

Which Words to Whose Mouth

A Descriptive Research into the WOM Phenomenon in the Restaurant Industry

ERASMUS UNIVERSITY ROTTERDAM

Faculty of Economics of Business

Marketing

Supervisor: G.W. Havranek

Mark Hakhof

368844

m.hakhof@live.nl

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Introduction

Due to the recent ongoing crisis, restaurant owners are having difficulties obtaining and retaining customers (Hickman, 2009) (Michaud, 2008) and if restaurant owners are able to do so, customers are continuously spending less on their meals (Carvajal & Minder, 2012). Times are clearly tough and restaurant owners have to think critically about changing or implementing marketing strategies.

Imagine yourself looking for a restaurant to eat at. You might spontaneously decide to visit the restaurant that looks busiest or nicest from the outside, but more than often you base your decision on whatever friends, family or colleagues recommend to you. Marketing in the restaurant industry is different from marketing tangible industrial goods. To some extent you can advertise the quality of the food in your restaurant, but when it comes to the customer experience (e.g. atmosphere in the restaurant), restaurant owners are clearly in a disadvantage regarding advertising. Customers – besides experiencing the restaurant themselves – heavily rely on the experiences of peers through word-of-mouth (WOM) (Tax, Chandrashekar, & Christiansen, 1993) (O'Connor, 2012) (Rainie, Purcell, Mitchell, & Rosenstiel, 2011).

WOM is led by either satisfaction or dissatisfaction and plenty of research has been done into the effect of experiences on WOM intentions (Jang, Cho, & Kim, 2013) (Heung & Gu, 2012) (Babin, Lee, Kim, & Griffin, 2005) (Velazquez & Blasco, 2012). Research has also delved into how to manage WOM (Gehrels, Kristanto, & Eringa, 2006), WOM communication patterns (Susskind, 2002), factors driving WOM (Longart, 2010) and e-WOM, electronic word-of-mouth (Behnke, Parikh, Vorvoreanu, Almanza, & Nelson, 2014) (EunHa Jeong, 2011).

However, none of these researches specify to whom the WOM in the restaurant industry is directed and how likely it is directed to a certain group based on the type of experience. The problem is that restaurant owners need to find the most efficient way to influence WOM marketing, without knowing exactly what kind of information customers share with what kind of group. Hence leading to the research question:

RQ: What category of customer experience should a restaurant owner focus on in order to maximize WOM efficiency?

This research tends to add to existing literature by investigating what type of experience customers in the restaurant industry share with which type of group of people. We will first set up a theoretical framework based on previous research, then explain the data gathering and methodology, show the results of the survey and research and conclude with answering the research question, limitations and suggestions for further research.

Theoretical Framework

Word-of-mouth

According to Hawkins and Mothersbaugh (2012) word-of-mouth (WOM) is a process that allows consumers to share information and opinions about a specific service in order to direct buyers towards or away from the service. Earlier in years Harrison-Walker (2001) defined WOM as informal, person-to-person communication between a perceived noncommercial communicator and even further back in time Arndt (1967) defined WOM as face-to-face communication about products or companies between people who are not commercial entities. Even though the definitions of WOM differ slightly, they remain fairly similar over the years and can be summarized as informal person-to-person communication about a product or service, with no specific commercial intend.

Word-of-mouth in the restaurant industry

The definition of WOM as defined above, can be directly applied to the restaurant industry. To make it more concrete, WOM in the restaurant industry is all about communicating the overall experience a customer has in a restaurant towards family, friends and so forth. This overall experience is in general not something that is easily measurable, but more of a feeling. Nevertheless, we will try to estimate this experience with the help of a few different experience categories and accompanying attributes. The feeling towards these attributes can be assessed with the help of a survey.

Restaurant experience

Previous research has revealed three commonly accepted categories for measuring restaurant experience (Joung, Choi, & Goh, 2011) (Jang & Namkung, 2009) (Ha & Jang, 2010) (Longart, 2010) (EunHa Jeong, 2011). Restaurant experience is broadly divided into food quality, service quality and restaurant atmosphere. Although one could possibly think of many more factors, these factors

allow for a fairly reliable research but at the same time limit its scope. These factors are also MECE, mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive. This means that the factors do not have any overlap and together comprehend every possible experience a customer can have in a restaurant.

Food quality

Food quality is a major factor in deciding whether or not to dine in a restaurant. Although this factor can be partly marketed through more reliable channels by using terms as eco-friendly, handmade and traditional, food quality supposedly has a high influence on the amount of WOM. To measure food quality, we rely on different food attributes. Attributes are more easily measured than overall quality, but can together still contribute to the greater good. For this research we will be keeping in the back of our head the attributes defined by Kim et al. (2009), namely freshness, taste, presentation and menu variety. These attributes only help in clarifying the survey, but serve no other purpose than that.

Service quality

Service quality portrays anything that has to do with the actual service a restaurant provides. From welcoming you in the restaurant or perhaps contact during the making of a reservation, to handing you your check and wishing you a pleasant evening. Exceptional service quality supposedly leads to more extreme forms of WOM than food quality, according to Kim et al. (2009). In order to measure service quality, Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988) have developed a mathematical model called SERVQUAL. This model has two levels of attributes, which together constitute a viable measure of service quality. This research will take into account the attributes on the top level of this model; reliability, assurance, responsiveness, tangibles, and empathy. Again, these attributes are solely used for survey clarification.

Restaurant atmosphere

Everything tangible and intangible in a restaurant that is not actual food or service falls under the restaurant atmosphere – from the music that is playing to the color of the walls – making the categories collectively exhaustive. The atmosphere directly influences a customer its satisfaction level and therefore their behavioral intentions concerning WOM. As it is not possible to say that a red colored wall is better than a yellow colored wall for everyone, we will only be using attributes that customers themselves could rate on a scale. The attributes are in accordance with Rya and Jang's (2008) DINESCAPE model. This model is somewhat similar to the SERVQUAL model mentioned before, as in that it tries to rate a restaurant atmosphere mathematically on the basis of many, many attributes. Again, we will be using only the top-level attributes to help clarify the survey: aesthetics, lighting, ambience, layout, dining equipment, and employees.

Importance

Food quality is obviously very important when you are going out for dinner. Besides the ease of not having to cook yourself, you are most likely looking for food that you are not able to cook so easily yourself. However, food quality might not be the basis for sharing a restaurant experience. You would consider it when you are asked for a recommendation, but most people would not consider spreading the word on the basis of food quality alone. Restaurant atmosphere also plays a significant role in the restaurant experience. However, a good atmosphere may lead to WOM some of the time, but most often the experience is completely dependent on personal taste. Therefore we might be less likely to share our experience with many different groups, as there are only a few people that have exactly the same taste as you have. Service quality may be considered as the most important factor for WOM in the restaurant industry. How often did you find yourself telling your friends about the exceptionally low or exceptionally high service quality that you received at a restaurant? Probably more often than about the taste of the food or the looks of the restaurant. Hence, leading to the first hypothesis:

H1: Service quality is the most important category in determining WOM intentions.

But, as also mentioned, the restaurant atmosphere is probably less likely shared with many different groups, as it can be something very personal. Therefore, it is important to estimate the relevance of the restaurant atmosphere on WOM intentions to help decide the usefulness of investing, leading to the second hypothesis:

H2: Restaurant atmosphere has a relatively little effect on WOM intentions.

Sharing the experience

WOM is all about sharing your experiences with other people, as defined before. What we are interested in in this research is what kind of experience customers share with what kind of people. As there are no theoretical guidelines that limit the type of groups you can share an experience with, the groups used in this research will be based on the researchers personal experience and the experiences of peers.

A first group that one could share a restaurant experience with is the family household. This encompasses anyone that is related to you and lives in the same vicinity. The trust levels in a family household are very high and therefore WOM is seen as highly influential. However, the group is limited to the few people that live in your household.

A second group that one could share a restaurant experience with is other family. This is different from the first group as in this case it includes all family that lives elsewhere in the world, but could perhaps use a recommendation for a restaurant when visiting. Trust levels are again high and therefore WOM again highly influential. The group is a little bit bigger, but still limited to the family that you have.

A third group that one could share a restaurant experience with is close friends. Close friends are friends you speak to on a regular basis. Trust levels are supposedly in between family and family household, but could sharply increase in different family situations. WOM has a strong influence on your closest friends, but

the group of friends that you are close with, is probably fairly limited. According to research, this group ranges between 5 and 15 people (Konnikova, 2014).

A fourth group that one could share a restaurant experience with is casual friends. According to the same research, this group can encompass up to 200 people. They are people that you would invite to large parties and sometimes end up hanging around with, but that you don't see on a very regular basis. Trust levels are lower and WOM more limited, but the reach is greater.

A fifth group that one could share a restaurant experience with is colleagues. After the weekend all your colleagues are chit chatting about their weekends and you might be trying to mingle by telling them about your restaurant experience. The size and trust level of this group is highly dependent on the type of work and therefore conclusions on this topic might be hard to draw.

The sixth and last group that one could share a restaurant experience with is strangers. A huge step in this direction has been taken since the existence of the Internet and today electronic word-of-mouth (E-WOM) is a topic many researchers are interested in. Behnke et al. (2014) have already done extensive research into the motives for reading and articulating user-generated restaurant reviews on Yelp.com and found that even though we do not put a high value of trust to the reviews, we are indeed influenced by especially the very negative reviews. Even though the trust level is low, the reach is humongous.

Triggers of WOM

According to Pedro Longart (2010), there are three triggers for positive word-of-mouth. Firstly, there is the meal experience. Customers compare their expectations against their actual dining experience (Kivela, Inbakaran, & Reece, 1999). Whenever customers' experiences exceed their expectations – and there is no reason to assume that this would not work in a negative sense, according to Longart – people are triggered to spread the word to others. Secondly, there is the tipping point. Gladwell (2000) dedicated an entire book to this phenomenon and explains that there is a rule referred to as 'the power of context'. This rule states that social behavior is a function of social context. Thirdly there is the effect of surprises. Although this area of research is relatively little explored, Rimé et al. (2000) conclude that people exposed

to an emotional event feel urgency to affiliate, or in other words, are more eager to share their experience.

This research will focus on the first trigger of WOM, the meal experience. In the questionnaire a 'standard' situation will be assumed and the rating of the categories will either exceed their expectations or be below their expectations.

In general, the disappointment effect of not meeting expectations is bigger than the positive effect of exceeding expectations (Bulygo, 2012). Therefore, we expect that in general the situations where expectations are not met will be more likely shared compared with situations where expectations are exceeded, leading to the hypothesis:

H3: Restaurant experiences that do not meet expectations are more likely to be shared than restaurant experiences that exceed expectations.

Besides the likelihood of sharing, people also seem to be more eager to share a really negative experience on the World Wide Web compared to a positive experience, leading to the hypothesis:

H4: Restaurant experiences that do not meet expectations are more likely to be shared with strangers than restaurant experiences that exceed expectations.

Data & methodology

The reason for this research is that there is very limited information on what kind of experience is shared with what kind of people via WOM. Therefore, this research will gather its own data through an online questionnaire. The online questionnaire will be distributed through the researchers own personal network. This will be mostly done through Facebook, which means that the main target group will be those aged between 18 and 25. The questionnaire will be made with Qualtrics' free software. This allows for easy and reliable data gathering, as well as options for randomization and forced responses. A hundred or more participants should suffice to draw reliable conclusions. More participants will mean that we are probably better able to see differences in demographics, if there are any. The survey will be available in English and in Dutch, the native language of the researcher.

As mentioned in the theoretical framework, there are three categories for measuring the restaurant experience: food quality, service quality, and restaurant atmosphere. These three categories will be tested based on the first trigger of WOM; either exceeding or falling short of expectations. For the research participants, expectations will be set to an average level. This level does not necessarily have to be the same for each participant, so the exact context will be left to the imagination. However, the survey does stress that it cannot be anything out of the ordinary.

Each participant in the questionnaire will receive a set of situations. These situations represent cases where one category of the restaurant experience is rated below expectations or exceeding expectations, keeping the others at the expected level. Based on the case, the participant can rate how likely one is to share the experience with a certain set of people. The set of people they can rate has been defined in the theoretical framework, namely family household, other family, close friends, casual friends, colleagues, and strangers. The rating ranges from 1 to 5. 1 means very unlikely to share, 2 means unlikely, 3 means undecided, 4 means likely and 5 means very likely to share.

Each participant will be presented with six cases. Each case will have one category that is not at the expected level and is either exceeding or below expectations, as this will allow us to isolate the different situations. In order to avoid

response order biases, the order of the situations and the order of rating the different kind of people will be randomized for each participant (Israel & Taylor, 1990). The complete questionnaire can be found in Appendix A.

Besides the six situations of restaurant experiences, participants will also be asked a few demographic questions. These questions allow for more in depth comparisons and conclusions. One might expect that for example younger people are more likely to share experiences in general, due to the online generation. The demographic questions that are posed to the participant are the age of the participant (divided in four categories for an easier overview, based on approximate life situations), the gender of the participant (male or female), how often the participant eats out (divided in five categories, ranging from less than once a month to 2-3 times a week) and how much the participant spends on average on eating out for one person (divided in five categories, ranging from less than 15 euros to more than 60 euros).

The data that is obtained will be analyzed with the help of SPSS. Multiple tests will be used in analyzing the data. First of all, a paired samples t-test is used. This test compares the means of two groups from the same sample. This can for example be useful in comparing the mean of sharing an experience regarding food quality or sharing an experience regarding service quality. Secondly, an independent samples test will be used for checking for differences between male and female participants. Thirdly, levene's test will be used for checking for equal variances leading up to the use of a one-way ANOVA table, to compare the likeliness to share between other demographic groups with more than two categories. Finally, the Tukey HSD test will be used to see where within these categories actually the differences are made, as the one-way ANOVA table only gives a summarized result of the category.

Results

General results

The survey has had 105 participants, out of whom 103 completed it. The uncompleted surveys have been deleted to avoid biases and make calculations easier. Out of the 103 participants, 45 were male and 58 were female. The greatest group, 51 out of 103, was aged between 18-25 years. The distribution of the frequency of visiting a restaurant is quite spread out. From never to up to 2-3 times a month almost equally shares 92 out of 103. Only 11 people eat out more often. Moneywise most participants said to spend on average 15 to 40 euros per person. 22 people spend more than 40 euros, whereas only 8 people spend less than 15 euros. Full demographics and a graphical representation can be found in appendix B, figure 6 and 7.

Figure 1 in appendix B represents the basic results regarding the category of food quality. There are a few things noteworthy. Firstly, besides sharing the experience with strangers, sharing the experience with all others has a mean higher than 3, meaning there is a positive possibility of WOM. We are however skeptical to sharing our experience with strangers, below or exceeding our expectations. Secondly, family household, close friends, and in the case of exceeding expectations casual friends, have a negative skewness greater than 1, meaning that the mean is more affected by low outliers. The paired samples test comparing the mean for the different groups between below and exceeding expectations, gives a significant result for all groups. This means that for every group, people would significantly rather share a positive experience than a negative experience.

Figure 2 in appendix B represents the basic results regarding the category of service quality. First thing noteworthy is again the positive means for all except strangers, regardless of below or exceeding expectations. Secondly, again there is quite some skewness, but less than with food quality, meaning there are fewer outliers. Thirdly, the paired samples test results in a lot fewer significant results. Only regarding other family and colleagues we are more eager to share positive experiences compared to negative experiences. For all other groups, there is no significant preference for the kind of experience to share.

Figure 3 in appendix B represents the basic results regarding the category of atmosphere. What is previous from the different two categories is that in the case of an experience below expectations, the mean of casual friends and colleagues is below 3 and the mean of strangers below 2, meaning participants are even not likely to share the experience. Big skewness this time only appears with exceeding expectations. The paired samples test shows us significant results for each of the groups of people, meaning that they are all more likely to share a restaurant experience regarding atmosphere that exceeds their expectations than when it is below their expectations.

To compare categories, figure 4 in appendix B has been set up. The top part of this figure shows the summarized sharing intentions for each restaurant experience category. What is worth noting is that all the means are between 3 and 4; meaning people are a little likely to share the experience. The only exception is when the restaurant atmosphere is below expectations. With a mean of 2,95, people are just below undecided. What can also be seen in this part is that all means of exceeding expectations are above that of an experience below expectations. In the bottom part of this figure, a paired samples test is used to compare the means of one below or exceeding expectations experience of one category to another category. Except for two tests, all tests are significant. For an experience below expectations we are significantly more likely to share about the food quality than about the atmosphere and about the service quality than about the atmosphere. However, there is no significant difference between sharing about food quality and service quality. For an experience exceeding expectations we are significantly more likely to share about the food quality than about the service quality and about the food quality than the atmosphere. However, there is no significant difference between sharing about service quality and atmosphere. Without accounting for expectations, we are more likely to share food quality over service quality, food quality over atmosphere and service quality over atmosphere, meaning we have a complete and transitive preference.

Figure 5 in appendix B continues comparing the categories, but now based on the type of people an experience is shared with. Paired samples tests are used to check for a statistically significant difference between sharing an experience with a certain group between the categories. The first thing noteworthy in this figure is that

all tests regarding the comparison between food quality and atmosphere are significant, meaning that we rather share an experience about food quality with any type of people over sharing an experience about the atmosphere for the same type of people. If we compare food quality and service quality we find a significant preference for sharing food quality over service quality with the family household, other family and colleagues, but no significant difference for close friends, casual friends and strangers. If we compare service quality and atmosphere we find a significant preference for sharing service quality over atmosphere with close friends, casual friends, colleagues, and strangers, but strangely not significant difference for family household and other family.

Now switching to the demographic results, figure 8 in appendix B shows the analysis of the likeliness to share based on gender. Before running a t-test, one has to test for equal variances (Levene's test). This test resulted in assuming equal variances, but still leads to an insignificant result in the t-test, meaning there is no significant difference in overall WOM intentions between male and female participants.

Figure 9 in appendix B shows the results of comparing the likeliness to share based on age group. What we can first note is that the youngest and the oldest age group have the highest sharing intentions with a mean of 3,6306 and 3,5961 respectively. A one-way ANOVA table shows a significant difference between the groups, leading to a Tukey HSD test for more specific results. With the help of this test, it only appears that there is a significant difference in WOM intentions between the age group 18-25 years and the age group above 35.

The results comparing the likeliness to share based on the frequency of visiting a restaurant can be seen in figure 10 in appendix B. Noteworthy here is that the group of participants that visit restaurants most often (2-3 times a week) also has the highest mean of 3,7917. However, the difference with the other groups appears to be insignificant according to a one-way ANOVA test.

The comparison of the likeliness to share based on money spend has more interesting results, to be found in figure 11 in appendix B. The group with the lowest expenditure has a mean of 2,9201 whereas the two highest groups, 40-60 € and 60 > €, have higher means with 3,6389 and 3,3544 respectively. A one-way ANOVA table shows a significant difference between the groups, leading to a Tukey HSD test for

more specific results. This tests shows that only the difference of likeliness to share between the groups below 15 euros and between 40 and 60 euros is significant.

The final figure in appendix B is figure 12, and shows the results of a general comparison between WOM intentions with experiences below expectations and exceeding expectations. In the top of the figure, it can be noted that the mean WOM intention of food quality is always higher than the mean WOM intention of service quality, which in its turn is higher than the mean WOM intention of atmosphere regardless of an experience below or exceeding expectations. However, the bottom of the figure does conclude significant differences based on a paired samples test. Except for service quality, it appears to be that the participants significantly prefer to talk about experiences exceeding their expectations than experiences below their expectations.

Hypotheses

The first hypothesis – service quality is the most important category in determining WOM intentions – cannot be rejected nor accepted on the basis of above results. Whereas service quality has a significantly higher mean compared to atmosphere in a situation below expectations, it has an insignificantly different mean from food quality in a situation below expectations and atmosphere in a situation exceeding expectations, and even a lower mean than food quality in a situation exceeding expectations.

The second hypothesis – restaurant atmosphere has a relatively little effect on WOM intentions – cannot be rejected and almost completely accepted based on above results. Restaurant atmosphere has a significantly lower mean when compared to food and service quality in a situation below expectations and compared to food quality in a situation exceeding expectations. It is only insignificantly different compared to service quality in a situation exceeding expectations.

The third hypothesis – restaurant experiences that do not meet expectations are more likely to be shared than restaurant experiences that exceed expectations – can almost be completely rejected based on above results. Looking at food quality, atmosphere and on the average, sharing an experience exceeding expectations is significantly preferred over sharing an experience below expectations. The mean

difference for service quality is in the right direction, but not significantly large enough.

The fourth hypothesis – restaurant experiences that do not meet expectations are more likely to be shared with strangers than restaurant experiences that exceed expectations – can almost be completely rejected based on above results. In the categories of food quality and atmosphere, sharing an experience exceeding expectations with strangers is significantly preferred to sharing an experience below expectations. Although there is a preference in the same direction for the category of service quality, the means do not significantly differ.

Conclusion

Restaurant owners are still trying to cope with the economic crisis and could use some help regarding word-of-mouth. Although many is known already, this research tries to aim to provide the restaurant owners with a little additional information, namely in the area of what kind of people a certain experience is shared with. Although this research has found some inconclusive comparisons and was not able to fully conclude on all hypotheses, the central question of this research – what category of customer experience should a restaurant owner focus on in order to maximize WOM efficiency – can be estimated fairly well.

The first hypothesis tried to help in deciding what restaurant experience category we should focus on. This hypothesis was inconclusive, but together with the second hypothesis we can help answer the research question. What we were able to find is that for 5 out of 6 situations portrayed in the research, the likeliness of sharing an experience concerning restaurant atmosphere was significantly lower than sharing any of the other experiences. Only when the atmosphere is exceeding the expectations the result is insignificant, but still pointing in the same direction. This means that a restaurant owner should not put focus on the restaurant atmosphere. Of course a certain base line has to be made, but the investment of exceeding expectations is worth more in the other two categories. The difference between food quality experiences and service quality experiences is little. In a situation exceeding expectations food quality is preferred, but in all other situations there is no significant difference. Therefore, a restaurant owner should find out what customers expect from his restaurant. If they expect more than that they are getting, he or she could put focus on either category. If you are on their expectation level, it might be worth investing in increasing the food quality over service quality.

The third hypothesis is one of the hypotheses that are almost fully rejected. The hypothesis concludes that customers are in almost every situation more eager to share an experience exceeding their expectations than an experience below their expectations. Therefore if a restaurant is underperforming in one category and on par in the other category, you might receive a higher return on your investment regarding WOM when investing in exceeding in the category currently on par.

According to the fourth hypothesis, bragging or complaining about restaurant experiences to strangers is not as popular as people might think with the current Internet generation. Although the group of strangers is very large, the WOM intentions are thus low that it is not worth investing in this type of experience and customer to increase WOM.

Based on the demographics, there is only one interesting conclusion to be made. The youngest group (under 18 years old) and the oldest group (above 35) have the (significantly) highest intention of sharing a restaurant experience. If you, as a restaurant owner, ever reach the point of having to choose a target public, aim for those groups.

Back to the research question. Of course, it completely depends on the situation you are currently in, in order to accurately say what to focus on. If you are in the luxury position of knowing exactly what your customers expect from you, there is however a good estimation that can be made. Based on WOM intentions, improving from par to exceeding expectations is always worth more than improving from below expectations to par. Restaurant atmosphere is not worth the investment compared to the other two categories. If you have to choose between food quality and service quality, food quality is likely to yield slightly more benefits regarding WOM intentions. In general, the best groups to target are younger people and older people, not the students and career starters. Strangers are not a target group that people communicate their experiences with; the family household is a good group, but fairly small. Best way to go is aim for the casual friends. However not everything is shared with this group yet, a little bit of promotional material might make you able to reach a large and trustworthy audience.

Limitations

This research has a few limitations that should be considered when assessing its external validity. First of all, the research did not make use of category attributes. It did briefly consider them in the theoretical framework and used them in the survey for exemplifying, but to keep the survey easy to participate in, they were left out in the actual research. This limits the amount of specific conclusions that can be made, but general conclusion on the categories should still be externally valid. Secondly,

only 103 people participated in the survey. The amount of participants should suffice for the general results, but might be too limited to conclude on demographics. Thirdly, the participants were given isolated situations. These isolated situations are ideal for research, but will almost never happen in real life; there would be more situations occurring where multiple categories have different ratings. Even though this limits the validity of the results to real life cases, it does unable us to draw preliminary conclusions in the scope of this research. Finally, the type of groups that people could share their experiences with is not scientifically proven but based on the researcher his experience. However obvious the groups may sound, they are not based on scientific evidence.


Future research

There are a couple of areas where this research lacks its external validity and are therefore worth researching in future researches. Firstly, future research could account more specifically for the category attributes by including them in the survey and results. This could perhaps be done with a discrete choice experiment where you can choose the situation among alternatives that you would most likely share. JMP could be a helpful program in the analysis. Secondly, research could be done into what groups of people customers share experiences with. This could be done with a fairly simple questionnaire with open-ended questions. Finally, future research could include the possibility of non-isolated situations. The estimations made in this thesis give a good approximation, but non-isolated situations could lead to different results. Like the example of the attributes, this research could be conducted as a discrete choice experiment. However, implementing the different types of groups of people would be too thorough and makes it difficult to set-up an understandable survey and with that interpretable result.

There are also a few new topics that could be researched, as a follow-up on this one. Firstly, what is interesting to see is whether the results of this research also hold up for the two other mentioned triggers of WOM; the tipping point and the effect of surprises. This could be researched in the same way that this research did, only than instead of talking about expectations, you would mention the other trigger. Secondly, this research was only aimed at investigating WOM intentions. An

interesting research topic is to extrapolate this research and see what the actual effect of these WOM intentions is. Even if the WOM intentions towards two different groups of people are equal, the actual effect it has on obtaining or retaining these groups as customers is unknown. However, this is a very extensive and difficult research and involves questionnaires to estimate WOM intentions that have to be linked to actual increases in sales due to WOM, which is difficult to estimate.

Appendix A – Questionnaire

English 

You can select the Dutch language on the top right

Nearing the end of the economic crisis, the restaurant industry seems to be gaining ground again. We are more often going out for dinner and our expenses at restaurants increase. However, restaurant owners still struggle to obtain and retain customers.

As picky as we are today, we heavily rely on word-of-mouth advertisement to pick the restaurant to our liking. My bachelor thesis aims to help the restaurant owners in investigating if there are different types of experiences that we share with different types of people.

This survey will only take around 4 minutes to complete.
Thank you!

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Please read carefully!

In this survey you will be shown 6 different situations. In each of these situations, one of the categories in determining the restaurant experience (food quality, service quality or restaurant atmosphere) will be either exceeding expectations or not living up to your expectations. It is important to note that everything else is considered to be exactly as you would expect it to be.

After a short sketch of the situation, you will be asked to rate the likelihood of sharing the experience with different kind of people. You can rate this likelihood on a scale from 1 to 5 (very unlikely - unlikely - undecided - likely - very likely). The different kind of people you are asked to rate on are family household (e.g. parents, brother/sister), other family (e.g. uncle/aunt), close friends (i.e. best friends), casual friends (e.g. Facebook friends), colleagues and strangers (e.g. Internet).

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Imagine your restaurant experience to be as expected. However, the **quality of the service** (measured in reliability, assurance, responsiveness, tangibles and empathy) is **exceeding** your expectations.

How likely are you to share this experience with...

	Very Unlikely	Unlikely	Undecided	Likely	Very Likely
Casual Friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Colleagues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Family Household	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Close Friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other Family	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Strangers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Imagine your restaurant experience to be as expected. However, **the quality of the food** (measured in freshness, taste, presentation and menu variety) is **exceeding** your expectations.

How likely are you to share this experience with...

	Very Unlikely	Unlikely	Undecided	Likely	Very Likely
Colleagues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other Family	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Casual Friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Family Household	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Close Friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Strangers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Imagine your restaurant experience to be as expected. However, the **restaurant atmosphere** (measured in aesthetics, lightning, ambiance, layout, dining equipment and employees) is **exceeding** your expectations.

How likely are you to share this experience with...

	Very Unlikely	Unlikely	Undecided	Likely	Very Likely
Family Household	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Strangers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other Family	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Close Friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Colleagues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Casual Friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Imagine your restaurant experience to be as expected. However, the **quality of the service** (measured in reliability, assurance, responsiveness, tangibles and empathy) is **not living up to** your expectations.

How likely are you to share this experience with...

	Very Unlikely	Unlikely	Undecided	Likely	Very Likely
Close Friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Family Household	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Colleagues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Strangers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other Family	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Casual Friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Imagine your restaurant experience to be as expected. However, the **quality of the food** (measured in freshness, taste, presentation and menu variety) is **not living up to** your expectations.

How likely are you to share this experience with...

	Very Unlikely	Unlikely	Undecided	Likely	Very Likely
Strangers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Colleagues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Close Friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Family Household	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Casual Friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other Family	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Imagine your restaurant experience to be as expected. However, the **restaurant atmosphere** (measured in aesthetics, lightning, ambiance, layout, dining equipment and employees) is **not living up to** your expectations.

How likely are you to share this experience with...

	Very Unlikely	Unlikely	Undecided	Likely	Very Likely
Colleagues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Strangers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Casual Friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Family Household	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Close Friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other Family	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Please select your gender

Male

Female

Please select your age range

Below 18 years

Between 18 and 25 years

Between 26 and 35 years

Above 35 years

How often do you, on average, go out for dinner?

Less than Once a Month

Once a Month

2-3 Times a Month

Once a Week

2-3 Times a Week

How much, on average, do you spend on dinner at a restaurant (price per person)?

Less than 15 euros

Between 15 and 25 euros

Between 25 and 40 euros

Between 40 and 60 euros

More than 60 euros

<<

>>

Appendix B – Results

Figure 1: Basic results of food quality

Basic results food quality				
1 = very unlikely, 5 = very likely		Mean	Std. Dev.	Skewness
Below Expectations	<i>Family</i>	3,86	1,268	-1,033
	<i>Household</i>			
	<i>Other Family</i>	3,44	1,355	-0,579
	<i>Close Friends</i>	3,93	1,165	-1,116
	<i>Casual Friends</i>	3,42	1,257	-0,565
	<i>Colleagues</i>	3,11	1,187	-0,246
	<i>Strangers</i>	2,02	1,093	0,787
	<i>Average</i>	3,2961	0,95570	-0,654
Exceeding Expectations	<i>Family</i>	4,28	0,954	-1,701
	<i>Household</i>			
	<i>Other Family</i>	3,80	1,158	-0,983
	<i>Close Friends</i>	4,31	0,805	-1,662
	<i>Casual Friends</i>	3,84	1,091	-1,253
	<i>Colleagues</i>	3,52	1,153	-0,745
	<i>Strangers</i>	2,41	1,208	0,459
	<i>Average</i>	3,6942	0,75843	-0,920
Paired Samples Test (Below vs. Exceeding)		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	<i>Family</i>	-3,710	102	0,000
	<i>Household</i>			
	<i>Other Family</i>	-2,970	102	0,004
	<i>Close Friends</i>	-3,047	102	0,003
	<i>Casual Friends</i>	-3,977	102	0,000
	<i>Colleagues</i>	-3,372	102	0,001
	<i>Strangers</i>	-3,267	102	0,001
	<i>Average</i>	-4,084	102	0,000

Figure 2: Basic results of service quality

Basic results service quality				
1 = very unlikely, 5 = very likely		Mean	Std. Dev.	Skewness
Below Expectations	<i>Family</i>	3,83	1,183	-0,848
	<i>Household</i>			
	<i>Other Family</i>	3,35	1,242	-0,383
	<i>Close Friends</i>	3,96	0,989	-1,036
	<i>Casual Friends</i>	3,40	1,106	-0,358
	<i>Colleagues</i>	3,02	1,084	0,008
	<i>Strangers</i>	2,16	1,127	0,694
	<i>Average</i>	3,2848	0,86213	-0,467
Exceeding Expectations	<i>Family</i>	3,94	1,046	-1,034
	<i>Household</i>			
	<i>Other Family</i>	3,57	1,143	0,786
	<i>Close Friends</i>	4,07	0,808	-1,264
	<i>Casual Friends</i>	3,54	1,027	-0,812
	<i>Colleagues</i>	3,32	1,068	-0,478
	<i>Strangers</i>	2,29	1,117	0,475
	<i>Average</i>	3,4563	0,74205	-0,673
Paired Samples Test (Below vs. Exceeding)				
		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	<i>Family</i>	-1,125	102	0,263
	<i>Household</i>			
	<i>Other Family</i>	-2,024	102	0,046
	<i>Close Friends</i>	-0,992	102	0,324
	<i>Casual Friends</i>	-1,326	102	0,188
	<i>Colleagues</i>	-2,629	102	0,010
	<i>Strangers</i>	-1,212	102	0,228
	<i>Average</i>	-1,952	102	0,054

Figure 3: Basic results of restaurant atmosphere

Basic results atmosphere				
1 = very unlikely, 5 = very likely		Mean	Std. Dev.	Skewness
Below Expectations	<i>Family</i>	3,50	1,220	-0,425
	<i>Household</i>			
	<i>Other Family</i>	3,16	1,251	-0,362
	<i>Close Friends</i>	3,58	1,116	-0,794
	<i>Casual Friends</i>	2,96	1,102	-0,146
	<i>Colleagues</i>	2,77	1,095	0,022
	<i>Strangers</i>	1,75	0,849	0,806
	<i>Average</i>	2,9531	0,82394	-0,468
Exceeding Expectations	<i>Family</i>	4,02	1,038	-1,111
	<i>Household</i>			
	<i>Other Family</i>	3,48	1,153	-0,624
	<i>Close Friends</i>	4,10	0,811	-1,194
	<i>Casual Friends</i>	3,52	1,170	-0,752
	<i>Colleagues</i>	3,24	1,124	-0,326
	<i>Strangers</i>	2,29	1,126	0,410
	<i>Average</i>	3,4417	0,77323	-0,383
Paired Samples Test (Below vs. Exceeding)				
		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	<i>Family</i>	-5,335	102	0,000
	<i>Household</i>			
	<i>Other Family</i>	-2,898	102	0,005
	<i>Close Friends</i>	-4,704	102	0,000
	<i>Casual Friends</i>	-5,115	102	0,000
	<i>Colleagues</i>	-4,186	102	0,000
	<i>Strangers</i>	-6,025	102	0,000
	<i>Average</i>	-5,948	102	0,000

Figure 4: Comparison of categories

Comparing Categories – Sharing Intentions				
1=very unlikely, 5=very likely		Mean	Std. Dev.	Skewness
Food Quality	<i>Below</i>	3,2961	0,95570	-0,654
	<i>Exceeding</i>	3,6942	0,75843	-0,920
	<i>Average</i>	3,3706	0,70690	-0,560
Service Quality	<i>Below</i>	3,2848	0,86213	-0,467
	<i>Exceeding</i>	3,4563	0,74205	-0,673
	<i>Average</i>	3,3706	0,66949	-0,286
Atmosphere	<i>Below</i>	2,9531	0,82394	-0,468
	<i>Exceeding</i>	3,4417	0,77323	-0,383
	<i>Average</i>	3,1974	0,68161	-0,408
Comparing Categories – Paired Samples Test				
		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Below	<i>Food & Service</i>	0,132	102	0,895
	<i>Food & Atmosphere</i>	4,683	102	0,000
	<i>Service & Atmosphere</i>	3,835	102	0,000
Exceeding	<i>Food & Service</i>	3,551	102	0,001
	<i>Food & Atmosphere</i>	4,103	102	0,000
	<i>Service & Atmosphere</i>	0,199	102	0,843
Average	<i>Food & Service</i>	2,035	102	0,044
	<i>Food & Atmosphere</i>	6,332	102	0,000
	<i>Service & Atmosphere</i>	2,700	102	0,008

Figure 5: Comparison of categories - based on type

Comparing Categories – Based on Type				
Paired Samples Test		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Food & Service	<i>Family Household</i>	2,703	102	0,008
	<i>Other Family</i>	2,090	102	0,039
	<i>Close Friends</i>	1,485	102	0,141
	<i>Casual Friends</i>	1,852	102	0,067
	<i>Colleagues</i>	2,007	102	0,047
	<i>Strangers</i>	-0,117	102	0,907
Paired Samples Test		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Food & Atmosphere	<i>Family Household</i>	4,075	102	0,000
	<i>Other Family</i>	4,565	102	0,000
	<i>Close Friends</i>	4,173	102	0,000
	<i>Casual Friends</i>	4,793	102	0,000
	<i>Colleagues</i>	5,063	102	0,000
	<i>Strangers</i>	2,869	102	0,005
Paired Samples Test		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Service & Atmosphere	<i>Family Household</i>	1,490	102	0,139
	<i>Other Family</i>	1,793	102	0,076
	<i>Close Friends</i>	2,191	102	0,031
	<i>Casual Friends</i>	2,473	102	0,015
	<i>Colleagues</i>	2,218	102	0,029
	<i>Strangers</i>	2,682	102	0,009

Figure 6: General demographics

General Demographics			
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Skewness
Gender (1=male, 2=female)	1,56	0,498	-0,258
Age (1=18-, 2=18-25, 3=26-35, 4=35+)	2,54	0,958	0,351
Frequency (1=less than once a month, 2=once a month, 3=2-3 times a moth, 4=once a week, 5=2-3 times a week)	2,20	1,070	0,414
Money (1=15-, 2=15-25, 3=25-40, 4=40-60, 5=60+)	2,74	0,990	0,365

Figure 7: Demographic distribution

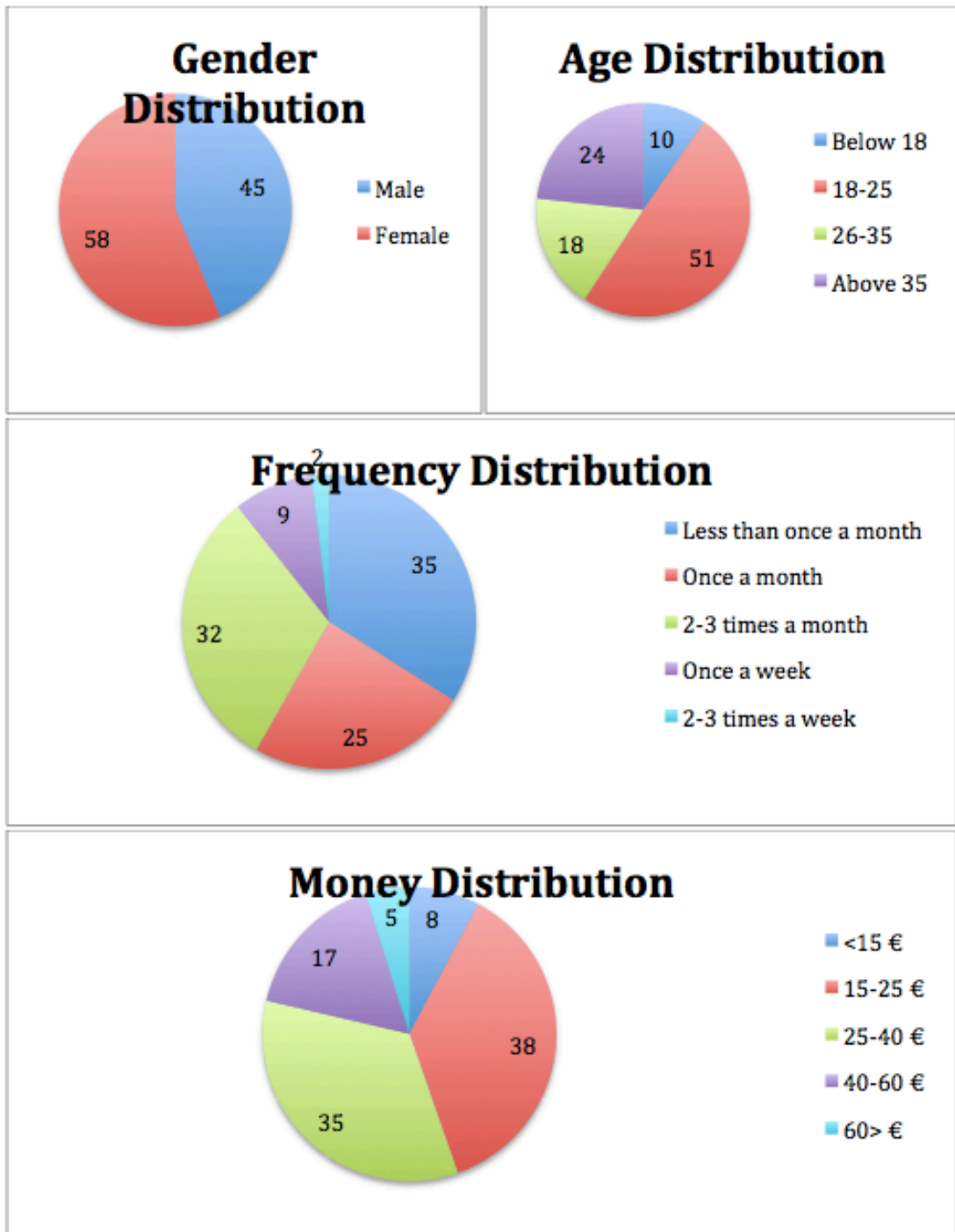


Figure 8: Analysis based on gender

Gender - Likeliness to Share					
		N	Mean	Std. Dev.	
Independent Samples Test	<i>Male</i>	45	3,2315	0,65662	
	<i>Female</i>	58	3,4497	0,53130	
			F	Sig.	
	<i>Levene's</i>	2,577	0,122		
			t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	<i>t-test</i>	-1,865	101	0,065	

Figure 9: Analysis based on age

Age - Likeliness to Share					
		N	Mean	Std. Dev.	
1-Way Anova	<i>Below 18</i>	10	3,6306	0,42230	
	<i>18-25</i>	51	3,1313	0,59424	
	<i>26-35</i>	18	3,5108	0,54342	
	<i>Above 35</i>	24	3,5961	0,59629	
			F	df	Sig.
	<i>Between</i>	5,454	3	0,002	
			Mean Diff.	Sig.	
Tukey HSD	<i>Below 18 & 18-25</i>		0,49929	0,055	
	<i>Below 18 & 26-35</i>		0,11975	0,949	
	<i>Below 18 & Above 35</i>		0,03449	0,998	
	<i>18-25 & 26-35</i>		-0,37954	0,071	
	<i>18-25 & Above 35</i>		-0,46480	0,006	
	<i>26-35 & Above 35</i>		-0,08526	0,962	

Figure 10: Analysis based on frequency of eating out

Frequency - Likeliness to Share				
		N	Mean	Std. Dev.
1-Way Anova	<i>Less than once a month</i>	35	3,2000	0,55775
	<i>Once a month</i>	25	3,4567	0,49665
	<i>2-3 times a month</i>	32	3,3984	0,57867
	<i>Once a week</i>	9	3,4167	0,98719
	<i>2-3 times a week</i>	2	3,7917	0,13749
		F	df	Sig.
<i>Between</i>		1,112	4	0,355

Figure 11: Analysis based on money spend while eating out

Money - Likeliness to Share				
		N	Mean	Std. Dev.
1-Way Anova	<i><15 €</i>	8	2,9201	0,77954
	<i>15-25 €</i>	38	3,2858	0,62448
	<i>25-40 €</i>	35	3,3302	0,47456
	<i>40-60 €</i>	17	3,6389	0,56800
	<i>60> €</i>	5	3,3544	0,44979
		F	df	Sig.
<i>Between</i>		3,000	4	0,022
			Mean Diff.	Sig.
Tukey HSD	<i><15 € & 15-25 €</i>		-0,36568	0,478
	<i><15 € & 25-40 €</i>		-0,41002	0,367
	<i><15 € & 40-60 €</i>		-0,71875	0,034
	<i><15 € & 60> €</i>		-0,85208	0,078
	<i>15-25 € & 25-40 €</i>		-0,04434	0,997
	<i>15-25 € & 40-60 €</i>		-0,35307	0,225
	<i>15-25 € & 60> €</i>		-0,48640	0,391
	<i>25-40 € & 40-60 €</i>		-0,30873	0,369
	<i>25-40 € & 60> €</i>		-0,44206	0,494
	<i>40-60 € & 60> €</i>		-0,13333	0,991

Figure 12: Comparison of situations below and exceeding expectations

Below vs. Exceeding Expectations				
		Mean	Std. Dev.	Skewness
Below	<i>Food</i>	3,2961	0,95570	-0,654
	<i>Service</i>	3,2848	0,86213	-0,467
	<i>Atmosphere</i>	2,9531	0,82394	-0,468
	<i>Average</i>	3,1780	0,73971	-0,421
Exceeding	<i>Food</i>	3,6942	0,75843	-0,920
	<i>Service</i>	3,4563	0,74205	-0,673
	<i>Atmosphere</i>	3,4417	0,77323	-0,421
	<i>Average</i>	3,5307	0,64708	-0,598
		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Paired Samples Test (Below vs. Exceeding)	<i>Food</i>	-4,084	102	0,000
	<i>Service</i>	-1,952	102	0,054
	<i>Atmosphere</i>	-5,948	102	0,000
	<i>Average</i>	-5,016	102	0,000

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