

Instagram and buying decision processes of restaurant consumers

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Abstract

Social media has changed the way people consume. One of the changes is how people eating outside at restaurant. People only need mobile phone to gather information when they feel hungry and look for a place to have dine. Consumers choose restaurants based on the information they get from social media. Consumers can decide which restaurant they would like to go just after checking its reviews and photos on Instagram. This research aims to find the information that consumers use in the buying decision processes. The data was collected through in-depth interviews with restaurant consumers who live in major cities in Indonesia. This study finds that price, location, and Instagram reviews have been considerations in the buying decision processes.

Keywords: *buying decision processes, Instagram food photos, social media, restaurant consumers.*

1. Introduction

Digital and social media have changed the way people consume. Social media has been a mean on consumer's decision making, sharing information about products, giving opinion, and evaluating their experiences. Consumers become more dependent on social media when they want to buy something. They rely on reviews and comments posted by other consumers as "the organic information" rather than information from the product's official website (Rudro 2017).

It also happens in the context of restaurant customers. Electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) defines how customers can get information about a restaurant from its social media or website. E-WOM works when some customers share the food photos and give positive reviews about a restaurant they have just visited. This mechanism will create loyal customers. Social media increases curiosity and provides information when someone searches for information about restaurants, food menus,

or cooking techniques. A person can buy food without touching, smelling or tasting the food first. Simply looking at food photos on social media, people can imagine the taste (Hartman 2012).

A previous study found that there are only two sensorial perceptions can be used when consumers want to appreciate food via digital media, namely vision and hearing sensory. This research justified that suggesting and determining are the factors impacted to customer's restaurant choice. Just by looking at the food photos on social media, customers are tempted to go to the restaurant and taste the food (Cornejo 2017).

The other study revealed that online platforms can influence customer's choice on restaurants in Portugal (dos Santos, 2017). Some of social networking such as TripAdvisor, Zomato, Facebook and Yelp became the information sources for restaurant's customers. The research found that costumers will not go to a new restaurant before they check the

restaurant's review and ranking. Another previous study on social media and eating at restaurant in Bangkok, Thailand is conducted by Pattanachai (2015). This research argued that social media has significant role on customer's fine dining choices. Customers are involved in social media by conversing and sharing information. This research also found that fine dining choice has positive correlation on decision making.

This study focuses on how restaurant customers use Instagram to seek information about restaurant as a part of buying decision

processes. Instagram is a very popular social media among young people in Indonesia. This research aims to find the information that consumers use in the processes of buying decision, to explicate the reasons behind the information seeking done by the customers.

2. Theoretical framework

This research applies the model pre purchase service consumption as proposed by Tsiotsou & Wirtz (2015)

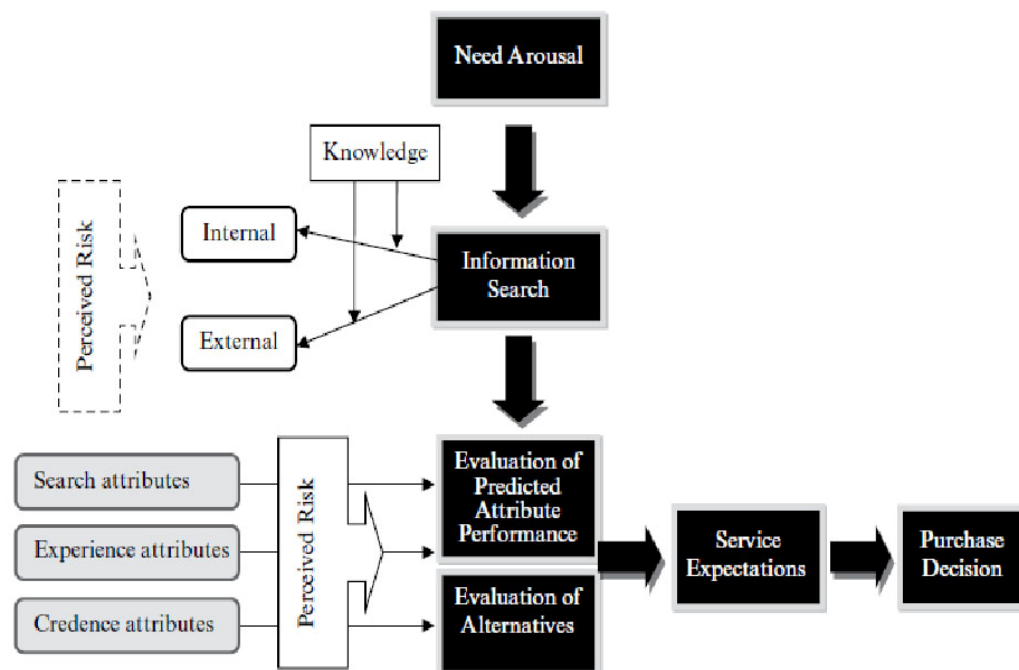


Fig 1. Model of pre purchase service consumption (Tsiotsou & Wirtz 2015)

The first stage is need recognition. This stage happens when consumers are in the ideal conditions because of the information they have got. At this stage, consumers find themselves facing problems and must immediately seek information to resolve the problem. For this research context, customers look for food or dining place when they feel hungry.

Second stage is information gathering. In this stage consumers search information internally and externally. The internal information searching can be based on their memory or past experience. But, consumers find themselves in uncertainty because sometimes they cannot assure about the information. Hence, consumers need external information

sources such as internet, mass media, social media, and others.

After gathering information, the next stage is information evaluation, consisting three types of evaluation. The first is the evaluation of search attributes, consumers evaluate information related to price, location, quality, and other considerations that can cause disadvantages to consumers. Consumers do not want experiencing many losses, materially and physically. The second evaluation is carried out on the experience attributes. Consumers consider past experiences related to the service providers they already heard or known. This evaluation can only be conducted if consumers have had experience with the service providers or products. The third evaluation is carried out

on the trust attributes. This evaluation can be done after consumers use the product or service providers for a long time. This evaluation usually occurs in services that have long-term impacts, such as insurance and health services.

3. Method

This study was conducted through in depth interviews and observations with five Indonesian restaurant customers who live in major cities in Indonesia. In the process of data collecting, there were several steps conducted in order to get customers who are fit with the research subject criteria. Data collecting was carried out during February to April 2018. In the beginning, there were 10 Indonesian restaurant customers to be selected as research subjects. But in the end, there were only five Indonesian customers who were chosen to be the main subjects. The process of choosing the customers was done through snowballing method.

4. Finding and discussion

This chapter describes how Indonesian customers seek information. In the need recognition stage, customers begin to feel the appetite to taste certain foods only by looking at the food photos on Instagram. Customers feel hungry because they see food photos on Instagram. All customers said that food photos on Instagram have raised customer's appetite to taste a food. It leads them to search information on the food photos they have seen in Instagram. Customer A described, *"It is like you go to a restaurant and open a menu book that provides many tempted food photos."*

It confirms Spence (2015) who has argued that the presence of food in the virtual form can make people feel hungry because it involves physiological, behavioral responses, and changes in their nerves. This study found that internal information searching occurs when customers have a desire to eat their favorite foods. The desire occurs usually when they are in their spare time. Searching for food photos is also based on their mood. There is no specific motivation that arises when customers want to eat their favorite food. The foods appear in the mind when they are hungry or in free time.

At this stage, customers also experience information selection processes. They browse

food photos in Instagram. They choose interesting food photos based on their taste, and pass unattractive food photos. There are two things that become customer's attention in selecting food photos. The first is menu or type of food and the second is the display of food photos that look attractive. Customer C said that he only likes interesting food photos on Instagram, *"I prefer color than composition aspect. Color really attracts me, and how the food is plated. I think it is really important."* At this stage, consumers imagine the taste and enjoyment of the food, then they would decide to continue the information seeking processes or not.

The next stage is information searching phase. In this stage, customers experience the information searching processes internally and externally. In the internal information searching, customers already knew what they need. It involves customer's memories, motivations, thoughts, and experiences so that they are encouraged to search information externally. The internal information sometimes is not enough so that customers still need external information searching.

It is similar to the behavior of consumers restaurants in Portugal as explained by de Azevedo (2012). The internal information gathering can be done when someone's data bank memory is sufficient in providing information. The data bank includes updated knowledge. However, internal search is often not enough if consumers have never had experience with the restaurant. Thus, consumers still need to collect information externally to make sure they visit the restaurant (de Azevedo 2012).

In the process of external information seeking, customers look for information from their closest people such as family and friends, or from social networks such as social media. At this stage, information searching is done to reduce uncertainty and anticipate the risks such as bad food quality, bad food taste, and expensive price. Customer D said:

"I will check into my Instagram account when I am hungry and want to look for a restaurant near my place. For an example, I want to eat fried chicken then I will use hash tag and type down "fried chicken" on searching tab. I use Instagram to suggest trusted accounts, and I really depend on it."

The customers said that social media is the main information source in searching

information about the food they want to eat. Even, each informant has different search pattern in searching food information on Instagram.

However, customers feel that they still need to gather other information from another sources to convince them to come to certain restaurants. Customers use restaurant directory sites such as *pergikuliner.com* and *zomato.com*. Customers can get more complete information through restaurant reviews in these sites. Also, these restaurant directory sites are acknowledged to provide honest opinions and reviews. Customer B said:

*"When I were at a place I do not really familiar with, especially the restaurants there, I will use *zomato.com* or *pergikuliner.com* to get some recommended restaurants. Then, I will check their (restaurants) Instagram accounts to look their food photos. If their (food) photos are interesting, I will decide to go to the restaurant. Just simply because of the photos."*

In the last stage, customers evaluate the information they have gathered before going to the restaurants. The restaurant location is central in the customer's evaluations. It is more important comparing to the food taste and quality. Customers prefer to eat at a near restaurant. Especially customers who live in Jakarta consider that with the same food menu, they don't have to travel too far. They can get the same food menu at the location around their residence. Besides, price is also the main evaluation standard in the decision making process. Customer uses price information to compare with food menus as well as with food quality.

This finding confirms Chung & Kim (2011) who said that food menus and prices are the main reason for customer in the decision making processes. Akbar and Alaudeen (2012) also argued that consumers of a restaurant evaluate several things such as the atmosphere around the restaurant, location, number of restaurant endings, prices, food quality, service quality, and variety of food menus.

Finally, this finding is related to the young people as Y generation. They are technologically literate groups and use their share of time and money for communication technology. They are "heavy" users of social networks, often share information and experience while eating in restaurants through social networks. Social media has a significant power to provide information and influence their decisions (Bilgihan & Kandampully 2014).

5. Conclusion

This research found the ways of restaurant consumers seek information in the buying decision processes. The steps consist of need recognition, internal and external information searching, as well as evaluation of the information. The first step is need recognition, happens when customers see food photos on Instagram and then feel hungry because of that. The second step is the information searching stage. It happens when customers begin to collect information internally based on their memory, as well as externally through their surrounding people, social media, and restaurant directory sites. The last stage is the information evaluation stage. This research found that customers evaluate the price of food and the location of the restaurant as the main considerations.

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