

Word of Mouth: A Systematic Review of Restaurants and Cafés.

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Abstract

Word of Mouth (WOM) refers to the organic dissemination of consumer experiences with products and services, distinguished from official business communications. Initially confined within consumer-community relationships, WOM typically involves verbal or textual messages. This systematic literature review examines WOM within the context of restaurants and cafés, exploring three primary research inquiries: 1) the recent development of WOM research in the restaurant and café settings, 2) the common methods used in these studies, 3) the variables commonly examined together with WOM in these studies. Using PRISMA method, this study retrieved 49 publications on WOM from Elsevier's Scopus database, with eligibility conditions such 1) WOM as a variable of interest, 2) only empirical studies is included, 3) studies must be conducted in restaurant or café settings and, 4) consumers as unit of analysis. The data suggests that WOM continues to be significant, as evidenced by a steady flow of scholarly publications spanning the period from 2013 to 2023. The field of research mostly use quantitative methodologies, such as surveys and experiments. In the literature, cultural discrepancies are evident in the preferences of Western customers, who tend to prioritize individualistic reasons, and Asian consumers, who place greater emphasis on supporting others and businesses through word-of-mouth (WOM) communication. There are also numerous studies that highlight the importance of intrinsic motivation within the realm of word-of-mouth communication pertaining to restaurants and cafes.

Keywords:

Systematic Literature Review, Word of mouth (WOM), PRISMA Method, Restaurant, Café

1 Introduction

Word of mouth (WOM) represents the informal sharing of consumer experiences concerning products and services, detached from the business entity (Pourfakhimi et al., 2020). Originating as interpersonal exchanges within consumer communities, WOM typically manifests through oral or written communication (Arndt, 1967; Bi et al., 2019). The proliferation of the digital age has ushered in electronic word of mouth (eWOM), extending the reach of information sharing irrespective of sender-receiver relations or geographic distances (Chen & Law, 2016; Lai et al., 2021). For the purposes of this study, WOM will encompass both traditional and electronic forms.

Following the global disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which began with an outbreak in 2019 and resulted in recovery efforts around 2021, WOM has become increasingly crucial for both consumers and businesses. In the post-pandemic economic recovery period, WOM is a critical business strategy that stimulates demand for goods and services (Ashan & Fernando, 2021; Azhar et al., 2022). On the other hand, WOM acts as a reliable and trustworthy information source for customers, influencing their actions in the direction of security and safety (Fuaddah et al., 2022). In the post-COVID era, businesses will need to prioritize developing strategies that clearly draw customers. Hospitality enterprises, like cafes and restaurants, are no exception.

Conducting a comprehensive analysis of the WOM literature within the specific domain of restaurants and cafés facilitates a comprehensive understanding of the current research landscape, as emphasized by Sarkis-Onofre et al. (2021). A thorough comprehension of the subject matter is crucial for identifying areas of research that have not been adequately explored, as well as for establishing potential directions for future research endeavors (Langevin, 2021). By reviewing and synthesizing existing literature on WOM, researchers can identify gaps in knowledge and areas that require further investigation. This not only helps in expanding the current understanding of WOM but also enables the development of new research questions and hypotheses. Furthermore, a comprehensive understanding of the research landscape allows scholars to identify potential avenues for future studies, contributing to the advancement of knowledge in this field.

The findings of this study will enable researchers to identify the essential drivers and motivators that underlie WOM dynamics in the restaurant and café context. Earlier research has highlighted the significance of customer satisfaction in fostering positive WOM (Schlesinger et al., 2023). By synthesizing and delving into the findings from numerous studies, researchers can meticulously uncover the critical factors and their intricate interconnections, thus delivering invaluable insights that can prove highly beneficial for restaurant proprietors and managers. The purpose of this study is to address the following questions:

1. What are the recent developments of word of mouth in the context of restaurants and cafés?

2. What are the methods commonly used in investigating WOM in the context of restaurants and cafés?
3. What variables are studied alongside word of mouth in the context of restaurants and cafés?

2 Method

The guidelines set in the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) were followed to ensure that the systematic review developed is organized and efficient. Numerous studies utilized PRISMA for its thorough and methodological way of constructing reviews on various subjects. The 27-item checklist was first developed by 29 medical editors, methodologists, consumers, clinicians, and review authors to enhance information reporting and transparency (Page et al., 2021). Although the current study utilizes PRISMA, the reviewer omitted items 11 to 15 and 18 to 22 as these items are more applicable for meta-analysis (Pahlevan Sharif et al., 2019).

Articles from Elsevier's Scopus database was analyzed in the current study. The Scopus database is a suitable source for reviewing literature because it contains numerous publications across numerous disciplines and is extensively utilized by researchers worldwide. Page et al. (2020) used the PRISMA 2020 flowchart to ensure that the systematic review was conducted in an organized manner. Figure 1 depicts the review's methodology.

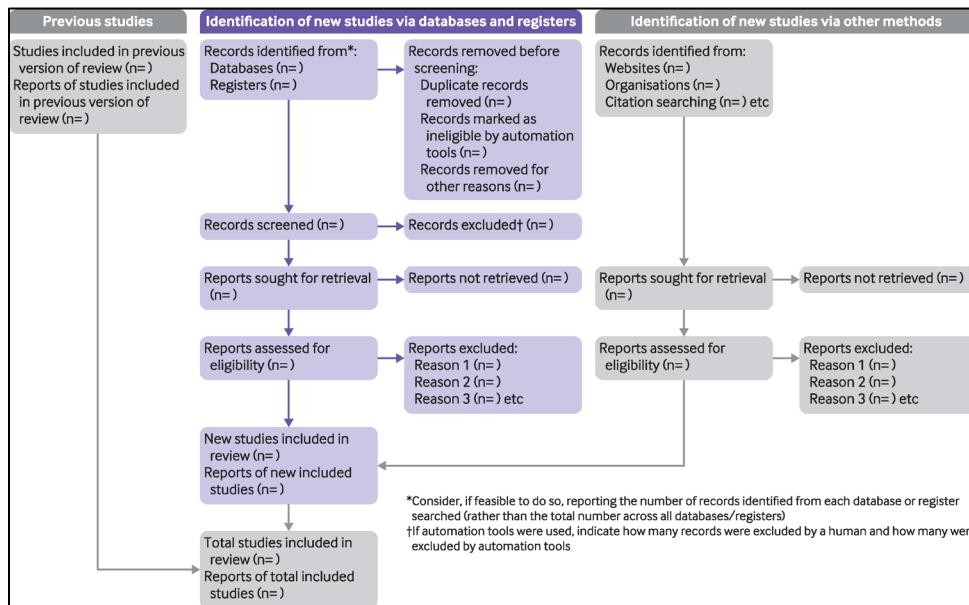


Figure 1: PRISMA 2020 flow diagram

The keywords used to search for related literature for the systematic review are “word of mouth,” “WOM,” and “eWOM.” To ensure the context of the generated literature matches the study's purpose, the words “restaurants” and “café” were keyed together. The exact query string entered was as follows: “TITLE-ABS-KEY ((“word of

mouth" OR "wom" OR "ewom") AND ("restaurants" OR "café")). The search that was conducted on 3 August 2023 resulted in 397 records.

In producing a review that is focused on significant articles, 397 records were filtered down to records that fit the following criteria: 1) published between 2013 and 2023, 2) limited to business, management, accounting, and social sciences, 3) are articles in document type, 4) written in English, and 5) limited to the top 30 journals on hospitality ranked and listed in Scopus. The filtered articles resulted in 72 documents.

All 72 records were then transferred to a table in a Microsoft Excel CSV format for further scrutiny. The titles, abstracts, and keywords of all 72 articles were analyzed to determine their usability and relatedness. The articles were then marked with either 2 (maybe), 1 (accept), or 0 (reject). After screening, 41 records were marked '1' because the title and keywords clearly indicate that they pertain to the study of WOM; 31 records were marked '2' because, although the abstract contains WOM, additional reading is required to determine their suitability for the review. Finally, no records were marked '0' or rejected from review inclusion. The following section discusses the retrieval and outcomes of these 72 accepted and possible records.

Based on the inclusion criteria stipulated, four reports (Hyun & Perdue, 2017; Jun et al., 2014; Liu et al., 2022; Ma et al., 2023) were discarded as WOM was not addressed as the variable of interest, five reports (Bradley et al., 2015; Gao et al., 2016; Hu & Yang, 2020; Line et al., 2020; Oliveira & Casais, 2019) were discarded as the articles were not empirical, eight reports (Barreda & Bilgihan, 2013; González-Rodríguez et al., 2016; Lee & Min, 2013; Seger-Guttmann & Gilboa, 2023; Sparks & Bradley, 2017; Wang et al., 2017; Xu et al., 2019; Xu et al., 2020) were discarded as the study setting is not either restaurants or cafés and lastly, another six reports (Abdullah et al., 2022; Anaya-Sánchez et al., 2019; Bradley et al., 2016; Li et al., 2022; Weber et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2022) were discarded as the unit of analysis were not restaurant or café consumers.

After the removal of 23 unrelated reports, the final figure of 49 reports (Israeli et al., 2017; Albus & Ro, 2017; Bavik & Bavik, 2015; Bujisic et al., 2019; Chao et al., 2021; El-Manstrly et al., 2021; Han et al., 2022; Hanks et al., 2022; Hanks & Line, 2018; Huang et al., 2019; Hur & Jang, 2015; Hwang, Choe, et al., 2020; Hwang et al., 2022, 2023; Hwang, Park, et al., 2020; Hwang & Choe, 2020; Joe & Choi, 2019; Jun et al., 2017; Kement et al., 2021; D. Kim et al., 2015; Kim & Tang, 2016; Kim & Jang, 2016; Kim & Hwang, 2022; Kim & Kim, 2017; Kim et al., 2014; Labsomboonsiri et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2013; Li et al., 2019, 2020; Liao et al., 2023; Lin, 2022; Line et al., 2018; Lu et al., 2021; McQuilken & Robertson, 2013; Ong et al., 2018; Ozanne et al., 2019; Parikh et al., 2014; Quan et al., 2021; Ruiz-Mafe et al., 2020; Seo & Jang, 2021; Sharma et al., 2022; Tang et al., 2023; Taylor et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2021; Wu & Mattila, 2013; Yang, 2017; Yim et al., 2014; Zhang et al., 2021) was included in the systematic literature review. Figure 2 summarizes the selection process.

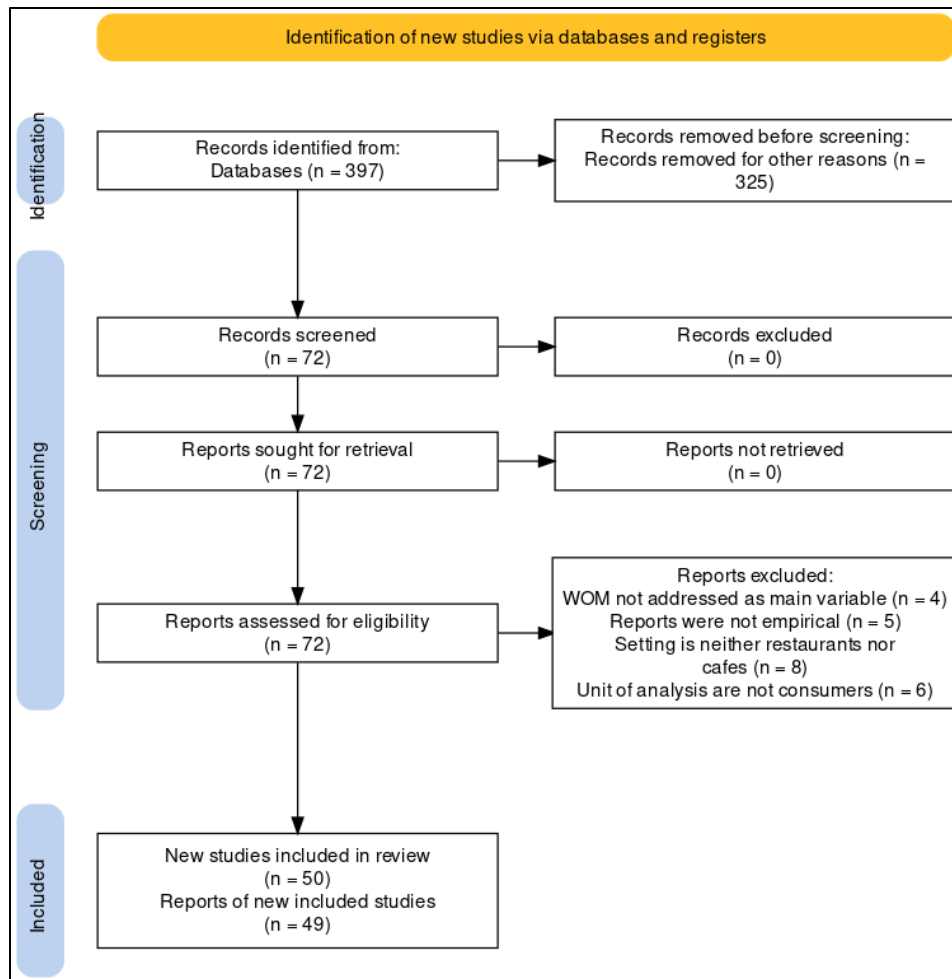


Figure 2: Selection Flow Chart

3 Results

3.1 Progress of WOM research

Based on the finalized reports included in the study, the most recent report was published in 2023, while the earliest entry was published in 2015. All 49 reports were published in the top 30 journals in Scopus' Source List, ranked by each of the journal's CiteScore for 2022. In terms of citations, the most cited report was 178 citations (Yang, 2017), and the least was 1 citation (Labsomboonsiri et al., 2022). The year 2021 represents the most active year in terms of the number of publications, with eight. The least number of reports published in a year was two in 2016. Most reports – which amounted to 29 reports – investigated WOM in general, followed by 17 reports addressing eWOM, while three reports compared both types of WOM. Table 1 highlights the development.

Out of the 49 reports gathered, only one study was done in a café setting (Kim et al., 2015), specifically an upscale café and the rest were all conducted in a restaurant

setting. Twenty-six reports (Israeli et al., 2017; Bujisic et al., 2019; El-Manstrly et al., 2021; Hanks & Line, 2018; Huang et al., 2019; Hur & Jang, 2015; Hwang et al., 2023; Jun et al., 2017; Kim & Jang, 2016; Kim & Hwang, 2022; Kim et al., 2014; Labsomboonsiri et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2013; Li et al., 2019, 2020; Liao et al., 2023; Lin, 2022; Line et al., 2018; Ozanne et al., 2019; Parikh et al., 2014; Seo & Jang, 2021; Sharma et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2021; Wu & Mattila, 2013; Yang, 2017; Yim et al., 2014) investigated WOM in a more general restaurant setting, and 22 reports (Albus & Ro, 2017; Bavik & Bavik, 2015; Chao et al., 2021; Han et al., 2022; Hanks et al., 2022; Hwang, Choe, et al., 2020; Hwang et al., 2022; Hwang, Park, et al., 2020; Hwang & Choe, 2020; Joe & Choi, 2019; Kement et al., 2021; Kim & Tang, 2016; Kim & Kim, 2017; Lee et al., 2020; Lu et al., 2021; McQuilken & Robertson, 2013; Ong et al., 2018; Quan et al., 2021; Ruiz-Mafe et al., 2020; Tang et al., 2023; Taylor et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2021) bearing 25 studies distinguished between the various types of restaurants. Figure 3 displays the various distinct restaurants studied. WOM was mainly studied in nine ethnic or time-honored restaurants, followed by eight casual or fast-casual restaurants, four theme restaurants, and lastly, four full-service or fine-dining restaurants.

Table 1: WOM research progress

Report	Authors	Citation	Journal	Type
Relationships among memorable brand experience, brand preference, and behavioral intentions: focusing on the difference between robot servers and human servers	(Hwang et al., 2023)	0	Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology	WOM
What makes consumers repeat consumption internet celebrity restaurant?	(Tang et al., 2023)	0	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	eWOM
“I Love It” Versus “I Recommend It”: The Impact of Implicit and Explicit Endorsement Styles on Electronic Word-of-Mouth Persuasiveness	(Liao et al., 2023)	0	Journal of Travel Research	eWOM
Saving Local Restaurants: The Impact of Altruism, Self-Enhancement, and Affiliation on Restaurant Customers’ EWOM Behavior	(Hanks et al., 2022)	3	Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research	eWOM
Recognise me or pay me? How rewards for online restaurant reviews impact continuity: A cross-country investigation	(Labsomboonsiri et al., 2022)	1	International Journal of Hospitality Management	eWOM
The antecedent and consequences of brand competence: Focusing on the moderating role of the type of server in the restaurant industry	(Hwang et al., 2022)	9	Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management	WOM
Exploring consumers’ domestic gastronomy behaviour: a cross-national study of Italy and Fiji	(Sharma et al., 2022)	15	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	WOM
Indirect customer-to-customer interactions and experiential value: examining solo and social diners	(Han et al., 2022)	5	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	WOM

Table 1: WOM research progress

Report	Authors	Citation	Journal	Type
Who is an evangelist? Food tourists' positive and negative eWOM behavior	(Kim & Hwang, 2022)	13	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	eWOM
Dining in the sharing economy: a comparison of private social dining and restaurants	(Lin, 2022)	5	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	WOM & eWOM
Investigation of the Effect of Restaurant Atmosphere on Behavioral Intention	(Kement et al., 2021)	7	Journal of Tourism and Services	WOM
Leveraging "human-likeness" of robotic service at restaurants	(Lu et al., 2021)	66	International Journal of Hospitality Management	WOM
Reconstruction of the relationship between traditional and emerging restaurant brand and customer WOM	(Zhang et al., 2021)	20	International Journal of Hospitality Management	WOM
Spatial and human crowdedness, time pressure, and Chinese traveler word-of-mouth behaviors for Korean restaurants	(Quan et al., 2021)	11	International Journal of Hospitality Management	WOM
Severe service failures and online vindictive word of mouth: The effect of coping strategies	(El-Manstrly et al., 2021)	16	International Journal of Hospitality Management	eWOM
A negative or positive signal? The impact of food recalls on negative word-of-mouth (N-WOM)	(Seo & Jang, 2021)	12	Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management	WOM
The financial impact of online customer reviews in the restaurant industry: A moderating effect of brand equity	(Wang et al., 2021)	15	International Journal of Hospitality Management	eWOM
Influence of servicescape stimuli on word-of-mouth intentions: An integrated model to indigenous restaurants	(Chao et al., 2021)	10	International Journal of Hospitality Management	WOM
Strategy for enhancing the image of edible insect restaurants: Focus on internal environmental locus of control	(Hwang, Choe, et al., 2020)	13	Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management	WOM
How to enhance the image of edible insect restaurants: Focusing on perceived risk theory	(Hwang & Choe, 2020)	56	International Journal of Hospitality Management	WOM

Table 1: WOM research progress

Report	Authors	Citation	Journal	Type
The effect of emotions, eWOM quality and online review sequence on consumer intention to follow advice obtained from digital services	(Ruiz-Mafe et al., 2020)	35	Journal of Service Management	eWOM
Variety-seeking motivations and customer behaviors for new restaurants: An empirical comparison among full-service, quick-casual, and quick-service restaurants	(Lee et al., 2020)	15	Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management	WOM
To follow others or be yourself? Social influence in online restaurant reviews	(Li et al., 2020)	32	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	eWOM
Understanding motivated consumer innovativeness in the context of a robotic restaurant: The moderating role of product knowledge	(Hwang, Park, et al., 2020)	54	Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management	WOM
Are tattoos still a taboo?: The effect of employee tattoos on customers' service failure perceptions	(Ozanne et al., 2019)	8	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	WOM
"When you write review" matters: The interactive effect of prior online reviews and review temporal distance on consumers' restaurant evaluation	(Li et al., 2019)	43	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	eWOM
The effect of fellow customer on complaining behaviors: the moderating role of gender	(Joe & Choi, 2019)	18	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	WOM
It's Raining Complaints! How Weather Factors Drive Consumer Comments and Word-of-Mouth	(Bujisic et al., 2019)	14	Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research	WOM
Face Gain and Face Loss in Restaurant Consumers' Brand Advocate Behaviors	(Huang et al., 2019)	5	Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research	WOM
An Expanded Servicescape Framework as the Driver of Place Attachment and Word of Mouth	(Line et al., 2018)	83	Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research	WOM

Table 1: WOM research progress

Report	Authors	Citation	Journal	Type
The restaurant social servicescape: Establishing a nomological framework	(Hanks & Line, 2018)	71	International Journal of Hospitality Management	WOM & eWOM
Impact of brand experience on loyalty	(Ong et al., 2018)	93	Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management	WOM
Increasing experiential value and relationship quality: An investigation of pop-up dining experiences	(Taylor et al., 2018)	37	International Journal of Hospitality Management	WOM
Corporate Social Responsibility: The Effect Of Green Practices In A Service Recovery	(Albus & Ro, 2017)	41	Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research	WOM
Effects of Restaurant Satisfaction and Knowledge Sharing Motivation on eWOM Intentions: The Moderating Role of Technology Acceptance Factors	(Yang, 2017)	178	Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research	eWOM
Achieving relational outcomes in casual dining restaurants through consumer commitment	(Kim & Kim, 2017)	10	Current Issues in Tourism	WOM
Investigating the Dynamics and the Content of Customers' Social Media Reporting after a Restaurant Service Failure	(Israeli et al., 2017)	29	Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management	eWOM
Does Social Capital Matter on Social Media? An Examination Into Negative e-WOM Toward Competing Brands	(Jun et al., 2017)	26	Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management	eWOM
Rectifying Failure of Service: How Customer Perceptions of Justice Affect Their Emotional Response and Social Media Testimonial	(Kim & Tang, 2016)	36	Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management	eWOM
Factors affecting memorability of service failures: a longitudinal analysis	(Kim & Jang, 2016)	18	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	WOM
Effect of employee incivility on customer retaliation through psychological contract breach: The moderating role of moral identity	(Bavik & Bavik, 2015)	38	International Journal of Hospitality Management	WOM
Anticipated guilt and pleasure in a healthy food consumption context	(Hur & Jang, 2015)	43	International Journal of Hospitality Management	WOM

Table 1: WOM research progress

Report	Authors	Citation	Journal	Type
What drives café customers to spread eWOM? Examining self-relevant value, quality value, and opinion leadership	(Kim et al., 2015)	67	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	eWOM
Determinants of a restaurant average meal price: An application of the hedonic pricing model	(Yim et al., 2014)	58	International Journal of Hospitality Management	eWOM
Determinants of Customer Complaint Behavior in a Restaurant Context: The Role of Culture, Price Level, and Customer Loyalty	(Kim et al., 2014)	37	Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management	WOM
Motives for reading and articulating user-generated restaurant reviews on Yelp.com	(Parikh et al., 2014)	53	Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology	eWOM
Investigating consumer embarrassment in service interactions	(Wu & Mattila, 2013)	23	International Journal of Hospitality Management	WOM
Who Chose this Restaurant Anyway? The Effect of Responsibility for Choice, Guarantees, and Failure Stability on Customer Complaining	(McQuilken & Robertson, 2013)	3	Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research	WOM & eWOM
Service encounters and face loss: Issues of failures, fairness, and context	(Lee et al., 2013)	37	International Journal of Hospitality Management	WOM

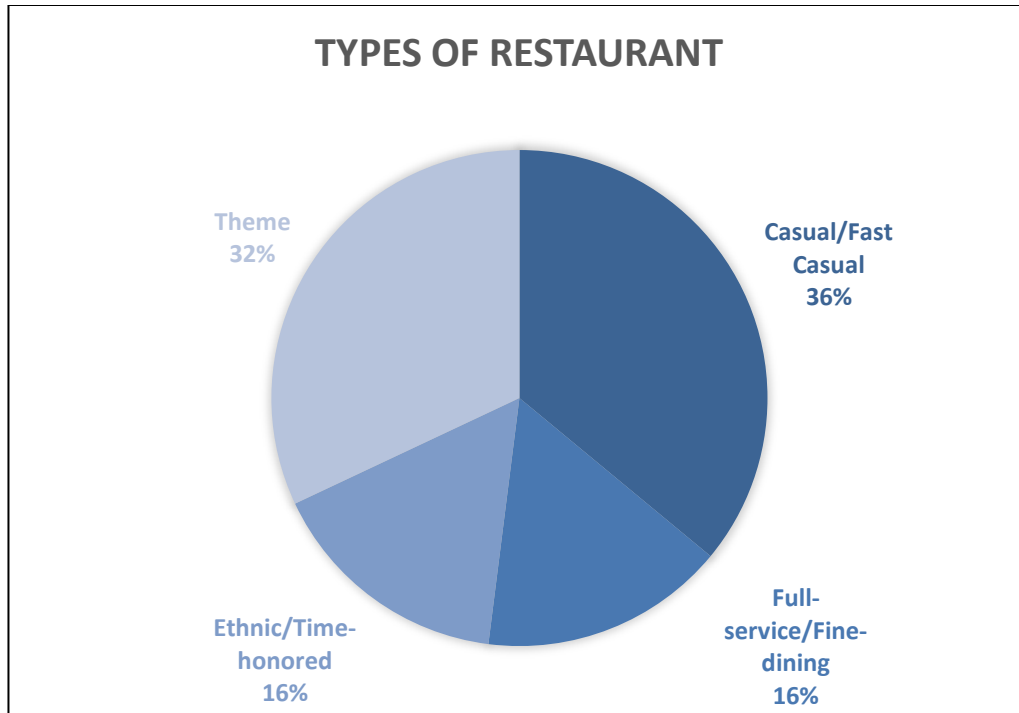


Figure 3: WOM studies based on the types of restaurants.

3.2 Methods Used in WOM Research

Among the 49 publications that were analyzed, only one paper applied a qualitative research strategy, while the remaining 48 articles utilized quantitative methodologies for data measurement and analysis. Out of the total of 48 studies with a quantitative approach, a subset of 10 articles employed a between-subject experimental design. Based on the review, 45 articles used established WOM scales adapted from past research. In contrast, four reports examined WOM as a single construct or as a subset of behavioral intention. WOM has been predominantly examined as a dependent variable in 44 studies, while in the remaining five studies, it was investigated as an independent variable.

While consumers' intention to engage in WOM has traditionally been used as a measure, certain reports have provided more specific information regarding WOM valence. Positive WOM was studied in eight (Chao et al., 2021; Hanks et al., 2022; Huang et al., 2019; Hur & Jang, 2015; Kim & Tang, 2016; Kim & Hwang, 2022; Sharma et al., 2022; Taylor et al., 2018) reports (16%), and negative WOM was the focus of ten articles (20%) (Israeli et al., 2017; Chao et al., 2021; Joe & Choi, 2019; Jun et al., 2017; Kim & Tang, 2016; Kim & Jang, 2016; Kim & Hwang, 2022; Lee et al., 2013; McQuilken & Robertson, 2013; Seo & Jang, 2021) reports.

Looking at the setting in which WOM was studied, the numbers revealed a split between 27 Western-centric studies (Israeli et al., 2017; Albus & Ro, 2017; Bujisic et al., 2019; El-Manstrly et al., 2021; Hanks et al., 2022; Hanks & Line, 2018; Huang et al., 2019; Hur & Jang, 2015; Jun et al., 2017; Kement et al., 2021; Kim & Tang, 2016; Kim & Kim,

2017; Kim et al., 2014; Labsomboonsiri et al., 2022; Li et al., 2020; Lin, 2022; Line et al., 2018; Lu et al., 2021; McQuilken & Robertson, 2013; Ozanne et al., 2019; Parikh et al., 2014; Ruiz-Mafe et al., 2020; Seo & Jang, 2021; Sharma et al., 2022; Taylor et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2021; Wu & Mattila, 2013) and 23 Asian-centric studies (Bavik & Bavik, 2015; Chao et al., 2021; Hwang, Choe, et al., 2020; Hwang et al., 2022, 2023; Hwang, Park, et al., 2020; Hwang & Choe, 2020; Kim et al., 2015; Kim & Jang, 2016; Kim & Hwang, 2022; Kim et al., 2014; Labsomboonsiri et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2013; Li et al., 2019; Liao et al., 2023; Lin, 2022; Ong et al., 2018; Quan et al., 2021; Tang et al., 2023; Yang, 2017; Yim et al., 2014; Zhang et al., 2021). The Western-centric studies are mainly from the United States of America (21 studies). In contrast, for the Asian-centric studies, South Korea is the main setting (9 studies), followed closely by China (8 studies).

3.3 Variables observed with WOM

The articles observed various motivators and effects of WOM. The motivators highlighted in the retrieved articles are categorized into five groups: (1) links to the brand, (2) the restaurant, (3) the servers or employees, (4) consumers' internal motivations, and (5) consumers' external motivations. Table 2 displays the categories in detail.

Table 2: WOM motivators

Motivators	Studied Variable
Brand	Preference Authenticity Personality Equity Familiarity
Restaurant	Competence Image Quality Design Dining experience Corporate social responsibility (CSR)
Server/Employee	Characteristics Service Excellence Service failure Service recovery
Internal	Altruism Self-enhancement Ethnocentrism Satisfaction Avoidance coping Memorability Mood Place attachment Pleasure Expectation

	Gender
External	Social influence
	Weather

Most of the reports studied the internal motivations of the consumer with 11 different variables, followed by the restaurant (6 variables), brand (5 variables), server or employees (4 variables), and the least variable studied based on the review is on the external motivations that the consumer is exposed to with only two. Regarding the effect of WOM, the reports described that WOM leads to brand resonance and the intention to visit.

4 Discussion

Three hundred ninety-seven articles on WOM extracted from Elsevier’s Scopus were screened in the initial process of the systematic review. After going through the decided inclusion criteria, 49 articles were retrieved and used. This systematic literature review investigates WOM, especially in the restaurant and café setting. Three research questions were raised, which are namely: (1) “What are the recent developments of word of mouth in the context of restaurants and cafés?”, (2) “What were the research methods utilized in investigating WOM in the context of restaurants and cafés?” and (3) “What variables are studied concerning word of mouth in the context of restaurants and cafés?” This section will address the questions posed with findings gathered from the retrieved reports.

The question “What are the recent developments of word of mouth in the context of restaurants and café?” is addressed by the systematic review with the inclusion of the past ten years’ publications on WOM gathered from Scopus. All 49 retrieved reports were published in prominent journals listed in the top 30 journals with the highest CiteScore from Scopus. It was also noted that WOM has been steadily studied throughout the ten years (2013 – 2023), as the retrieved reports revealed no gaps in WOM publication from 2013 to 2023. Both factors indicate that WOM is still relevant and could be further explored.

The second research question, “What were the research methods utilized in investigating WOM in the context of restaurants and cafés?” was addressed with the inclusion of the research design, measurement scale of WOM, and the cultural setting of the studies. The research design utilized was mainly quantitative, with the predominant use of surveys and experiments. Highlighting that WOM could be quantified and analyzed according to the various aspects of the concept.

The measurement scales used were varied but were dedicated to studying WOM specifically. Highlighting the variety of ways and angles in investigating WOM. This is comparable to various publications on WOM. WOM has been studied for its effectiveness (Carpentier et al., 2019; Van Hoyer & Lievens, 2009), as a form of self-expression (Aytaç & Akin, 2021; Saenger et al., 2013), and even in terms of the consumers’ engagement likelihood (Ahmadi, 2019).

Regarding the cultural aspect of the reports, WOM was investigated through the lenses of a Western-centric view and an Asian-centric view. Distinct findings were identified whereby Western-centric consumers were more individualistic and reacted more to rewards when engaging in WOM spread than Asian-centric consumers who were more motivated to spread WOM to help other consumers and businesses. This is supported by numerous studies on the differing consumer behavior between various cultures regarding WOM (Choi & Kim, 2019; Christodoulides et al., 2012)

Lastly, the third research question, “What variables are studied concerning word of mouth in the context of restaurants and cafés?” is addressed in this systematic review by highlighting the main drivers or motivators towards the usage of WOM and what effect it has. Based on the retrieved reports, most studies highlighted the significance of the restaurant and café consumers’ internal motivation in sharing or engaging in WOM. This is supported by various other researchers (Chelminski & Coulter, 2007; de Matos & Rossi, 2008; Mahmood et al., 2019; Mowen et al., 2007) who reported that the internal motivations of consumers are a key driver towards WOM spread.

5 Conclusion and Future Research

Since its earliest literary discussion, WOM has remained one important informal form of communication and promotion for both consumers and businesses alike. (Brooks, 1957; Pourfakhimi et al., 2020). Consumers view WOM as a trusted and reliable source of information in making decisions (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012). WOM offers a real-world point of view from other relatable consumers who have experienced the services or purchased the products first-hand (Shabbir & Varshney, 2022). For businesses, WOM is a form of marketing that is cost-effective as it derives from the endorsement of satisfied consumers (Ngoma & Ntale, 2019). Maintaining this positive WOM leads to loyal consumers that could potentially bring in new consumers from the WOM spread.

With the advent of digital technology, WOM has become borderless, as the limitation of the more conventional WOM is overcome by the far-reaching internet. Spreading the WOM to consumers of various backgrounds more than before (Babić Rosario et al., 2020). As supported by previous authors (Paley et al., 2018; Shanmugam & Sulthana, 2019), WOM is influential in shaping the decision-making and behavior of consumers. Therefore, it is pertinent that researchers continue to advance the body of knowledge and further our understanding of WOM.

Based on the articles gathered from 2013 – 2023, the reviewers have noted that there are still gaps for future researchers to fill. All the data and information gathered was secondary data from Scopus. Although the search brought forth 397 articles, future systematic reviews could expand this further by including other databases such as Google Scholar or Web of Science (WOS). Which could provide an additional worldview on WOM. This view could also be enhanced with the inclusion of WOM literature from the perspective of the businesses, as this systematic review only covered studies relating to consumers.

The systematic review reported that only one of the 49 reports was conducted on café consumers. Highlighting a good opportunity for research in a unique segment of the food and beverage sector. Cafés or coffee shops have a unique market of consumers, especially through the transition from the second to third coffee wave of the coffee industry, whereby decisions are based on having initial product knowledge (Barahona et al., 2020). This is supported by Sun et al. (2021), who reported that prior knowledge, expertise, and how the consumers are given education on a brand or product affect the consumer's positive WOM-sharing tendencies.

It is great to report that WOM studies have been conducted in Asian and Western settings as they can provide a more rounded view of WOM with the various cultures considered. Future research could extend this body of knowledge by perhaps discussing WOM in more varied cultures, such as countries from the African continent, or even perhaps narrowing down the scope of culture to smaller groups, such as Southeast Asian cultures. More comparison studies could also be conducted testing the difference between cultures within the same controlled and defined conditions.

As highlighted in the result and discussion section of the review, there were numerous scales used in discussing WOM. All of which were designed and constructed based on a thorough and vigorous research process. Perhaps in the future, a meta-analysis could be done to compare the various WOM scales found in the literature to identify the strengths and weaknesses in measuring WOM through valid and real research data.

Based on the review, it was noted that all but one retrieved study was done cross-sectionally. As establishments are now putting more and more effort and importance into their WOM campaigns, it would be interesting to investigate how WOM affects consumer behavior in the long run with more longitudinal studies. In addition, more qualitative studies or interviews could be done to support the current findings and provide validation.

As a summary, this systematic review highlights the value of WOM in the food and beverage industry – especially in restaurants and cafés – and provides the basis for further research undertakings. Future research should address the evolving landscape of WOM marketing, integrating digital technologies, and ensuring ethical and effective practices to maximize the industry's potential for success.

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