



The Impact of Media Reputation on Customers Behavioral Intention - The Contextual Stepwise Approach

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Abstract. This study employed both quantitative and qualitative approaches to discuss the impacts of media reputation on customers behavioral intentions. A total of 322 completed questionnaires were analyzed, and found that theoretical framework and uncovered strong links between a numbers of hypothesized antecedent and behavioral intentions. The variable which made the largest contribution to prediction of media reputation from customers is social responsibility. Moreover, fifteen qualitative interviews were conducted. The owner-managers, however, have different points of view, they have thought about their restaurants reputation, but it not come from the media. The main contribution drawn from this study is to connect the media reputation from both sides, one side being the customers and the other the owner-managers of Chinese restaurants.

1. Introduction

The importance of the business reputation for a company has garnered growing attention among many scholars and managers as it is considered a key factor in attracting customers and in increasing financial performance by maximizing income and market share in the industries [1–4]. A number of studies have found that a positive reputation of a firm can enhance customers positive image of the firm. For example, a company with good reputation can increase customers satisfaction [5, 6]; trust [7]; and customers loyalty [8–11]. Therefore, reputation can be viewed as an outcome of managers efforts to prove their success and excellence.

In spite of the acknowledged interest in the business reputation and its importance in achieving a competitive advantage, little systematic effort has been made to investigate the relationship of the reputation with small business. Previous research are largely limited to the study of one large company and its reputation [12, 13]; or the importance of reputation for a large or an international company [1, 14, 15]. For example, empirical studies have tested reputation by using Fortune ratings and with the rating that comes from public media. The results show that the Fortune ratings had a positive effect on stock market and operational performance [16, 17]. Graham and Bansal [12] investigate customers willingness to pay for corporate reputation, airline companies as example. Other reputation research which concentrated on large companies includes Davies et al. [5], Fombrun and Gardberg [2] and so forth. Therefore, there still seem to

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be the areas calling for more research to understand the effects of reputation on small firms. Consequently, the present study aims to fill this research gap. It proposes and integrates the study of small business and their reputation.

The impression of a business would be judged or reported via news from the media [18]. Once good judgments of a firm accumulate over a period of time, and then reputational capital will be developed. Accordingly, a good reputation from the media can be defined as an intangible asset and wealth that gives a company a competitive advantage because this kind of a company will be attractive as reliable, trustworthy and responsible for customers, employees, shareholders and financial institutions. Therefore, reputation is not only one of the main business assets and a resource leading to competitive advantage [9, 19], but also enhances profitability because it attracts customers to products [15].

The target examples of this study are small Chinese restaurants in Southern Taiwan and their customers. Consequently, data will be collected from both owner-managers of small Chinese restaurants and their customers. The objectives of current study are (1) to examine the influence of media reputation on customers behavioral intentions; (2) to explore the points of view of media reputation from owner-managers of small Chinese restaurants; (3) to discuss if there is difference between owner-managers and customers.

This study is the first work to discuss the media reputation from both owner-managers and customers, and they may have different points of view from owner-managers. This is important for both theoretically and practically. Practically, this study can provide owner-managers with various insights into the role of reputation on customers behavioral intention. The conceptual framework, questionnaire survey instrument, and findings can be used to help owner-managers to understand the importance of media reputation on customers. This can also help them to attract and retain more customers, which could lead to increase revenue income and customers loyalty. In addition, the comments from owner-managers can help researchers to know the real ideas in owner-managers mind. The unique contribution of this study is to discuss the media reputation of small Chinese restaurants from both customers and owner-managers.

1.1. Media Reputation

The media includes contains newspaper, television, radio, and even internet, which can be seen as a platform aims to play a communication tool. Customers always receive information of a firm or a product from the media, which can enhance customers first impression of the company. Kim and Ko [20] suggest that the media record public knowledge and opinions, and the report from the media can have a dramatic impact on a company's reputation. Deephouse [18] also indicates that media reputation was valuable, rare, non-substitutable, and imperfectly imitable. Consequently, the positive reputation is an intangible resource leading to competitive advantages between reputation and the media.

In addition, it needs to deserve to be mentioned that media reputation develops over time through a complex social process. This makes it quite difficult to devise a replacement. Thus, the chance of imitability is reduced [3, 9]. In summation, the complex and social nature of media reputation means that reputation may be hard to imitate and there is a lack of an open market for reputation, except for the acquisition by the firm itself. Accordingly, firms do not ignore the conceptions of a business in the media. Overall, media have played an important role in determining reputation and the media reputation is a kind of intangible, economic asset which would contribute to a business which has a good image that comes from customer value. Customers acquire information via the media, and recalls that this information related to firms may influence purchasing decision-making [18, 20].

1.2. Behavioral Intention

Behavioral intention has been identified by Eagly and Chaiken [21], as a person's conscious plan to exert effort to carry out a particular behavior with these intentions being formed from both a personal evaluative and a normative construct. This is regard to that behavioral intention equates to conative loyalty or intention to rebuy [22]. Furthermore, behavioral intentions of customers are conceived as either favorable or unfavorable. Favorable behavioral intentions lead to positive praise for the company or product, and customers are willing to pay price premiums. On the other hand, unfavorable behaviors where customers tend to switch the company or product, and display unwillingness to pay more [23].

2. Methodology

Siu and Kirby [24] review relevant research methodology for small firm marketing and suggest the adoption of a contextual stepwise approach. The approach outlines a three-stage contextual stepwise approach to the study of small business research. They are exploratory research, descriptive study, and in-depth interview. That is because small firms, especially in Chinese society, compared with large companies, are less willing to open the door to an unknown researcher for investigation. Moreover, small firms are less willing to cooperate in research surveys and are often quite reluctant to open up the company to an unknown researcher to carry out their research [25]. Another troublesome problem to be faced is that in Chinese society there is a strong preference for secrecy regarding profits and business operations, the reasons for which are not altogether clear [26, 27]. In summation, Chinese owner-managers prefer to maintain a low profile [25]. Furthermore, as suggested by Davidsson [28] that small business research requires both quantitative and qualitative approaches. This is very similar to the suggestions of Siu and Kirby [24], the three-stage contextual stepwise approach to small business marketing research.

However, not only the three-stage contextual stepwise approach, but also the suggestions from Davidsson [28], the target research sample is owner-manager of small business. For this study, we do not plan to design a questionnaire for owner managers. That is because the most common field strategy in small business is the interview, particularly face-to-face interview [29]. Moreover, previous research has found that managers are more likely to be interviewed, rather than complete a questionnaire, especially when the topic is seen to be interesting and relevant to their own current work [25, 29].

Overall, in order to receive points of view of media reputation from both owner-managers and customers, this study therefore yields both quantitative and qualitative approaches to assess the points of view between owner-managers of small Chinese restaurants and customers. Two versions of questionnaires have been designed. A questionnaire was designed for collecting data from customers. Another semi-structured interview questionnaire was also developed for owner-managers.

2.1. Theoretical Model and Hypotheses

The survey instrument should contain measures of media reputation and behavioral intentions. However, the measure of media reputation is difficultly derived from the existing literatures, because the range of media reputation is huge. Wartick [30] also states that the definition of reputation perhaps is the most comprehensive issue. Therefore, the conceptual model was structured in the following way. First, we review the concept of reputation with particular reference to customer-based and the media. As suggested that reputation emerges from many elements, these elements are: (i) managerial quality; (ii) financial strength; (iii) product and service quality; (iv) innovation; (v) use of corporate assets/efficiency; (vi) capability to gather, develop and retain talented people; (vii) social responsibility among the community; and (viii) value of long term investment [3, 31]. As this research focuses on small firms, it is thought that some items would not be relevant, for example: managerial quality, financial strength, use of corporate assets/efficiency and so forth. In the end, we demonstrate three common variables which may interest customers in small firms, especially for small restaurants, such as product (food) quality, service quality and social responsibility. Walsh and Beatty [10] also adapt these three variables as factors of customer-based reputation (CBR). The definition of customer-based reputation (CBR) as the customer's overall evaluation of a firm based on his or her reactions to the firm's goods, services, communication activities, interactions with the firm and/or its representatives or constituencies (such as employees, management, or other customers) and/or known corporate activities [10]. Accordingly, we can decide to make a decision that product quality, service quality and social responsibility should be included in the structure.

Second, in order to identify customers points of view of what kind of media reputation that may influence customers behavioral intention. We also interviewed twenty customers who include five university staffs and five university students at Tainan University of Technology; and ten patrons in the restaurants. Therefore, twelve unstructured interviews were undertaken individually and two focus group interviews with interviewees were conducted before designing the quantitative questionnaire. Their previous experience of media reputation received has helped this study with a way to establish a conceptual framework. A

narrative analysis was used in this study to examine what kind of reputation from the media may influence their behavioral intentions of small Chinese restaurants.

Finally, following the suggestions generated in the processes, we decided to address the topics of service quality, product quality, social responsibility, food price, and atmosphere in the restaurant. Accordingly, a figure identifying the key constructs included in the study is provided in Figure 1.

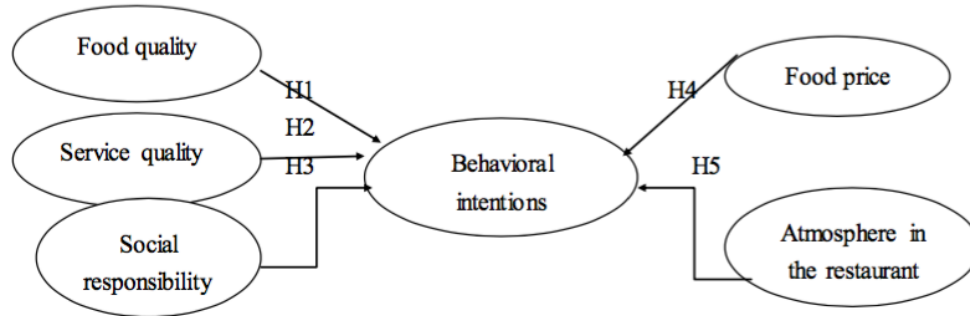


Figure 1: Proposed model

2.2. The effects of food and service quality on behavioral intention

Quality is an elusive and indistinct construct [32]. It is clearly something that business has to provide not only product but service quality to their customers. Previous literature has identified that reputation is considered as an intangible asset that can contribute to a competitive advantage in the marketplace of goods and service [9, 19, 33]. Following the research by Castro et al. [34], reputation is the main issue of the core business and two main components are product and service quality.

There is no doubt the importance of food and service quality for restaurant industry. Both can be seen as assets which can improve a restaurant competitiveness and profitability. For instance, food quality definitely is the first considered element for dining out in the restaurant. Moreover, service quality from customers perspective is one of the most important developments in the service industry. Service quality cannot be counted, measured, tested or verified in advance, so that it is difficult for firms or researchers to understand how consumers perceive their service and evaluate service quality [23]. However, the endorsed frameworks reflect conceptual and empirical works that support associations between service quality and satisfaction [35], service quality and loyalty [36]. This means service quality leads to satisfaction and loyalty. Therefore, it can be accepted that the media reputation of food quality and service quality may influence customers behavioral intentions. Overall, these descriptions supply general support for the suggestion that:

H1. The media reputation of product quality has a positive effect on customers' behavioral intentions.

H2. The media reputation of service quality has a positive effect on customers' behavioral intentions.

2.3. Effect of social responsibility on behavioral intention

Social responsibility means customers perceptions that the company sees and acts on environmental and social responsibilities [10]. This is also a core issue of reputation [34]. Previous research has revealed that reputation emerges from social responsibility [3, 10, 15]. The dimension social responsibility has a positive association with trust and customer satisfaction [10]. Brown and Dacin [36] also indicate that the reputation of social responsibility may influence how consumers think about a company. Hence,

H3. The media reputation of social responsibility has a positive effect on customers' behavioral intentions.

Effect of food price on behavioral intention

Customers' personal attributes can affect the price that they are willing to pay. A company with a positive reputation will enjoy higher price [12, 37]. There is also a positive relationship between companies

reputation and final price premium [35, 37]. This study therefore tries to explore the relationship between reputation and price, but from the other direction: from price to reputation. This can define how this reputation influences restaurant selection by customers. Hence,

H4. The media reputation of food price has a positive effect on customers' behavioral intentions.

2.4. *Effect of atmosphere in the restaurant on behavioral intention*

Many studies have examined that atmosphere, also called physical environment in the service environment, have effects on consumer behavior and identified the importance or the roles of atmosphere in the service environments [38–43]. The pertinent studies have identified the physical environment is a precursor of service quality [23] and this will influence customers behavioral intention and enhance customers satisfaction [39–45] and loyalty [23, 46]. Reimer and Kuehn [47] also find that restaurant patrons expect a well designed and built environment if they are to consume in a highly-priced restaurant, and customers demands of atmosphere also depend on the prices in the restaurant. Hence,

H5. The media reputation of atmosphere has a positive effect on customers' behavioral intentions.

2.5. *Measures and samples*

The survey instrument contained measures of behavioral intentions and five product quality, service quality, food price, social responsibility and atmosphere in the restaurant and are largely derived from the existing body of literature on this subject area. First, the behavioral intentions have often been seen as part of loyalty and in this regard this study followed the work of Mehrabian and Russell [48] and Zeithaml et al. [23], and adapts their scale to fit the small Chinese restaurant. Secondly, the food quality and service quality were designed to measure the overall food and service quality. The scales were based on the four-item scale forwarded by Walsh et al. [49] with some modifications. Thirdly, to measure social responsibility and the scale suggested by Walsh et al. [49] with some modifications to fit small firm. Fourthly, the four-item food price scale measured how effective people thought the price or discount of restaurant provided was developed by focus group interview and extensive pre-testing procedures. Finally, this study measured the perceptions of atmosphere in the restaurant. Three attributes reflect three dimensions of atmosphere ambience, spatial layout and interior design [41, 44, 50] were selected in the structure. All items used a Likert-type seven-point response scale, ranging from not at all (1) to very strongly (7).

Finally, data are collected on a street and where many restaurants are doing business there in Southern Taiwan. A systematic sampling was demonstrated to select participants as they walk in the street. Data were obtained from Monday to Sunday, therefore both weekday and weekend customers were surveyed. A total of 150 males and 172 female, ranging in age from 18 to 70 years, are collected.

2.6. *A Semi-structured Questionnaire*

As described this study adopts both quantitative and qualitative approaches. These two methods have to be a proper match between the research question and the chosen approach [28]. For this study, the interviewer had a framework, as same as Figure 1, of themes to be explored. Therefore, a semi-structured questionnaire was designed and the questions similar to the quantitative questionnaire. The advantages of semi-structured interview allows new questions to be discussed, for instance do you agree media reputation of product quality has an effect on customers behavior intention? and why?, during the interview as a result of what they said.

2.7. *Samples*

This study simply wants to know points of view about media reputation from the owner-managers of small Chinese restaurants. Non-probability convenience sampling is perhaps the best way of getting some primary information quickly and efficiently. As data collected of quantitative questionnaire is on a street in Southern Taiwan. In order to follows the suggestions of [28], this study also interviews the owner-managers of the restaurants on the same street. Therefore, the two kinds of research methodologies obtain matching samples, the owner-managers of the restaurants and their customers. According to the interviews, this study can provide a sensitive discussion of the effects of media reputation from owner-managers on customers behavioral intention.

3. Results

Overall, there are 322 useable samples, a total of 150 males and 172 female. Ages 31-40 (39.1%) and 21-30 (35.1) account for the biggest portion of the sample, followed by 41-50 (13.9%). In all, 67% hold a bachelor's degree or higher, while 27.9% have achieved the education level of senior high school. The shared of married respondents (57.5%) is higher than unmarried respondents. Respondents with a monthly income NTD20, 001-40,000 account for slightly more than 40%; while service worker (31.6%) or clerical worker (25.4%) are the major occupations of the respondents. Overall, Table 1 presents a profile of the sample.

Table 1: Sample Profile

Characteristic		%			%
Gender			Monthly income (NTD) ^a		
Male	150	46.6	less than 20,000	32	9.9
Female	172	53.4	20,001-30,000	106	32.9
Marital status			30,001-40,000	90	27.9
Married	185	57.5	40,001-50,000	42	13.0
Single	137	42.5	over 50.000	52	16.1
Age			Occupation		
under 20	16	4.9	Student	18	5.5
21-30	113	35.1	Civil servant	18	5.5
31-40	126	39.1	Service worker	102	31.6
41-50	45	13.9	Self-employed	40	12.4
51-60	16	4.9	Housework	17	5.2
60 above	6	1.8	Clerical worker	80	25.4
Education			Others	47	14.5
Junior high school or less	16	4.9			
Senior high school	90	27.9			
Bachelor's degree	193	59.9			
Master's degree or above	23	7.1			

^a: 1USD = 30 NT

The internal validity of the measurement model is examined by the results of reliability and average variance extracted (AVE). As can be seen from Table 2, the composite reliabilities of the six constructs range from 0.71-0.83 and are well above the recommended value of 0.70 [38]. The AVE of each measure ranges from 0.55 to 0.68, which is more than 50% of the variance as suggested by Hair et al. [38]. Therefore, the internal validity of the construct is adequate.

Table 2: Measure scales and summary statistics

Behavioral intention $\alpha = .71$, AVE=.54	I would like to come to the restaurant.
	I would recommend the restaurant to my friends.
	I am willing to stay longer than I used to stay in the restaurant.
	I am willing to spend more than I used to spend in the restaurant.
Food quality $\alpha = .74$, AVE=.66	The restaurant is a strong and reliable restaurant.
	The restaurant develops innovative services.
	The restaurant offer high quality food.
Service quality $\alpha = .82$, AVE=.66	The restaurant is a strong and reliable restaurant.
	The restaurant develops innovative services.
	The restaurant offer high quality service.
	The restaurant stands behind the services that it offers.
Social responsibility $\alpha = .83$, AVE=.68	The restaurant seems to make an effort to create new jobs.
	The restaurant seems to be environmentally responsibility.
	The restaurant would reduce its profits to ensure a clean environment.
	The restaurant appears to support good cause.
Food price $\alpha = .72$, AVE=.55	Price of main meals is cheaper than others.
	Price of sweet and drinks is cheaper than others.
	Service charge is lower than others.
	Special discount
Amtophere $\alpha = .74$, AVE=.60	Ambience
	Spatial layout
	Interior design

As shown on Table 3, a significant overall relationship between the independent variables and behavioral intention where $F(5, 316) = 626.543$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.90$, $B = 0.717$, and t -statistic = 5.538. However, only two of the fifth proposed relationships are revealed to be individually statistically significant. They are service quality ($B = 0.956$, $t = 51.720$) and social responsibility ($B = 0.042$, $t = 2.468$) have directly and positively associated with the behavioral intentions of consumers. Hence, H2 and H3 can be accepted without reservation. However, the food quality, food price and atmosphere are not directly associated with the behavioral intentions of customers. Thus, H1, H4 and H5 are rejected.

Table 3: Regression results for Behavioral intention

Variables		B	t-statistics
Constant		0.717	5.538***
Direct linkages			
Hypothesis 1:	Food Quality	0.006	0.378
Hypothesis 2:	Service Quality	0.042	2.468*
Hypothesis 3:	Social Responsibility	0.956	51.720***
Hypothesis 4:	Food Price	-0.003	-0.181
Hypothesis 5:	Atmosphere	-0.001	-0.070
Diagnostic statistics			
Adjusted $R^2 = 0.90$			
$F(5, 316) = 626.543$			
Multicollinearity	Passed (Checked via Tolerance and VIF)		
Linearity	Passed		
Heteroscedasticity Passed			

* Statistical significance at the 0.05 level;

***Statistical significance at the 0.001 level

4. Discussion

The study examines the effects of the media reputation on customers behavioral intentions. The findings of the study support the following conclusions. Firstly, the variable which made the largest contribution to prediction of media reputation is social responsibility. In addition, the media reputations of service quality also can directly link into behavioral intention. Secondly, unlike literatures in prior studies, the three media reputation drivers show no significant influence on customers behavioral intention in the case of small Chinese restaurant.

There are three possible reasons for the results are as follows. First, this may be because this study focuses on small restaurants. Small firms mostly rely on local markets or small geographic markets, especially for restaurant industry [51]. Consequently, their customer base is limited. Therefore, it can be inferred that customers may think the restaurant recommended from the media is quite far away from their place. Another possibility would be due to increased competition among restaurants, it has become more difficult to sustain customers behavioral intention toward a specific media reputation and other factors might have been affecting behavioral intention more than the three drivers examined in this study. Third, this could be because the food tainted by scandal last year. In 2013, a series of food security scandals and scares, which include the adulteration of rice, edible oils, milk and saltwater fish, has shaken Taiwanese society, almost destroying public trust in the government in the process. Therefore, customers may not believe recommendations from the media anymore and this needs further research. This also can refer back to the results of social responsibility is the most significant factor on the framework.

A narrative analysis is used to examine the owner-managers tell about the media reputation of restaurant on customers. Overall, 15 interviews were conducted. The majority of respondents are of prime age between 40 and 59 years of age. Middle or low academic achievement is present (high school degree or lower, and nearly all respondents who graduated from senior high school were from a vocational school).

All of these 15 respondents agree or strongly agree that the reputation of restaurants is important to the customer. They all believe it is a good way to strengthen customers behavioral intention by establishing a good reputation in customers minds. Although managers agree that reputation will positively affect customers behavior, only just under half of owner-managers agree or strongly agree that their reputation is due to the media, or they do not think about the media reputation.

Finally, although the owner-managers of small restaurants are confident of success, they put themselves in an uncertain environment. They are confusing many of the critical issues, for example in the cases of social responsibility and profit, the range of visibility and formation of relationships with the media, a well relationship with media or focusing on personal contact, and so forth.

5. Conclusion

The current study supplies an empirical contribution through both questionnaire collected and personal interviews on the impact of media reputation on customers behavioral intention. For the quantitative research, a series of statistical analysis procedures were adopted to test the relationships in the models. The variable which made the largest contribution to prediction of media reputation from customers is social responsibility. The owner-managers, however, have different points of view, they have thought about their restaurants reputation, but it not come from the media. In addition, the media reputation of service quality also can directly link into behavioral intentions of consumers. Overall, this study provides different points of view of media reputation and the main conclusion of the research drawn from this study is to connect the media reputation and customers behavior from both customers and the owner-managers of Chinese restaurants.

6. Recommendations

Consistent with Walsh and Beatty [10] and Parasuraman et al. [32], the results of the study have demonstrated that the media reputations of social responsibility and service quality play important roles on customers behavioral intention. Although the owner-managers may have different points of view of social responsibility, this study still recommends that owner-managers of small Chinese restaurant should

pay extra attention to social responsibility and service quality to match customers intended purpose for customers in order to enhance positive outcome in customers. The current study has a number of limitations. The first limitation involves the use of only one restaurant sector within a specific segment of the restaurant industry, a small Chinese restaurant. A second limitation relates to the adoption of only five reputation attributes. In fact, there are many different types of restaurants. Moreover, the reputation is intangible and it may have other different attributes. Future research can apply different reputation elements and different service environments or types of restaurants other than small Chinese restaurant. Consequently, the results of our findings can only be generalized to a typical small Chinese restaurant. Other than the type of small Chinese restaurant, the generalization of other types of restaurants needs to be established and generalized with caution.

The results of our study demonstrated the weaker nature of food quality, food price, and atmosphere in the model. We would like to address this limitation and at the same time, suggest that perhaps the food quality, price and atmosphere in this study could not as good of a chance to show the effect on customers behavior as social responsibility can. This may be because the target sample is small Chinese restaurant. For future research, we recommend similar research model be put into the test in all different kinds of restaurants and additional samples consumers of restaurants is necessary. The final limitation relates to the methodology. As explained this study adopts the contextual stepwise approach. However, we did collect quantitative questionnaire from owner-managers. For future research, this study does suggest that researcher should try to collect quantitative questionnaire from owner-managers.

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