



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

***RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CONSUMER SATISFACTION AND  
ELECTRONIC WORD OF MOUTH ABOUT RESTAURANT EXPERIENCE  
IN SARAWAK, MALAYSIA***

**TAN CHIN CHOO**

**FSPM 2016 13**



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ELECTRONIC WORD OF MOUTH ABOUT RESTAURANT EXPERIENCE IN  
SARAWAK, MALAYSIA**

By

**TAN CHIN CHOO**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra  
Malaysia, in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of  
Science**

**January 2016**

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirement for the Degree of Master of Science

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By

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**January 2016**

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Competition in food service industry and the introduction of social media have created a challenge in restaurant industry. This is because restaurant operators need to adapt to the new trend of electronic communication technology which may give great impact to their companies. The purpose of this study is to identify the determinant factors of customer satisfaction which may direct or indirectly affect customer return intention and involvement of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) through social media. This study is conducted in Sarawak, Malaysia where its occupants are mainly consisting of Chinese, Malay and Iban population. Convenient sampling method is utilized in collecting the samples and regression analysis is utilized to analyze the data and hypothesized both independent and dependent variables.

The results of the analysis revealed that there is a significant relationship between restaurant experiences towards customer satisfaction, return intention and eWOM respectively. It is proved that eWOM is significantly related to customer satisfaction and return intention. This means that the utilization of eWOM would most likely assist the restaurant operators in their business. eWOM as the new trend of communication is the main contribution of this study because it has been proven that eWOM is related to customer satisfaction, return intention and certain customer experience. Due to that, this study gives some insights to the practitioners, academicians and policy makers to assist them in different aspects and prospective fields.

**Key Words:** restaurant experience, customer Satisfaction, return intention, electronic word of mouth (eWOM).

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Master Sains

**HUBUNGAN ANTARA KEPUASAN PELANGGAN DAN KOMUNIKASI  
ELECTRONIK TERHADAP PENGALAMAN MELANGGAN RESTORAN DI  
SARAWAK, MALAYSIA**

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Daya saing dalam industri perkhidmatan makanan dan pengenalan media sosial telah mewujudkan satu cabaran dalam industri restoran. Ini adalah kerana pengusaha restoran perlu menyesuaikan diri dengan trend baru teknologi komunikasi elektronik yang boleh memberi kesan yang besar kepada syarikat-syarikat mereka. Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mengenal pasti faktor-faktor penentu kepuasan pelanggan yang secara langsung atau tidak langsung memberi kesan kepada pelanggan dengan niat kembali dan penglibatan komunikasi elektronik (eWOM) melalui media sosial. Kajian ini dijalankan di Sarawak, Malaysia di mana penghuninya kebanyakannya terdiri daripada Cina, Melayu dan Iban. Kaedah persampelan konvenien digunakan dalam mengumpul sampel dan analisis regresi digunakan untuk menganalisis data.

Keputusan analisis menunjukkan bahawa terdapat hubungan yang signifikan di antara pengalaman restoran ke atas kepuasan pelanggan, niat kembali dan penggunaan komunikasi elektronik masing-masing. Ia membuktikan bahawa komunikasi elektronik (eWOM) adalah signifikan dengan kepuasan pelanggan dan pulangan niat. Ini bermakna penggunaan komunikasi elektronik (eWOM) kemungkinan besar akan membantu pengusaha restoran dalam perniagaan mereka. komunikasi elektronik (eWOM) sebagai trend baru komunikasi adalah sumbangan utama kajian ini kerana ia telah terbukti bahawa komunikasi elektronik (eWOM) berkaitan dengan kepuasan pelanggan, niat kembali dan pengalaman pelanggan tertentu. Oleh kerana itu, kajian ini memberikan beberapa pandangan kepada pengamal, ahli akademik dan pembuat dasar untuk membantu mereka dalam pelbagai aspek.

**Kata Kunci :** pengalaman pelanggan, kepuasan pelanggan, niat kembali, komunikasi elektronik (eWOM).

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The thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

eWOM	Electronic Word of Mouth
F & B	Food and Beverage
SNS	Social Networking Sites
WOM	Word of Mouth





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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter covers an overview of the whole study. It includes industrial background in order to understand and identify the significant aspects of study towards the influence of restaurant experience towards customer satisfaction which will trigger electronic word of mouth (eWOM) and return intention to restaurants. Background study, problem statements, justification and research objectives of study are discussed in this chapter.

### 1.1 Background of the Study

The background study of this study is divided into three sections which are industrial background, food service industry or restaurant industry and the development of electronic gadgets. It is imperative to study the background of the industry in order to understand the market's demand.

#### 1.1.1 Industrial Background

Malaysia is a developing country and is forging ahead to become a developed nation. Vision 2020 blueprint comprises nine strategic challenges that need to be successfully addressed in order to be developed not only in economic sense but also politically, socially, spiritually, psychologically and culturally (Mohamad, 1991). Thus, in line with the 9<sup>th</sup> challenge, government is focusing on boosting country's economic to make it competitive, dynamic, robust and resilient. Bringing up a country's economic is directly related to its development in various aspects including food service industry as food is the basic need to mankind.

Other than that, the boosting of tourism industry in Malaysia has encouraged positive economic growth. This is due to the fact that Malaysia which is a multi-racial country which has a unique blend of natural beauty and a rich diversity of culture. Thus, government has identified tourism industry as a high priority growth sector and is aggressively promoting Malaysia worldwide (Saeed, Josiam and Ismail, 2000). Tourism is inseparable with exotic cuisines of Malaysia and this causes restaurant industry to mushroom drastically. Hence, we can predict various factors that have affected the growth of foodservice industry. For examples, better socioeconomic conditions, demographic shifts, changing food habits and also the desire of the people.

#### 1.1.2 Food Service Industry / Restaurant industry

Food Service Industry is referred to businesses, institutions, and companies responsible for any meal prepared outside the home. This industry includes

restaurants, school and hospital cafeterias, catering operations, and many other formats. There are some types of restaurants in Malaysia which include family restaurants, fine restaurants and fast-food restaurants.

In addition, people nowadays are quite dependent on food at take-out counters, fast food outlets and restaurants as cooking or food preparation has become a time consuming chore especially for the working parents. Thus, people may tend to dine out at the restaurants.

The market of food and beverage (F&B) is prosperous because food is one of the basic needs of human beings. In other words, human beings need food and water to survive. Wherever there is human resided population, there will be a demand and supply. Another plus point of F&B is, the transaction is mainly cash. Furthermore, the consumers' trend of expenditure pattern on food service in Malaysia is expected to grow at a faster rate (Tey, Mad, Zainalabidin, Amir and Alias, 2011).

### **1.1.3 The Development of Electronic Gadgets**

In line with the development of science and technology, electronic gadgets such as smart phone, laptop, desktop, netbook and ipad have become a norm and we can see life is inseparable with these electronic gadgets for certain people. Due to that, electronic-word-of-mouth (eWOM) slowly surfaced as part of communication. Consumption experiences produce influence that act as powerful sources of human motivation (Westbrook, 1987) and consumption experience and motivation are closely related in the process of word-of-mouth (WOM) transmission (Sundaram, Mitra and Webster, 1998). Furthermore, Westbrook (1987, p.261) has defined WOM communications as "*informal communications directed at other consumers about the ownership, usage, or characteristics of particular goods or services and/or their sellers.*" Similarly, the transformation of new trend of communication in the era of electronic has given people a platform to exchange information electronically. eWOM connect people anytime and anywhere as long as the internet service is available. This means that the exchange of information through internet is convenient, easy and user friendly. Helpful applications which are easily available such as Facebook and Whatapp have promoted internet users to exchange information more vigorously in terms of texts and pictures.

In a nutshell, development of country provides chances to its nation. The massive development brings about the increment of population and boosting food service industry. In addition, advanced technology has surfaced a lot of innovative electronic gadgets (smartphone, netbook, etc.) and applications (4square, Wechat, Whatsapp, etc.) which influence the way people communicate and spreading information. Therefore, by studying customer's satisfaction towards their dining experience will definitely benefit the restaurant

operators to understand the situation better and enhance their service and revenue.

## 1.2 Problem Statement

According to official website of the Sarawak government (assessed on 8 March 2016), the statistic of population in Sarawak which is conducted once in every 10 years by Department of Statistic Malaysia. The statistic shows that the population of Sarawak is in a growing trend ranging from 2071,506 in 2000 to 2471,140 in 2010 and estimated 2636,000 in 2016. When the population increases especially in cities, it is not uncommon to see restaurant industry is mushrooming. Due to that, restaurant industry in Malaysia is facing increasingly competitive (Huam, Seng, Thoo, Rasli, & Abd. Hamid, 2011).

Upon facing competitiveness in restaurant industry, restaurant operators need to concern about strategies to attract and retain their customers. There are a lot of factors that might affect customer satisfaction and it is unpredictable because it is hard to guess a human's thought and behavior. The relationship between customer satisfaction and future intentions has been proven by previous studies (Gracia, Bakker and Grau, 2011; Kimberly, Lisa and Loana, 2015) on restaurants. However, does it work in Sarawak, a multi-ethnic's state of Malaysia? Due to that, it is crucial to examine to what extent customer's satisfaction will give significant effect on the customer's return intention.

There are numerous previous studies on service quality and customer satisfaction (Brady, Robertson and Cronin, 2001; Qin and Prybutok, 2008; Huam *et al.*, 2011). The five dimensions of SERVQUAL which include tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, empathy and assurance may not necessary be included at the same time simply because some of them seem less appropriate for the restaurant context (Andaleeb and Conway, 2006). It is said that reliability and responsiveness dimensions should be more emphasized in restaurant industry in Malaysia (Jangga, Sahari and Mohd Basir, 2012). Nonetheless, service quality is included in this study to see how it impacts customer satisfaction, revisit intention and eWOM among patrons of restaurant in Sarawak.

Besides, environment issue is getting attention by customers to decide which restaurant they want to dine in. The element focus as one of the restaurant experience is ambience scent. Morrin and Ratneshwar (2000) illustrated ambient scent can improve evaluation of a particular products that are unfamiliar. In addition, ambient in a restaurant is playing a role to link to the emotional responses of customers. Consequently, atmosphere in a restaurant has significant impact on customer's perception toward overall quality of the restaurant, which will directly affect customer satisfaction (Ryu and Jang, 2008). Thus, restaurant operators should concern on understanding environment issue in their restaurant. Besides, good ambience might have influenced customer intention to spread eWOM (Jeong, Cheong and Jang, 2011). There are also

studies conducted in Malaysia reported that food quality, service quality and restaurant environment will affect customer satisfaction (Habib, Dardak, and Zakaria, 2011; Aaijaz and Ibrahim, 2011). So, it is necessary to investigate further the factors that might influence customer satisfaction and eWOM in Sarawak.

Besides, the invention and advancement of telecommunication has put the restaurant operators into another bottle neck. The restaurant operators need to find ways to fix into the current way of communication, promotion and advertisement. If we compare the restaurants these days and ten years ago, it is obvious that they are very much different. It is similar to the CD and audio cassette. According to Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (hand phone user survey 2014), there are 63.3% of Malaysia population use internet on hand phone compared to 2006 with only 18.4%. This shows that eWOM is easily available through hand phones. eWOM has become an influential marketing instrument (Craciun and Shin, 2010). Internet has given opportunity for eWOM such as blog, discussion forums, review sites, shopping sites and social media websites (Cheung and Thadani, 2012). However, social media is a relatively new aspect of eWOM which enables users to communicate through their hand phones. They can easily exchange opinions and experience about a product or service with their friends or acquaintances on social media (Chu and Kim, 2011). It is necessary for restaurant operators to understand eWOM in restaurant industry.

The changing of eating habit, most of the people love to go out to eat because they are captivated by the appearance of food (Johnson, 2011). People especially youngsters are fond on searching for new recipes and eateries. A gourmet meal will give people a good and unforgettable impression. However, epicurean delicacies but experiencing bad service will totally damage the name of the restaurant too. Different gender and age might give different view and opinion on what they see and perceived. Different demographic attributes may prefer to choose to dine in restaurants due to several reasons. This is most likely due to gaps and preferences of varied generation and gender. So, gender and age are selected as the moderators to examine how far these moderators related to customer satisfaction in restaurants. It is necessary for restaurant operators to know if age and gender bring effect in influencing customer satisfaction in restaurant context.

Koutroumanis (2011) also mentioned that technology is playing a strategic role in the booming of hospitality industry. The increasing usage of smartphones among Malaysians had increase the competitiveness in restaurant industry. This is because of the convenience of smartphone enable customers to check-in location by just a few touches on their smartphone screen. Moreover, addresses of the restaurants are easily traced through internet. It seems that everything is on the tips of fingers. Besides, sending voice messages in just a second enhances the process of spreading news or gossips. Also, by commenting on dining experience on the social media can reach to hundreds of people in few

hours. Blogging, text messages or share post in social media sites encourage people to express their feeling openly. This is because talking face to face causes discomfort and uneasiness for some people. Hence, restaurant operators need to know the relationship between return intention and eWOM in order to plan their strategies in management.

In a nutshell, competitiveness and the popularity of social media have put the restaurant industry in Sarawak into a situation where restaurant operators need to know the right path to popularize their restaurants and increase their profit margin by retaining existing customers and attract new customers.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

There are several research questions needed to be answered in this research as follow:

- i. Is there any relationship between restaurant experience (service quality, food quality, price and value, atmosphere and convenience) and customer satisfaction?
- ii. Is there any relationship between restaurant experience (service quality, food quality, price and value, atmosphere and convenience) and return intention?
- iii. Is there any relationship between restaurant experience (service quality, food quality, price and value, atmosphere and convenience) and eWOM?
- iv. Is there any moderation relationship of age and gender between restaurant experience and customer satisfaction?
- v. Is there any relationship between return intention and eWOM?

### **1.4 Research Objective**

Generally, the objective of this study is to examine customer satisfaction among restaurant patrons on different restaurant experiences and to examine whether there is significant relationship between restaurant experience, customer satisfaction, return intention and eWOM respectively.

The specific objectives of this research are as follow:

- i. To investigate relationship between restaurant experience and customer satisfaction among patrons on restaurants.
- ii. To investigate relationship between restaurant experience and return intention among patrons on restaurants.
- iii. To investigate relationship between restaurant experience and eWOM among patrons on restaurants.
- iv. To investigate relationship between customer satisfaction and return intention.

- v. To investigate relationship between customer satisfaction and eWOM among patrons on restaurants.
- vi. To examine the relationship between eWOM and return intention among patrons on restaurants.
- vii. To examine the relationship between restaurant experience and customer satisfaction moderated by age.
- viii. To examine the relationship between restaurant experience and customer satisfaction moderated by gender.

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

Return intention is important for a restaurant to maintain its profit margin in order to survive in the glowing competitive environment. This study is carried out to understand the factors that trigger customer satisfaction and revisit intention in restaurants in Sarawak. The robust growth of restaurant industry bringing challenges to the restaurant operators to identify factors that might be hindering customer to revisit their restaurants. Due to that, it is crucial for restaurant operators to gain better understanding and knowledge on factors that actually attract the customers' revisit intention.

Other than that, the development of electronic gadgets and social media have provided a platform for exchange information and socialize is a challenge for the restaurant operators because they couldn't estimate or expect the impact of eWOM on restaurants which can be extreme. By understanding the factors that are affecting customer revisit intention and eWOM, restaurant operators should be able to plan and develop their marketing strategies in order to enhance their service, achieve their profit target and compete in the similar industry. In other words, acquiring beneficial knowledge in understanding customers would enable the restaurant operators to gain its competitive advantage to compete in the rapid development in restaurant industry.

### **1.6 Organization of the Thesis**

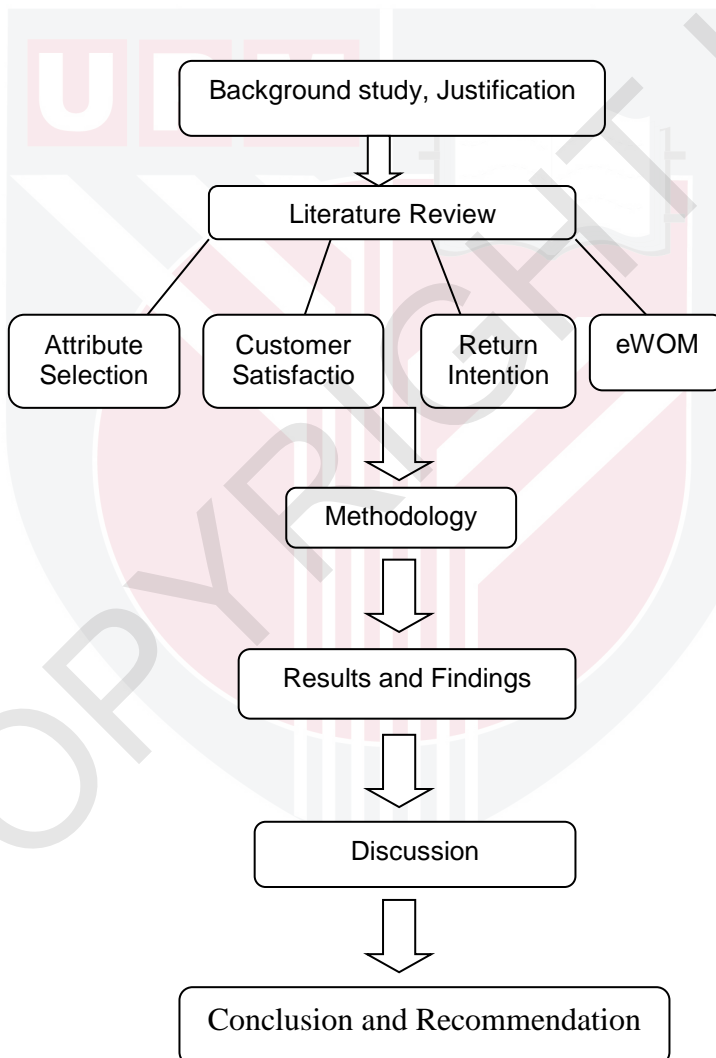
The current study is organized into 6 chapters. Chapter 1 is an introduction which covers an overall view of the whole study. It includes the background study of the restaurant industry. This is followed by justification and problem statement. Research's objectives are mentioned in chapter 1 too.

Chapter 2 is the literature review. It discusses the previous literatures on service quality, food quality, price and value, atmosphere, convenience, customer satisfaction, return intention and eWOM.

Chapter 3 is the research methodology which highlights the method used or applied to collect data. It comprises research methods being undertaken including sampling design, data processing and method of analysis.

Chapter 4 is analysis and findings. This chapter indicates the results of analysis of the study. The collected data are analyzed and interpreted. The data are analyzed according to the hypotheses. Chapter 5 is the discussion of the major findings of the study.

Finally, chapter 6 summarizes the major findings of this study and their implications on parties like academicians, practitioners and policy makers. Then, limitations of study will be discussed and recommendations will be provided for future studies.



**Figure 1.1 : Organization Chart of Study**



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Tan Chin Choo or known as Sharon Tan was born on 2 April 1978 at Kuching in Sarawak. She received her early education at SRB Chung Hua Bintulu. She studied in SMK Bintulu for her secondary education for 6 years and completed her SPM in 1996. In 1997, she pursued NCC International Diploma in Computing in King's Business Institute, Kuching while completed her Advanced Diploma in Computing at INTI College Sarawak in 1998.

In 2000, she was graduated from Bolton Institute of Higher Education, United Kingdom with Bachelor of Science with Honours in Computing. After that, she worked at INTI College Sarawak for 1 year as lecturer before going back to Bintulu. She had some working experiences as software tutor and temporary teacher before pursuing Diploma in Education (TESL) at Rajang Teachers Training College in 2003. She started her journey in education line after her first posting in 2004 as English teacher in SMK Bandar Bintulu.

However, interest in studying never stop her to aim higher. Thus, she furthered her study in University Putra Malaysia (UPM) Bintulu Campus to pursue master's degree in science since 2013. She is keen in academic research especially on marketing which is challenging and interesting. She wishes to become an academician in the future.



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