

Are Asians too polite or is it altruism? Deciphering motivations and positive electronic word-of-mouth of Hipster café dining experience in Malaysia and Indonesia

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Abstract

Despite the popularity of hipster café and the growing importance of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) for restaurants' success, there appears to be a lack of empirical data on why customers leave positive eWOM in café, particularly in Malaysia and Indonesia. This study attempted to fill this gap by investigating motivational factors for positive eWOM within hipster cafes and examining positive dining experiences driving eWOM. Adopting a qualitative approach, a total of twenty-six participants were involved in the semi-structured interviews carried out in both countries, and data were analyzed using ATLAS.ti software (version 9.1.3). In this study, Maslow's motivational theory was utilized in the context of eWOM marketing within Asian perspectives of the food and beverage sector. The alternative framework suggested positive dining experiences elicited positive emotional responses, which mediated the motivational engagement in eWOM behaviour, specifically in the hipster café context. Herein, when customers experience pleasure and satisfaction from dining, they are more likely to engage in positive eWOM. The findings featured the collectivist nature among Malaysian and Indonesian societies, concerns for others, self-enhancement, and being an information leader as key motivations towards participants' engagement in eWOM. The findings also showed that the quality of food, service, atmosphere, price, and Instagrammable influenced positive eWOM engagement. Pleasant dining experiences also lead to customer satisfaction and revisit intention. Therefore, the results provided are helpful for hipster cafe owners as a guide to developing satisfaction and encouraging positive eWOM among customers which might help enhance business profitability.

1. Introduction

The emergence of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is attributed to internet advancements (Kim *et al.*, 2015; Line *et al.*, 2020; Sohaib *et al.*, 2020) which involves online informal communication on services and products through information exchange (Sohaib *et al.*, 2020). Customers utilize social media as a platform for eWOM (Erkan and Evans, 2016) to express thoughts, opinions, and reviews, presenting an effective marketing tool for the food service industry given the prevalent online product information search. It is believed that eWOM is more effective than traditional word-of-mouth

(WOM) nowadays (Serra-Cantalops *et al.*, 2018), with a greater impact on behavioural intention (Uslu, 2020). Several factors were discovered to influence online review sharing, such as self-appraisal, self-image congruity, café quality (Kim *et al.*, 2015), concern for others, positive expression, helping the restaurant businesses (Jeong and Jang, 2011), social benefits, and self-enhancement (Sohaib *et al.*, 2020; Kim and Hwang, 2022). Some engage in eWOM altruistically, aiding others without expecting rewards, while others do so in response to positive dining experiences, contributing to restaurant growth (Fu *et al.*, 2015; Whiting *et al.*, 2019;

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Ismagilova *et al.*, 2021). Understanding these motivations is crucial for restaurant owners as eWOM significantly affects purchase intention and profitability. Notably, positive eWOM can attract new customers based on online reviews, making the review's content highly influenced by the dining experience.

Pleasurable aspects of the dining experience influence people's engagement in eWOM (Line *et al.*, 2020). High-quality food, encompassing factors like presentation, variety, taste, freshness, and temperature (Hanaysha, 2016; Baiomy *et al.*, 2019), is crucial in shaping brand image, customer loyalty, and overall dining experiences (Torlak *et al.*, 2020). Meanwhile, service quality, including reliability, responsiveness, and empathy (Hanasya, 2016; Ramya *et al.*, 2019; Uslu, 2020; Yu, 2021), along with fair pricing strategies, plays a significant role in satisfying customer expectations and fostering positive eWOM (Hanaysha, 2016; Bernarto and Purwanto, 2022). Then, creating an inviting atmosphere through both tangible and intangible elements such as physical environment and ambience contributes to customer satisfaction and prolonged stays (Tuzunkan and Albayrak, 2016; Sitingjak *et al.*, 2019; Jusuf and Gamal, 2020). Additionally, incorporating Instagrammable qualities like aesthetic decorations (Karyatun *et al.*, 2021) and unique food items, with suitable lighting, further enhances the likelihood of customers sharing their experiences on social media platforms, thus amplifying the café's visibility and brand presence (Yong *et al.*, 2020). Hence, a hipster café should provide good quality services for customers to trigger them to share their dining experiences on social media.

Hipster cafe is defined as a subculture dominating the lifestyles of the younger generation and has seen rapid growth in urban areas (Abu Thahir and Krishnapillai, 2018). These cafes, specializing in coffee and characterized by unique décor using old items, often have their own identity through distinctive food and drink names (Min and Mamat, 2021). High demand and preference for hipster café have resulted in many new hipster cafes in Malaysia and Indonesia. The surge in demand for hipster cafes has led to increased competition, necessitating innovative value creation beyond customer expectations (Pangaribuan *et al.*, 2020). Thus, hipster cafe owners must be creative in developing and improving their services to compete effectively. With the emerging growth of hipster cafes, it is necessary to discover what kind of dining experiences can satisfy hipster customers until they are willing to post online positive reviews.

Despite the widespread use of eWOM, there is a lack of research on its motivational factors (Sohaib *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, the research question of this study is:

what are the motivational factors that trigger customers to elicit positive eWOM toward hipster cafés? Additionally, what are the positive dining experiences that elicit positive eWOM among customers? To answer the questions, this study addresses this gap by applying Maslow's motivational theory, which posits that people are motivated to fulfil hierarchical needs: physiological, safety, social, self-esteem, and self-actualization (Bishop, 2016; Ngwenya *et al.*, 2018). A person is driven to meet the demands of each level and they are unable to advance to further levels until the prior level has been satisfied. The theory, linked to customer satisfaction, emphasizes the role of pleasant dining experiences in positive eWOM engagement. Once fulfilling basic needs, people seek social connections and affection (Taormina and Gao, 2013), followed by the desire for recognition and value (Sohaib *et al.*, 2020). At the peak is self-actualization, where individuals strive for personal growth (Bishop, 2016), often by sharing expertise within social communities. Therefore, this study aims to investigate motivational factors for positive eWOM engagement and examine positive dining experiences that drive eWOM at hipster cafes. The findings could enhance hipster cafe quality and attract potential customers.

2. Materials and methods

This research used a mixed-qualitative approach with a combination method of netnography analysis in Phase 1 and semi-structured interviews in Phase 2. In Phase 1, netnography was used to identify the themes of positive dining experiences among hipster cafe customers through online reviews. Netnography is a type of ethnographic research method that is performed online and creates theory through qualitative data analysis (Lee and Ko, 2022). In this study, netnography analysis was conducted toward selected hipster cafes in Malaysia and Indonesia by using Google Reviews as a platform. First, about 100 online reviews for each selected hipster cafe, published from January 2021 until December 2022 were exported from Google Reviews. To collect valid data, the listed reviews were screened and any reviews that were negative and too short for any meaningful content were removed due to the unsuitability of this research's data. Netnography allowed us to understand which experience has been triggering customers to write positive reviews on hipster cafes.

Following that, in Phase 2, this study proceeded by conducting semi-structured interviews with 16 Malaysian customers and 10 Indonesian customers to explore motivations in positive eWOM engagement based on their satisfaction with dining experiences. This research which involved human participants had received

ethical approval from the University Malaysia Terengganu Research Ethics Committee (UMT REC) with the number of human ethics approvals was UMT/JKEPM/2023/128. Furthermore, inclusion criteria were established where they must post positive online reviews of selected hipster cafes on social media sites. To recruit participants, a recruitment message was privately sent on social media to ask permission to do the online semi-structured interview with these individuals. When they agreed to interview for this study, a link to a video meeting (Google Meet) was sent to them. Another way was through a phone call or online messages, depending on participants' comfort. Since all participants were located in different geographical areas of Malaysia and Indonesia, hence, online semi-structured interviews were essential for this research. The interviews were conducted through Google Meet, calls, and online messages. All interviews were consented to and audio-recorded for analysis purposes. By repeating the recorded audio, accurate information could be gained. Table 1 provides an overview of the demographic of the interviewees.

Then, thematic analysis was conducted in this study to identify the patterns in the data. Thematic analysis was a systematic method used to uncover patterns and meanings within qualitative data, such as interview transcripts (Syla, 2023). It also allowed us to reveal deeper insights that contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter (Lin, 2018). In this

study, the interview data were analyzed using ATLAS.ti software (version 9.1.3). To analyze the semi-structured interviews, the first step was to write down the transcript data verbatim. After transcribing, coding was done by using short phrases, which were then further classified. Next, the categories would be reduced and sorted into workable themes. Overall, five themes of positive eWOM motivation have emerged.

3. Results and discussion

The research outcomes, obtained through detailed data analysis, had been systematically organized to address the research objective of this study. Thematic analysis was presented under the main topic of positive eWOM motivation which explores the motivations behind participants engaging in positive electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) activities, focusing on factors driving favourable recommendations about the dining experience. The first table provided a breakdown of key themes and codes that emerged during analysis, encompassing diverse aspects of participants' perspectives and behaviours in the café setting. Themes ranged from altruistic actions and reciprocal interactions to promoting the café for its success and self-enhancement through sharing personal experiences. The theme of being an information leader highlights certain participants' influence in shaping perceptions and decisions. Each theme included associated codes, offering insights into the intricate dynamics and

Table 1. Demographic profile of interviewees.

| Malaysia | | Indonesia | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Demographic characteristics | Number of participants (N=16) | Demographic characteristics | Number of participants (N=10) |
| Region | | | |
| Pahang | 3 | Jakarta | 1 |
| Selangor | 3 | Blitar | 1 |
| Perak | 2 | Bali | 1 |
| Kuala Lumpur | 2 | Makasar | 1 |
| Pulau Pinang | 2 | Kupang | 2 |
| Terengganu | 1 | Malang | 2 |
| Negeri Sembilan | 1 | Palu | 1 |
| Melaka | 1 | Kendari | 1 |
| Others | 1 | | |
| Age | | | |
| 20-30 | 12 | 20-30 | 6 |
| 31-40 | 1 | 31-40 | 3 |
| 41-50 | 2 | 41-50 | 1 |
| 51-60 | 1 | | |
| Occupation | | | |
| Employed | 8 | Employed | 5 |
| Student | 5 | Student | 5 |
| Unemployed | 3 | | |

motivations underlying participants' interactions in this environment.

3.1 Motivation for leaving positive eWOM

Referring to Table 2, participants from Malaysia and Indonesia engaged in positive electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) due to factors like (1) Concern for others; (2) Helping the business; (3) Self-enhancement; and (4) Information leader. First, concern for others involves altruism, recommendations, and reciprocity, driven by a genuine desire to help restaurants and fellow customers. Altruism, in particular, stems from the joy of assisting others without expecting anything in return. Sharing positive experiences through eWOM allowed participants to contribute to society by aiding others in making informed purchase decisions (Ismagilova *et al.*, 2021). Customers mentioned how they hoped the review would be able to help others. The reviews uploaded on social media might help other customers in choosing a place to dine and avoid possible disappointment when the food or service does not meet their expectations since customers always expect desirable food quality, inviting service, pleasant environment, fair pricing, and Instagram-worthy settings. Desirable food quality encompassed taste, menu variety, uniqueness, and generous portions, with perceived food quality strongly influencing customer satisfaction (Kannan 2017; Chun and Nyam-Ochir, 2020).

“... some underrated cafes deserve more customers due to their qualities and some people do not know where to dine in and they often choose a famous one despite the food being so-so.” (Malaysian participant 13)

Table 2. Thematic analysis for positive eWOM motivations.

| Themes | Codes |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Concern for others | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Altruism Giving recommendations Reciprocal |
| Help the business | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To promote the café |
| Self-enhancement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sharing Dining Experience Telling people about the existence of café |
| Information leader | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Influence other |

Second, the study identified supporting hipster cafes as a significant motivation factor among participants, particularly through promoting the businesses. When customers experienced good service and quality, they felt the urge to help the cafe business gain more customers by leaving positive reviews. Previous studies also mentioned positive eWOM emerged as a means for customers to help companies gain more customers due to perceived good service and products, fostering a desire to reciprocate favourably (Jang and Jeong, 2011;

Whiting *et al.*, 2018). Participants expressed a willingness to endorse cafes with good quality food and service to aid both the business owners and potential customers, reflecting a sense of communal support and a desire to contribute to the local economy. Through this study, some participants were found to be willing to promote the cafes due to their satisfaction with the food taste and variety of food choices with reasonable prices.

“If the food is good, the service is good, we should give them some credit so that other people can visit too. We are helping the business. It is a domestic business.” (Malaysian participant 9)

Then, happy customers were likely to recommend a café or restaurant, encouraging others to visit (Pangaribuan *et al.*, 2020). Experiencing tasty food, nice services, and a relaxing ambience with aesthetic decorations during the dining may develop a positive feeling that triggers their intention to share the reviews with others. Furthermore, customers in a positive mood tended to judge their dining experiences more favourably, emphasizing the importance of creating favourable experiences for customers in different emotional states. Positive emotional experiences, as found in a previous study, positively impact satisfaction, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) generation, and company reputation (Serra-Cantalops *et al.*, 2018). This study revealed that most Malaysians gave reviews for their enjoyment, while Indonesians did it for others' happiness. This aligned with Jeong and Jang's (2011) finding that customers engage in positive eWOM to express positive feelings and share the joy of experiences.

“My motive for doing the reviews first is for a personal vlog. I want to have my pleasurable memories of dining during my holiday on my TikTok. Then, it is fun doing the positive reviews on the food and dining experience.” (Malaysian participant 1)

Meanwhile, people motivated by self-enhancement looked for opportunities to look for fame by sharing positive eWOM (Sohaib *et al.*, 2020). Writing online reviews related to self-enhancement as consumer-opinion platforms have enormous potential to reach a high number of people. Self-enhancement (or self-improvement) refers to the situation when individuals try to present themselves positively by sharing information (Ismagilova *et al.*, 2021). This motivation was the least mentioned among Malaysian participants. However, there was an Indonesian participant who talked about how posting a positive review was one form of making a good positive image. Referring to the Maslow motivation theory relates to self-esteem, customers were motivated to gain respect and appreciation of others.

“I feel happy when I see the place that I like is busy with customers. I feel like I am helping them to advertise their café, besides, it proves that my taste is good, right?” (Indonesian participant 4).

Individuals engaged in eWOM communication for self-benefit (egoism), group benefit (collectivism), and altruism (Fu *et al.*, 2015). Malaysia and Indonesia, both collectivist societies, prioritized group goals and unity (Irawan *et al.*, 2022). Community belonging fosters positive feelings (Ismagilova *et al.*, 2021). Collectivist societies like Indonesia and Malaysia stressed interdependence, group harmony, and maintaining positive relationships (Weiss-Sidi, 2023). These cultures prioritized the group over individual interests, leading to consistent consideration of others' needs and selfless acts (Weiss-Sidi, 2023). Altruism in collectivist cultures was directed toward recipients, reflecting a strong adherence to societal norms and group opinions (Weiss-Sidi, 2023).

“When I enjoyed it, I wrote it on my Twitter once after I visited a café. And usually it was a good review, but if I had a negative experience, I never posted it.” (Indonesia participant 5)

Finally, opinion leaders wanted to be viewed as experts by a large number of consumers (Ismagilova *et al.*, 2021). Opinion leaders influence the members of social communities and networks by disseminating information about certain products or brands (Ismagilova *et al.*, 2021). Information-sharing behaviour is influenced by the perceived usefulness of information by the one who shares the information (Ismagilova *et al.*, 2021). Some customers felt like it was essential to give reviews about the café that they visited so that their followers know about the café too.

“I have 4000 followers, My review will help my followers to make purchase decisions. I like to go to a lot of new places and let them know about it, and I want to let my followers know about the new places.” (Indonesian participant 7)

Most of the participants agreed that leaving a positive review was only natural for them as a collectivist society. All of the participants from Malaysia and Indonesia also mentioned that they read reviews about the hipster café before they decided to go to the café. The review helped them to decide to visit certain places and to get information about those places. So, it was only natural for them to help others as part of the community. Therefore, positive eWOM was pivotal in contributing to building a restaurant's positive image and influencing customer purchasing decisions (Tan *et al.*, 2016). Feedback was crucial for financial performance (Wang *et al.*, 2021), and emotions, whether incidental or

pre-consumption, could impact consumer mood and purchasing decisions (Le *et al.*, 2020).

3.2 Conceptual framework

This study concluded that positive dining experiences at hipster cafes contribute to favourable motivations for positive eWOM, and revisit intentions. Key elements of positive dining experiences include desirable food quality, inviting service, pleasant environment, fair pricing, and the Instagrammable aspect. The latter was emphasized due to technology and social media trends, particularly among younger demographics. Notably, satisfied customers due to positive dining experiences were motivated to share positive eWOM about hipster cafes, driven by concerns for others, self-enhancement, and information leadership. Positive emotional responses strengthen this intention. Additionally, satisfied customers express an intention to revisit, influenced by factors such as food and drinks, reasonable pricing, good service, and a pleasant environment, aligning with Torlak *et al.*'s (2020) findings on customer satisfaction. Transforming first-time visitors into repeat customers is vital for sustained business success, requiring cafe owners to prioritize ongoing improvements in food and services. The study proposes a conceptual framework based on these conclusions in Figure 1.

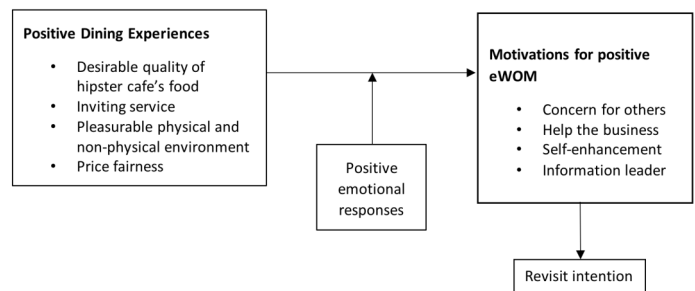


Figure 1. Motivations for positive eWOM framework at hipster café.

4. Conclusion

This study delves into positive motivations for eWOM, focusing on factors like concern for others, support for businesses, self-enhancement, and information leadership. The research highlights that in collectivist societies like Indonesia and Malaysia, group harmony is prioritized, leading individuals to actively contribute positive eWOM to strengthen community bonds. The study suggests the need for further research in other highly collectivist countries to validate these findings. Positive dining experiences, comprising elements like tasty food, friendly service, pleasant atmosphere, value for money, and visual appeal, drive customers to share their satisfaction through positive eWOM. These enjoyable experiences not only prompt

customers to express contentment but also fuel a desire to revisit, driven by the relaxing ambience and food preferences. In essence, positive dining experiences contribute to both positive eWOM engagement and revisit intentions.

In summary, delightful dining encounters act as catalysts for positive eWOM engagement and revisit intentions. The combination of delicious food, excellent service, inviting ambience, affordability, and visually appealing elements collectively enhances customer satisfaction, encouraging customers to share and return, reinforcing the pivotal role of such experiences in shaping customer engagement and loyalty. While shedding light on motivational factors behind positive eWOM, it's important to acknowledge potential limitations, such as the exclusive focus on positive reviews. To enhance insights, future investigations into negative reviews among hipster cafe customers would be valuable, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of dynamics and yielding more robust findings.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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