

**LINKING ONLINE REVIEWS, PERSONAL AND
ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS AND DINERS'
INTENTION TO EAT OUT**

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ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS AND DINERS'
INTENTION TO EAT OUT**

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.....	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iii
LIST OF TABLES.....	ix
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xi
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	xii
LIST OF APPENDICES.....	xiii
ABSTRAK.....	xiv
ABSTRACT.....	xvi
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 Background of the Study	1
1.2.1 Changing Diner Behaviour in Eating Out	5
1.2.2 Restaurant Reviews	7
1.3 Problem Statement.....	9
1.4 Research Questions.....	14
1.5 Research Objectives.....	14
1.6 Scope of the Study	15
1.7 Significance of Study.....	16
1.7.1 Theoretical Contributions.....	16
1.7.2 Methodological Contributions	18

1.7.3	Practical Significance.....	19
1.8	Definition of Key Terms.....	20
1.9	Organization of the Chapters	22
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW		24
2.1	Introduction.....	24
2.2	Eating Out.....	24
2.3	Diners' Intention.....	26
2.4	Social Media (SM).....	28
2.4.1	Diners and Social Media	31
2.5	Underpinning Theory	33
2.5.1	Social Cognitive Theory (SCT).....	33
2.5.2	Heuristic-Systematic Information Processing Model (HSM).....	38
2.6	Online Reviews.....	42
2.6.1	Argument Quality.....	45
2.6.2	Source Credibility	46
	2.6.2(a) Source Credibility Dimensions	48
2.6.3	Perceived Quantity of Reviews	50
2.7	Personal	52
2.8	Environmental.....	55
2.8.1	Social Influence.....	56
2.8.2	Situation	58
2.9	Research Gap in Literature	59

2.10	Development of Research Framework and Hypothesised Relationship	61
2.10.1	Source Credibility with Argument Quality and Diners' Intention..	61
2.10.2	Perceived Quantity of Reviews with Argument Quality and Diners' Intention	63
2.10.3	Argument Quality with Personal Factor, Environmental Factors and Diners' Intention	65
2.10.4	Personal Factor with Diners' Intention	68
2.10.5	Environmental Factors with Diners' Intention	68
2.10.6	The Mediating Effect of Argument Quality on the Relationship Between Source Credibility and Quantity of Reviews with Diners' Intention	70
2.11	Proposed Research Framework	72
2.12	Chapter Summary	74
2.12.1	Summary of the Research Hypotheses	75
CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY		76
3.1	Introduction.....	76
3.2	Research Paradigm	76
3.2.1	Research Approach for the Study	77
3.2.2	Justification for a Quantitative Method Research Design	78
3.3	Research Design	78
3.3.1	Population and Unit of Analysis	80
3.3.2	Sampling Design and Technique	80
3.3.3	Sample Size	82
3.4	Development of Survey Instrument	84

3.4.1	Variables and Measurements	84
	3.4.1(a) Diners' Intention	84
	3.4.1(b) Personal Factor	85
	3.4.1(c) Environmental Factors	87
	3.4.1(d) Argument Quality	90
	3.4.1(e) Source Credibility	92
	3.4.1(f) Perceived Quantity of Reviews	94
3.4.2	Questionnaire Design	95
3.4.3	Translation (Back-to-Back Translation).....	97
3.4.4	The Pre-Test.....	98
3.4.5	Pilot Test.....	100
3.4.6	Data Collection Procedure	100
3.4.7	Common Method Variance	102
3.5	Data Analysis Technique – Partial Least Square-Structural Equation Modelling	103
3.6	Chapter Summary	108
	CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS	109
4.1	Introduction.....	109
4.2	Preliminary Quantitative Data Analysis	109
4.3	Response Rate.....	110
4.4	Profile of the Respondents.....	111
4.5	Descriptive Analysis	114

4.6	Common Method Variance (CMV)	116
4.7	Goodness of Measures: Assessment of the Measurement Models	116
4.7.1	Assessment of Composite Reliability (CR)	117
4.7.2	Assessment of Construct Validity - Convergent Validity	118
4.7.3	Assessment of Discriminant Validity	120
4.7.4	Testing Second-Order Construct	122
4.8	Assessment of the Structural Model Direct Relationship	126
4.9	Mediating Analysis	132
4.10	Hypotheses Summary	135
4.11	Chapter Summary	138
	CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION.....	139
5.1	Introduction.....	139
5.2	Recapitulation of Findings.....	139
5.3	Discussion of Findings.....	141
5.3.1	Objective 1: To examine the relationship between source credibility, perceived quantity, and argument quality of online reviews.	142
5.3.2	Objective 2: To examine the influence of the argument quality of online reviews on diners' personal and environmental factors to eat out.	145
5.3.3	Objective 3: To examine the influence of argument quality, source credibility and perceived quantity of online reviews on diners' intention to eat out.	147
5.3.4	Objective 4: To examine the relationship between personal and environmental factors with diners' intention to eat out.	151
5.3.5	Objective 5: To examine the mediating effect of argument quality on the relationship between source credibility and perceived quantity of	

	online reviews with diners' intention to eat out.	154
5.4	Implications of Study	157
5.4.1	Theoretical Contributions	157
5.4.2	Practical Contributions	159
5.5	Limitations of Study	162
5.6	Direction for Future Research.....	163
5.7	Conclusion	165
	REFERENCES	167
	APPENDICES	

LIST OF TABLES

		Page
Table 1.1	Retail Value Sales of Malaysia’s Consumer Foodservice by Category and Growth %.....	4
Table 2.1	Summary of the Research Hypotheses	75
Table 3.1	Sample Size Recommendation in PLS-SEM for a Statistical Power of 80%	83
Table 3.2	Source, Original and Adapted Items for Diners’ Intention	85
Table 3.3	Construct, Source, Original and Adapted Items for Personal Factor	86
Table 3.4	Construct, Source, Original and Adapted Items for Environmental Factor.....	88
Table 3.5	Construct, Source, Original and Adapted Items for Argument Quality	91
Table 3.6	Source, Original and Adapted Items for Source Credibility	93
Table 3.7	Construct, Source, Original and Adapted Items for Perceived Quantity of Reviews.....	95
Table 4.1	Results of Pilot-Test.....	110
Table 4.2	Response Rate	111
Table 4.3	The Respondents’ Demographic Information.....	113
Table 4.4	Descriptive Analysis (n = 236).....	114
Table 4.5	Normality Analysis (n = 236).....	115
Table 4.6	Reliability Analysis (n = 236).....	117
Table 4.7	Construct Validity Analysis (n = 236).....	119
Table 4.8	Fornell-Lacker Analysis (n = 236).....	121
Table 4.9	HTMT Analysis (n=236)	121
Table 4.10	Redundancy Analysis (n=236).....	124

Table 4.11	Lateral Collinearity Analysis (n = 236).....	127
Table 4.12	Hypothesis Testing (n = 236).....	128
Table 4.13	Hypothesis Testing (n= 236).....	130
Table 4.14	Total Indirect Effects	133
Table 4.15	Total Effects.....	134
Table 4.16	VAF Calculation.....	134
Table 4.17	Summary of the Research Questions, Research Objectives and Hypotheses Results.....	136

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1.1	Eating Out Expenditure of United States of America.....2
Figure 2.1	Social Cognitive Theory.....37
Figure 2.2	Heuristic and Systematic Processing.....40
Figure 2.3	Research Framework.....73
Figure 4.1	First-Order and Second-Order Formative Constructs.....123
Figure 4.2	Reflective-formative type of Hierarchical Component Model as source credibility as the Second Order Construct.....123
Figure 4.3	Hierarchical Component Model PLS-SEM results in source credibility as the Second Order Construct.....125
Figure 4.4	Mediation Model.....132

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EO	Eating Out
DI	Diners' Intention
SCT	Social Cognitive Theory
HSM	Heuristic-Systematic Information Processing Model
SM	Social Media
SNS	Social Network Service

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX A	QUESTIONNAIRE
APPENDIX B	RELIABILITY ANALYSIS
APPENDIX C	FREQUENCIES
APPENDIX D	COMMON METHOD VARIANCE ANALYSIS
APPENDIX E	MEASUREMENT MODEL
APPENDIX F	LATENT VARIABLE CORRELATIONS
APPENDIX G	CROSS LOADINGS
APPENDIX H	PATH COEFFICIENTS
APPENDIX I	SMARTPLS GRAPHICAL OUTPUT

HUBUNGKAIT ULASAN DALAM TALIAN, FAKTOR PERIBADI DAN PERSEKITARAN NIAT PELANGGAN UNTUK MAKAN DI LUAR

ABSTRAK

Konsep makan di luar telah berubah sebagai bidang kajian yang penting dalam industri servis makanan seiring dengan pertumbuhan pelbagai saluran media sosial. Walaupun kajian ulasan dalam talian di media sosial meningkat beberapa tahun ini, terdapat kekurangan bukti empirikal terhadap ulasan dalam talian dan kesannya ke atas niat pengunjung untuk makan di luar. Dua teori telah digunakan dalam kajian ini termasuk *Heuristic-Systemation Information Processing Model* (HSM) dan *Social Cognitive Theory* (SCT). Kajian ini bertujuan untuk memeriksa kesan ulasan dalam talian (kualiti hujah, kredibiliti sumber dan kuantiti ulasan) ke atas niat pengunjung untuk makan di luar, hubungan antara faktor peribadi dan faktor persekitaran dengan niat pengunjung dan bagaimana kualiti hujah memberi kesan ke atas kedua-dua faktor tersebut. Tambahan pula, kajian ini menyiasat kesan pengantaraan kualiti hujah dalam hubungan antara kredibiliti sumber dan kuantiti ulasan dalam talian dengan niat pengunjung. Maka, 12 hipotesis telah dicadangkan. Reka bentuk kajian seperti keratan rentas dan pendekatan kuantitatif telah digunakan. Penyelidikan ini menggunakan tinjauan dalam talian untuk pengumpulan data pengunjung rakyat Malaysia yang mempunyai satu akaun media sosial dan mempunyai pengalaman membaca ulasan dalam talian. Pengunjung telah didekati melalui pelbagai saluran media social. Teknik persampelan secara bertujuan telah digunakan untuk mengumpul data. 236 respon dari pengunjung telah digunakan untuk dianalisis dengan '*Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM)*' bersama perisian *SmartPLS*. Keputusan menunjukkan semua hipotesis disokong

kecuali H4, H10 dan H12. Kajian mendapati kualiti hujah mempunyai hubungan dengan faktor ulasan dalam talian yang lain, factor peribadi dan pengaruh sosial. Tambahan pula, penemuan mendapati kualiti hujah dan kredibiliti sumber ulasan dalam talian memberi kesan kepada niat pengunjung untuk makan di luar tetapi tidak untuk kuantiti ulasan dalam talian. Hasil kajian juga menyokong bahawa kepercayaan dan jangkaan positif pengunjung yang mencerminkan keseronokan pengalaman menjamu selera mempengaruhi keputusan pengunjung. Di samping itu, keputusan makan di luar juga dibuat di bawah pengaruh sosial di kalangan pengunjung. Kajian ini mengukuhkan pemahaman tentang impak ulasan dalam talian, pengaruh peribadi dan pengaruh sosial terhadap niat untuk makan di luar. Penemuan ini juga berharga untuk perniagaan penubuhan makanan di Malaysia dan negara Asia lain dalam industri perkhidmatan makanan untuk kekal berdaya saing kerana ia memberikan pandangan tentang bagaimana kualiti dan kredibiliti ulasan dalam talian memberi kesan kepada keputusan pengunjung. Selain itu, kajian ini dapat membantu industri perkhidmatana makanan dan minuman tempatan dalam pemasaran media sosial dan menekankan kepentingan ulasan dalam talian untuk meningkatkan imej jenama.

LINKING ONLINE REVIEWS, PERSONAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS AND DINERS' INTENTION TO EAT OUT

ABSTRACT

The concept of 'eating out' has changed as an important area of study within the food service industry with the growth of social media (SM) platforms. Even though research on online reviews from SM has been increasing in recent years, empirical evidence is scarce on online reviews and their consequences on diners' intention to eat out. Two theories were applied to underpin this study, which is Heuristic-Systemation Information Processing Model (HSM) and Social Cognitive Theory (SCT). This study examines the effects of online reviews (i.e., argument quality, source credibility, and perceived quantity of online reviews) on diners' intention to eat out, the relationship between personal and environmental factors with diners' intention and the influence of argument quality on these factors. Moreover, this study investigates the mediation effects of argument quality to the relationship between source credibility and perceived quantity of reviews with diners' intention to eat out. Thus, 12 hypotheses are proposed. Cross-sectional design and quantitative approach were employed. The study used an online survey to collect data on Malaysian diners with an SM account and experience reading online reviews. The respondents were approached through various SM platforms. A purposive sampling technique was used to collect data. Two hundred thirty-six useful responses were analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS software. The results showed that all hypotheses are supported except for H4, H10, and H12. The argument quality was found to have relationships with other online review variables and personal and social influence. Furthermore, the findings

indicated that online reviews' argument quality and source credibility significantly impacted diners' intention to eat out, but not the perceived quantity of online reviews. The result also supports that diners' positive beliefs and expectations that reflected the leisureliness and enjoyment of the dining experience influence diners' decisions. In addition, dining-out decisions were also made under the influence of diners' social circles. This study strengthens the understanding of online review impact, personal and social influence on intention to eat out. Besides that, this study could assist the local food and beverage service industry in social media marketing and emphasise online reviews to enhance brand image. The findings are also valuable for food establishment businesses in Malaysia and other Asian countries within the food service industry to stay competitive as they provide insights into how the quality and credibility of online reviews impact decision-making.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter first discusses the background of the study. Next, the problem statement, research questions and objectives are addressed. This is followed by a brief discussion of the scope of the study, which provides the rationale for selecting the theories and respondents. Consequently, the significance of the study includes both theoretical contribution and practical significance, and the definitions of key terms are presented.

1.2 Background of the Study

Eating out is a concept that began and has increased in popularity since at least the end of the 1950s (Warde, 2000). It began with the processing and distribution of food, which was greatly influenced by tradition and slightly changed how individuals consumed it (de Rezende & Silva, 2012). According to previous studies, eating food outside of the home includes practices such as eating at commercial establishments that offer food as part of their service as well as eating in the homes of families and friends (de Rezende & de Avelar, 2012; de Rezende & Silva, 2014; Olsen, Warde, & Martens, 2000). The motivation to eat out has undergone a transition where people eat out for convenience, necessity, and pleasure (Olsen et al., 2000).

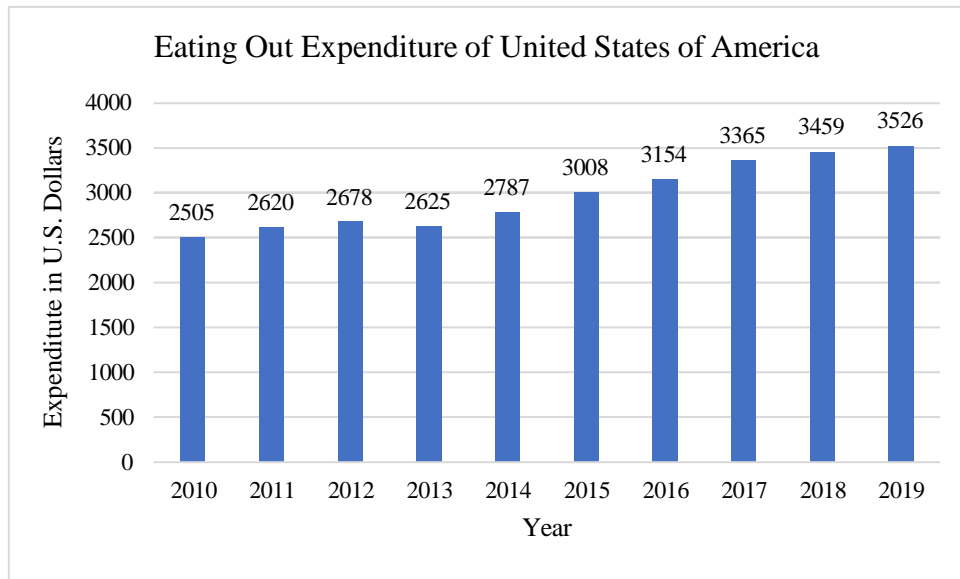


Figure 1.1: *Eating Out Expenditure of United States of America (2010-2019)*
Source: Wunsch (2021)

Over the past four decades, spending on eating out as a percentage of total food expenditure has been growing by almost 5-6% per decade (Kant & Graubard, 2004). The money spent on eating out has been increasing globally. For example, the level of spending on eating out in the United States of America (USA) increased from 26% of total food expenditures in the 1970s to 39% in 1996 and reached 42% in 2002 (Bezerra & Sichieri, 2009). For instance, Figure 1.1 shows an increment in eating-out expenditure of the USA from 2010 to 2019 by 40% (Wunsch, 2021). Besides that, other researchers reported that three or more weekly consumptions of commercially prepared meals among Americans increased from 36% in 1987 to 41% in 1999–2000 (Kant & Graubard, 2004). Nearly one out of every two meals is eaten outside of the home in the USA (Poulain, Tibere, Laporte, & Mognard, 2014).

Meanwhile, compared to other European countries, about one out of every three meals is eaten out in the United Kingdom (UK), one out of four in Italy, one out of five in Spain and France, and one out of seven in Germany (GIRA, 2012). The UK also reported that 27% of adults consumed meals outside of the home every week, where eating out has become increasingly common (d'Angelo, Gloinson, Draper, & Guthrie, 2020).

Yet, compared to trends worldwide, in the Asia Pacific region, China and South Korea dominated the total foodservice spending in 2010 with around 40% (Edwards, 2013). Eating out was reported to be more common in a few Southeast Asian countries like Singapore and Thailand (Dawe et al., 2019; Naidoo et al., 2017). For example, about 77% of Singaporeans eat out at least one meal per day (Naidoo et al., 2017). The increased spending on eating outside of the home showed that eating out has increased yearly in most countries.

The same situation can be observed in Malaysia. According to Poulain, Tibere, Laporte, & Mognard (2014), more than 64.1% of Malaysians eat at least one meal outside of their home. Meanwhile, 35.7% of Malaysians eat meals only at home (Poulain et al., 2014). It shows that most Malaysians spend at least one time to eat outside. Besides that, some Malaysians (11.2%) do not cook at home; they eat meals outside of their home (Poulain et al., 2014). Another study also showed the eating-out trend among Malaysians. According to Islam, Yew, Abdullah, & Mohd Noh (2010), the household's average weekly Malaysian eating-out expenditure on breakfast, lunch, and dinner were RM34, RM47, and RM43. The study was proved by Ashari et al. (2022) & Elise Mognar et al. (2023) that Malaysian diners ate out mostly during lunch.

Table 1.1:

Retail Value Sales of Malaysia's Consumer Foodservice by Category and Growth %

Category	Annual Growth % (2021-2022)
Total Foodservice by Type	13.6
Chained Foodservice	18.4
Independent Foodservice	9.0
Cafes / Bars	12.1
Full-Service Restaurant	9.5
Limited-service Restaurants	20.7
Self-service Cafeterias	9.6
Street stalls	10.7

Source: Agriculture and agri-food Canada, 2023

The statistics are expected to increase as restaurants and hotels were reported to be the fourth highest (13.9%) in necessity, dominating the Malaysian household expenditure in 2019 and 16.1% in 2022 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020; 2023). Additionally, the food and beverage industry grew by about 5% from 2010 to 2015, from 130,570 to 157,490 food and beverage establishments (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2017). Furthermore, Table 1.1 shows the sales growth of 13.6% in all restaurant categories from 2021 to 2022. The circumstances are similar from 2022 to 2023, with a projected increase of 22% (Moh, 2023). These statistics show that Malaysia's food and beverage service industry is growing, as well as the frequency of eating out.

Several factors contribute to the increased eating-out trend, including rising incomes, two-income households, low prices of food, and demand for convenience (Kant & Graubard, 2004; Pawan, Langgat, & Marzuki, 2014). These factors drive growth in commercial food establishments and have caused a significant and dramatic increase in fast-food restaurants (Kant & Graubard, 2004). These factors cause a rise in eating outside the home and show the transformation of why people choose to eat out.

Currently, eating out is considered as casual dining in our changing society. This concept of eating out has become essential to social life in the workplace and during leisure time (Díaz-Méndez & García-Espejo, 2017).

1.2.1 Changing Diner Behaviour in Eating Out

A comparison across a survey in 1995 and 2015 showed significant changes in the formalization and simplification of eating out in restaurants (Paddock, Warde, & Whillans, 2017). The proportion of last meals in a restaurant described as ‘convenience/quick’ has increased. Meanwhile, the proportion described as ‘special occasions’ has dropped. Thus, a change has occurred from special occasions to convenience/quick events as reasons to eat out (Paddock et al., 2017). This evidence shows the transformation in eating out behaviour in the past and current times.

The eating trend has changed from the formal to the casual concept. Presently, rather than being a necessity, people feel motivated to eat outside the home for pleasure (de Rezende & Silva, 2014; Warde, 2000). For example, eating out is considered one of the most popular leisure activities today (de Rezende & Silva, 2014). The trend is changing to a casual concept to share experiences and find restaurant information. Social media (SM) use has changed, such as social networking sites (SNS), food blogs, and websites. The way how consumers share their experiences and find restaurant information is changing from traditional word-of-mouth to electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) through SM. Consumers can spread information about food and restaurants on social networks and reach huge audiences almost instantly (Stephens & Malone, 2009; Zhu, Anagondaalli, & Zhang, 2017). For example, SM provides a platform for consumers to share their eating-out experiences such as by

posting and commenting on food photos (Zhu, Jiang, Dou, & Liang, 2019).

Besides that, the eating out trend among young adults was highlighted and became the study's target population. According to Hartwell et al. (2023), young adults (18 – 30 years old) are at a transitory stage where their eating habits are less influenced by parental and more affected by peer sociocultural norms, obtaining peer social approval and peer influence. Besides that, people at this age develop social and physical habits (Mollaei et al., 2023). The habits of using technology among young adults might influence the concept of eating out as they feel that promotions make them buy new food (Karimikonda, 2020). Moreover, socialising with friends is part of the pleasure and casual concept of eating out that has been practised by young adults in recent years (Karimikonda, 2020). In 2015, it was found that young adults were the most important factor in increasing the propensity to eat out frequently in three English cities: Preston, Bristol, and London (Warde, Whillans, & Paddock, 2019). The same situation happened in other countries like Albania, where almost 47% of the total energy intake per day came from eating out among young adults (Llanaj, Adany, Lachat, & D'Haese, 2018). In Spain, young adults and university students prefer to eat out during the weekend for leisure time compared to older people (Díaz-Méndez & García-Espejo, 2017). Meanwhile, in Malaysia, half of young adults eat out two to five times per week, and about 42% spend more than one hour eating out (Pawan et al., 2014). Thus, it shows that the eating out trend among young adults' study is prominent.

1.2.2 Restaurant Reviews

Besides the eating out trend becoming more popular, especially among young adults, the trend of using SM is also increasing. People use SMs such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter as part of their lifestyle and as a way to communicate with peers and friends daily. Until 2012, Facebook had 850 million active users, and at least 78% of college students logged on to Facebook once a day, and 21% checked in more than five times a day (Kittinger, Correia, & Irons, 2012; Twenge, 2013). A previous study also revealed that Singaporean adults spent the longest time connecting with friends and sharing updates on topical news on Facebook (Tang & Koh, 2017). Moreover, 71% of young adults engage in SM for about five hours daily, and their activities involve posts, photos, blogs, email, texting, and talking to others about specific issues (Manik, 2015).

The increase of SM users among diners also affects their decision to eat out. As mentioned before, SM has changed how they spend their time eating out. For example, people will take photos of food and post them on SM before eating. Besides that, they can also search for information about food and restaurants near their places since SM provides the space to share comments and reviews on food and restaurants. Therefore, people could use this opportunity to find good food and restaurant information from the comments and reviews for future outings. The comments and reviews on SM, especially on Facebook, mostly come from peers and anonymous individuals. Both peer and anonymous reviews were revealed to influence restaurant preference significantly (Richards & Tiwari, 2014).

Furthermore, information obtained from peer networks is more vital than information derived from anonymous reviews on SM (Richards & Tiwari, 2014). Sometimes, the trend of reviewing food and restaurants and sharing it with friends can go viral and create eWOM. The eWOM uses traditional word-of-mouth communication as information directed through Internet-based technology since consumers use the internet, especially SM, to search for brands, products, and services (Webber, 2013). Research has proven that in Jaipur, 37% of consumers accept that peer advice or feedback on SM often affects their decisions before selecting any restaurant (Goyal, 2016).

The internet wave in this era could also affect eating-out behaviour since people could search for any information about food or restaurants through SM. As mentioned previously, peer and anonymous restaurant reviews could affect their choice. How consumers perceive quality when eating out also depends on these reviews. It may also cause young people who use SM to develop food addiction (Tang & Koh, 2017). Consumers may have expectations of the quality of food and restaurants based on the positive and negative comments and reviews on SM. Furthermore, SM's easy features and mobility make it the best place to gather and obtain information about the best food and restaurants available.

Additionally, consumers could use restaurant reviews on SM as an evaluation tool before deciding where to eat out. Yet, using the review as an evaluation tool has disadvantages, such as false or inaccurate reviews, causing customers to patronise a poor restaurant or avoid a good one (Parikh & Behnke, 2013). Most consumers define Facebook as a credible source from which to review a restaurant. However, some do

not consider Facebook an entirely credible review source (Webber, 2013). Thus, to help consumers filter all the information, comments, and reviews on SM, one approach was introduced by previous research called the Heuristic-systematic Model (HSM). The HSM helps the consumer process all incoming information, especially on SM, by looking at argument quality, source credibility, and quantity of reviews (Zhang, Zhao, Cheung & Lee, 2014). For example, if young adults find online reviews on food and restaurants credible, their intention to try the food could be increased and influence their intention to eat out (Zhang et al., 2014).

1.3 Problem Statement

Traditionally, previous studies on eating out have only focused separately on one side of the concept change, such as leisure or convenience. However, the changes may come from one or a combination of both sides, as diners have different purposes when eating alone or with companions. Furthermore, some diners have many impromptu meals that are often unexpected when there is no initial plan to do so (Paddock et al., 2017). The situation above often occurs when many restaurants are available in one place. Still, the concept of eating out from both attitude and environment, especially in Malaysia, has been poorly discussed and rarely studied. Thus, this study calls into question how both can influence diners' intention to eat out and contribute to defining the concept of changes in eating out in Malaysia.

The concept and trend of eating out are experiencing changes in terms of how people share experiences and find restaurant information. The changes involved in SM intervention include social networking sites, food blogs, and websites that are becoming increasingly popular, especially for sharing food experiences online when

eating outside of the home. The social conversation has changed due to increasing SM users over the past few years. The advantage of using SM is that people can create text, words, pictures, and videos to share on SM (Evans, 2012). Besides that, people can interact, communicate, follow trending issues, and express their opinions more freely and actively than before across the globe using traditional communication (Kucukemiroglu & Kara, 2015). People use this opportunity to share their opinions and views with others in a split second. This could be why obtaining news and information is becoming easier and more accessible (Hanaysha, 2016).

Compared to years before, people's opinions and reviews towards food and restaurant services are only shared among family members and friends in small-scale neighbourhoods. News would take longer to spread to people from other places. Yet today, people can freely give their opinions regarding their restaurant experiences and food and share them with others, as SM provides the space to discuss and talk practically. All this information on SM will create a good perception among consumers as restaurants can keep in touch with consumers and provide good services outside the premises. Thus, restaurants can develop a perceived favourable image, consequently leading to perceived customer value via effective SM advertisements (Hanaysha, 2016). Unfortunately, a lot of online reviews could also become a disadvantage to customers and restaurant owners. High numbers of online reviews can lead to information overload, making it hard for consumers to identify which information is good for them, especially when deciding to buy something (Hong, Yu, Wu, & Pu, 2020). Furthermore, when searching for advice, information overload can lead to contradictory online reviews regarding the credibility of the opinions (Bigne, Chatzipanagiotou, & Ruiz, 2020). Thus, how consumers process all these opinions to

evaluate the restaurant's service and food is unclear. Consequently, this research examines how consumers process online reviews that are available on SM using the HSM.

The information available on SM gives consumers a lot of choices when selecting a restaurant to eat out. Before consumers choose the restaurant to dine in, they will consider all the reviews they can easily find on SM, which helps them form expectations on the food quality and restaurant service. As mentioned before, online reviews can come from the multitude of opinions available. Both positive and negative reviews could affect the consumers, especially their emotions. In addition, negative reviews have a far stronger effect on consumers' preferences than positive reviews. Negative reviews were found to evoke stronger emotions, leading to negative responses (Bigne et al., 2020). Consumers' preferences are shaped by a greater aversion to potential loss than potential gain (Richards & Tiwari, 2014). In addition, active users on SM are more likely to engage in negative eWOM about their poor service experience (Zhang, Abound Omran, & Cobanoglu, 2017). Since consumers can freely read all the negative reviews, they can imagine the quality of food and service even though they have not tried it yet. Besides that, the credibility of positive reviews and engagement in negative reviews on SM may affect how consumers perceive the quality of food and service at a restaurant nowadays and affect their eating-out behaviour. Positive and negative online reviews also affect trust in the restaurant service and the consumers' response, which leads to the willingness to visit the restaurant (Bigne et al., 2020). Because of this situation, the consumer may be more careful when selecting a restaurant to eat out. However, in a good way, the consumer may also become more curious to try new foods or a new

restaurant to dine in. Trust in restaurants could depend on source credibility and argument quality of the online reviews. Thus, research must be done to find this impact on diners' intentions and behaviour.

Since it is easy to find information and feedback from other consumers' experiences, there is an overload of information on SM and information integrity is questioned. Furthermore, SM lacks regulation on the credibility of the information presented (Henderson et al., 2017). For example, Twitter is a platform for people to think out loud, so certain people may not possess any credibility, particularly in anything they "tweet" (Henderson et al., 2017). Viral food, cooking, and service instances at restaurants, especially on SM, may or may not be true, since anyone can write without permission. The company or restaurant may pay for certain reviews, and some reviews may not be a hundred percent honest. Furthermore, one study mentioned that consumers are not good at identifying fake online reviews, and about 50% of fake online reviews remain undetected (Plotkina, Munzel, & Pallud, 2018). Thus, not all SM platforms can be used as a guideline to help consumers find information on food and restaurants. Even the biggest reviewing websites (e.g. Yelp) may potentially have manipulative reviews (Plotkina et al., 2018). Consequently, consumers must consider source credibility and identify reviewers who have a trustworthy profile before deciding to dine out at any restaurant.

Previous research showed that SM plays a progressively important role in consumers' purchase decisions in the hospitality industry with the emergence of product/service reviews on web-based platforms (Ghiselli & Ma, 2015; Zhang, Ye, Law, & Li, 2010). For example, Yelp and TripAdvisor websites give consumers space to leave reviews

about restaurants and hotels they have experienced before. These websites let users determine whether to go to a restaurant (Ghiselli & Ma, 2015). However, information is also overloaded on SM apart from review websites, yet too little research has focused on it. Thus, this study tries to fill the gap by exploring the effect of online reviews from SMs like SNS on diners' intention to eat out.

In this study, diners' intentions and behaviour based on the SM context could give some important input to the restaurant industry. Even though source credibility was questioned, and fake reviews are easily loaded, SM could empower consumers to find information about good food and restaurants and help them shape their preferences. Besides that, this study could identify whether online reviews on SM could impact diners' intention to eat out. This could help restaurant owners practice using SM to create more profit and build their brand. Thus, this study could also guide food service managers in developing an effective online SM marketing strategy to build and maintain their restaurant's image.

Theoretical and practical examinations of the relationships between online reviews on SM and diners' intentions are lacking, especially for eating out behaviour. Since there is inadequate literature on how online review constructs, including argument quality, source credibility, and quantity of reviews, influence diners' intention to eat out, this study attempts to fill the gaps. The study also intends to investigate whether online reviews on SM can affect personal and environmental factors of diners' intentions. The study could be a significant step towards further comprehending the relationship between online reviews' personal and environmental factors with diners' intention to eat out.

1.4 Research Questions

How do online review constructs and personal and environmental factors influence diners' intention to eat out? This central research question is broken down into smaller sub-research questions and will be answered through a quantitative study.

RQ1: Is there any relationship between source credibility and the perceived quantity of online reviews with argument quality?

RQ2: Does the argument quality of online reviews influence diners' personal and environmental factors to eat out?

RQ3: Do argument quality, source credibility, and perceived quantity of online reviews influence diners' intention to eat out?

RQ4: Do personal and environmental factors influence diners' intention to eat out?

RQ5: Does argument quality mediate the relationship between source credibility and the perceived quantity of online reviews with diners' intention to eat out?

1.5 Research Objectives

The objectives of this research are as follows:

- i. To examine the relationship between source credibility, perceived quantity, and argument quality of online reviews.
- ii. To examine the influence of the argument quality of online reviews on diners' personal and environmental factors to eat out.
- iii. To examine the influence of argument quality, source credibility, and perceived quantity of online reviews on diners' intention to eat out.
- iv. To examine the relationship between personal and environmental factors with diners' intention to eat out.

- v. To examine the mediating effect of argument quality on the relationship between source credibility and perceived quantity of online reviews with diners' intention to eat out.

1.6 Scope of the Study

The scope of this study is to understand better how online reviews can influence diners' intentions and eating-out behaviours in Malaysia. Zhang et al. (2014) proposed that the HSM can influence diners' intentions and behaviours. Thus, the current study broadens its scope to include argument quality, source credibility, and perceived quantity of online reviews. In addition, the study also aims to examine the relationship between personal and environmental factors with diners' intention to eat out. Bandura's social cognitive theory (SCT) was also utilised to ascertain the relationship of other factors with diners' intention to eat out, which are personal and environmental factors (Bandura, 1986).

Therefore, the current study broadens SCT's scope to include dimensions for each factor: outcome expectation for personal factors and social support and situation for environmental factors. Both model and theory are suitable in this study's context to investigate the relationship between online reviews, personal factors, and environmental factors with diners' intention to eat out. Besides that, this study focused on Malaysian diners who have at least one account on any SM site and have experience reading any feedback and reviews related to food and restaurants through SM platforms. Diners with SM accounts were chosen because they are considered SM savvy, and their intentions were heavily influenced by technology and the internet (Pawan et al., 2014).

Furthermore, the current study only focused on online reviews from SM platforms especially social networking sites (SNS). According to Popy & Bappy (2022), the persuasive power of YouTube, Instagram, Twitter and other online rating platforms in influencing restaurant consumer behaviour is vital in this competitive era. Besides, SNSs that include many restaurant reviews from various users are considered reliable information sources (Kang et al., 2018). The overall scope of the study is expected to derive results that can contribute further to the food and beverage sector and service marketing research.

1.7 Significance of Study

This study can potentially deliver a significant theoretical and practical contribution to the food and beverage service industry. As Corley & Gioia (2011) suggested, the theoretical contribution involves two main principles: originality and utility. By advancing knowledge, the study can provide original insights into a particular phenomenon deemed useful for some purpose (Corley & Gioia, 2011). This study contributes to the body of knowledge by examining online reviews and personal and environmental factors that influence diners' intentions within an integrated research framework. Furthermore, this study also delivers a new understanding to the market practitioner. The details of the theoretical and practical contributions are discussed in the following sections.

1.7.1 Theoretical Contributions

The results of this study will enrich the body of literature on diners' intentions to eat out. Using HSM and SCT as the foundation, the study attempts to fill the gap in the current concept of eating out. This study examines the influence of online reviews

through SM and personal and environmental factors on diners' intention to eat out. HSM proposed that online reviews, including both persuasion cue and persuasive argument, impact information processing, creating a greater possibility of attitude change (Kang, Huang, & Hung, 2009; Kim, King, & Kim, 2016). In addition, the SCT suggested that personal and environmental factors can also shape eating behaviour (Chansukree & Rungjindarat, 2017). Thus, HSM and SCT are useful frameworks to examine the factors that influence diners' intention to eat out. This research extends beyond the diners' intention to eat out by realising the importance of advanced technology such as SM on eating-out practices. The research is significant because it extends the past literature on eating-out behaviours. Furthermore, this study contributes to past research as there is an opportunity to apply the SM effect in the current situation. In contrast, past research focused on demographic factors, including gender, income, and so forth. Thus, this study provides additional information on how SM can influence current diners' intentions to eat out.

Besides that, this study attempts to fill the gap in the existing literature on online review sources in the food service industry. Nowadays, online reviews mostly come from review websites compared to other platforms. As highlighted in several studies, the influence of online reviews on the food service and hospitality industry is more dominantly investigated in the case of review websites such as Yelp (Chen, Fay, & Wang, 2011; Gunden, 2017; Ke, 2019; McManus, 2019; Xiang, Du, Ma, & Fan, 2017; Yiru, 2019). Yet, there has been very little research into the impact of other types of SM, particularly from customers' perspectives. In addition, a recommendation was suggested from previous research to examine how diners'

intentions can be affected by emerging social media such as microblogs and social network sites (e.g. Twitter, Facebook) (Chen et al., 2011). Thus, this study can give further information and contribute to the literature on other types of social media and their effects on diners' intentions.

Another aim of this study is to introduce the HSM approach to measure the effectiveness of online reviews on social media towards diners' intention to eat out. The increasing number of online reviews on social media and its functions as one of the marketing roles affect consumers' buying patterns (Chen et al., 2011). A high number of online reviews come from family members and friends, yet anonymous online reviews must also be considered to build consumers' expectations of restaurants. Thus, HSM can be applied to get the right information about food and restaurants and filter all the information from online reviews. As suggested by other research, the usefulness of the HSM approach is needed to examine the impact of online reviews on information processing and attitude formation (Kim et al., 2016). The HSM approach is introduced in this study to help consumers process and filter all the online reviews to choose good food and restaurants for them to eat out. Therefore, this study can give additional information on the usefulness of the HSM approach towards diners' intentions to eat out.

1.7.2 Methodological Contributions

This study utilized the quantitative method; thus, the measurement scales adapted in this study were improved and can be used in future research. Furthermore, the context of this study is established in developing countries, yet only a few studies on how online reviews on SM influence diners' intention to eat out were conducted in

Malaysia. The usefulness of models in this study contributes towards providing the result of online reviews on diners' intention to eat out in Malaysia in different social contexts.

In addition, the data collection procedure in this study applied an online survey to replace the conventional method. This study provides a flow of how the online survey for data collection can be carried out successfully. The use of an online survey was suggested since the context of this study is focused on SM, especially for a cross-sectional study. Few remedies were applied, which are procedural and statistical, although the common method bias during data collection has become a concern in this study. The remedies aid in controlling common method bias through an online survey.

1.7.3 Practical Significance

Restaurateurs can use this study's findings to understand the SM trend among Malaysians better. Furthermore, this study gives awareness to restaurant owners about food and restaurant reviews on SM and their influence on diners' intention to eat out. Online reviews on SM could become a vital factor in building customer loyalty, which is essential for communication efforts to be more acceptable to customers and influence customers' decisions when selecting a restaurant to eat out (Kim et al., 2016). Online reviews provide many opportunities, but it also come with risks as it could directly affect the restaurant's sales and profit if there are many bad reviews on the food and restaurant, especially by influential people on SM. Thus, restaurateurs should engage in SM platforms and thank reviewers for their positive reviews to build a positive image of their restaurant (Li, Xie, & Zhang, 2020; Parikh,

Behnke, Vorvoreanu, Almanza, & Nelson, 2014). Thus, the discussion and recommendations of this research can be used as inputs for managers to understand the importance of online reviews on SM that lead to business success.

In addition, the government and private sector marketers can use the findings and contributions in this study to develop their marketing strategy through SM. This study can show the current effects of SM among Malaysian diners and how it can influence their intention and behaviour with the HSM approach. It has been suggested that HSM can help consumers analyse any information on SM, including online reviews, about the products and services available in the market (Kim, Kim, & Reid, 2017). Highlighting the HSM approach to consumers is important as they routinely check online reviews before purchasing (Smith & Anderson, 2016). The results of this study could hence assist the government and marketers in encouraging consumers to process all the information on SM and make wise decisions. It can help the consumer avoid misunderstanding or being misled or deceived by any reviews and feedback on SM. Therefore, this research can also guide marketers to ensure all future customers have the right information about the food and restaurant (Smith & Anderson, 2016).

1.8 Definition of Key Terms

Diners' intention: Diners' behavioural intention is defined as consumers' willingness to dine at a place after they process issue-relevant online reviews and is influenced by their beliefs and social environment (Zhang, Zhao, Cheung, & Lee, 2014). In the context of this study, diners' intention is discussed, as well as their willingness to purchase products and services at an eating place.

Argument Quality: Argument quality measures the arguments' strengths by checking the completeness and consistency of information through online reviews on SM (Kang et al., 2009).

Source Credibility: Source credibility is perceived as a credible source of product and service information that can be trusted to give an objective view of the product and service (Shan, 2016).

Expertness: Expertness refers to the degree to which a customer believes a reviewer knows the truth based on the reviewer's expertness and qualification (Lin, Spence, & Lachlan, 2016; McCroskey & Teven, 1999).

Trustworthiness: Trustworthiness refers to the degree to which a customer believes a reviewer would tell the truth as he or she honestly knows it (Lin et al., 2016; McCroskey & Teven, 1999).

Quantity of Reviews: Quantity of reviews refers to the number of online reviews about a company's products and services in a given period (De Pelsmacker, van Tilburg, & Holthof, 2018).

Personal: Personal refers to an individual's cognitions, thoughts, beliefs, feelings, and actions towards an individual's intention and behaviour (Bandura, 2006; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020).

Outcome Expectation: Outcome expectation is the belief about the expected outcomes of performing a behaviour (Bandura, 2002). It refers to the expected costs, benefits, and possible consequences of eating out behaviour.

Environmental: Refers to external aspects, including social and opportunities from the physical environment that influence a person's intention and behaviour (Bandura, 2002; Lubans et al., 2012).

Social influence: Social influence refers to the modification of an individual's opinion in the social environment that involves interpersonal influence, including family, friends, and peer social networks (Lubans et al., 2012; S. Peng, Yang, Cao, Yu, & Xie, 2017; Story, Neumark-Sztainer, & French, 2002).

Situation: Situation refers to the individual's perception of their environment, including opportunities and the availability of foods and restaurants (Lubans et al., 2012).

1.9 Organization of the Chapters

The thesis includes a total of five chapters. The first chapter is the introduction, which explains the background of the study and discusses the research problem. Besides that, this chapter identifies the research questions and their objectives, describes the study's scope and significance, and defines the key terms. Chapter two is the literature review, which discusses theories and literature on diners' decision-making and social media. The research framework and research hypotheses have been introduced and covered in this chapter.

Chapter three discusses the methodology of this research, including the research design, sample and sampling, preliminary research design, instrumentation, and data analysis technique. Chapter four presents the data of the study, describes the findings of the descriptive analysis, and provides the results of the hypotheses developed for this study. The final chapter discusses the research's main findings, including the research framework developed from the quantitative analysis result. Besides that, this chapter provides theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions, recognises limitations, and suggests some recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the background of the study for diners' intention, eating out, and SM, as well as other issues related to this study. This study aims to determine the influence of personal, environmental, and online reviews on SM on Malaysian diners' intention to eat out. Food and restaurant reviews on SM can be one of the methods used to obtain information on when to choose to eat out. Thus, this chapter conveys a general idea of the literature regarding diners' intentions, eating out, and using SM. The first part of the chapter discusses the diners' intention to eat out and social media. Next, the theories used to support the research framework are discussed. Then, a detailed explanation of individual constructs of HSM and SCT is given. Lastly, the study's framework is proposed and reviewed to test the hypotheses.

2.2 Eating Out

Eating out has become prevalent in the 21st century. According to de Rezende & Silva (2014), eating out involves several practices, such as eating at commercial establishments that specialise in food establishments (restaurants, fast-food restaurants and snack bars) that offer food as a part of their services (hotels and in-flight meals); and non-commercial alternatives such as eating in the homes of family and friends. Besides that, according to Sharma et al., (2024), eating outside the home typically refers to eating meals at restaurants or fast food. It also can be referred to as away-from-home meals, out-of-home food consumption, takeaway food, ready-