to limit the implication of this issue, questionnaires were distributed early in the research process. Another limitation that the researcher was aware of was that questionnaires themselves can be time consuming to compile, then once completed and distributed there was the chance of a low response rate. To deal with this issue a single reminder was sent after one week of initially publishing the questionnaire. Any non responses were not included in the sample.
Chapter Four: Data Analysis and Findings
Chapter Four: Data Analysis and Findings

4.0 Responses

The questionnaire was answered by 60 people in total. With its quantitative nature the results were analysed with the use of SPSS. This chapter will explain the responses.

4.1 Results

4.1.1 Respondents background

The questionnaire was answered by 60 people in total, 30 male and 30 female. As the graph above shows twenty six of the 60 respondents were aged 26-30, with a majority of 14 female respondents over 12 male in this age group. The highest number of respondents fell into the 21 to 25 age category, with 15 female and 14 male. This leaves five respondents in the 18 to 20 age category with 1 female and 4 male. Of the 60 respondents 29 were from Dublin or the surrounding area, 16 of these respondents where male and 13 female. The remaining 31 respondents who were not from Dublin came from various different places namely: Donegal, Westmeath, Monaghan, Cork, Carlow, Fermanagh, Galway, Cavan, Wexford, Holland, Russia, China, Malawi and India. These respondents have lived in Dublin from a few months up to 14 years.
4.1.2 Visits to Restaurants in last 3 months

From the 60 respondents who answered the surveys one male respondent did not answer the question regarding the number of times they had visited a restaurant. Of the number of people who did respond the majority of males and females had in the last 3 months visited a restaurant between five and twelve times. Eighteen out of the 30 female respondents were in this bracket. Nine of the remaining female respondents had visited restaurants less than 5 times, two had visited between thirteen and twenty times and one female respondent had visited more than twenty times. Thirteen of the 29 male’s who responded to the survey had visited restaurants between five and twenty times, nine had visited less than 5 times, four male respondents had visited between thirteen and twenty times and three had visited more than twenty times. The majority of respondents in each age category had visited bars and restaurants between five and twelve times. There were seventeen respondents between 21 and 25 years who had visited restaurants in this section.
4.1.3 Visits to Bars in last 3 months

All of the sixty respondents answered the question regarding the number of times they had visited a bar in the past 3 months. Similar to the number of restaurant visits the majority of respondents visited bars between five and twelve times. Fourteen of the female respondents visited bars between five and twelve times, seven had visited less than seven times, six female respondents had visited between thirteen and twenty time and three had visited more than twenty times. Ten of the male respondents had visited bars more than twenty times, this was the highest number of males in a category, seven males had visited less than five times and seven had visited between thirteen and twenty times. Six of the male respondents had visited between five and twelve times. As in the previous question related to restaurant visits again the majority of respondents who had visited bars between five and twelve times with 14 respondents were between the ages of 21 and 25.
4.1.4 Use of the Internet to plan social occasions

The following data is depicted in the above graphs regarding use of the internet to plan social occasions. All 60 of the survey respondents answered the question regarding how frequent they used the internet when planning social occasions. Seventeen of the respondents stated that they always searched the web for a suitable establishment for their occasion and four stated that they never used the internet when planning. The majority of respondents answered that they used the internet occasionally. Of the seventeen respondents who stated that they always used the internet to plan social occasions twelve were female and five were male. Two of these respondents were between the ages of 18 and 20, seven people were between 21 and 25 and the remaining people were between 26 and 30 years old. When asked in question 9 the last time they had visited a user review site and what site it was two respondents did not answer the questions. Of the 58 respondents who did answer
question 9 six replied that they had never used a user review site. 28 of the respondents had used a review site in the month before replying to the survey. Others had stated they had used a user review sites in the past three months to a year. Some respondents did not state when they last used a site. TripAdvisor was the most popular site used with 27 respondents referring to it. The next site which received the highest number of mentions was Yelp.com with 9 people referring to this site. Other sites that where mentioned where Google Reviews, MenuPages, and FourSquare as well as Hostelworld that focuses more specifically on reviews of accommodation and Amazon that focuses on specific products.
4.1.5 Importance of high ratings in restaurants

One of the sixty responders to the survey did not answer the question regarding star ratings of restaurants. The question stated “When researching a restaurant to visit, positive reviews and a rating not less than 4.5 out of 5 will convince me to consider it as an option for a social occasion”. The question was intended to measure the effect of positive reviews. Thirty-seven of the fifty nine respondents to this question stated that they agreed with this statement and fifteen responded that they strongly agreed. Only three people disagreed with this statement and four respondents neither agreed nor disagreed. The individual who did not respond was a female. Of the fifteen respondents who strongly agreed six were male and nine were female. Nineteen of the respondents who answered that they agreed with the statement nineteen were male and the remaining eighteen respondents were female. One male respondent disagreed with the question and two females strongly disagreed.
and the four respondents to respond that they neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement were male. The three respondents who disagreed with the statement were between the ages of 21 and 25 years. Of the respondents who strongly agreed eight were in this age bracket, six were between the ages of 26 and 30 and one respondent was between 18 and 20 years. The majority of respondents stated that they agreed with the statement. Four of these respondents were aged between 18 and 20, sixteen were aged between 21 and 25 and the remaining seventeen were between 26 and 30 years. Of the four respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed two were in the 21 to 25 and two were in the 26 to 30 age group.
4.1.6 Importance of high ratings in bars

The questions that related to the importance of positive reviews for bars had 59 out of 60 responses. One respondent strongly disagreed with the statement that positive reviews and a rating of 4.5 out of 5 will convince them to consider a bar as an option for a social occasion and four respondents disagreed with the statement. Thirty-three respondents stated that they agreed with this statement and ten stated that they strongly agreed. Eleven of the respondents stated that they neither disagreed nor agreed with the statement. One male respondent did not answer this question. Out of the ten respondents who strongly agreed with the effect of positive reviews and high ratings eight were female and the remaining two respondents were male. Of those respondents that agreed with the statement twenty of those were male and thirteen were female. One male respondent strongly disagreed with the question and four female respondents disagreed with it. Of the eleven respondents who neither disagreed nor agreed with the statement, six were male and five were female. The one
individual who strongly disagreed and the three people who disagreed with the statement regarding positive reviews of bars where between the ages of 21 and 25. One individual in the 26 to 30 age bracket stated that they disagreed with the statement. Of the ten people who strongly agreed with the statement four individuals were in the 26 to 30 age group, five individuals were between 21 and 25 years and the remaining one individual was in the 18 to 20 age group. From the individuals who agreed with the statement four were in the 18 to 20 age group, fifteen were in the 21 to 25 age group and fourteen were in the 26 to 30 age group.
4.1.7 Negative reviews leading to avoiding an establishment

In responding to question 12 of the questionnaire, three individuals did not give an answer. Three of the 57 respondents strongly disagreed that negative reviews will convince them to avoid a bar or restaurant and ten individuals disagreed with the statement. Fourteen of the respondents strongly agreed that negative reviews would make them avoid an establishment and twenty individuals agreed with the respondent. The remaining ten individuals who responded neither disagreed nor agreed with the statement. Of the three individuals who did not reply to the question, two were female and one was male. Eight female respondents strongly agreed with the question of avoiding an establishment that had received negative reviews and six female respondents agreed. Six male respondents strongly agreed and fourteen male respondents agreed. Of the three respondents who strongly disagreed with the statement two were male and one was female. Three male respondents disagreed with the statement and seven female respondents disagreed. Of the individuals who neither disagreed
nor agreed four were male and six were female. Of the five respondents in the 18 to 20 age group, two stated that they strongly disagreed with the question of avoiding an establishment and the remaining three stated that they strongly agreed. The remaining individual who strongly disagreed was in the 26 to 30 age group. Four individuals who strongly agreed with the statement were in the 26 to 30 age group and seven individuals were aged between 21 and 25. Of the twenty individuals who agreed that negative reviews would cause them to avoid an establishment ten were in the 21 to 25 age group and ten were in the 26 to 30 age group. Four individuals in the oldest age category disagreed with the statement and six individuals in the 21 to 25 age group disagreed. The three individuals who did not respond to the question were in the 26 to 30 age category. The ten individuals who neither disagreed nor agreed with the statement, four were 26 to 30 and six were 21 to 25.
4.1.8 Forming own opinion after reading negative reviews

Question 13 of the questionnaire asked if respondents were likely to still visit and establishment and form their own opinion after reading a negative review. Fifty-nine out of sixty individuals answered this question. Thirty individuals agreed with this and six strongly agreed. One individual strongly disagreed with the statement and eleven individuals disagreed while the remaining eleven respondents neither disagreed nor agreed with the statement. One female respondent did not reply to the question. Of the respondents who strongly agreed with the statement five were male and one was female. Sixteen female agreed with the statement and fourteen male respondents agreed. On the other side of the scale one male respondent strongly disagreed and four disagreed while seven female individuals disagreed. Of the eleven respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed four were male and seven were female. The one respondent who did not answer question 13 was in the 21 to 25 age category.
The one respondent who strongly disagreed was also in the category. Of the individuals who strongly agreed with the statement two were in the 18 to 20 age group, one individual was in the 21 to 25 age group and three were in the 26 to 30 age group. Fifteen individuals agreed with the statement in the 26 to 30 age group, thirteen individuals in the 21 to 25 age group agreed with the statement and two individuals in the 18 to 20 age group agreed. The remaining individual in the 18 to 20 age group disagreed with the statement. Eight individuals in the 21 to 25 age group disagreed and two individuals in the 26 to 30 age group disagreed that they would be willing to try out the establishment had it received negative reviews.
4.1.9 Posting Reviews after a positive experience

Question 14 of the questionnaire asked if respondents would post a review on an online review site if they had a positive experience in a bar or restaurant. All sixty respondents replied to this question.

The majority of respondents disagreed with this statement with twelve replying that they strongly disagreeing and twenty four disagreeing. Ten respondents agreed that they would post a review and three respondents strongly agreed. The remaining eleven respondents neither agreed nor disagreed.

The ratio of female to male respondents who were on the side of disagreeing with the statement was close to equal and on the other side of the spectrum female respondents were more likely to post reviews than male. The three respondents who stated that they strongly agreed that they would post a review were in the 26 to 30 age group and three more agreed. Of the remaining respondents who agreed with statement one was in the 18 to 20 age group and six were in the 21 to 25 age group. Of
the respondents who strongly disagreed that they would post a review, one individual was in the 18 to 20 age group, seven were between 21 to 25 years and four were in the 26 to 30 age group. Eleven respondents in the 26 to 30 age group disagreed, ten respondents in the 21 to 25 age group disagreed and three individuals in the 18 to 20 age group disagreed with the statement to post on a user review site after a positive experience. Of the few respondents who agreed that they would post a review more of them were from outside of Dublin. The respondents from outside of Dublin who agreed that they would post reviews came from a wide range of locations both in Ireland and abroad.
4.1.10 Posting Reviews after a negative experience

Fifty-eight of the sixty respondents answered the question regarding posting reviews after negative experiences in an establishment. Seven of these respondents strongly disagreed and twenty one respondents disagreed that they would post on a user review site after a negative experience. Fourteen individuals agreed that they would post a review and four strongly agreed that they would post a review. More males than females were likely to post a review after a negative experience. The majority of individuals in the 26 to 30 age group stated that they would not post a review after a negative experience and more individuals in the 21 to 25 age group were likely to post a review than any other group. One male and one female respondent did not respond to the question.
4.1.11 Respondents connections with bars and restaurants

Figure 31 Social Media Connections

Figure 32 Visits to Establishments connected with

Figure 33 Interacting with establishments in newsfeed

Fifty-nine out of the sixty respondents answered the question regarding how many bars and restaurants they were connected with over social media. Five individuals stated that they were not connected with any and twenty-nine respondents were connected with less than 5. There were fifteen of the respondents connected to between six and ten establishments, seven were connected with between eleven and fifteen establishments and three individuals answered that they were connected with sixteen plus establishments. Question 17 asked the respondents do they regularly visit the bars and restaurants they are connected with. Two people did not reply to this question. Twenty-two respondents agreed that they do regularly visit the bars and restaurants they are connected with and two individuals strongly agreed. Five people strongly disagreed and fifteen disagreed that they would regularly visit the establishments they are connected with. The remaining fourteen responses neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. When asked if they were likely to click on a page for a new
bar or restaurant that appeared on their newsfeed via another friend twenty-seven respondents agreed that they would click into the page and three respondents strongly agreed. Five of the respondents strongly disagreed that they would and eleven individuals disagreed with thirteen neither disagreeing nor agreeing. One individual did not reply to this question.
Chapter Five:

Discussion
Chapter Five: Discussion

This section will discuss how each objective was accomplished by the primary research conducted via the questionnaires.

**Objective 1: Assess usage levels of young Irish consumers within the bar/restaurant trade of popular user review sites (TripAdvisor, Yelp.com, Google Reviews etc).**

This objective set out to analyse the usage levels of Irish consumers aged 18 to 30 years of user reviews sites for the hospitality industry, in particular bars and restaurants in Dublin. The second aim in this objective was to determine which site was the most popular.

This objective was covered by questions 8 and 9 in the survey and the data from the results is expressed in section 4.1.4. The response to question 8 showed that the majority of individuals used the internet occasionally when planning social occasions. From the individuals who responded that they never used the internet, the majority were male. The majority of individuals who answered that they always used the internet to plan social occasions were female, with 12 out of 30 responses. Of the 12 respondents who always use the internet to plan social occasions six of those were aged between 26 and 30, five of the respondents were between 21 and 25 years and one was aged 18 to 20. The data from questions 6 and question 7 and explained in sections 4.1.2 and 4.1.3 shows that of the 17 respondents who always use the internet to plan social occasions to bars and restaurants the majority of those had visited restaurants between 5 and 12 times and the majority had visited bars less than 12 times in the three months prior to completing the survey. As mentioned above TripAdvisor was the most popular site for users planning social occasions. Twenty-seven of the respondents had used this site while nine respondents had used

**Objective 2: Investigate the development of consumer attitudes to online word of mouth via user review sites.**

This aim of this objective was to identify first consumers trust in user generated content via user review sites. The objective also aimed to determine the likelihood of consumers to be affected by a review and the likelihood of consumers to post a review after and experience in a bar or restaurant.
Questions 10, 11, 14 and 15 in the survey covered the data for this objective and the results are presented in sections 4.1.5, 4.1.6, 4.1.9 and 4.1.10. From the data analysed above it was evident that the majority of the respondents did use review sites at least occasionally when searching for a bar or restaurant to plan a social occasion. Therefore how they stated they react to reviews should be evident of how attitudes towards online user review websites have developed. The first point to be examined is how high ratings and good reviews of bars and restaurants effect customers. As expressed in section 4.1.5 of the fifty-nine respondents to question 10 the majority either strongly agreed or agreed that positive review and a high rating would be enough to convince the individual to plan a social occasion in the establishment. Likewise respondents to question 11 which asked respondents of the effect high ratings and good reviews of bars were the majority of respondents agreed they would consider the establishment. However what is noticeably different between the results of these two questions is that there were a higher number of respondents who either disagreed, strongly disagreed or neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. What can be taken from this evidence is that customers who are choosing restaurants will be slightly more responsive to positive reviews than those who are searching for a bar to patronize. With the majority of people stating that they agreed with these questions the high level of trust of user generated content is evident.

One of the factors that will have an impact on how much consumers trust a review is the characteristics of the reviewer. In answer to question 14 regarding the likelihood of posting a review of an establishment after a positive experience 36 of the respondents disagreed with the statement and 11 respondents neither agreed nor disagreed. There was a similar response to question 15 with 28 respondents disagreeing with the statement and 12 respondents neither disagreeing nor agreeing. The evidence that appears from these results is that the majority of respondents do take note of user generated content in regards to bars and restaurants but are unlikely to write their own reviews after a negative experience.
Objective 3: Identify the characteristics of an individual who will likely post a review

This objective specifically aimed to identify the gender and age of the individual likely to post a review, where the reviewer is from and how often the people who were likely to post a review visits bar or restaurants.

Of the 13 individuals who agreed that they would post a review after a positive experience the majority were female with a ratio of 8 female to 5 male respondents. In regards to age category, one individual was aged 18 to 20, six individuals were aged 21 to 25 and six aged 26 to 30. The third characteristic examined was if the respondents were from the Dublin area. Six of them were from the Dublin and surrounding area and seven were from outside the area. The purpose of examining characteristic was to determine if nationality or growing up in a highly urbanized area played a part on likelihood of posting reviews, the results however have expressed that this is not a major contributing factor. There were 5 more respondents likely of posting a review after a negative experience with 18 individuals agreeing that they would post a review. Of those likely to post a negative review the majority were male with 11 and 7 female respondents. Ten of the respondents were aged between 21 and 25, six were between the age 26 and 30 and two were aged between 18 and 20. Of the individuals who agreed that they would post reviews after a positive or negative experience the majority of individuals visited bars or restaurants between 5 and 12 times and the second highest group of individuals visited more than 20 times in the 3 months previous to answering the questionnaire.

Objective 4: Assess the impact of online word of mouth on purchase intention of bar and restaurant customers in Dublin.

This objective aimed to identify whether consumers are affected by posts on user reviews sites, i.e. are they likely to avoid an establishment that has a received a negative review. This objective was covered by question 12 and question 13 in the survey and the results are expressed in sections 4.1.7 and 4.1.8. These questions cover how likely respondents are to act in certain ways towards negative reviews. When asked how likely the respondents where to avoid an establishment after negative reviews, 34 individuals either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. And when asked if respondents would consider the review but still try out the establishment before forming their own
opinion 36 of the respondents agreed. When predicting these results the researcher would have expected that these two questions would have a near opposite mirror response. However the responses are close to identical. There are two possible reasons for this. The first being that the questions were not worded clearly enough. It this is the case the researcher takes responsibility. The second possibility however is that while respondents consider negative reviews to be a reason to avoid an establishment in reality it is likely that they realise their expectations of a bar or restaurant are not going to be identical to that of the reviewers.

**Objective 5: To determine if a bar or restaurants social media presence from the customer’s perspective will add to their online word of mouth portfolio**

This objective aimed to determine whether being connected to an establishment via social media made an impact on how the customer reacted towards it. The second part of this objective was to determine whether consumers were influenced by their peers Facebook connections. Questions 16, 17 and 18 cover this objective in the survey and the results are expressed in section 4.1.11 above. Question 17 asked the respondent how likely they were to visit an establishment that they were connected with over social networking sites. Twenty-six of the respondents agreed that they would. This figure is less than half of the respondents to the survey. Question 18 asked how likely respondents were to click into a bar or restaurant unknown to them that had appeared on their social media feed via a friends page. 30 respondents agreed with this statement. From these results we can state that being connected with an establishment does not necessarily mean anything. This fact echo’s the argument made by Bunker, Rajendran and Corbin (2013) that simply motivating customers to “like” a company may not be enough. It is evident that this is the case for the consumers in the Dublin hospitality market. With half of the respondents stating they would interact with new establishments on their page, there are still obvious benefits to bars and restaurants having their own social networking pages.
Chapter Six

Conclusions
Chapter Six: Conclusions

6.0 The Research topic

The primary research objective of this dissertation has been to answer the following question in order to give management and owners of bars and restaurants an insight into the minds of their customers in regards to online word of mouth, more specifically in the form of user reviews:

*Does Online Word of mouth via user review sites have an impact on the purchase intentions of young bar and restaurant customers (aged 18 to 30 years) in Dublin?*

There is a vast amount of research surrounding the topic of online word of mouth but research specifically relating to the influence of user generated content is limited. In order to answer the research question a number of objectives were set out at the beginning of the research process. These objectives were met by having a sample of the targeted age group complete a brief questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to gain an insight into the impact that the reviews of bars and restaurants, on sites such as TripAdvisor, Yelp.com and Google Reviews have on the potential customers of these establishments. The research was aimed at individuals who would be frequent patrons of restaurants or bars in Dublin, therefore when posting the questionnaire, potential respondents were chosen only if they were currently living in Dublin or surrounding counties.

With the rapid expanse in the use of the Internet in everyday life, the topic of online word of mouth is one that is becoming more and more relevant in the marketing world. It is the belief of this researcher that it goes without saying that the social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter have become an integral part of everyday life as the Internet continues to grow. Kietzmann and Canhoto (2013) reported that there are now over 900 million people using Facebook and users are generating more than 300 million Twitter posts daily. For this reason the following sub question was proposed:

*Do other social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter influence the power of Online Word of Mouth?*

The outcome of this question is to determine the benefits of bars and restaurants building and maintaining their online presence on social networking sites. The previous research on this matter has debated the strengths of sites such as Facebook for marketing of bars and restaurants. The results of
the primary research here lead to the determination that this form of free marketing should not be abandoned by companies in the hospitality trade.

6.1 The Research

As mentioned above, this paper researched the influence of previous consumer generated content on user review sites of potential customers of bars and restaurants in Dublin. Prior to distributing questionnaires secondary research was conducted. A number of journal articles surrounding the area of online word of mouth were studied. This information was discussed in Chapter two of this paper. The main topic areas covered in the available literature as discussed in chapter two of this dissertation covered the strengths of online word of mouth as opposed to face-to-face word of mouth where online word of mouth was deemed to be more powerful as consumers realise that the writer put the effort into constructing the post regarding their few on the topic. In comparison face-to-face word of mouth was deemed to be idle chit chat (Berger and Iyengar, 2013; Chen and Kirmani, 2011). The various other strengths which previous research described of online word of mouth included the high level of trust and the speed in which it can spread. The secondary research also provided insight into the necessity to monitor online word of mouth with Rosman and Stuhura (2013) highlighting the need to keep track of what is being said about the business so as to know how to market themselves correctly. Furthermore in this stage of the research process the effect of reviews was examined with previous research stating that the trustworthiness of an online review brings a strong influence to the business (Robson et al., 2013). The argument was also made that reviews for more high class goods would be heeded to larger degree than goods such as everyday items (Mardhiyah, Dharmmesta and Purwanto, 2013). This argument can relate directly to the question of this research paper. As previous research found that for high class items, the content of reviews would be important, the researcher would suggest that as the majority of people do not frequent bars and restaurants more than 12 times in a three month period they will endeavour to choose the most appealing place to them given as much information as is available. The secondary research described reviews over social networking sites as having a high level of influence as the information is being shared directly with the individual’s friends and also to any potential customers that are connected to the restaurant. The public nature of these sites mean that if a customer comment goes ignored then all other potential customers who have witnessed this on Facebook or Twitter will see that the company has not responded. This goes
against one of the major benefits that social networking sites provide, that is building relationships with customers (Bunker, Rajendran and Corbin, 2013). The final point that was found in the secondary research regarded the designated user reviews sites such as TripAdvisor and Yelp.com. What was highlighted as one of the reasons to trust these sites was the up to date nature of the content. This coupled with the fact the reviews are written by previous customers and give managers a chance to reply in a entirely open forum make them useful sites for anybody that has a connection to the hospitality industry. The previous research surrounding online word of mouth does show the benefits of using these sites, however this paper looks more exclusively at how the different types of reviews, positive or negative, influence the potential customers who read the review.

Chapter Three of this paper deals with the second stage in the research process which was to conduct the primary research in order to answer the research question was to decide on the methodology. The methodology follows the research structure defined by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012) in the Research Onion as depicted in Figure 1. The positivism approach was applied as the research philosophy. The philosophy shows dictates that data is collected about an observable reality that can identify regularities and relationships to identify trends. The next layer of the onion is the research approach. This paper adopted the deductive approach determining the relationships between the variables such as gender, age, frequency of visiting bars and restaurants, the reactions to positive reviews as well as many others. The methodology of choice as mentioned above was the quantitative research method. This method focused on using the data collected to achieve the objectives of the research project. The strategy appointed was questionnaires. These were distributed via a snowball method to 60 individuals aged 18 to 30 living in the Dublin area. The time horizon chosen was cross-sectional. This research took a “snapshot” of the individual’s thought on user generated content and user review sites and also the additional impact of social networking sites on online word of mouth.

6.2 Research Findings

This research set out to determine the influence of online word of mouth via user review sites on potential bar and restaurant customers in the Dublin hospitality industry. The objectives to achieve the result were defined in section 3.2.1 above.

The first objective which was to assess usage levels of consumers aged 18 to 30 years within
the bar and restaurant trade of popular user review sites such as TripAdvisor, Yelp.com and Google Reviews. The questionnaire proved that the majority of individuals in this age group do consult some kind of online user generated content when searching for a bar or restaurant to frequent. The most popular site that had been used was TripAdvisor.

The second objective was an investigation into the development of consumer's attitudes to online word of mouth via user review sites. Firstly under this objective consumers trust in user generated content was determined. The secondary research had identified that consumer’s trust in user reviews came from the up to date nature of the reviews and the fact that they were posted by previous customers. This fact was supported from the results of the questionnaires, where it was found that the majority of respondents would be convinced to visit a bar or restaurant that had received strong positive reviews. The research also showed that individuals were more responsive to reviews regarding restaurants than bars leading the researcher to interpret this as saying people are more inclined to worry about the reviews of a restaurant than a bar they are considering. This fact can be backed up by the literature review where it was argued by Mardhiyah, Dharmmesta and Purwanto (2013) that the more sacrifice given to a product or service the higher quality is expected of it. Also under this objective the likelihood of consumers to post a review after a positive or negative experience in a bar or restaurant was examined. The majority of respondents stated that they were unlikely to post a review with only thirteen individuals stating they would post a review after a positive experience and slightly more with eighteen individuals stating they would post a review after a negative experience. The researcher would suggest that more people are willing to post a negative review as they feel the need to warn people of the experience that they had in the establishment.

The third objective was to identify the characteristics of the individuals who were likely to post online reviews. The results found that of the people who would post positive reviews the majority were female aged 21 to 25. The majority of individuals who stated that they would post a negative review were male aged 21 to 25.

The aim of the fourth objective was to assess the impact that online word of mouth has on purchase intention. Under this objective it was examined if consumers would be affected by reviews. The results here showed that although consumers would trust that negative reviews proved to be a reason to avoid an establishment, the majority of consumers would also be willing to visit a bar or restaurant and form their own opinion of an establishment after reading negative reviews. This
outcome leads the researcher to assume that individuals are less affected by reviews when they take into consideration the fact that their expectations of bars and restaurants will likely be different to others.

The final objective aimed to determine the impacts that bars and restaurants social media presence had on their word of mouth portfolio from the perspective of customers. What is to be remembered under this objective is that social networking sites are a purely free source of marketing with the possibilities of reaching millions of people. Almost half of the respondents agreed that they would regularly visit the bars and restaurants that they are connected with over social media. And half of the respondents stated that they would be likely to click into a page of an establishment which was new to them. This final objective was aimed at answering the sub question which aimed to investigate the added impact that social media sites have on online word of mouth. It is evident that these sites have countless benefits for bars and restaurants.
Chapter Seven: Recommendations
Chapter Seven: Recommendations

This final chapter of the research project will highlight the recommendations that the researcher has put forward after completing the project. The recommendations include areas for future research and recommendations to any marketers in the hospitality industry who may read this paper.

7.1 Academic Recommendations

In the process of conducting this research, primarily when constructing the Literature Review, it was evident that in the past number of years the topic of Online Word of Mouth has become very popular. However there are still subject areas within the topic that could benefit from further research. With word of mouth becoming one of the main tools in the marketing world, continuous examination into this area is recommended. One subject area that deserves attention is the question of the life span of online word of mouth. While completing this dissertation a fact that stuck out as interesting to the researcher throughout is how old a review of a bar or restaurant would be before it is considered to be null. A point that sticks out is that when searching for a particular establishment on TripAdvisor, reviews can be viewed as far back as the very first review was posted. What strikes the researcher as intriguing is what impact reviews that are old have on bars and restaurants. The industry that is under discussion is one that is known to be constantly changing. A bar or restaurant may have received a negative review 10 years ago, but in the 10 years since the bar or restaurant could have become an entirely different place. The recommendation for future research may determine if users will allow older reviews to impact them in the same way as more recent ones.

7.2 Market Recommendations

The recommendations to the market once this research project had been completed are additions to recommendations that having been growing with the internet as it has. For the past number of years as social media has expanded, bars and restaurants have been participating in this world. Many bars and restaurants have their own websites and social network portfolios. More recently companies will have been taking note of their profiles on user review sites. From this research it is evident that consumers do pay attention to what they are reading either on user review site or on social networking sites. Therefore it is crucial for bars and restaurants to have a developed strategy for managing their online presence.
Bibliography


**Textbooks**


Appendix
I have generated this survey to aid me with my research for my masters dissertation at Dublin Business School. The research is based on young people aged 18 - 30 living in Dublin or neighbouring counties. If you fit this category I would be grateful if you would complete this survey. There are 18 questions and this should not take longer than 5 minutes. All information is confidential but should you have any questions please contact me at 10025068@mydbs.ie.

Thank you in advance.

Áine

1. What is your gender?

- [ ] Female
- [ ] Male

2. Which category below includes your age?

- [ ] 18-20
- [ ] 21-25
- [ ] 26-30

3. Are you originally from Dublin or a neighbouring county (i.e. Wicklow, Meath, Louth, Kildare)?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

4. If you answered 'No' to question 3, please state where you are originally from (i.e., County, City, Town, Country).

   

5. How long have you been living in Dublin or a neighbouring county?

   

6. In the last three months how many times have you visited a restaurant in Dublin city?

- [ ] Less than 5 times
- [ ] 5 to 12 times
- [ ] 13 to 20 times
- [ ] 20 + times
Influence of Online Word of Mouth on the Hospitality sector in Dublin

7. In the last three months how many times have you visited a bar in Dublin city?

☐ Less than 5 times
☐ 5 to 12 times
☐ 13 to 20 times
☐ 20 + times

8. From memory when was the last time you visited an online user review site? (i.e. TripAdvisor, Yelp.com, Google Reviews, UrbanSpoon, Other.) Please state the name of the site you visited.

9. When looking for a bar or restaurant to plan a social occasion how often do you research the options online?

☐ Always
☐ Occasionally
☐ Never

How do you react to the following statements?

10. When researching a restaurant to visit, positive reviews and a rating not less than 4.5 out of 5 will convince me to consider it as an option for a social occasion.

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11. When researching a bar to visit, positive reviews and a rating not less than 4.5 out of 5 will convince me to consider it as an option for a social occasion.

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12. When researching a bar or restaurant, negative reviews will convince me to avoid the establishment.

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13. If a bar or restaurant receive a negative review I will take note of this but will still visit the establishment before forming my own opinion of the bar or restaurant.

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14. After a positive experience in a restaurant or bar I will post a review on an online user review site.

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Influence of Online Word of Mouth on the Hospitality sector in Dublin

15. After a negative experience in a restaurant or bar I will post a review on an online user review site.

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16. In regards to your own social media networks (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.), how many bars/restaurants in Dublin are you connected with?

- ○ None
- ○ Less than 5
- ○ 6 to 10
- ○ 11 to 15
- ○ 16 +

17. Of the restaurants and bars I am connected with over social media networks I visit them on a regular basis.

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18. If a bar or restaurant that you have never heard of pops up on your newsfeed how likely are you to click into it?

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