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“Restaurant Service Failure in a Digital Era:  
An Investigation of the e-WOM Impact on Irish  
Millennials’ Dining Experiences”

**MSc. in Marketing**

**Andreea Roxana Vintea**  
Submitted to the National College of Ireland, August 2018

## ABSTRACT

### **Purpose:**

The purpose of this study is twofold: to develop an understanding of Millennials’ impact on the Irish restaurant industry, in a digital era *and* to investigate what are their service recovery expectations when the service experienced fails to meet their required standards.

### **Design/Methodology/Approach:**

*Exploratory* in nature, this research was constructed under the interpretivist philosophy using an *inductive* approach.

Primary data were collected using a qualitative method – *focus groups discussions* which contained (5 participants for each of the 3 focus groups completed).

The *sample* encompassed 6-Irish, 4-Russians, 2-French, 2-Indians and 1-Estonian.

Using a *thematically* approach, data analysis exposed valid insights about the Millennials’ *opinions* towards the impact of e-WOM on their overall dining experiences and *attitudes* regarding restaurant service failures.

### **Findings:**

In a digital era, e-WOM was found as the utmost influencer for the restaurants’ services, as having the power not only to sway their perceptions of ‘quality’ but as well, to shape their behavioural characteristics.

With few exceptions, findings emphasised a higher tendency for satisfactory experiences to be shared online compared with the unsatisfactory ones. The common thread was attributable to their inner desire of sharing positivity as opposed to negativity, where Millennials’ dining experiences per se, were shared in the virtual space only in extreme cases. Thus, a mediocre experience where pre-determined expectations pair with service delivery does not trigger any kind of emotions.]

The most frequently mentioned concern linked with the attitude of the restaurants’ personnel who were required to acknowledge their mistakes, apologize and take responsibility for the issue. Participants sought additional support in finding a solution for the occurrence in a polite and respectful manner. In terms of outcomes or results, findings proved that Millennials requested adequate compensations to match their financial loss and replacement of the meal.

### **Originality/Value:**

This Dissertation brings value to the existing services marketing literature concentrated around hospitality industry and business practitioners, by revealing findings from an Irish Millennial perspective, around e-WOM influences, both a positive and a negative on their ‘dining experiences’. Moreover, the study informs about behavioural characteristics and general services recovery expectations when experiencing a less favourable situation.

### **Key Words:**

e-WOM, Web 2.0, Millennials, Restaurants, Dining Experiences, Hospitality Industry, Services Marketing, Service Failure, Service Recovery Expectations, Complaining Behaviour.

### **Paper Type:**

Research Paper – Dissertation

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks for my supervisor, Dave Hurley, who guided and motivated me over the past years in the learning process, as well as his patience and support for completing this Dissertation.

I would like to express my appreciation for all the participants in the research who made this Dissertation possible.

Last but not least, I would like to say a big `thank you` to my family and dearest friends for their constant encouragements along the entire journey.

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## CHAPTER 1 - OVERVIEW

### 1.1. Background to the Research Problem

Since the rise of digital transformation and proliferation of social media, the Irish Hospitality sector grabbed attention from both academia and industry practitioners. Traditional scholars discussed profusely the experiential services and specifically, the consumer behaviour in the services environments.

Contemporary researchers, on the other hand, are challenged now to understand the swaying power of e-WOM shared thru social networking sites on purchase decision journeys and how e-WOM might shape behavioural characteristics for the Millennial generation (Fox and Longard 2016; Yang 2017; Panchengo 2018).

This dissertation aims to add value to the existing services marketing literature concentrated around the hospitality industry, by bringing fresh and valid insights for both, researchers and marketing practitioners. This study was built on secondary findings from scholars and industry reports which encouraged the author to pursue a primary research with the intention to broaden the current knowledge.

The literature review findings shaped the paper in a more structured way, as well as leading the author to investigate the current issues in a thematically approach. From these, the research questions and objectives were further developed to support the present research achieving the overall goal.

This research is exploratory in nature, where findings were built using an inductive approach under the 'interpretivist' philosophy. Primary data were strategically collected using a qualitative method – focus group discussions, with the aim of exploring, recognizing and probing the issue matter. The qualitative data provided the author with valid and meaningful insights to formulate a strong background for answering the research questions and later, engender the conclusions.

## **1.2. Justification for Research**

### **1.2.1. Academic Justification**

As the Web 2.0 continues to grow (Litvin, Goldsmith and Pan 2008) the academic body of research and marketing practitioners already envisioned the emerging trends in the hospitality industry, attributable to the cutting-edge technology advancements.

Restaurants as part of this industry, are advised to embrace and adapt to the new trends to in an ongoing competitive environment. Although most of the restaurants strive to have failure free services, the occurrence is inevitable (McCollough 2009; Krishna 2009).

Nevertheless, how Millennials` respond to a service failure in a digital era remains a springboard for research. Given these, the author aims to delve deeper in developing an understanding of how e-WOM shared thru social networking channels and emergent reviews based web pages might impact the Irish Millennials` dining experiences and how this generation of `digital natives` might change the food industry.

Moreover, this study seeks to demonstrate to which extent the qualitative analysis of the Irish Millennials` insights advises about the possible impact that e-WOM might have on their `dining experiences`. Building on the existing framework and traditionally taught vis-à-vis customer`s responses to service failure, theorized by (Lovelock et al. 2009), the study looks deeper into Millennials rational thinking, to develop an understanding of their complaining behaviour and how their actions and feedbacks might impact the restaurant businesses.

As a continuation of (Tax, Brown and Chandrasekharan`s 1998) study, and researched from a Millennial perspective, the author pursues to investigate what their recovery expectations might be, when the restaurant service experienced falls below their accepted standards.

### **1.2.1. Market justification**

Millennials are known to be a digital savvy generation which uses technology, internet-based platforms and social media, on a daily basis, for almost every aspect of their life. Known as individualistic and constantly in search for social approval, the way they dine is no exception from the rule.

For a large proportion of this cohort, the emergent social networking sites along with the rising reviews web-based platforms shaped the way they look for information. National Restaurant Association (2017) estimated that over 34% of people look at reviews before they make a purchase. Additionally, 'The Local Consumer Survey' conducted by Bright Local (2017), estimated that approximately 85% of consumer would trust online recommendations as much as personal ones.

The same study revealed a staggering discovery, that, on average people would read 7 reviews before they could trust the business and that, this trend has grown 6 times more as compared with last year. With no surprise, this behaviour rise attention for the hospitality industry experts, marketers and academic body of research, who examined the power and influence of positive and negative reviews on businesses performances.

### **1.2.3. Personal justification**

The hospitality industry has always been an attractive area for the author, which sparked the idea of broadening the background of knowledge in services marketing. The author strongly believes that all the captivating research conducted along the journey of completing this Dissertation, along with the interesting findings and results generated by this investigation, would benefit for pursuing the ambitious career as a Business Consultant.

## **1.3. Research Aims and Objectives**

### **1.3.1. Research Problem Definition**

The fundamental aim of this research is to develop an understanding of Millennials' impact on the restaurant industry, in a digital era. Considering the emerge of technology advancements, the proliferation of social networking sites, and more recently, the reviews based-websites, the objective is to investigate if e-WOM has the influencing power of shaping the Millennials' dining experiences.

The study, further seeks to find out what are the service recovery expectations of the Irish Millennials' when experiencing a less favourable situation and to understand in what circumstances they would engage in complaining behaviour.

The **Research Question** can be formulated as:

*“What are the effects of e-WOM influences on the Irish Millennials` dining experiences? “*

### **1.3.2. Research Objectives**

#### **Objective 1:**

*“To investigate if Millennial’s ‘dining experiences’ has changed in a digitally connected society”.*

#### More specifically:

To examine if Millennial consumers perceived any variances in their dining experiences as a consequence of Social Media proliferation and to learn if e-WOM had any degree of influence in their choices.

- Observed Variances
- e-WOM Alleged Influence
- e-WOM Credibility
  - e-WOM perceived as `Trustworthy`
  - e-WOM perceived as `Deceitful`
- Alternative Influencers

#### **Objective 2:**

*“To study if Millennials use e-WOM to share about their satisfaction or disappointment with the service experienced”.*

#### In particular:

To investigate when Millennials are most likely to share online about their dining experiences and to examine the main personal triggers for engaging in complaining actions.

- Satisfactory vs. Unsatisfactory Dining Experiences
- Customers’ Complaining Behaviour
- Apparent Value of Complaints
- Type of Complainers

### **Objective3:**

*“To examine if Millennials use e-WOM to make a complaint and develop an understanding about their recovery expectations”.*

#### More specifically:

To investigate Millennials’ evaluations of service complaint experiences and examine what their recovery expectations might be from the Restaurant’s employees or management.

- Customers’ Evaluations of Complaint Experiences
- Dimensions of ‘Perceived Fairness’ in the Service Recovery Process

### **1.4. Scope and Limitations**

This research looks mainly at developing an understanding around Irish Millennial consumers’ impact on the Restaurant industry, in a digital era.

The investigation seeks to find out if e-WOM have any power in swaying consumers, in a positive or a negative way, when consulting social networking sites or any other reviews based websites. Lastly, this study looks at behavioural attitudes when Millennials’ experienced a disappointing dining experience underpinning their service recovery expectations.

This study is approached from a consumer perspective only (Irish Millennials from Dublin) and does not include any managerial viewpoints.

### **1.5. Dissertation Structure**

With the effort of making this paper clear and easy to follow, the author approached the following structure:

The **abstract** offers a snapshot or a short summary of this paper.

#### **CHAPTER 1: OVERVIEW**

The **first** chapter of this Dissertation provides a background to the research problem by offering a clear justification for research. The objectives and scope provide a sharp understanding of the author’s intentions with regards to the overall purpose of the primary research.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The **second** chapter offers an academically background that include both references from the existing literature as well as industry reports. This tactic helped the author to set the study within the broader context and to structure the rest of the paper in a thematically approach.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The **third** chapter presents the methodological progression of the primary research which enabled the author to underline the value and reliability of the findings generated by the qualitative data collection. The last part presents the limitations of the present research.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The **fourth** chapter enabled the author to present in a logical flow the findings obtained from primary data collection. In this chapter, the findings are discussed and analysed using the author`s deductions and assumptions, based on the results - direct quotes from the focus group discussions as well as academics references, where applicable. Results from data sample are presented in graphical formats for an enhanced visualisation and understanding.

## CHAPTER 5:

**Lastly**, in this chapter, the author highlights the conclusions of the research. Based on the study`s own limitations, and emergent from the findings and discussion section, possible springboards for future research were suggested. And **finally**, this chapter includes some suggestions for industry practitioners and restaurant managers.



## CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Overview

#### 2.1.1. Literature Review Introduction

The literature review is defined by Collis and Hussey (2014: 87) as “the critical evaluation of the existing body of knowledge on a topic”, which offers the foundation for research. When the literature review is robust, contextualised and critical, will provide the readers with sufficient theories and published material to support any investigation or analysis of that particular work. Doing a literature review it helps the academics to offer a critical and realistic overview of what studies have been completed before.

#### 2.1.2. Content of the Literature Review

The first part of the literature review contains details about the Irish service sector and how this segment has changed with the emerge of technology. Statistics from industry reports and government publications are merged with academic journals to provide a holistic view of the importance of the services sector in the Irish economy. A section of this chapter covers the literature around the service failure and recovery, emphasizing the possible effects of the recovery process in the restaurant business.

The second part of the literature review is mainly focused on the Millennial generation and seeks to understand how e-WOM shared thru different communication channels might influence their dining experiences. Finally, the literature pursues to investigate further the Millennials’ online behaviour and recovery expectations when a service fails below their standards, with a particular focus on their complaints experiences. Both parts are amalgamated, to provide a clear picture for the research background, to give strong evidence for the research purpose and formulation of the subsequent research questions, which will be further scrutinized in the next chapter of this Dissertation.

### 2.2. Services Marketing

Several authors have recognised services as part of our everyday life, considering them - ‘drivers of happiness’ when the technical and the functional service quality is satisfactory (Keyser and Lariviere 2014). Some authors perceived services “as experiences” (Wilson, Zeithaml, Bitner and Gremler 2016: 10), while other academics remarked that services enable brands to develop intimate customer relationships (Hsieh and Hiang 2004; Eisingerich and Bell 2008).

The traditional academics such as Lovelock, Parasuraman, Zeithaml, Berry and Gronroos who dominated the 80s and 90s publications and long after this, combined their researches with a plethora of experts and industry leaders who enhanced the existing service marketing academia (Boksberger and Melsen 2011).

The service literature has been discussed and analysed for many centuries offering sizzling debates and contrasting opinions around different aspects of service marketing and what services means.

For instance, Vargo and Lusch (2004) disputed a new dominant logic for service marketing. This concept was further investigated by Gronroos (2011) who emphasized the creation of value thru customers' interaction and the role of customers played in service delivery. More recently, the Internet and technology allowed these interactions to evolve with the emerge of Web 2.0 tools such as websites, social media platforms and similar networking channels, online forums, review sites, apps and location-based services (Wilson et al. 2016).

Although academia presents a wide choice of papers about services and marketing of services, this research focuses on providing a review of the literature on the hospitality industry and restaurants.

The author brings information about the background of the problem by specifically looking into the Irish marketplace thru providing up-to-date industry data, market insights and growth trends. The method introduced by the author has the advantage of providing from the early stages of the investigation a clearer picture of the Irish service market size. This approach enables the readers to appreciate the value of the current research findings from both literature review and additionally from the primary data collection.

## **2.3. The Irish Service Sector in the 'Digital Era'**

### **2.3.1. Market Size and Trends**

A series of recent studies have indicated that Ireland, a small country in the EU succeeded to recover and grow exponentially over the past years, by developing a globalised economy and a prodigious exporting service sector. For example, the research conducted by the CSO (2018) demonstrated that Ireland has provided evidence for a sustainable economic growth, as the total exporting service sector registered a record high of over €122 million after the big economic downturn.

Other surveys validated this affirmation, as the OECD (2018) report - 'Economic Survey of Ireland 2018' claimed that the Irish Service Sector accounted for 75% of employment across the country. This has also been explored by different global statistics publications which affirmed the recent 'boom' of the Irish Service sector. The Central Intelligence Agency - The World Factbook (2018) discovered that there was an estimation of approximately 60.7% of GDP attributable to services sector alone.

### **2.3.2. The Irish Hospitality Sector**

Although the shadows of the last's decade economic recession are still sensed the industry reports and Government publications proved with encouraging statistic a flourishing hospitality industry, as the Hospitality Sector Oversight Group - Interim (2017) estimated an outstanding €3 billion worth for Irish hospitality sector alone.

Research has also been carried out by the Central Statistics Office - CSO (2017) to measure the workforce employed in this sector. The results were published in the 'Quarterly National Household Survey' revealing a total number of 148,000 workers with a 3.5% increase in employment from the previous year. In addition, with the studies described above, the research report commissioned by the DIGI - Drinks Industry Group of Ireland (2016) claim that "Ireland is the home to 7.193 public houses, 2.406 licensed restaurants, 3.161 off-licences, 983 licensed hotels (including similar venues with licensed bars), 98 producers and 483 wholesalers in the Drink and Hospitality sector" (DIGI – Drinks Industry Group of Ireland 2016).

First, this sector alone supports the tourism expenditure of €6.4 billion, from which "food and beverage consumption accounts for 35% of all international tourism revenues" (Failte Ireland – 'Food and Drinks Strategy 2018-2023' 2018: 5) which benefits the overall country economic value and growth. Second, the hospitality sector including pubs, restaurants, hotels, sector producers, etc. constitutes 10% of all jobs and exports accounting for over €1.25 billion worth of production (DIGI – Drinks Industry Group of Ireland 2016).

Given these statistics, it can be said that the research findings obtained from a Millennial perspective and applied in the restaurant's context, will bring value for the industry practitioners.

The proliferation of social media platforms and other social networking channels influences on Millennials 'dining experience' remains briefly discussed in the literature.

Most of the early studies focused on the growing numbers and augmented profits disregarding the impact of these ‘digital generations’, how they ‘consume’ services and respond to service failures as this cohort are described as heavy users of technology and digital space. In this paper, the author attempts to address this gap by initially pinning down few emerging trends in the Restaurant Business and discuss the influence of technology in the service sector.

### **2.3.2.1. The Hospitality Sector and Digital Landscape**

Seminal contributions to the service literature were made by contemporary academics and researchers who discussed the digital transformation widespread, how the Internet and particularly, the proliferation of social networks are constantly shaping the hospitality industry (Fox and Longard 2016; Yang 2017; Pacheco 2018).

Looking from a critical perspective, there are scholars who offer contrasting viewpoints about these social interactions believing that the effects of technology adoption, e-WOM and online reviews might have negative influences on restaurant employees or managers by presenting them as “stressor effects on anger and burnout in the restaurant industry” (Weber, Bradley and Sparks 2017).

On the flip side, the annual study conducted by Failte Ireland (2018)– ‘Tourism Barometer’ stated that 56% of restaurants claimed drop-in sales mainly because of the increased operating costs. Considering this statement, there are several industry leaders who suggest the adoption of Technology into their streamline operations as a good way in creating a differentiation point, enhancing their customers’ experience and defining a sustainable competitive advantage. As an example, Toast (2017) in their third annual report – ‘Restaurant Technology in 2017’ affirmed that 73% of restaurant-goers have started to embrace technology to augment their dining experience while 95% of restaurant owners agreed that technology improved their business efficiency.

These competencies were attributable to the Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning Algorithms which proved to boost the overall productivity and efficiency in the hospitality sector. For example, data collection capacity is aggregated into specialized platforms that transform raw data into contextualized insights which enable managers to stay better informed and make efficient decisions. Shorter waiting and preparing times for food orders, distinguished purchasing patterns, customer habits, are just a few of the benefits that Toast (2017) industry report ascertain to be achieved by simply using a handheld tablet by the employees when taking orders or payments.

The same report claimed that 61% of diners agreed that the server handheld tablets, apps or mobile pay options improved their restaurant experience while 67% of restaurateurs found that tables enhanced their business efficacy.

The more enthusiast researchers and inventors Mercuri and Tisdale (2012) talked about the ‘connected car’ which allows customers to access services while driving, as the built-in systems can make recommendations about a restaurant or even make dinner reservations based on the current location and the GPS systems. Today, the revenue market of the ‘connected cars’ is growing exponentially, as the report from Statista (2018) highlights a market of €97m with a penetration rate of 32.9% that is expected to reach 79% by the year of 2022.

Considering that research has shown how technology can facilitate the restaurants’ services delivery in more accessible and appropriate ways for targeted consumers, it is worth mentioning further about the emergent trends regarding services business models. In the next section, the author will synthesize the impact of technology and specifically the Internet in developing new avenues for service encounter and service delivery performance.

#### **2.3.2.2. Platform Revolution and the Internet-Based Businesses**

A recent study has been carried out by Geoffrey, Marshall, Alstynne and Choudary (2018) who elaborated a deeper understanding about the ‘Platform Revolution’ phenomenon as the new business and organisational model of our digital era. The authors recognised the importance of platform-based business, as one of the highly significant economic developments of our epoch that use technology to create a connexion between people across boundaries. In a hyper-connected world, digital connectivity plays an important role in the social life of consumers, especially in the hospitality industry where these platforms “*beat the pipelines because platforms unlock new sources of value creation and supply*” (Geoffrey, Marshall, Alstynne and Choudary 2018: 13). The authors defend their statement by providing the Airbnb and Uber immense successful examples which operate completely as a platform-based business.

As a similar example, the Internet offers a wide range of free or premium Apps for the Irish consumers who wish to make an instant restaurant or bar booking directly on their smartphones (Restaurants Ireland). Additionally, customers can find information about the menus and special offers (Foodgawker) but also read or verbalise reviews and impressions with other customers.

Therefore, a customer can have a preview of the entire ‘dining experience’ in the virtual world (Yummly) or frame an opinion about a restaurant by reading the online reviews.

Irish businesses started to understand the power of a linked network where they can connect with the restaurant-goers, regardless of their dining requirements, by joining the emergent ‘Platform Revolution’ trend that Geoffrey, Marshall, Alstynne and Choudary (2018) discussed. As an example, The Irish Times (2017) magazine, talks about the ‘Zazu’ App which connects 30 businesses in Dublin and joins similar apps which target dining reservations like ‘Opentable’ –which includes the famous ‘Michellin App’.

#### **2.4. Service Failure and Recovery**

This section reviews the literature on Service Failure related to the hospitality industry with a focus on the restaurants’ segment. The author suggests this section as a stepping stone in creating a rationale for the research objectives, by delving deeper in understanding the Millennials’ impact on the restaurants business when using the Web 2.0 tools and e-WOM to communicate about their dining experiences.

The last part will attempt to present a well questioned theme in the service literature -the service recovery paradox, with the objective of highlighting possible effective recovery strategies and communication streams for restaurants’ employees and managers in the era of digital connectivity. Despite decades of research, service failure and recovery strategies continue to be debated among scholars’ due to a volatile marketplace and the looming influences of the digital platforms. The latest technology advancements and the emerge of social networks and other Web 2.0 tools were found in works of literature’ publications as the main influences for the gradual changes in the service landscape.

##### **2.4.1. Service Failure**

According with Wilson et al. (2016) service failure is described as “a service performance that fail below a customer’s expectation in such way that lead to customer dissatisfaction” (pp. 327) or in situations when “a service is not delivered as originally planned or expected” (Bateson and Hoffman 1999: 311).

The contemporary authors acknowledged that although companies struggle to have no failures, the occurrence in the delivery process is inevitable McCollough (2009).

Similar thoughts were shared by Krishna (2011) which appraised the previous literature findings affirming that is quite impossible to deliver failure free services even for the most competitive firms.

The existing literature provides different views about the possible occurrence of a service failure, where Komunda (2012) believes that a failure might occur because of a poor service provided – the core service, otherwise, as a product or a policy disappointment.

Additionally, it was suggested that a service failure might happen in the delivery process which leads to dissatisfaction after the service was ‘experienced’ (Lin 2009; Palmer 2011; Wilson et al. 2016). Palmer (2011) suggested that there are different levels of service failure occurrence, categorizing them from a low to a high impact - as in the case of a food poisoning in a Restaurant. Krishna (2011) continues Palmer’s investigation related to the service failures incidence, in the context of Restaurants, and remarked twelve levels of impact which might have serious consequences for customers who experienced that service. The author supports Palmer’s illustrations of severe consequences - ‘health loss’ and continues to describe medium failures as being related to the relationship that customers have with the service providers.

#### **2.4.1.1. Possible Effects of the Service Failure in Restaurants**

It was suggested by scholars, that restaurant managers should develop dynamic tactics to overcome service failures to keep customers satisfied and encourage repeat purchases.

As the literature review exposed, restaurants are highly reliable on the spread of positive e-WOM. Therefore, the effects of service failures could have an unprecedented impact on the brand image and the overall business performances in the era of digital connectivity.

Although there are many studies in hospitality literature, there are key questions and notions which are still not discussed in the academia. Grounded on this, the author identified a possible springboard of research, the study of e-WOM influence on the evaluations of customers complaining behaviour when a service fails below their desired state. The suggested research was grounded on Tax, Brown and Chandrashekar (1998) investigation who examined this topic by looking at possible implications for relationship marketing. The gap was determined as the authors disregarded the massive impact of e-WOM, possibly because their investigation was conducted in the past decade when the proliferation of social media was not as advanced as it is today.

#### **2.4.2. Service Recovery Process**

Seminal contributions were made by traditional scholars like Lovelock, Tax, Brown, Parasuraman and countless others who enriched the existing literature with exceptional theories and frameworks.

The contemporary academics took over these philosophies and applied them in more dynamic settings where the influence of social networks and e-WOM are dominant.

More recent studies identified service recovery as “actions taken by an organization in response to service failure” (Wilson et al. 2016: 327). The authors suggested that firms should understand their customers well to implement the correct strategies for recovery. These should be carved on the specific requirements of customers with a precise timing and speed of action.

#### **2.4.2.1. Service Recovery Effects**

As the review of the literature established, a service failure will surely lead to complaining behaviour from a dissatisfied customer. For example, Silber, Israelei, Bustin and Zvi (2009) based their study on the restaurants` setting and discovered that customers who experienced a service failure, will expect that the service provider should take immediate actions. Boshoff (2012) parallels the idea of complaining behaviour asserting that recovery strategies should be endeavoured by service providers to fix the occurrence. On the flip side, (Smith, Bolton and Wagner 1999; Andreassen 2000) noted that the literature presents gaps in research, claiming that most of the existing studies focus on consumers` perspectives when they respond to disappointment disregarding the providers. This gap in the literature may bring insights into understanding how businesses can organise the available systems from which retrievals may be approved (Smith, Karwan and Markland 2009; Vaerenbergh and Orsingher 2016).

#### **2.4.2.2. Service Recovery Paradox**

Tax, Brown and Chandrashekar (1998) accentuated that solving customers` frustrations efficiently will directly impact their sense of approval and trustworthiness, levels of loyalty, WOM and e-WOM communications and the bottom-line performances.

The recovery paradox has been discussed in the service literature by a great number of contemporary authors (Magnini 2007; Zeithaml 2009; Brock 2010) who questioned its validity. These hypotheses and theories were based on the important contribution made by Hart, Heskett and Sasser (1990) who discussed the ‘recovery paradox’. The authors identified that, in some cases, after experiencing a service failure and receiving outstanding service recovery, customers expressed higher levels of satisfaction and repurchase intentions. Wilson et al. (2016) compliment this idea, by stating that “an initially disappointed customer who experienced good service recovery might have been even more satisfied and loyal – has been labelled as service recovery paradox” (: 328).



A critical open question relates to the context and setting of the recovery paradox, as customers might have different needs at specific points in time. A more theoretical and systematic analysis is required to understand the validity of the phenomenon of service paradox and its impact on repurchase intentions when customers ‘voice their opinion’ thru social networks.

## **2.5. Millennials as ‘Digital Natives’**

This section reviews the literature related to ‘Generation Y’ or ‘The Millennials’ cohort by emphasizing their online behaviour, technology adoption and lifestyle, applied specifically to the hospitality industry. In his article, Schiffman (2010) defines an age cohort as those people born on a specific age bracket. This cohort has been discussed in the literature by a great number of scholars which rise divergences when establishing the exact age classification of these ‘generations’ by the assumed age-boundaries (Prensky 2001; Howe and Strauss 2009; Brosdahl and Carpenter 2011).

Nevertheless, the Pew Research Center (2018) has examined ‘Millennials’ for over a decade and established that the ‘cut off point’ for the Millennials cohort are those that turn 37 this year. Therefore, the recognised age bracket includes those people born between 1981- 1996, respectively, aged (22-37) in 2018. Therefore, this study will use this age bracket when referring to the ‘Millennials’.

### **2.5.1. Millennials and Digital Landscape**

A series of recent studies have indicated that Millennials grew up in the ‘Age of Interactivity’ (Block and Schultz 2012) where the proliferation of Social Media and Technology developments shaped the way they communicate with each other and their preferred brands (Wesner and Miler 2008). On the same light, Bolton et al. (2013) pondered that Millennial consumers were more inclined to use social media for everyday communication, including their family, friends, favourite brands or service providers. Their lifestyle is mainly carved by the social networking and constant online interactions which could directly impact (positive or negative) the restaurant service providers’ social presence, reputation and image.

Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello (2009) theorized communication as the cornerstone in generating brand loyalty and strengthen the relationships between brands and consumers. On the flip side, Hollebeek (2011) questioned this argument by underlining the issue that, the consumers might perceive this relationship as purely grounded in their intention to repurchase from that brand.

A remarkable point was made by Block and Schultz (2012) findings by stating that a double way communication between consumer and brands might harm brand loyalty over a long period of time. This argument was based on the research findings on consumers' loyalty towards the brands. The authors discovered that consumers were more loyal to social media and other people's recommendations as opposed to the brand communication messages.

### **2.5.2. Millennials and their 'Dining Experiences' in a Digital Era**

Previous literature ascertains that Millennials "have grown up with technology and are expected to be highly skilled in the digital environment and strong users of social media" (Bolton et al. 2013: 1). Moreover, for this generation, technology and Internet are believed to be at the heart of any daily action, a generation of 'digital natives' rather than just 'digital immigrants' (Prensky 2001). Moreover, it was found that Millennials are progressively changing the hospitality landscape with activities that range from online and digital food ordering, payment methods, to simply, dining behaviour and lifestyle habits.

There have been numerous studies about Millennials and the extensive implementation of social media for brands aimed to inspire the engagement and to spark conversations (Sultan, Rohm, and Gao 2009). Similar ideas were shared by Peres, Shachar and Lovett (2011) who appreciated that brands which actively encourage consumers to co-create value by content co-creation will have the most benefits over time.

## **2.6. Web 2.0 Tools and Electronic Word-Of-Mouth (e-WOM)**

This section will further delve deeper into understanding the communication avenues, the power and influence of word-of-mouth (WOM) and the electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) on consumers. A dedicated section will analyse the Web 2.0 Tools as enablers of e-WOM spread and the implementation benefits for the restaurants'.

### **2.6.1. Word-of-Mouth (WOM) and (e-WOM)**

Communication between customers was traditionally labelled word-of-mouth (WOM) - "a naturally occurring phenomenon of consumer behaviour" (Nyilasi 2006). The more enthusiast scholars have further studied this phenomenon and determined that word-of-mouth (WOM) can be defined as:

“the transfer of information from one customer (or a group of customers) to another customer (or group of customers) in a way that has the potential to change their preferences, actual purchase behaviour, or the way they further interact with others”. (Libai, Bolton, Bugel, Ruyter, Gotz and Stephen 2010: 269).

In a digital environment, communication between customers, about a company or a product follow the same principles as WOM via the Internet (Henning-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh and Gremler 2004) also known as electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM). Most websites and social networking platforms allow consumers to actively engage and create content where information about products is exchanged in a more dynamic way (Cheung, Lee and Rabjohn 2008).

Despite decades of research around e-WOM, this topic continues to be debated by the contemporary scholars “as firms are increasingly looking for ways to create buzz for their brands without being manipulative” (Thomas, Mullen and Fraedrich 2011: 38). These trends have also been explored by Kozinets (2010) who parallels his study, affirming that the Internet has made it more accessible and transparent for brands not only to communicate but also to observe, record and influence word-of-mouth.

### **2.6.2. Using Web 2.0 Tools to Share e-WOM**

The ‘Web 2.0’ term was first mentioned by Tim O’Reilly in a conference with Media Live International in 2001. Later, O’Reilly (2009) published a book about ‘Web 2.0’ explaining why this term is still so ambiguous and misused by many academics and practitioners.

In their study, Litvin, Goldsmith and Pan (2008) recognise the spread of Web 2.0 tools which includes the websites, social networking channels, blogs, online forums and many others. The authors believed that the traditional forms of word-of-mouth were shaped by these tools by creating more engaging forms of communication between customers and between customers and their brands.

Scholars ascertained that consumers are more inclined to be influenced by people’s recommendations and opinions because they access vast amount of information at just a tip of a finger (Christakis and Fowler 2009; Fox and Longart 2016), where social media and review sites were found as the most influential ways to spread e-WOM in the travel industry Ye, Law and Gu (2009).

Therefore, restaurants, as part of the hospitality sector, were advised by Nielsen (mentioned in Libai et al. (2010) to pay closer attention to e-WOM, as 80% of consumers affirmed that they highly trust recommendations when choosing a service. Parallel thoughts were given by Fogel (2010) who discuss 'Trip Advisor' and 'Menu Pages' as review sites which consumers consult prior to their purchase decisions.

#### **2.6.2.1. e-WOM and Restaurants**

Although it has been previously reported in the literature that e-WOM has a great influence on consumers, several authors drawn attention to the issue of communication between individuals. It was claimed that people do not necessarily have a previous connection with the content creators nor with the readers yet, is a powerful way to influence consumers because of speed and convenience (Xia and Bechwati 2008; Schindler and Bickart 2012).

There is evidence in the literature regarding these influencers, as Gladwell (2000) identified that the 'Connectors' as influencers on Social Media and 'Mavens' as bloggers, were used by brands as key players in swaying consumers. Contrary, Kozinets, de Valck, Wojnicki and Welner (2010) judged the power of the e-WOM and messages conveyed, as bloggers and influencers might just 'act a role' instead of conveying a natural personal message, which lacked credibility.

Looking from a critical angle, Bolton et al. (2013) suggested that the previous studies can only be considered as the first steps towards a more profound understanding of the e-WOM influence in the hospitality industry. The authors claimed that there is still insufficient valuable research dedicated specifically to the e-WOM that happens on Social Media. In their study, based on a Korean restaurant, Babin, Yong-ki, Fun-Ju and Griffin (2005) shared the same ideas as Bolton et al. (2013) which were further affirmed by Longart (2010) who ascertain that the e-WOM is under-measured for the Restaurant Businesses.

As has previously been reported in the literature by Wilson et al. (2016) customers tend to greatly emphasize recommendations and evaluations of others' e-WOM because of the intangibility characteristics of experiences service.

Nevertheless, there are scholars who believed that a more systematic and theoretical analysis is required about the reliance on WOM and e-WOM in the hospitality industry (Lovelock and Wirtz 2011; Obal, Burtch and Kunz 2011).

An important question associated with e-WOM could be linked with the requirement of monitoring the social networking sites and the content published. Block and Schultz's (2012) research was later developed by Ho-Dac, Carson and Moore (2013) who affirmed once again that a large portion of consumers ignored the status and image of the brand nonetheless they followed others' recommendations and reviews. Therefore, additional research is needed to address the validity and originality of these reviews as the traditional and digital advertising messages conveyed by brands, are increasingly disregarded.

#### **2.6.2.2. Using Web 2.0 Tools for Effective Communication Strategies**

The contemporary researchers alleged that both WOM and e-WOM has the same levels of credibility Kim, Seo and Schrier (2014) however Cheung and Thadani (2012) speculated that e-WOM have a larger scale of reach and speed of circulation.

O'Reilly's (2009) theory was later examined by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) who described Web 2.0 as a platform which facilitates the communication and participation of customers thru a range of interactive social networking sites. Likewise, Trusov, Bucklin and Pauwels (2009) appreciated Social Media as a vital tool for creating virtual communities for interactive communication.

Several studies suggested that e-WOM spread can be accomplished with the aid of Web 2.0 tools which includes different forms of Social Media - Social Network Sites, Blogs, Review Rating Sites, Forums and other similar community websites. A study conducted by Obal et al. (2011) claimed that social networking sites were found as a credible source of e-WOM as the users connect and interact with each other based on their profiles bios which provide information about interests and demographics. The same opinion was pointed out by Chu and Kim (2011) who stated that consumers perceived the messages shared thru social networks to be more reliable and trustworthy as opposed with the anonymous comments made on product review websites and online forums.

Inspiring findings were discovered by Fox and Longart (2016) who completed a study on Restaurants in Dublin. The authors investigated how marketers can stimulate e-WOM for effective communication strategies to engage with their customers suggesting that "social media communication needs to be engaging and interactive but at the same time it must promote the restaurant" (:217). Another key conclusion reflected the message style which should "have a personal touch [...] must be distinctive and restaurants must be able to transmit their own character thru their social content" (: 217).

Moreover, Libai et al. (2010) ascertains the impact and spread of positive e-WOM when customers' experiences surpass expectations for customers delight and intention for repurchase.

## **2.7. Millennials, (e-WOM) and Service Failure**

This section presents highlights of online consumer behaviour and e-WOM with a special focus on 'Generation Y- the Millennials'. Additional assumptions will be explored to better justify the rationale for the research objective – *“To investigate if Millennial's 'dining experiences' has changed in a digitally connected society”*.

Although the previous review provided some insights into the service failure and recovery issues, there is still a need for continued exploration and application of these findings. One possible avenue for research is the study of complaining customers using the Web 2.0 tools to share about their experiences. This will provide a clearer view to formulate a pertinent answer for the research objective – *“To study if Millennials use e-WOM to share about their satisfaction or disappointment with the service experienced”*.

As so, this evaluation will seek to find out the main triggers and motivation of the Millennials' online complaining behaviour, where and how they criticize and who is more likely to complain or at least share their opinion and reviews about their dining experience. The closing section will include a discussion about the complaining outcomes where the author aims to find out about the alleged value of complaints.

### **2.7.1. How do Millennials Respond to Service Failure?**

Although the emerge of Internet has shaped the way consumers gather information about experiential services, especially among the Millennials, a striking deduction was founded by the Food Safety Authority – FSAI (2013) who measured the Consumers Attitudes to Food Safety in Ireland. Findings highlighted that 56% of those surveyed felt that they are 'fairly informed' about the food safety information, where the highest ratios were recorded among the younger respondents - males under 25's.

Nevertheless, when asked if they have ever made a complaint about any aspects of hygiene in a restaurant, café, bar or hotel, 40% of adults reported an occurrence. These findings underline the necessity for food-related businesses to share health-related information, advice and tips with consumers which will hopefully diminish the 'need' for people to complain.

Furthermore, the FSAI (2013) results emphasised that the categories most willing to make a complaint were the ABC1 social classes and those who were retired usually located in Dublin areas. In line with these results, the traditional researchers ascertained that there is a huge potential reach of WOM where an unhappy customer is more likely to share about their negative experiences with 9 other people and about 13% of dissatisfied customers will use a 3<sup>rd</sup> party option to share about their grievance (Walker 2005).

With the world-shattering emerge of the social media platforms it was quite surprising that Keller and Berry (2006) claimed that 90% of WOM is taking place off-line while contrasting opinions are later given by Keller and Libai (2009) who found that ‘social talk’ alone generates around 3.3 billion impressions daily. The reason why most of the latest studies and current working papers in the marketing and advertising industry focused on developing an understanding of the social networks’ influence on the services sector and how these are shaping the digital landscape.

### **2.7.2. Why do Millennials (not) complain?**

The traditional literature around consumers’ complaining behaviour (CCB) was first combined by Singh (1990) and further developed by Lovelock, Chew and Wirtz (2009) who presented their findings in a simple classification called the ‘Types of Complaining Customers’ where four distinct categories of ‘complainers’ were identified: ‘Passives, Voicers, Irates and Activists’ (please see Table 1 below).

Continuing Singh’s research, Lovelock et al. (2009) conveyed evidence about the motives behind customers engaging in complaining actions. The author suggested four different triggers leading to dissatisfaction as a consequence of a service failure. Some customers desired to get a ‘compensation’ to match their disappointment, while others stated that they complain to release negative emotions (anger).

There were others who looked beyond their personal reasoning and affirmed that they engage in complaining behaviour to improve the service quality delivery and from unselfish concern to other consumers. In the same light, several studies discovered that, because of a negative incident, recovery attempts were implemented for ‘judicious reasons’ (Worsford 2007), ‘to reply’ (Zethaml 2009) and possibly to address in a proper manner their ‘grievances’ (Palmer 2011).

As the authors noted earlier, more work is necessary to investigate what could be the stimulus for the Millennial generation when they do decide to make a complaint and in what situations they will presumably engage in such behaviour.

To address the possible gap, this research will pursue to further investigate in what category are Millennials most likely to fall into after the research has been conducted.

**Table 1 - 'Types of Complainers' Classification by Lovelock, Chew and Wirtz (2009)**

<p><b>PASSIVES</b></p> <p>Less likely to take any action, speak with others or engage in negative WOM/e-WOM</p> <p>Doubt about the effectiveness of complaining believing that consequences will not merit the time and effort spent.</p> <p>Sometimes their personal values/norms argue against complaining</p>	<p><b>ACTIVISTS</b></p> <p>Frequently complain to providers</p> <p>Tell friends/family and any other about their experiences</p> <p>Sometimes complain to 3<sup>rd</sup> parties</p> <p>Complaining fits with their personal norms although they have an optimistic sense of potential consequences of all types of complaining.</p>
<p><b>VOICERS</b></p> <p>Actively complain to the service provider, but less likely to engage in spreading negative WOM/e-WOM or switch providers</p> <p>Consequences could be perceived as positive</p> <p>Usually give the firms a 'second chance' as their intrinsic motivation is believed to have social benefits</p> <p>Should be viewed as the best friends of service providers</p>	<p><b>IRATES</b></p> <p>More likely than others to engage in negative WOM/e-WOM</p> <p>Angrier with the provider nevertheless they believe in the positive outcomes of complaining</p> <p>Less likely to give a second chance</p> <p>Usually switch to competitors</p>

Source: Own illustration based on Lovelock, Chew and Wirtz (2009) book - '*Essentials of Service Marketing*'. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Pearson



## 2.8. Service Recovery Expectations

As has previously reported in the literature, customers' recovery expectations could vary from one customer to another depending on their level of disappointment, context, setting or emotional state. For instance, Tax, Brown and Chandrashekar (1998) developed their hypothesis based on the 'Theory of Justice' affirming that no matter their grievance, all customers want to be treated fairly when engaging in complaining actions. The authors ponder their theories by claiming that customers were looking for three distinct types of 'justice' – *distributive justice* (outcome or results), *procedural justice* (process and policies) and *interactional justice* (interpersonal treatment).

As research demonstrated, once a person has made a complaint they require to be treated fairly and obtain the right compensation to match their individual needs which should match their level of disappointment at the given time of the occurrence. A decade after, Lovelock et al. (2009) further investigate the work of Tax, Brown and Chandrashekar (1998) investigation and determined a variation of 85% in the 'satisfaction with the service recovery' (: 399) based on three proportions of fairness.

The author aims to delve deeper into developing an understanding around these three dimensions of perceived fairness and how these can be applied in the context of the current research.

Hence, in Table 2, this 'dimensions' are detailed to construct the research ground for further investigation. The author suggests this approach to formulate a ground for further investigation which will provide a rationale for the research objective – “*To understand the Millennials' evaluations of service complaint experience in the Restaurant industry and how e-WOM might influence the recovery expectations*”.

**Table 2 - Definition of Justice Dimensions and their associated Dependent Variables**

JUSTICE CONCEPT	DEFINITION	DEPENDENT VARIABLE
<b>1. Distributive Justice</b> <i>(Outcomes and Results to match dissatisfaction)</i>		
<b>1.1 Equity</b>	Delivery of outcomes proportional to contributions	Satisfaction, Repurchase Intention WOM
<b>1.2 Equality</b>	Equal outcomes regardless of contribution to an exchange	Satisfaction Social Harmony
<b>1.3 Need</b>	Based on requirements regardless of contribution	Satisfaction
<b>2. Procedural Justice</b> <i>(Policies, Rules, Timelines of the complaining process)</i>		
<b>2.1 process control</b>	Freedom to communicate views on a decision process	Satisfaction Commitment
<b>2.2 Decision control</b>	The extent to which a person is free to accept or reject a decision outcome	Satisfaction Relationship Investment
<b>2.3 Accessibility</b>	Effortlessness of engaging a process	Satisfaction
<b>2.4 Timing/ speed</b>	Perceived amount of time taken to complete an action	Anger Satisfaction Uncertainty Service Quality
<b>2.5 Flexibility</b>	Adaptability of procedures to reflect individual circumstances	Satisfaction Market Orientation
<b>3. Interactional Justice</b> <i>(Interpersonal treatment during the complaining process)</i>		
<b>1.1 Explanation / causal account</b>	Delivery of reason for failure	Attributions for Failure Satisfaction Fairness
<b>1.2 Honesty</b>	Perceived reliability of information provided	Satisfaction with the complaint handling
<b>1.3 Politeness</b>	Well-mannered courteous behaviour	Satisfaction Complaint evaluation Repurchase intention
<b>1.4 Effort</b>	Amount of positive energy put into solving an issue	Satisfaction Anger Trust
<b>1.5 Empathy</b>	Provision of caring and individual attention	Satisfaction Service Quality

Source: Own illustration adapted from “Customers evaluations of Service Compliant Experiences: Implications for Relationship Marketing” by Tax, Brown and Chandrashekar (1998: 63), *Journal of Marketing*, April 1998, Vol. 62, 60-76

## CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY

### 3.1. Introduction

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012: 680) defined research as “the systematic collection and interpretation of information with a clear purpose to find things out”. These processes should be planned and conducted using a strong and clear methodological framework (Blumberg, Cooper and Schindler 2011: 4) so as the researcher can inquire and investigate the findings (Collis and Hussey 2014: 2) to upsurge their knowledge.

The main purpose of this study is to demonstrate to which extent the qualitative analysis of the Irish Millennials’ insights advises about the possible impact that e-WOM might have on their ‘dining experiences’. Moreover, building on the existing framework and traditionally taught vis-à-vis customer’s responses to service failure, theorized by (Lovelock et al. 2009), the study aims to look deeper into Millennials rational thinking, to develop an understanding of their complaining behaviour and the implications of such conduct for restaurant businesses. Assuming the less favourable circumstances, the study will further determine the expectations of service recovery hypothesized by (Tax, Brown and Chandrasekhar’s 1998) and applied in an Irish context.

The present study was guided by the following **objectives**:

#### Figure 1 - Research Objectives

##### OBJECTIVE 1:

*“To investigate if Millennial’s ‘dining experiences’ has changed in a digitally connected society”.*

- Perceived Variances
- e-WOM Alleged Influence
- e-WOM Credibility
- Alternative Influencers

##### OBJECTIVE 2:

*“To study if Millennials use e-WOM to share about their satisfaction or disappointment with the service experienced”*

- Satisfactory vs. Unsatisfactory Dining Experiences
- Customers’ Complaining Behaviour
- Value of Complaints
- Type of Complainers

##### OBJECTIVE 3:

*“To examine if Millennials use e-WOM to make a complaint and develop an understanding about their recovery expectations”*

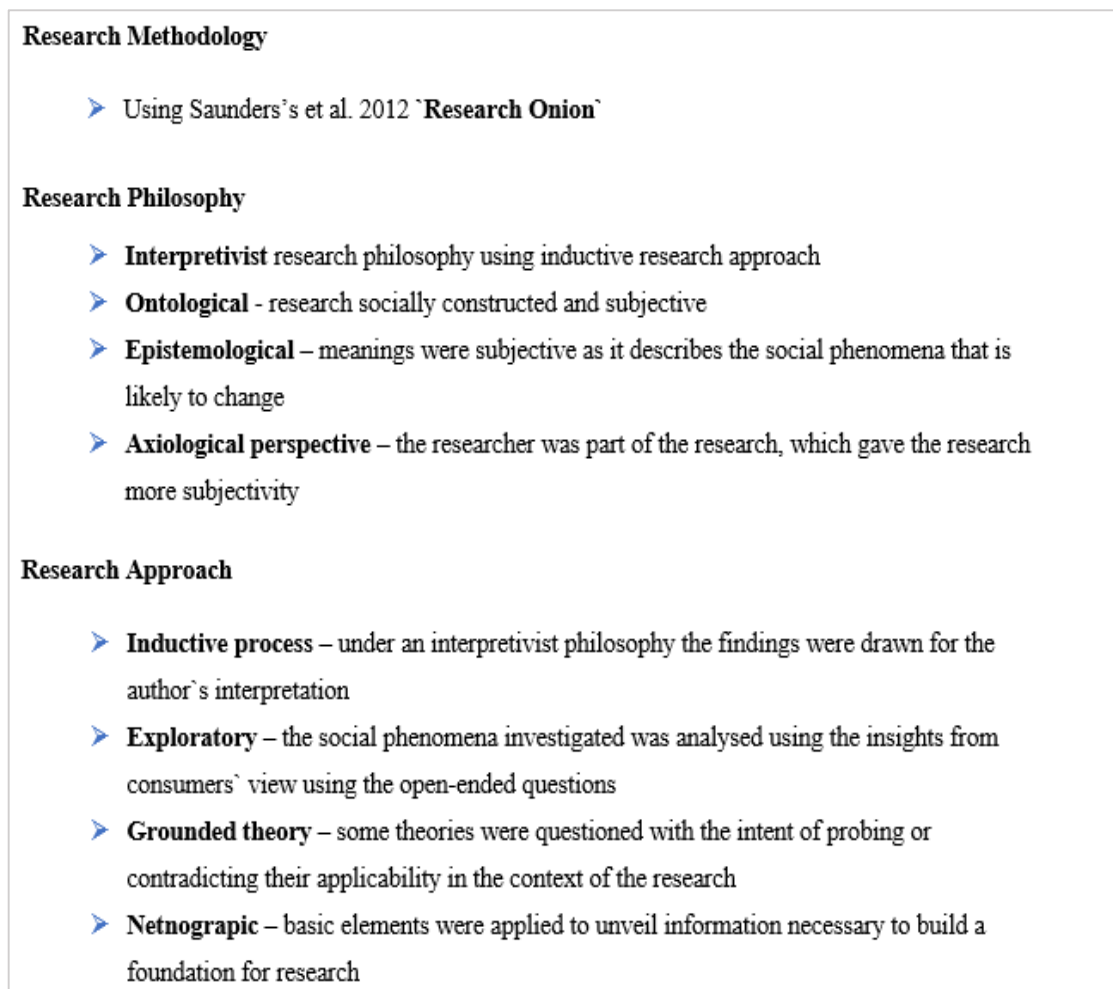
- Customers’ Evaluations of Complaint Experiences

To accomplish the research's purpose, this section will first detail the chosen research methodology, followed by a description of the research philosophy that will guide the entire work. Subsequently, the research approach and strategy used to collect necessary data followed by a detailed description of planning how the data will be collected to answer the research objectives and related questions.

This chapter includes a section dedicated specifically to the data sampling development which will further be analysed and presented in the Findings and Discussion section. Lastly, the research ethical consideration applied during the entire investigation to support this study and the limitations of present research.

### 3.2. Overview of the Research Methodology

**Figure 2 - Overview of the Methodology Chapter**



### Research Strategy and Choice

- **Qualitative methods** – study was exploratory in nature drawing meaningful insights and valuable results from participants' answers
- **Mono- Method** – Qualitative method using 3 Focus Group discussions

### Time Horizon

- **Cross-sectional** – based on the available time –frame to complete the Dissertation

### Sampling

- **Target Population and Sample Frame** – Sample was extracted from the 'Millennial generation' where the research focused specifically at 'Irish demographics'
- **1<sup>st</sup> step – Non-probability or Random Sampling** –each of the three focus groups conducted included 5 participants which were selected based on the author's judgment thru the use of Social Media platforms
- **2<sup>nd</sup> step – Volunteer sampling** using the **Snowballing or Networking sampling** techniques – after information was given via social media, private invitations (to those who showed a genuine interest in participation) which included additional information with regards to the study were sent via email or private message
- **Self-selection** – based on the restricted time available for data collection (one week).

### Data Collection and Analysis

- **Secondary Data collection**
  - using the **National College of Ireland's Smurfit Norma Library** for available databases and variation of Journals and Academic publications
  - using **industry and government statistics and reports** publicized online in form of pdf s.
- **Primary Data collection**
  - **qualitative** primary data collection using the **focus group discussions** which were further analysed using a combination of inductive and deductive processes
- **Low Reliability** – as the study was to be conducted at different time the results generated could vary
- **High Validity** – as insights and meanings were drawn from the Millennials themselves and of those who were active users of restaurant service in Dublin

### Negotiating Access and Research Ethics

- Strategy for granting access – participants were contacted via **Social Media** platform and further received additional information via **Email** or **Private Message**
- **Ethical** considerations followed a Deontological approach – recognition of the **Social Research Association's Ethical Guideline** that strictly looked at (privacy, confidentiality, anonymity, participation on a voluntary basis having the right to withdraw at any time in the process)

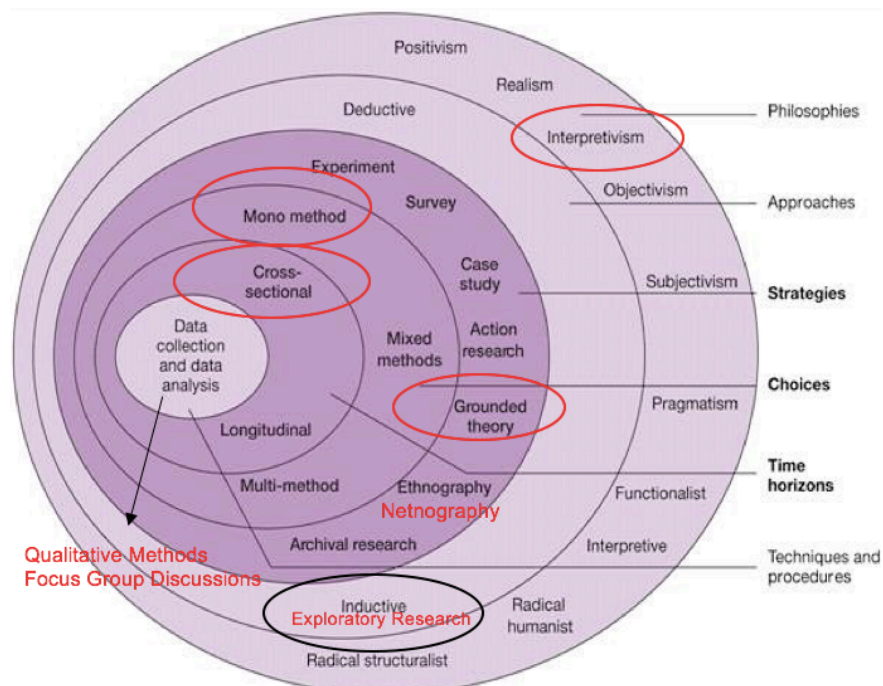
### Limitations of Research

- Several limitations were acknowledged and presented by the author using a logical reasoning

### 3.3. Proposed Research Methodology

To achieve the goals and aims presented in section 3.1, the research methodology was adapted from the 'Research Onion' by Saunders et al. (2012: 128). The author embraced this method as a guideline throughout the investigation process and to organise Dissertation in a more structured way.

**Figure 3 - The Research 'Onion' adapted from Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill's (2012)**



Source: Saunders, M., Lewis, P., and Thornhill, A. (2012: 128). 'Research Methods for Business Students'. 6th ed. Edinburgh Gate, Essex, England: Pearson Education Limited

### 3.4. Research Philosophy

Research ‘philosophy’ was defined by Saunders et al. (2012) as an all-embracing term which relates to “the development of knowledge and the nature of that knowledge in relation to research” (:680) or simply - “developing knowledge in a particular field” (:124). The philosophical phenomenon of research – how humans understand their environment (Saunders et al. 2012), is described thru qualitative methods of study.

This was selected since this methodology is mainly concerned with the subjective experiences of the participants (Englander 2012) followed by their portrayal of perception (Goulding 2005).

Crotty (1998 cited in Saunders et al. 2012: 128) believes that scholars understand the research questions, methods implemented for examination and interpretation of their findings based on their personal assumptions (realistic or pragmatic) as the research philosophy is merely “a set of systems of beliefs” Waite and Hawker (2009: 685). These assumptions will underpin the research strategy while allowing a gradual development of knowledge to create a valuable framework for ideas expression (Saunders et al. 2012).

It was discussed in the literature that scientists were influenced in their studies by the two main paradigms, ‘Positivism’ and ‘Interpretivism’.

Traditionally, scientists used systematic methods which involved observation and experiment by applying an **inductive logic** to discover explanatory theories which could be used for further predictions (Collis and Hussey 2014).

In this case, the researchers’ assumptions were based on ‘positivism’ – a philosophy created by the social scientists usually associated with the quantitative research data. This paradigm assumed that “social reality is singular and objective [...] and involves a deductive process with a view to providing explanatory theories to understand social phenomena” Saunders et al. 2012: 43).

Academics criticized the positivism paradigm claiming that humans are complex and unique where the social contexts may variably influence their own perceptions. This philosophy was rejected by many scholars on the belief that researcher’s objectivity only highlights their own interest which might diminish the value of the research.

Literature around business research suggested that there are contemporary researchers who still use the positivism paradigm to “explain or predict social phenomena” Saunders et al. 2012: 44) using a logical reasoning and objectivity as oppose to subjectivity and intuitive interpretation (Creswell 2014, cited in Collis and Hussey 2014: 440).

As a response to criticism, a novel and idealist philosophy emerged, the ‘interpretivisms’ paradigm – based on subjective and intuitive interpretations, usually associated with the qualitative methods of research. The new philosophy assumed that “social reality is in our minds and is subjective and multiple, therefore social reality is affected by the act of investigating it” (Collis and Hussey 2014: 44). Based on the above justification Johnson and Clark’s (2006) suggestion that, the academics should choose a research philosophy that fully reflects their investigation and defend it against alternatives, this study follows an interpretivist philosophy.

This study is reflected by an inductive approach or “a study in which theory is developed from the observation of empirical reality, thus general inferences are induced from particular instances” Collis and Hussey (2014: 44).

Deldridge and Kirkpatrick (1994: 37) underlined the significance of researchers’ “immersion in the research setting, with the objective of sharing people’s lives while attempting to learn their symbolic world”. This statement is in sync with the core subject of the research thesis, where researchers “enter the research world of the research subjects and understand their world from their point of view” (Saunders et al. 2012: 116). In this case, the research world refers to the online universe where interaction among people was believed to shape behaviour (Libai et al. 2011).

Saunders et al. (2012: 140) discussed three different ways of thinking linked with the research philosophies that will undoubtedly influence the way academics approach the research development.

These ‘ways of thinking’ incorporates first, the ontology or “the researcher’s view of the nature of reality” Saunders et al. (2012: 140). It is assumed that the researchers draw meanings from the research that is socially constructed where the subject or interpretation of the results given by the subject or participants of the study may change over time. All answers hold a valid meaning as “each person has their own sense of reality and there are multiple realities” Collis and Hussey (2014: 46).

Second, the epistemology or “the researcher’s view regarding what constitutes acceptable knowledge” Saunders et al. (2012: 140). Under this thinking, the researcher’s vision allows the exploration of the reality behind the social interactions and online communications, where e-WOM is perceived to shape opinions and attitudes (about perceived service quality) or patterns of behaviour (regarding complaining actions).



Lastly, the axiology or else, “the researcher’s view of the role of values in research” Saunders et al. (2012: 140). It was argued that each person’s values integrates their actions and reactions, where the researcher himself reflects its own values across the entire research process. Therefore, the researcher becomes part of the investigation, which added even more subjectivity to the nature of the study.

### **3.5. Research Approach**

The main purpose of any research is to refine theories and frameworks thru different stages until it can approximate reality. As Maylor and Blackmon (2005: 149) infer, the chosen approach needs to be adapted to the research questions and used consistently as it may limit the appropriate research methods. Thus, the authors recommend two logics – inductive and deductive approaches.

#### Deduction:

(Collis and Hussey 2014) described ‘deductive research’ as the approach where a theory or framework is developed throughout the research then tested using empirical observations. A deductive reasoning happens when “instances are deduced from general inferences” (Collis and Hussey 2014: 7) and conclusions are derived logically (Ketokivi and Mantere 2010; Blumberg et al. 2011). Saunders et al. (2012) consider that a research which uses deduction will test the theoretical proposition using a research strategy specifically tailored for this purpose.

#### Induction:

On the flip side, Blumberg et al. (2011) suggested that using the induction approach for the evolvment of a theory is based on observation and experience using empirical evidence from data collected and analysed beforehand (Ghauri and Gronhaung 2005). Academics criticize this approach by claiming that the relationship between reasons and conclusions are not as powerful as they are when using a deductive reasoning.

#### Abduction:

Additionally, Saunders et al. (2012) discuss abduction as a further research approach used to determine theories, by explaining that the ‘surprising fact’ observed will be investigated “back and forth in effect of combining deduction and induction reasoning” (Sudaby 2006). Considering the time constraints, a small sample of participants was deemed appropriate as opposed to relatively large numbers applicable mostly for a deductive approach (Saunders at al. 2012: 146).

This study is qualitative in nature and uses the interpretivist philosophy or the **inductive** process based on the researcher's interpretation of findings. First, to understand the social phenomena (influence of e-WOM on Millennial generation dining experiences and perceived satisfaction with the service encountered). Secondly, the series of events occurred in a specific context (in case of restaurants, when the service experienced fails below their anticipated scenario, each individual might react differently depending on the context and personal motivational triggers or influencing factors).

(Easterby-Smith et al. 2008, mentioned in Saunders et al. 2012: 147) believes this approach is alleged to help researchers in taking more informed decisions about the research design, quality of information and evidence and how these can formulate a suitable answer for the research questions.

Moreover, Saunders et al. (2012) provides a classification based on the nature of research (or purpose) which can be described as 'exploratory, descriptive or explanatory'.

Exploratory research is a discovery-orientated study which seeks to find new insights by asking different questions which will help to understand the issue or the present situation (Hair et al. 2010).

Descriptive research is described by Hair et al. (2010) as the study concentrated on the experiments and performance to create accurate representations of participants and offer trials of events or situation.

As opposed to an exploratory study, Saunders and Lewis (2012) described an explanatory research as the cause-orientated study focused on the situation or the issue under investigation to explain the possible relationships between variables. Descriptive and explanatory research were not applicable for the present research as the nature of the problem is not fully grasped, and a precise understanding of the social phenomenon is perhaps required.

This **exploratory** research, under the interpretivist paradigm, allowed the author to study the social phenomenon by asking open-ended questions (during the focus group discussions) to gather qualitative consumer insights about their dining experiences. Likewise, to inform to what extent e-WOM might influence their perception of a restaurant if they encounter a dissatisfactory experience or they decide to make a complaint.

The chosen research instrument (focus groups) will be detailed later in this chapter.

To fully comprehend the essence of the phenomenon, the author deemed appropriate to use the qualitative research because “it is a multifaceted approach that investigates culture, society and behaviour through the analysis and synthesis of people’s words and actions” (Hogan, Dolan and Donnelly 2009: 3) where data was analysed thru **inductive reasoning** of the author.

Additionally, this study applies the principals of **grounded theory**, which according to Goulding (2002) is very effective in studying, predicting and interpreting behaviour, with the intent of developing a theory”. This was applicable as theories were questioned throughout the study with the intent of probing or contesting their applicability in the online environment and Irish Millennials.

Although the author used as an initial stage an ethnographic approach – the study that “focuses on the manner in which people interact and collaborate in observable and regular ways” (Gill and Johnson 1997: 97 cited in Colin Fisher 2010: 170).

Another attempt for research was made by an undeveloped ethnographic research which shadows the same principles of ethnography but in the online environment (Kozinets 2010) with the intent of discovering content, comments and reviews about restaurants and dining experiences in Ireland. Nonetheless, given the time horizon (cross-sectional study) these methods could not be further developed (into a longitudinal study) yet, it provided the fundamental information about the problem being explored.

### **3.6. Research Strategy**

Saunders at al. (2012) suggests that the research strategy should be in line with the research philosophy and the research approach previously discussed. For optimal results the research strategy should be created in a coherent manner so that the philosophy, research questions and objective are linked with the research approach and purpose, to create robust conclusions. Furthermore, careful considerations should include the time horizon, resources available and access to contributors.

According to Saunders at al. (2012) the qualitative research may be associated with many strategies where the strategy layer of the ‘research onion’ presents different tactics: survey, archival research, experiment, action research, netnography, case study, grounded theory and narrative inquiry. Nevertheless, all tactics “shares ontological and epistemological roots and common characteristics” (: 164) where each tactic has its own “emphasis and scope” (: 164), that require specific actions.

This Dissertation is **qualitative** and **explorative** in nature, as the researcher developed a qualitative method of research – **Focus Groups**, to obtain rich, in-depth insights from participants, in a neutral setting thru open discussions and debates. A qualitative approach allows the researcher “to pay special attention to the ‘qualities’ experience, aspects of life that quantitative approaches typically gloss over” (Gubrium and Holstein 1997: 11).

Thus, the qualitative methods were found as ‘the best fit’ to investigate how Millennials assessed their dining experiences in terms of quality of food and service delivery. Additionally, a qualitative research was deemed appropriate as it relates to an **interpretative** philosophy where the researcher will attempt to answer the predetermined research questions based on results and interpretation of findings and further, to make subjective assumptions about the phenomena being investigated (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, cited in Saunders et al. 2012).

Having access to a small sample of participants, the author was allowed a more controllable process as opposed to rather larger populations. Although, working with a small sample is financially beneficial, the main advantage is that the sample provides generalizable and representative findings for the entire population (Saunders et al. 2012).

### **3.7. Research Choice**

Saunders et al. (2012) discussed the research choice which can include two different methodological approaches, the multiple methods and the mono-method. The multiple methods can further be classified by using a multimethod or a mixed method of research. Saunders et al. (2012) acknowledged that “different combinations of mixed methods research may lead to various research strategies” (: 168) which invariably brings a multitude of benefits for the actual research.

Nevertheless, this investigation implied a **mono-method of research**, the qualitative study. Additional with all the above justifications, a supplementary rationale for choosing a mono-method is given by (Collis and Hussy 2014) who claimed that the nature of a qualitative study is driven by an interpretivist paradigm. They suggested that “under interpretivism paradigm, the emphasis is on the quality and depth of data collected about the phenomenon being researched” (: 54).

For the purpose of this investigation, the qualitative methods were used by conducting **focus groups** or group discussion at different prearranged times and locations.

The justification for the research choice is assumed by the fact that the researcher aims to investigate variables like influence, persuasion, behavioural actions and attitudes of Millennials in a particular context (Restaurants).

Evidence from Kruger's (1994) studies of focus group interviews, proved that "people do influence each other with comments" (: 11) that might change the course of actions and dynamics of discussion or even more "the opinions of an individual might shift" (: 11).

Given these, a group discussion with a relatively small number of contributors (5 for each focus group conducted) will entice all the participants to provide, in equal measure with valuable taught, ideas, feelings, etc. while speaking about their dining experiences. The author preferred to form a smaller group for an even distribution of the available time (one group discussion lasted for approximately 50 mins.) so that each participant had a chance to share about their personal opinions. As opposed to in-depth interviews, a group discussion favours the free and non-judgmental way of thinking while listening to other contributors, as a bonus for delving deeper into the understanding the social phenomena under research.

### **3.8. Time Horizon**

Saunders et al. (2012) discussed the time horizon required to complete a research study and distinguished two separate studies: cross-sectional and longitudinal studies.

A cross-sectional study is conducted just once, providing the researchers with a 'snap' of reality which happened at one point in time. Opposing, the longitudinal studies are used repetitively over different periods of times to track any occurring changes in variables (Blumberg et al. (2011)).

The rationale for choosing a **cross-sectional** was built on Collis and Hussey's 2014 study, who claimed that this approach is most suitable "for the study of people" and used to examine variables or "a group of subjects in different contexts over the same period of time" (: 63).

Moreover, the author chooses to adopt the cross-sectional study based on the allocated time to answer the research questions after qualitative data was collected. Data gathering step was unfolded over a period of one week which limited the research to investigate any other changes over a certain period of time. Allegedly, the overall time horizon assigned for completing this Dissertation denoted a time constraint as well.

### **3.9. Sampling**

#### **3.9.1. Target Population and Sampling Frame**

The optimal size of a focus group was long debated among scholars. Yet, the appropriate number is set by the researcher according to the purpose of the study, research question, time horizon and resource limitations, but ensuring a demographic diversity Barbour and Kitzinger (1999) and develop advantageous sampling strategies (Kruger (1994).

Selecting a sampling frame or “a subset of the population” (Collis and Hussey 2014: 131) under the interpretivist philosophy will permit a qualitative analysis of this sample which has the ability to generalize the findings for the entire population or “body of research” (Collis and Hussey 2014: 131). For this study, the *population* is represented by the ‘**Millennial generation**’ and the *sample* is characterised by the ‘**Irish Millennials demographics**’- those living in Ireland at the time of research who fit in the predetermined age bracket.

#### **3.9.2. Sampling Design**

Narrowing down the scope of the study for a particular location – Dublin city, the author used Saunders’s (2012) sampling techniques when deciding which sample is most representative for this study.

As previously agreed that the present research is exploratory in nature where research questions and findings use the subjective assumptions of the researcher, the **non-probability** or **random sampling** techniques were decided.

Although the sample size is usually given by the research questions and objectives, what the researchers aim to find out, when considering the time constraints in completing this study the author used a **sample of the population containing 5 participants for each of the 3 focus groups conducted**. As Saunders` et al. (2012) suggested, a small sample of people included in the study will help the organisation of data collection to be more manageable and the results will be presented more swiftly.

#### **3.9.3. Sampling Techniques and Negotiating Access**

The sample was selected on the basis of **volunteer sampling** techniques recommended by the academics. **Snowball** or **networking sampling** was the first method applied by the author using social media channels to share the invitation about the group discussion.

(Lee 1993 cited in Saunders et al. 2012) ascertain that a snowball sampling may present drawbacks because “biases are huge, as respondents are most likely to identify other potential respondents who are similar to themselves, resulting in a homogenous sample” (: 289). To overcome this potential drawback in the study, the author additionally applied the **self-selection sampling** techniques based on the participants` interest in the subject being investigated. Next, personalized invitation (via email) was sent to the most appropriate people who previously agreed to participate with the aim of creating a more diverse and dynamic sample.

**Table 3 - Participants` demographics – A sample of data analysis development**

<i>Focus Group (1)</i>					
<i>Code</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Education</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Nationality</i>
<i>Participant 1</i>	27	F	Level 9	Unemployed	Irish
<i>Participant 2</i>	29	M	Level 8	Financial	Irish

\*These tables include information on the participants of the study which include age, gender, education and occupation.

The composition and dynamics of the sample will further be detailed in the Findings and Discussion chapter.

### **3.10. Data Collection**

#### **3.10.1. Secondary Data Collection**

Secondary data was described as “data collected from an existing source” (Collis and Hussey 2014: 59) which was collected and recorded by scholars for academic or commercial reasons (Maylor and Blackmon 2005).

The advantages of using secondary data is primarily given by the time and costs restraints but also by their effectiveness in own research. Nevertheless, the main drawback for secondary data is given by the fact that this data provides an orientation toward the central focus of the investigation, as the secondary data was not collected with the researcher`s explicit questions in mind.

Therefore, Blumberg et al. (2011) suggest that secondary data should be examined and tested to judge the fit of individual research. This research was constructed using secondary data collected from multiple springs, mainly using the National College of Ireland Library facilities and the available electronic academic databases.

This included ‘snapshot’ sources (books, academic journals) and longitudinal sources (industry statistics from reports and indexes publicized online, government figures from annual publications, journals and books).

### **3.10.2. Qualitative Primary Data Collection**

As previously mentioned, this research rely on the qualitative methods of analysis for data gathered specifically for this investigation. This approach follows an interpretivist philosophy where findings typically emerge from a higher set of valid data. The qualitative data are “transient and normally understood only within the context” (Collis and Hussey 2014: 130) as opposed with the quantitative (statistical) methods that use reliable data gathered and tested at different moments of time.

For this investigation, the researcher collected primary data over a *7 days* period while conducting **3 separate focus groups** in different locations (the NCI’s group study room and personal premises) and at different moments of the day (1 in the afternoon and the other 2 in the evening).

Building on the earlier mentioned justifications, for adopting focus groups as the method of collecting primary data, the author further links it with Kruger’s (1994) assertion, that focus groups are a successful method of research as “it taps into human tendencies” (:10) where attitudes and perceptions related to the services experienced are developed as part of the continuous interaction and engagement with the other participants.

Focus groups are a “socially orientate research procedure” (Barbour and Kitzinger 1999: 34) which enable participants to formulate their own personal viewpoints about an issue and sometimes after listen to another people’s opinion (Kruger (1994). This method enables the researcher “to access data that would be less accessible without the group interaction” (Morgan 1997, cited in Collis and Hussey 2014).

Focus groups are created to obtain qualitative information to measure, experiences, attitudes, emotions, thoughts and any other non-quantitative data from a prearranged number of people. Focus groups are the qualitative method in which “disclosures are encouraged and nurtured” (Kruger 1994: 15) but are carefully controlled by the mediator or facilitator to keep focus for these open-ended questions. This method is beneficial since it allows participants to craft their own style of answers, frames, concepts and set their own boundaries using their own vocabulary (Barbour and Kitzinger 1999).



The qualitative findings were generated by the open-ended questions asked during the focus group sessions (see Appendix 1 for a sample layout of questions). Following Bell's (2010) suggestions, these questions were initially screened, and pilot tested, to ensure that the layout and construct of questions will produce the type of data necessary to answer the research questions.

Kruger (1994) draws attention towards the possible limitations of focus groups methods suggesting that the "sharing of group control results in some inefficiencies such as detour of conversation" (: 36). Another point was made with regards to the diversity and dynamism of groups as these may vary considerably, from dull and lethargic to exciting and invigorating. Convenience, availability and willingness from participants to be at a certain time at a pre-determined location may slow the process of assembling a group discussion.

Though, other qualitative methods like in-depth interviews could provide a high significance of reliable data, the author considered this option as the next step in her investigation. This was justified by the fact that after the group discussion was undertaken, the author may perhaps recruit (for supplementary investigation) the most knowledgeable and interesting individuals (Ghauri and Gronhaug 2005), those who enriched the previous debates with strong and meaningful arguments.

Blumberg et al. (2011) underlined the importance of data collected to create a high-quality research. The authors draw attention towards the reliability and validity variables explaining the variances between them. A reliable research must include strict data collection methods and analysis procedures to create strong and consistent findings.

For data to be considered valid, Blumberg et al. (2011) ponder that it should be able to "accurately prove the purpose for what data was originally collected". In this case, to examine the influence that e-WOM might have on Irish Millennials' dining experiences and to learn about their complaining behaviour after they experienced a less satisfactory service encounter, which will be reflected in the research findings.

Nevertheless, scholars acknowledged that research has its own drawbacks, but this need to be identified, controlled and solved at early stages of the investigation (Saunders and Lewis 2012). In the case of a valid study, the researchers may lose the central focus and subjectivity or data collection encounters on participants. In a reliable study, the researchers or observers frequently came across human error or bias.

This investigation might be perceived as having a low-reliability value if considering Bryman and Bell's (2011) condition that, if the study was to be conducted at a different time, results might differ considerably. Yet, these conditions hold towards the positivist paradigm rather than an interpretivist one. Likewise, the study can be considered of high value if based on Coolican's 1992 assumptions that, a study is value if "demonstrates or measures what the researcher thinks or claims it does" (: 35).

### **3.11. Analysing Qualitative Data**

Although the value of qualitative data is given by the findings they create, this type of data tends to be more "ambiguous, elastic, and complex" (Saunders et al. 2012: 546) as opposed to statistical data, where meanings are derived from words. To ease the analysis process, the focus group sessions were **audio-recorded** using a mobile phone device and later **transcribed** as a word document. This step was made so that the author could later summarize or condense parts, categorize data based on themes, identify trends and common patterns to formulate an efficient structure for answering the research questions (Saunders et al. 2012). The authors suggested four ways of analysing data inductively: template analysis, grounded theory, analytic induction, discourse analysis and narrative analysis.

This study adopted a **template analysis** which includes a variety of techniques used in the analysis process to support the thematically organisation and analysis of written data. This template embodies a "list of codes or categories that represent the themes revealed from the data that has been collected" (Saunders et al. 2012: 572) **a combination between the inductive and deductive process**, as some codes were predetermined while others emerged from the text analysis. This technique enabled the author to make sense of data in a more structured way, to identify key themes and emergent issues which were not initially planned to focus on.

### **3.12. Research Ethics**

According to Collis and Hussey (2014: 30), ethics in general, refer to "the moral values or principles that form the basis of a code of conduct". When looking narrowly at research ethics, the author clarified ethics as "the manner in which research is conducted and how results or findings are reported" (: 30). Blumberg et al. 2011 stated that, although parties involved in the investigation or research display ethical behaviour, ethical issues are unmissable. To reduce such instances, several academics and professional bodies published different ethical guidelines for researchers Bell and Bryman (2007) teaching them how to avoid harmful circumstance (Ghauri and Gronhaug 2005).

Therefore, the author followed the *Social Research Association's Ethical Guidelines* throughout the entire investigation, at all stages of research paying close attention to the ethical code of conduct to avoid any arising issues or breaches of code. At all stages of the investigation, the researcher showed professionalism, objectivity and integrity commencement of the group discussion, the attendees were informed about the **purpose** of collecting data, in which way is going to be used and how is going to be transcribed.

To follow Saunders et al. (2012) standards, this investigation took a deontological approach which claims that “the ends served by research can never justify the use of research which is unethical” (:184). **Privacy** of participants and **confidentiality** was assured thru completion of the ‘*consent sheet forms*’ which explained that the private **data** will be stored in the researcher’s personal mobile phone or laptop and later stored digitally in Google Drive and not made public at any stage. After the completion of the Dissertation, contributors’ data was assured to be discarded. **Anonymity** was guaranteed as each individual was coded, for example (Participant 1, Participant 2, etc. or P1, P2, etc for the Findings and Discussion chapter).

Involvement was on a **voluntary** basis and participants were explained that they have the right to **withdraw** at any stage in the research.

### **3.13. Limitations of Research**

Hair et al. (2011) underline the importance of recognising any possible restrictions in the investigation process to minimize their impact on the researches’ findings. This study recognized few limitations encountered at different stages of the research process:

Time horizon: The limited time available to complete this Dissertation directly impacted the data collection process (cross-sectional) which was constrained by a tight *deadline*.

The author acknowledged that a *longitudinal approach* (netnographic or ethnographic) will possibly benefit the researcher to observe behavioural changes over time, make connections between sequences of events and even measure the attitudes and opinions of the same sample over a longer period.

Sample: Although the sample size in a qualitative study is not as impactful as in quantitative data, the author acknowledges that a rather *larger sample* would have additionally benefited the present research. The invitation to participate was initially sent via Social Media and asked people to participate (those included in the Millennials bracket (22-37) which did not receive the anticipated response.

Thus, a different approach was implied, which included personalized invitations sent via email which slowed down the research process.

Uneven distribution of *gender*. The focus groups participants were not distributed evenly as the last group included 4 females and 1 male. Similarly, the *age range* was almost the same for all the 5 participants (27-29) in the case of the first group. For the second group, three out of 5 had the same age (23) while the third group was comprised of 3 older Millennials (over 30). Although the author chose purposefully such a varied aged span to compare results between the ‘young Millennial’ with the ‘old Millennial’, the *uneven distribution of age* for each focus group composition might have been avoided if time frame allocated for research and data collection would have followed different time patterns.

*Geographical boundaries* were somehow narrow, as the study was based in Dublin city only and the study provided findings just from the *customer’s perspective*.

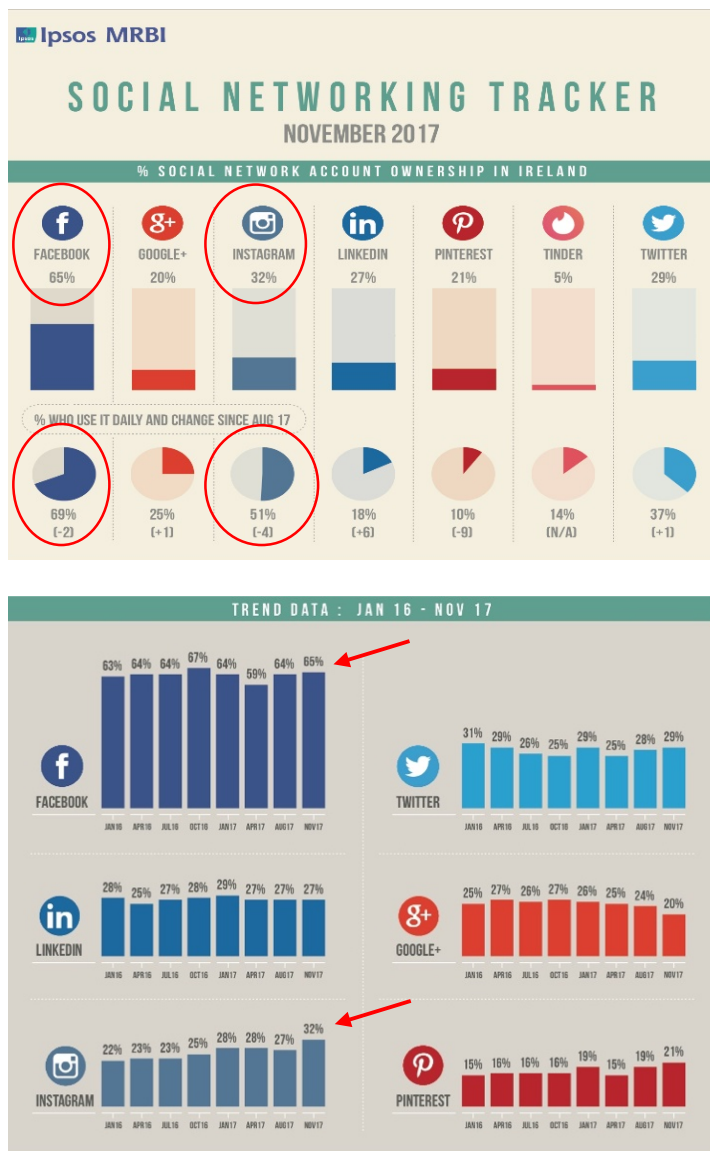
Mono-method: This study used only the qualitative research methods and collected primary data thru one avenue – the *focus groups discussions*. While this method allowed data to answer the research questions and to be translated into meaningful finding, a mixed method or even a mixed approach might have uncovered different results. Since triangulation of data provides a more comprehensive understanding of the research’s findings and ensure the readers about the validity and credibility of the investigation.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 4.1. Introduction

Social Networking has increasingly become the most flattering way to connect with the Irish consumers. As the latest social report from Ipsos MRBI (2017) proved, Facebook and Instagram remain the two most popular platforms for online communication amongst the Irish population. Facebook (with account ownership in Ireland of 65%) verified an outstanding 69% digit of ‘daily active users’ and respectively, Instagram (with account ownership in Ireland of 32%) displayed a growing figure of 51% daily usage.

**Figure 4 – Percentage of the ‘Social Network Account Ownership in Ireland’ and ‘Daily Active Users’**



*Source: Ipsos MRBI. 2017. Social Networking Tracker.*

These findings were considered as stepping stones for the present study as the research questions were formulated around the investigation of possible e-WOM influences on Millennials' dining experiences.

Additionally, the objective of this section is to delve deeper into the research data to examine if participants of this study sensed any variances in their 'dining experiences' as a result of social media proliferation. Subsequently, the analysis seeks to find out, how persuasive and trustworthy was e-WOM perceived as a factor for choice when compared with alternative influencers.

The analysis continues to investigate if participants used any form of e-WOM to share (or not) about their satisfaction or disappointment or to make a complaint when service experienced fell below their standards. Lastly, the scrutiny of data will bring to light what participants perceived as 'fair justice' in the service recovery process after they evaluated their objection.

Research conveyed that Millennials are a generation of 'digital natives' (Prensky 2001). Nevertheless, in the 'era of interactivity' (Block and Schultz 2012) they seemed to be a generation of controversy. Some digest huge digital information and interact with each other mainly in the digital landscape, while others use it less actively.

The results of this investigation will enrich the existing studies conducted on hospitality literature and Millennial cohort, as findings were based on a miscellaneous sample looking specifically at how this generation is impacting the restaurant industry.

The researcher hopes that the study's findings presented in a qualitative light will encourage other academics, scholars or students to pursue further research and conduct more investigations around Millennials and how they are changing the food industry in a digitally connected world.

#### 4.2. Findings from Data Sample

**Table 5 - Participants' demographics – Data analysis findings**

<i>Focus Group (1)</i>					
<i>Code</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Education</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Nationality</i>
<i>Participant 1</i>	27	F	Level 9	Unemployed	Irish
<i>Participant 2</i>	29	M	Level 8	Financial Accountant	Irish
<i>Participant 3</i>	29	F	Level 8	Web Developer	Irish
<i>Participant 4</i>	29	M	Level 9	Technician	French
<i>Participant 5</i>	28	M	Level 8	Multimedia specialist	Irish

Code	Age	Gender	Education	Occupation	Nationality
<i>Participant 6</i>	23	M	Level 9	Unemployed	Indian
<i>Participant 7</i>	23	M	Level 9	Unemployed	Indian
<i>Participant 8</i>	30	F	Level 9	Hotel administrative	Mexican
<i>Participant 9</i>	26	F	Level 9	Management control	French
<i>Participant 10</i>	28	F	Level 8	Tour Guide	Irish

Code	Age	Gender	Education	Occupation	Nationality
<i>Participant 11</i>	27	F	Level 8	Business owner	Russian
<i>Participant 12</i>	37	M	Level 8	Property Manager	Russian
<i>Participant 13</i>	36	F	Level 8	Business owner	Russian
<i>Participant 14</i>	32	F	Level 8	Office Manager	Russian
<i>Participant 15</i>	23	F	Level 5	Healthcare assistant	Irish

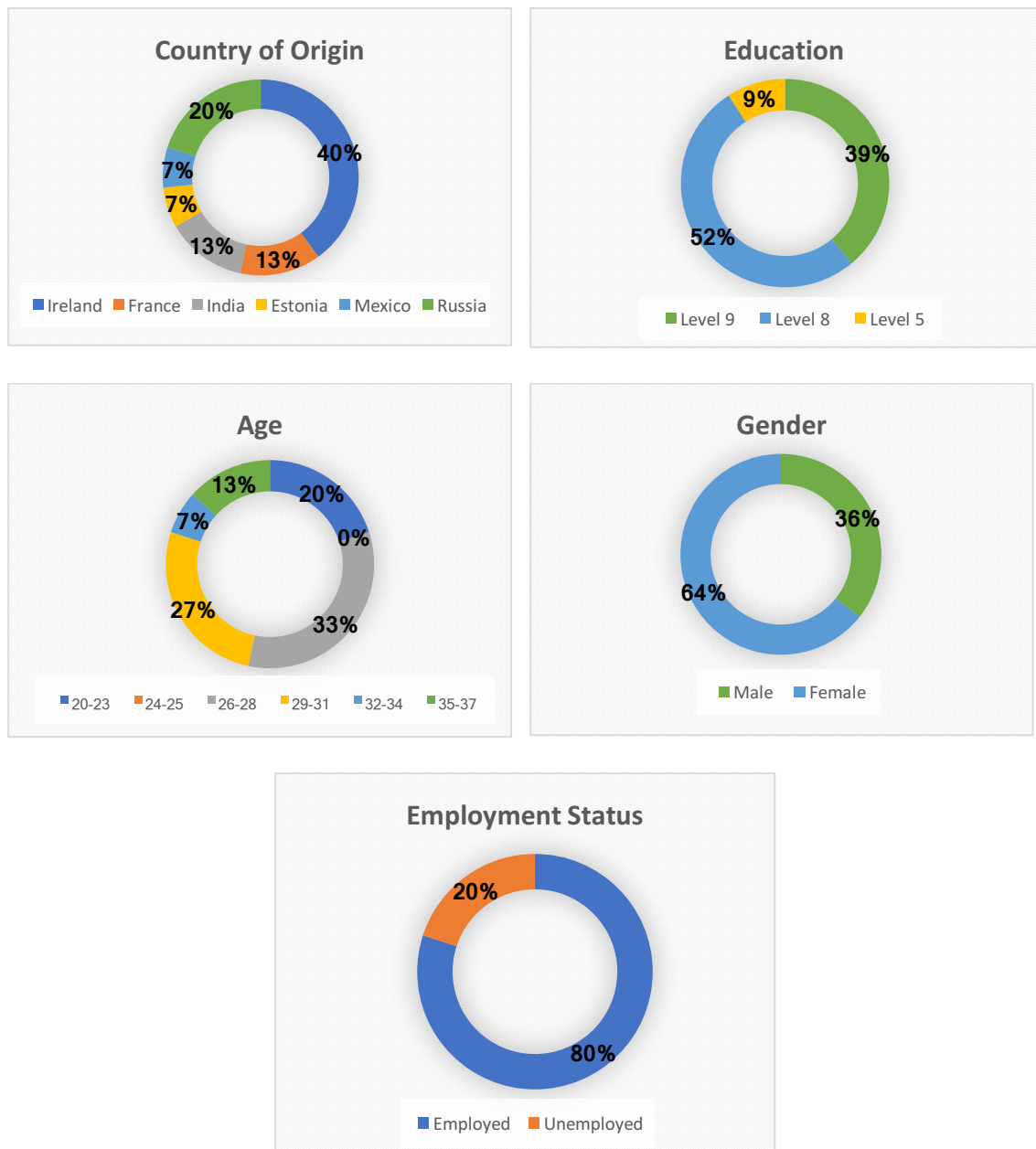
\*These tables include information of the focus group's participants comprising of age, gender, education, occupation and country of origin.

When deciding on the groups' composition, the author aimed to create a diverse cluster of participants based on their demographics. Nevertheless, the author aimed to have a fifty-fifty split between male and female but given the limited access to other male respondents the sample comprised of 5 *Male* and 9 *Female*. From those attending, 14 (out of 15) already had a 3<sup>rd</sup> level education with the majority 12 (out of 15) by now, in the workforce. The most *dominant age bracket* was represented by those belonging between 26-31 years-olds.

This result was anticipated by the researcher as most of the author's contacts were of similar age (29-31's category). The author aimed to compare if there were sensed any variances across different cultures. Thus, although contributors were all Irish residents they were asked to state their country of origin. The sample used in this research had its own uniqueness which was based on the participants' backgrounds. The total of 15 participants included: 6-*Irish*, 3-*Russian*, 2-*French*, 2-*Indian*, 1-*Estonian* and 1-*Mexican*.

The sample demographics are represented in the descriptions below based on their age, gender, education, employment status, and country of origin.

**Figure 5 - Participants` demographics – Data analysis findings based on (country of origin, gender, age, employment status and education)**



By using a dynamic sample, the author aimed to frame adequate research questions as a strong foundation for the research objectives. In the next part of this study, the author will provide a comprehensive analysis of the research findings by presenting one objective at a time. This section includes not only the findings rise from the research but also a significant discussion around the objectives, where personal thoughts of the author were merged with the literature and industry evidence to support or to contest the research findings.



\*For a simplified context of the following discussion section, the author coded each participant of the focus group as P1, P2, etc. and the direct quotes extracted from the group discussions will be presented in italics.

### **4.3. General Findings**

#### **4.3.1. Objective 1**

*“To investigate if Millennial’s ‘dining experiences’ has changed in a digitally connected society”.*

More specifically:

To examine if Millennial consumers perceived any variances in their dining experiences as a consequence of Social Media proliferation and to learn if e-WOM had any degree of influence in their choices.

##### ○ **Observed Variances**

The author aimed to find out if Millennials perceived any changes in their dining experiences over the past decade and what would be the main reason for this. Almost all participants (13 out of 15) agreed in a form or another that, yes, their dining experiences had changed considerably over the past years.

It is important to highlight that some observed high changes *“I think social media is the evolution”* (P9) while others clarified that *“is much easier now to communicate available options and find about the special offers and menus”* (P10). These findings support Bolton et al. (2013) previous studies, which hypothesized that Millennials were expected to be highly skilled in a digital landscape and active users of social media. Results proved that online communication streams had a great impact on the way people consume and experience restaurant services.

As an example, one of the participants said that *“The rise of social media has deepened my experience with restaurants”* (P14) while (P11) acknowledged that *“I have not visited a single restaurant in the past few years without some prior research online, on social media. I am very dependent on public opinion on this matter”* (P11). This result is in line with Nielsen (mentioned in Libai et al. 2010) who claimed that 80% of people read and trust recommendations before making a purchase.

A clear, yet, significant illustration can be drawn from (P4) answers who admitted that social media along with other online social platforms helped him choose *“what to eat according to preference, where to eat based on convenience and how to eat based on accessibility of prices”* (P4).

The literature evidenced the importance of Web 2.0 tools as enablers of communication between brands and customers (Litvin, Golsmith and Pan 2008). As well, the study's results provide a sustainable foundation for Obals's et al. (2011) research, agreeing that e-WOM was considered a credible source of information for the Millennials.

Nonetheless, a striking assumption came to light when few Millennials stated that social networks did not spur significant changes in their dining experiences and were not perceived as strongly as the other counterparts stating that "*my experience in choosing a restaurant has not changed with the emergence of social media*" (P12) or "*I trust what I see where I am, I do not waste time on social media to make a decision on casual dining, I am not one of those people who is involved in this, like reading and posting reviews*" (P13).

Although Bucklin and Pauwels (2009) conveyed social media as a powerful tool in creating virtual communities to enable communication, these results somehow contrast their options. The author assumed that the opposite results of the Millennials' views were supposedly attributed to the age gap between respondents (where the youngest had 23 and the eldest 37). Data results confirmed the author's earlier suppositions that findings will vary significantly because the sample was deliberately composed of 'young and old' Millennials, where age was used as a moderating variable.

- **e-WOM Alleged Influence**

The author pursued to out find more about Social Media as a driver of change by investigating what or who exactly have the power to sway them when making their choices.

The analysis found evidence for Facebook, which was frequently mentioned as one of the most accessible online spots containing the utmost reviews from customers "*the place to go and check what other people said about a particular restaurant*" (P1); "*I can see my friends sharing their good and bad experiences, so I can avoid that place*" (P14).

In light of these findings, (P9) made a valuable point, explaining that many restaurants just have a Facebook page, and "*sometimes includes even more ratings than anywhere else which makes it easier to share with your network of friends*" (P9). These findings agree with previous studies by Chu and Kim (2011) who agreed that social networking messages shared thru personal accounts of consumers were found more reliable as opposed to online reviews post on specialised webpages.

Besides, findings were in line with the Ipsos MRBI (2017) report which statistically proved that Irish consumers are heavy users of social media (see introduction section for percentages).

From the results, it is clear that Instagram was the most adored and swaying online channel, as *“it is such a visual platform”* (R1); *“the most important platform for me”* (R11). Majority of participants apprised its functionality, interactive and convincing power, as people share pictures and videos with special meals and drinks or *“often, Instagram allows me to see the interesting interior design of a restaurant and make me take a decision based purely on that image”* (P14). Overall, these verdicts are in accordance with findings reported by Statista (2018) which conveyed an astonishing 1 billion monthly active users on Instagram worldwide

The outcomes lead to similar conclusions, where Instagram was found once again highly persuading, because of the tagging options, which (P11) finds it very helpful when looking for places to eat, recommendations or specific location of a restaurant. She admitted that *“I look closely at reviews of public figures, celebrities, although realizing that most are paid advertising”*. Nevertheless, she admitted that if one of the people she follows who’s tastes she trusts, she would most likely be influenced and go to the same place. Results correlate with the literature review as Sultan, Rohm and Gao (2009) discussed about brands who actively engage with their consumers using interactive digital content.

The results of the analysis were then compared with other participants and similar links were found with (P3) who acknowledged that after following many food bloggers *“I’ve gone to many places purely based on their suggestions”*. Similar findings were deducted from (P1) statement after explaining that *“I am visually enticed to go and see those places just because I see them posting pictures and videos all day long. I must be subconsciously influenced or something like that”* (P1).

The industry report published by National Restaurant Association (2017) concluded that over 34% of people look at reviews before they make a purchase, clearly sustains the research findings that highlighted the importance of online reviews in their decision-making process.

It is by now generally accepted that social influencers or ‘mavens’ have quite a high degree of influence over the Millennial generation, especially for those who are digital savvy or those who followed these people long enough to build certain levels of trust.

These findings support the notion of Gladwell's (2011) remarks that businesses use 'mavens - bloggers' or 'connectors - social influencers' as key players in swaying consumers.

- **e-WOM Reliability**

The implications of these findings were discussed in relation with developing a greater acquaintance with the possible influence of e-WOM on Millennial's decisions when choosing a restaurant.

At this stage of understanding the available data, was not generally agreed among participants that e-WOM was a reliable source of information, as most of the debating arose around reviews posted online and their levels of dependability when taking a decision. The analysis found evidence for both trustworthy and deceitful e-WOM shared thru Social Media.

Some examples of these 'review based platforms' mentioned during the study included - TripAdvisor, Facebook and Instagram, followed by Google Reviews (P10, P15, P5), Foursquare (P11 and P12), Bloggs (P14) and Zomato App (P7) – an App which includes reviews for over 3300 restaurants in Ireland, and other online publications (P13).

e-WOM Perceived as 'Trustworthy'

Findings unveiled that people might get very influenced without even noticing, by other individuals with whom they had no prior connection. To bring a light upon these assumptions, the author justified by connecting it with (P3) statement *"if I see just one bad review this might influence me not to go there – do I even want to be there in case this happens to me?"* (P3). To reinforce, an additional prop was found in (P2) statements who self-confessed that *"If I see one bad review there, gone! I just do not want to take any risk paying all that money, I am not even taking any chances, there are so many other choices available, we are actually spoilt for choices in Dublin"* (P2).

To underline this conclusion, the author linked it with (P5) clarification *"I could partially be influenced by others' evaluations. If something good or bad is written, then it should be there for a reason!"* (P5). Interestingly, a valuable point to support the perceived reliability of social influencers and their reviews was found in the statement - *"because they are monitored by the creator, and reviews are only allowed by people with no personal connection with the premises"* (P10).

This deduction introduced a possible connection with Ho-Dac, Carson and Moore's (2013) paper, who pondered that reviews along with friends' recommendations as the most reliable springs of information when choosing a particular brand. The applicability of these results was then tested with the industry statistics, and the findings hold valid. Statista (2017) confirmed a growing trend in consumers' tendency to trust online reviews compared with personal recommendations, where 25% stated that they would trust them if they come from an "authentic source".

To strengthen the research findings, Bright Local (2017) released a report named 'Local Consumer Survey' where the organisation claimed an outstanding discovery, with 84% of people surveyed, "trusting online reviews as much as personal recommendations" and 91% of people "regularly or sporadically read online reviews". Moreover, the organisation determined that just one bad review could have an immense impact on a business, as 22% of people will drive away towards competitors.

#### e-WOM Perceived as 'Deceitful'

Some participants were more reluctant when reading online reviews "*taking them with a pinch of salt*" (P5) suggesting that "*people can be very emotional as they do not have a robot experience*" (P5). A popular explanation is that the majority of reviews were not perceived as honest, or some were considered to be for commercial purposes only. These results are in line with the previous study by Buttle (1998) who speculated that the e-WOM creators of content could be incentivised to publish content or additionally, to evaluate a product or a service.

It is important to highlight that few participants believed that reviews were both useful and reliable but at the same time, tricky and misleading. The analysis found that the levels of reliability were assessed differently even among the same participants as discussion unfolded. A ground for these verdicts was linked with (P3) thoughts "*I think restaurants should really re-evaluate it. Because social media is so big. Now they can be critiqued so easily!*" as opposed to her earlier assumptions that just one bad review might discourage her to even try that particular restaurant.

It is important to note that the present evidence relies solely on one discussion, which might have limited the possibilities to unveil a more comprehensive understanding of this participant's statements. To underline this conclusion, the author linked it with (P5) clarification "*I could partially be influenced by others' evaluations. If something good or bad is written, then it should be there for a reason!*".

Fundamental to note is that reviews, at some degree, were considered useful and reliable if looking objectively at what people shared online. To explain, (P5) affirmed that reviews should be considered holistic and not impartial, *“make an average between bad and good reviews and make up my own mind”*. On the same note, (P7) explained that reviews helped him decide about the quality of services offered in a restaurant as *“people share about their personal experiences, using real pictures taken by themselves, and assessing the quality based on their own judgment”* (P7).

This is partially important when evaluating a restaurant’s quality based on the scoring obtained from the reviews. There was found a direct correlation of results with literature evidence as Lee, Law and Murphy (2011) conducted a comprehensive analysis which assessed people’s views vis-à-vis the credibility of the reviewers using a special formula based on TripAdvisor website. Findings proved that people found reviews to be helpful and reliable. On the same note, Fogel (2010) mentioned TripAdvisor as a review website which people consult before making a purchase.

Additional connexion was observed when comparing the quality of reviews with the quantity. To clarify, (P12) made a significant comment *“it would be important to me to see that there is an adequate number of reviews, the positive reviews would look effective in massive numbers. If there are not sufficient reviews, less than ten for example, it would not convince me in any way”* (P12). From these statements, it is clear that reviews, positive or negative, would represent a swaying factor for consumers when considered in large quantities.

It is notable that online reviews for restaurants were found as significant as in the hotel business, where the ‘voice of customers’ weights substantially *“I would consider these reviews quite reliable. If not the visitors or restaurant users tell us about the service experienced, what other sources can give us all this exact information?”* (P11).

Linking these results with Konus, Verhoef and Neslin’s (2008) research conducted in the hotels’ industry, this study found clear the support of the conclusions, that consumers were searching multiple online streams to compare the offerings and gain assurance from a price perspective and that the option was less risky.

Curiously, data showed that some participants would pay attention to the same reviews over time *“I would particularly read some reviews as I am looking to find out if the restaurant has replied to it. If they dealt with the issue in a reasonable time, yes, I would definitely go to that place just based on this behaviour”* (P1). In this case, data evidenced that reviews which received instant replies from provider could be perceived as an appraiser of credibility for that business. Results ties well with the literature as (Silber, Israeli and Bustin 2009; Boshof 2012) discussed about the importance of companies to take immediate action in case of service failure to minimize the potential drawbacks.

Data also revealed significant importance for reviews, particularly when participants were travelling abroad. For example, the majority stated that they would be more inclined to read and judge a place, based on what information they could find online.

Reason for that was explained by factors as *“little familiarity with the places”* (P2); *“don’t really know what to expect”* (P1); *“I want to find out more about that place from locals, to see it from their perspectives”* (P5). It is notable that, reviews in any shape or form *“comments combined with photos”* (P7) represents the utmost influential factor when people are travelling. Results found direct correlation with the literature as Schindler and Bickart 2005; Xia and Bechwati 2008) remarked that people do not necessary need to have any prior connection with the other people in the virtual communities, yet, they find them as a reliable source of information.

From this standpoint, e-WOM can be considered as a persuasive factor, which, to some extent, might influence the way Millennial generation collect information and further consume the restaurant services.

- **Alternative Influencers**

The author pursued to investigate more deeply into Millennials activities to better understand who or what influence them in their restaurant decisions, outside the online environment. These findings highlighted what was previously exposed to regards with the perceived variances of Millennials’ dining experiences.

Generally speaking, the results underlined that customers often rely on their personal past experiences. People were more inclined to visit familiar places which they had visited before and by now developed some degree of connection and trust, with either the staff or the food quality.

To bring a light upon these findings, the author justified by connecting it with (P12) statement *“I chose restaurants or cafes spontaneously, based on intuition, or I prefer to go to places where I have been many times before, where I am familiar with the place and the price category, so I know what exactly to expect from that restaurant”* (P12).

Interestingly, more judgement for alternative influencers revealed that people have unique personal motivation *“sometimes I would take the chance and give it a try, just like that, but most often I am purely driven by hunger”* (P6). Further analysis underlined more alternative stimuli *“price and accessibility”* (P15) or *“friends and family recommendations, as they are an impartial criterion”* (P8).

The author speculates that the difference between the presented contrasting opinions can only be attributable to the participants’ level of consumption and daily interaction with these online communication streams.

#### **4.3.2. Objective 2**

***“To study if Millennials use e-WOM to share about their satisfaction or disappointment with the service experienced”***

In particular:

To investigate when Millennials are most likely to share online about their dining experiences and to examine the main personal triggers for engaging in complaining actions.

- **Satisfactory vs. Unsatisfactory Dining Experiences**

With few exceptions, findings emphasised a higher tendency for satisfactory experiences to be shared online compared with the unsatisfactory ones.

The evaluation of the data proved that participants were more inclined to bring value to a business *“give a nice review about the place”* (P11) as opposed to *“publicly shame a restaurant”* (P3). Closer examination of the data highlighted an increased tendency to share about positive outcomes *“I am more likely to share my good mood and good comments rather than sharing a complaint and spread negativity”* (P11). New results emerged when comments were cross-linked with findings from the previous section about complaining actions - only in ‘extreme scenarios’.



A definite correlation was found as *“the only time I would complain is when service or food quality is a serious threat to my health”* (P11). These connexions established a common ground for complaining about patterns and behaviour.

It is important to highlight that some participants claimed that, although disappointed at first instance, they would leave a good review about the place if the restaurant has dealt with it professionally. The findings have a strong link with the previous studies discussed in the literature review section based on recovery paradox (Magnini 2007; Zeithmal 2009; Brock 2010).

- **Customers’ Complaining Behaviour**

This section of analysis aimed to bring attention to the readers about the specific circumstances when participants were most likely to complain about the service received.

The most remarkable results to emerge from data was that participants in this study claimed that they would engage in online complaining behaviour only in extreme cases when a situation got out of hand. Otherwise, they would just try and solve the problem *“there and then, face-to-face, as I want to give them a chance to fix it”* (P2). Moreover, the analysis pursued to investigate at a deeper level what were the main personal triggers that pushed them to get involved, or not, in complaining actions.

The majority of those who responded claimed that they usually do not engage in any kind of complaining actions even *“if I was dissatisfied in any way, I would still just not complain. I tend to avoid conflicts with all occasions”* (P1). At a closer examination of the same participant responses, a striking deduction was found that, while not a loud complainer, she would influence someone else to do it for her (in this case P2) *“I would complain to everyone around me until someone else would stand up and complain about for me [...] I would just convince my boyfriend to do it for me”* (P1).

Looking for a common thread, data highlighted that there was a similar response given by another participant *“I would just ask Mark to say something about it”* (P3).

The correlating data assumed that some people (in the present case, females) have the power to influence other peoples’ complaining behaviour. Although thought-provoking, data was not considered sufficient to generalize these findings, as the discussion was concentrated on different themes to support the research questions.

The results further demonstrated captivating findings which can be linked with the above speculation that, although a participant (female in this case) would be *“shy to say anything to anyone in person”* (P1) the same person would just *“go to social media and post about it, as I do not want anyone to apologize in front of me, I would just cry”* (P1).

Fundamental to note that, participants proved high levels of indulgence related to bad or unsatisfactory experiences *“we are all humans and we all make mistakes”* (P7). Analysis further proved that respondents would give the restaurant provider many opportunities to fix the problem *“I would give them a second or maybe a third chance, especially if I really like that place”* (P6); *“I don’t want to make a business look bad, I would just give them a second chance”* (P15).

Interesting results were further discovered related with the possible chances to fix the problem *“on the spot”* (P2) without any major interferences that would lead to extraneous complaint behaviour. To exemplify, the conclusion was supported on the same responder’s answers (P2), where analysis verified that no matter how renown a restaurant is, if the personnel do not respond professionally - *“employees should receive appropriate training of how to deal with complaints”* (P2), the reputation will be undeniably damaged.

At a closer look, results proved that this was not necessarily true. Examination brought to the researcher’s attention that there were participants who would not say anything at the occurrence but *“choose to contact them afterwards or wait and contact the manager the following day”* (P10). Controversy arises as data highlighted different behavioural patterns related to where or to whom they would complain *“I would rather complain face-to-face because is more honesty involved [...] complaining thru social media is coward-like. Giving an opinion online (positive or negative) is ok, but giving a full complaint in comments is like making fun of someone on the street”* (P9).

It was by now, not generally agreed that most people would criticise something when it happens. To support this conclusion, valuable insights were found along the lines, where personality *“I am shy”* (P13) or moral standards *“due to my personal beliefs I never say something about a bad experience”* (P13) discouraged the involvement in peevish behaviour *“I have never left a complaint in a restaurant or online”* (P13).

- **Apparent Value of Complaints**

New deductions were aimed to examine the levels of perceived value for engaging in complaining actions. The results demonstrated that four contributors of this study shared the same opinion, strongly believing that their complaining deeds will bring immense value to the business *“it helps businesses to improve”* (P9); *“I think is vital or otherwise businesses will not improve”* (P10); *“a benefit and a sign to owners of how their business can be improved”* (P12).

The additional investigation brought to light interesting results related to the perceived value of complaints. Some discussed their personal triggers beyond the practical value offered for businesses claiming that *“I complain because I appreciate my money”* (P2). Contrastingly, one participant brought a valuable point to the research findings affirming that *“I complain because I paid for the entire service, the entire experience, not only the value of that dish”* (P3).

It is by now generally agreed that complaining to a restaurant will help *“improve the place [...] help managers to understand that there is a problem and help them make their service better”* (P13). Other fallouts linked with the worth of complaints proved that *“restaurant owners should see a complaint as an opportunity to solve an issue”* (P12) or *“opportunity to adapt to nowadays expectations”* (P10).

A captivating line of conclusions came to light as results proved that, not all participants perceived their complaints as valuable or beneficial, claiming that they are not listened or *“when we complain we are not taking seriously”* (P3 and P15). Intriguingly, some even stated that complaining online *“involves too much work and is not worth my time or effort”* (P6).

Following the same tread, the examination found that, in cases when people are loyal to a certain place, they tend to use *“anonymous ways”* (P7) to ‘voice’ about their disappointment or *“use a platform or direct online chat to let the personnel know about the issue”* (P11) since their comments will be highly beneficial.

Other results showed a higher predisposition for public care *“I take it as my duty to let other potential customers know about the problems in a restaurant which could cause serious issues to their health”* (P11). The author speculates that the contradictory assumptions might be based on the sample’s characteristics as the age range of respondents varied significantly. These findings support the notion that complaints made with a sensible judgment could be highly valuable in the long run for any service business.

- **Type of Complainers**

The analysis found that participants were engaging, or not, in complaining behaviour activities based on their personal stimuli or the specific context. These findings were compared with previous studies of Lovelock et al. (2009) who classified customers based on how they react to service failure and the available response choices to service failures.

To better visualize and understand the purpose of this section, the author provides below an explanation for each of the four categories included in Lovelock's et al. (2009) theory.

**Figure 6 – 'Types of Complainers' description, adapted from Lovelock, Chew and Wirtz (2009)**

<p><b>ACTIVISTS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Frequently complain to providers</li> <li>➤ Tell friends/family and any other about their experiences</li> <li>➤ Sometimes complain to 3<sup>rd</sup> parties</li> <li>➤ Complaining fits with their personal norms although they have an optimistic sense of potential consequences of all types of complaining.</li> </ul>
<p><b>PASSIVES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Less likely to take any action, speak with others or engage in negative WOM/e-WOM</li> <li>➤ Doubt about the effectiveness of complaining believing that consequences will not merit the time and effort spent.</li> <li>➤ Sometimes their personal values/norms argue against complaining</li> </ul>
<p><b>VOICERS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Actively complain to the service provider, but less likely to engage in spreading negative WOM/e-WOM or switch providers</li> <li>➤ Consequences could be perceived as positive</li> <li>➤ Usually give the firms a 'second chance' as their intrinsic motivation is believed to have social benefits</li> <li>➤ Should be viewed as the best friends of service providers</li> </ul>
<p><b>IRATES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ More likely than others to engage in negative WOM/e-WOM</li> <li>➤ Angrier with the provider nevertheless they believe in the positive outcomes of complaining</li> <li>➤ Less likely to give a second chance</li> <li>➤ Usually switch to competitors</li> </ul>

Source: Own illustrations based on Lovelock, Chew and Wirtz (2009) book - '*Essentials of Service Marketing*'. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Pearson

To some extent, the results agreed with previous literature, although, the analysis identified a gap in Lovelock's et al. (2009) theory which categorized customers only in the four given categories.

There were trends in the data which proved that customers might fall in more than just one category purely based on their own judgments and actions.

To explain, some participants were identified as ‘passives’ in the initial stage as, being shy (P1), only complaining in extreme cases (P2; P5) or not seeing any value in complaining deeds because she was not taking seriously (P3). Surprisingly, the same people but in a different context shifted categories almost instantly.

For example:

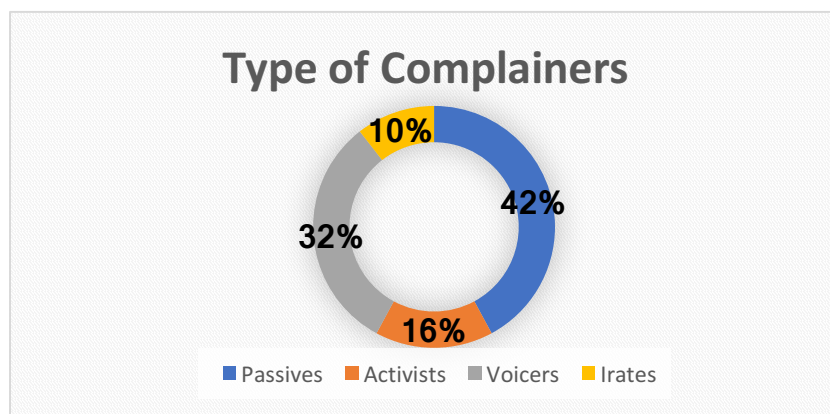
**Instance a** - (P5) initially found as a ‘*Passive*’ becomes a ‘*Voicer*’ – when standing up for a friend.

**Instance b** - (P2) ‘*Passive*’ by nature becomes a ‘*Voicer*’ – if influenced by the group peers or family members to act.

**Instance c** - (P3) declared firstly as a ‘*Passive*’ became an ‘*Irate*’– after she was publicly embarrassed by the bistro’s manager because she complained

**Instance d** - (P1) ‘*Activist*’ at hearth may become an ‘*Irate*’ quite easy – especially after making a complaint and not receiving any sort of response in a sensible time

Together, the present findings confirm the initial deductions that some people might fall into more than just one category. To exemplify, (P1) Activist - Irate; (P3) Passive - Irate; (P2) Passive - Voicer; (P5) Passive – Voicer. The other participants of this study inclined to fall mostly into just one category.



**Figure 7 – ‘Types of Complainers’ – Portrayal of research findings, based on Lovelock, Chew and Wirtz (2009)**

### 4.3.3. Objective 3:

*“To examine if Millennials use e-WOM to make a complaint and develop an understanding about their recovery expectations”*

#### More specifically:

To investigate Millennials’ evaluations of service complaint experiences and examine what their recovery expectations might be from the Restaurant’s employees or management.

- **Customers’ Evaluations of Complaint Experiences**

The results of this section aimed to highlight the participants’ levels of satisfaction or disappointment with the complaining process. Data showed evidence for repeated unsatisfactory situations when *“although I complained about it, they would just not take me seriously”* (P15). In line with this conclusion, the analysis found similar links with regards to complaining process *“some restaurant does not really want to have a complaint procedure as it is a troublesome for them”* (P10).

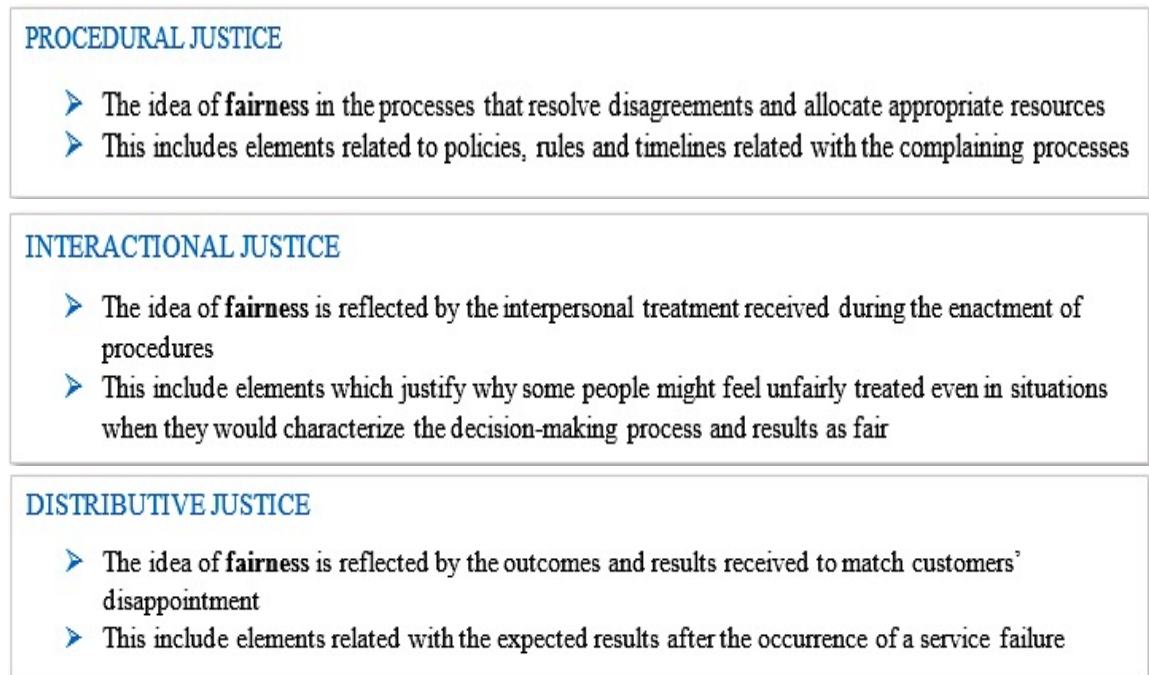
The data revealed significant differences in contributors’ experiences where few acknowledged that, after voicing their own disappointment and receiving an immediate solution, they were even more satisfied with the service than their initial state. These results tie well with the previous studies by Hart, Haskett and Sasser (1990) who investigated the effect of the service recovery paradox. The authors claimed that some people showed higher levels of satisfaction with the service recovery process after they experienced a service failure but recompensed outstandingly.

It is important to note that the present evidence relies solely on the findings generated by the data gathered during the group discussion sessions. The author believes that a broader gamut of examination would be considered appropriate to generalise these findings at a larger scale.

- **Dimensions of ‘Perceived Fairness’ in the Service Recovery Process**

The analysis included in this section presents the results of the investigation based on Tax, Brown and Chandrasekaran’s (1998) theory of justice and the three dimensions of perceived fairness. To clarify, the author finds it appropriate to offer a description of the justice elements and what are the associated elements.

**Figure 8 – Dimensions of `Justice Elements` adapted from Tax, Brown and Chandrashekar (1998) philosophy**



*Source:* Own illustration adapted from “Customers evaluations of Service Compliant Experiences: Implications for Relationship Marketing” by Tax, Brown and Chandrashekar (1998: 63), *Journal of Marketing*, April 1998, Vol. 62, 60-76

For a clear understanding of the findings, the same coding for the participants' study - (P1, P2, etc.)

Additionally, Table 6 (a, b, c) describes the three dimensions of perceived fairness - what customers actually expected in their complaint process, how they expected to be treated all the way in the process and what they believed to be 'fair' at the time of occurrence so that they would be satisfied with the service recovery.

**Table 6 (a) – Procedural Justice - Dimensions of ‘Perceived Fairness’ with the Service Recovery process – Data Analysis findings – adapted Tax, Brown and Chandrashekar (1998)**

JUSTICE DIMENSIONS	INCIDENCE	SAMPLE COMMENTS
<i>Procedural</i>		
<i>Assuming responsibility</i>	(P5) (P7) (P6)	<i>“I wanted them to acknowledge their mistake” (P7); “acknowledgement of your own mistakes would be highly appreciated” (P7 &amp; P6);</i>
<i>Timing or Speed</i>	(P5) (P12)	<i>“When a problem occurs, I want them to solve it there and then, on the spot” (P5) “I made a complaint 5 days ago and still not got any replay from them” (P12)</i>
<i>Convenience</i>	(P5)	<i>“The waitress blamed me for the misunderstanding although I was sure about what exactly I ordered! After the waitress brought me the wrong food and I sent it back I told them that I do not want anything anymore. Amazingly, they offered me the corrected meal, the one I asked initially, disregarding what I just told them” (P5)</i>
<i>Process control</i>	(P5)	<i>“I want to be able to speak with the front staff first before going anywhere else. Most of problems can be solved without any major interferences” (P12) “face-to-face” (P5); “I would not say anything there, I would wait and contact the manager the next day” (P10)</i>
<i>Flexibility</i>	(P9) (P11)	<i>“I would like to say it face-to face or even write it down on a piece of paper” (P9); “I would rather use an online platform or direct online chat” (P11)</i>
<i>Knowledge of process</i>	(P14) (P1) (P9)	<i>“If I see a bad online review left unanswered by the staff or manger, this tells me a lot about their attitude to customers. There must be a certain, clear response to all complaints. Ideally, a rep should respond below and invite the client to negotiation, offer a compensation and request for contact details of that person” (P14)</i>

*Source:* Own illustration adapted from “Customers evaluations of Service Compliant Experiences: Implications for Relationship Marketing” by Tax, Brown and Chandrashekar (1998: 63), *Journal of Marketing*, April 1998, Vol. 62, 60-76.



**Table 6 (b) – Interactional Justice - Dimensions of ‘Perceived Fairness’ with the Service Recovery process – Data Analysis findings – adapted Tax, Brown and Chandrashekar (1998)**

<i>Interactional</i>		
<i>Politeness</i>	(P8) (P2) (P5) (P15)	<i>“The waitress was very nice and courteous. She remedies the problem almost instantly” (P8) “No matter the quality of food, if the atmosphere is unpleasant or staff are not polite I would just not go there” (P15)</i>
<i>Empathy</i>	(P5) (P13)	<i>“I do not want any kind of explanations for mistake. I just want what I ordered” (P5)</i>
<i>Effort</i>	(P3) (P15)	<i>“I knew that there is no point in complaining as they would not listen to me. They just see you are young, so they are just not taking you seriously” (P3)</i>
<i>Explanation or Information</i>	(P3) (P15)	<i>“The manager blamed me saying that there is nothing wrong with the food but with my own taste!” (P3); “The waiter explained me that is a particular ingredient that makes the soup taste like that, I knew he was bluffing. The soup was just off!” (P15)</i>
<i>Honesty</i>	(P8) (P2)	<i>“They should have been honest with me and admit that it was not an ‘authentic’ Mexican restaurant, they used misleading and false advertising” (P8);</i>
<i>Attitude</i>	(P14) (P3) (P15)	<i>“I have never had a bad experience in a restaurant as I always look very carefully where I go” (P14); “The manager embarrassed me in front of my friends, he spoke down to me” (P3); “the personnel should receive professional training in how to deal with a complaining customer” (P5) “I encounter unhelpful waiters, unwilling to even listen to me” (P1)</i>

*Source:* Own illustration adapted from “Customers evaluations of Service Compliant Experiences: Implications for Relationship Marketing” by Tax, Brown and Chandrashekar (1998: 63), *Journal of Marketing*, April 1998, Vol. 62, 60-76.

**Table 6 (c) – Distributive Justice - Dimensions of ‘Perceived Fairness’ with the Service Recovery process – Data Analysis findings – adapted Tax, Brown and Chandrashekar (1998)**

<i>Distributive</i>		
<i>Compensation Issues (associated with financial loss)</i>	All participants	<i>“free deserts would be amazing” (P6, P15, P5); “a glass of wine” (P15); “a free beer” (P5); “Corrections or Reduction of the bill” (almost all participants); “I would expect a serious compensation if I was food poisoned again” (P11) “offer me something free, more food or something like that” (P4)</i>
<i>Reimbursement or Refund</i>	(P11)	<i>“Return of money spent or some financial compensation if it was about food poisoning” (P11)</i>
<i>Replacement</i>	All participants	<i>“Replacement of meal” (mentioned by all participants); “Receive an alternative” (P12); “The food I ordered came to cold. I asked for them to reheat or replace it” (P7);</i>
<i>Corrections</i>	(P9) (4)	<i>“I asked the waiter to re-cook the pork as it was still raw in the middle. He immediately sent meal back in the kitchen and have it cooked more” (P9); “The stake was not cooked as I asked the waiter. The manager decided to offer me another steak cooked according with my taste” (P4)</i>
<i>Credit or Vouchers</i>	(P4) (P10) (P9)	<i>“I was offered 20% reduction on my bill” (P4); “A reduction, a gift or a gift voucher at least” (P10); “Discount” (P9)</i>
<i>Apology (associated emotional costs)</i>	(P7) (P6)	<i>“Just apologize! Attitude is very important to me” (P7) “A change in situation. If there was an adequate change of situation, as a client I would just leave happy” (P14)</i>

*Source:* Own illustration adapted from “Customers evaluations of Service Compliant Experiences: Implications for Relationship Marketing” by Tax, Brown and Chandrashekar (1998: 63), *Journal of Marketing*, April 1998, Vol. 62, 60-76.

The evaluation of data presented in this section leads to the conclusion that the most popular perceived ‘fairness elements’ for each of the three ‘justice dimensions’ were quite similar among participants of this study. These most popular ‘Fairness Dimensions’ extracted from data analysis are presented below:

<b>Justice Dimension</b>	<b>‘Perceived Fairness Dimension’</b>
<b>Procedural Justice</b>	➤ The most often mentioned issue was linked with the restaurant’s personnel who was required to acknowledge, apologize and take responsibility for the issue.
<b>Interpersonal Justice</b>	➤ Participant sought additional support in fixing the issue in a polite and respectful manner. Attitude along the entire process was found very important for the majority of participants
<b>Distributive Justice</b>	➤ The most ‘discussed about’ results were concentrated around compensation issues (associated with financial loss) and replacement

**Figure 9 – ‘Dimensions of Fairness’ – Findings from Qualitative analysis**

## CH 5 - CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1. Introduction

The purpose of the research was to investigate thru qualitative methods the consumer experiences of the Irish Millennials. The results clearly emphasized how this generation of controversy is gradually changing the `dining trends` by highlighting their definite impact on the restaurant industry.

In a digital era, e-WOM was found as the utmost influencer for the restaurants` services, as having the power not only to sway their perceptions of `quality` but as well, to shape their behavioural characteristics. Building on traditional academic taught vis-à-vis customers` responses to service failure, the research looked deeper into Millennials` rational thinking, to understand their grouchy attitudes related to their most recent dining experiences.

This study joins the plethora of debates around the Millennial generation, by offering updated insights and valuable results that support their relentless researches aimed to understand Millennials` attitudes and behaviours in the online environment. Although similar patterns of customer recovery expectations were identified across investigation, this study brings to light additional findings which proved that the individual beliefs of customers engaged, or not, in criticisms could reveal unusual `categories of complainers`.

### 5.2. Conclusions from Research

This study was built on current theories and assumptions related to service marketing with a particular focus on service failure and recovery, applied in the restaurants` sector and grasped from an Irish perspective. Conclusions drawn upon investigation will be highlighted under each pre-determined research objective.

#### **Objective 1: Digital Era Undeniably Shaped Millennials` Dining Experiences.**

Looking from an Irish perspective, it is the researcher`s deduction that Millennial generation sensed considerable variances in their dining experiences over the past decade. While there are still few reluctant people to embrace the `journey of digital transformation`, the majority acknowledged that the proliferation of social media and similar online communications streams has shaped the way they consume `experience services`. For restaurants, in particular, these platforms were sensed as enablers of `tangibility` by using the power of visuals and interactive content.

Through swiping and clicking the available online information they could find almost instantly, exactly what to eat according to their tastes, where to eat based on convenience and how best to eat grounded in their value for money.

The highest levels of `alleged influences` were first attributed to Facebook and Instagram platforms, which comes as no surprise. The most recent report from Ipsos MRBI (2017) recorded a remarkable 69% daily active users for Facebook and a growing 32% digit for the Instagram platform among the Irish demographics. Along these, the mavens - as bloggers and connectors - as social influencers (Gladwell 2011) were considered second most swaying powers and lastly, the `reviews based platforms` the case of TripAdvisor, Foursquare or `Zomatto` App – which includes customers` reviews for over 3300 restaurants in Ireland.

Triggers and impact of both positive and negative e-WOM influences were discussed throughout the research where the credibility of these `influential sources` was constantly debated. The investigation uncovered higher predispositions towards `trustworthy` as compared with `deceitful` e-WOM. These tendencies weight quite heavy in the consumers` pre-purchasing stage especially for the experiential services where reviews or `the voice of consumers` are highly valued. Indeed, the National Restaurant Association (2017) estimated that over 34% of people look at reviews before they make a purchase.

Moreover, the research concluded that beside reviews and e-WOM, alternative convincing factors were linked with personal recommendations, pleasant past experiences where people tend to have some levels of familiarity with restaurant menus, intuition, hunger or just casual dining.

**Objective 2: Millennials express higher levels of indulgence for service failures, shifting towards rewarding excellent dining experiences.**

With few exceptions, findings emphasised a higher tendency for satisfactory experiences to be shared online compared with the unsatisfactory ones. The common thread was attributable to their inner desire of sharing positivity as opposed to negativity, where Millennials` dining experiences per se, were shared in the virtual space only in extreme cases. Thus, a mediocre experience where pre-determined expectations pair with service delivery does not trigger any kind of emotions.

The present findings add to the growing corpus of the marketing literature debates around service recovery paradox Hart, Haskett and Sasser (1990) that some people who were initially disappointed after experiencing a failure were even more satisfied with the recovery process. The research found a valuable deduction for such paradox which was grounded on receiving an instant remediation of the situation (replacement of the meal, free drinks or sweets) or were recompensed outstandingly (discount on the final bill, voucher, free meal). Some people claimed that they would even go a step further and post a review online about their `delight`.

Importantly, the results provided evidence for two occurrences of biased behaviour (in the present case, females) which, although passive by nature, would persuade other people around them to engage in peevish behaviour in their favour. This is considered a significant assumption in the process of understanding Millennials` complaining behaviour in a restaurant context. Ideally, these findings should be replicated in an ampler study to compare males` and females` reactions in different contexts or to investigate variables like `power` or `control` that might unveil new judgements.

In addition, these findings provide a new assumption for the existing classification of complaining customers disputed by Lovelock et al. (2009) which only identified four types or categories. Results prove that some customers might fall in different categories at the same time, depending on the circumstances and personal motivators.

Values of complaints were perceived as more beneficial for managers` perspectives as was commonly agreed that any complaint is a chance to improve the quality of the service and an opportunity to adapt to the new trends. Contrastingly, a captivating line of conclusion came to light as results proved that, not all participants perceived their complaints as valuable or beneficial, claiming that they are not listening or taken seriously.

### **Objective 3: `Attitude` weights as much as `Recompense` in the eyes of Millennials.**

Although companies struggle to have no failures, is quite impossible to deliver failure free services even for the most competitive firms (Krishna 2011). Nevertheless, when it happens, customers expect to be treated impartially during the entire process and to receive a fair outcome that matches with their levels of dissatisfaction.

Collectively, these conclusions appear consistent with the traditional research around customers' perceived levels of 'fairness' discussed by Tax, Brown and Chandrasekhar's (1998). The most frequently mentioned concern linked with the attitude of the restaurants' personnel who were required to acknowledge their mistakes, apologize and take responsibility for the issue. Participants sought additional support in finding a solution for the occurrence in a polite and respectful manner. In terms of outcomes or results, findings proved that Millennials requested compensations to match their financial loss and replacement of the meal. This allows the conclusion that 'attitude' of personnel or restaurant managers is the second most important 'justice dimension' that Irish Millennials' expects in the recovery process.

### **Figure 10 – Overview of the Research Objectives and Conclusions**

#### **Objective 1:**

***“To investigate if Millennial’s ‘dining experiences’ has changed in a digitally connected society”.***

#### **More specifically:**

To examine if Millennial consumers perceived any variances in their dining experiences as a consequence of Social Media proliferation and to learn if e-WOM had any degree of influence in their choices.

- Observed Variances
- e-WOM Alleged Influence
- e-WOM Credibility
  - e-WOM perceived as 'Trustworthy'
  - e-WOM perceived as 'Deceitful'
- Alternative Influencers

#### ***Research Conclusion:***

***Digital Era Undeniably Shaped Millennials' Dining Experiences.***

**Objective 2:**

***“To study if Millennials use e-WOM to share about their satisfaction or disappointment with the service experienced”.***

In particular:

To investigate when Millennials are most likely to share online about their dining experiences and to examine the main personal triggers for engaging in complaining actions.

- Satisfactory vs. Unsatisfactory Dining Experiences
- Customers’ Complaining Behaviour
- Apparent Value of Complaints
- Type of Complainers

**Research Conclusion:**

**Millennials express higher levels of indulgence for service failures, shifting towards rewarding excellent dining experiences.**

**Objective3:**

***“To examine if Millennials use e-WOM to make a complaint and develop an understanding about their recovery expectations”.***

More specifically:

To investigate Millennials’ evaluations of service complaint experiences and examine what their recovery expectations might be from the Restaurant’s employees or management.

- Customers’ Evaluations of Complaint Experiences
- Dimensions of ‘Perceived Fairness’ in the Service Recovery Process

**Research Conclusion:**

**‘Attitude’ weights as much as ‘Recompense’ in the eyes of Millennials.**

### **5.3. Recommendations for Future Academic Research**

Although the present investigation has enriched the understanding of how Millennials are shaping the restaurant industry in the era of interactivity, as well as the possible effects of e-WOM influences on the long run, there are still areas insufficiently explored. This section looks to highlight new springs for future research, anchored in the study’s limitations itself or emerging from data analysis.



By looking at the geographical boundaries (Dublin only) it can be said that the research would additionally benefit if this study was conducted in different areas of Ireland or even more ambitiously, in other countries. Cross-comparison among different culture might unveil discoveries that will benefit the existing academia with fresh insight and knowledgeable findings.

The author acknowledged that a *longitudinal approach* (netnographic or ethnographic) will possibly benefit the next researchers to observe behavioural changes over time, make connections between sequences of events and even measure the attitudes and opinions of the same sample over a longer period. An interesting avenue for research might be to compare both perspectives (customers and restaurant managers) in the same study, seeking to examine if there are any missing links or misunderstandings across the entire service recovery process.

This study was conducted in an exploratory note using a qualitative approach (focus groups discussions) to collect and interpret data from Millennials. Avenues for research could include quantitative methods looking to analyse differences between males' and females' attitudes towards service failure of the same age category or comparing Millennials with generation Z.

#### **5.4. Recommendations for Practitioners and Restaurant Managers**

As research revealed that all services are 'experiences' and that a mediocre level will not trigger any sort of emotional response, customer satisfaction and delight should be top priorities for restaurateurs'. In return, providers will be 'rewarded' by their customers by sharing positive ratings and reviews over social networking channels and demonstrate repeated purchase behaviour based on trust and commitment.

Results from data highlighted that people tend to read not only the reviews and comments of customers but they are precisely seeking to find if the restaurant took any initiative to replay and to fix the issue. If proved the case, customers tend to trust the restaurant even more purely based on the initiative.

Moreover, the Deloitte (2016) conducted a research that surveyed over 3000 Millennials - 'The Restaurant of the Future' concluded that "84% of customers returns if restaurants respond directly to their feedback (...) and 60% would go back to a restaurant that provides good service".

Thus, restaurant managers should - act quickly, act efficiently, be present!

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Focus Group Discussions – Layout of Questions

This research is concentrated around four main points:

- A. Your 'dining experience' with a focus on the less positive experience (when the service provided by the Restaurant fails below your anticipated standards)
- B. And your 'complaint experience' after this incidence. I am looking to investigate: if you complain, where, to whom you make the complaint? Do you use Social Media or any other Online platforms to make a complaint?
- C. What would be 'your personal expectations' from Restaurant employees or manager after you made a complaint? (perceived fairness)
- D. The last thing would be to assess yourself based on the answers provided in what category of 'Types of complainers' you best fit in. (Please see the last section of the attached document for a full description of the categories)

There is no right or wrong answer and each of your opinions / thoughts are highly valued in this research!

#### OBJECTIVE 1:

"To investigate if Millennial's 'dining experiences' has changed in a digitally connected society".

1. Do you feel that your 'dining experience' has changed due to emerge of social media or any other similar platforms?
  - 1.1. How different do you see this change?
2. What do you think about e-WOM shared thru Social Media? (reviews, rating stars, reading blogs, friends' recommendations, social influencers, mavens, bloggers, any others)
  - 2.1. Have you used these platforms to look up for a specific restaurant (or general)? For what purpose you used these platforms? Could you name few of these?
  - 2.2. Would you consider them as a reliable source of information? If yes/no, why?

#### OBJECTIVE 2:

"To study if Millennials use e-WOM to share about their satisfaction or disappointment with the service experienced"

When experiencing a Restaurant service that falls below your desired standards...

3. Do you usually complain about your dissatisfaction? If yes, no, why?
4. In what circumstances are you most likely to / not to complain?
5. How / Where / to whom you complain?
6. Do you feel that e-WOM ease the complaining process? Are you more likely to complain online rather than face -to-face? If yes/no, why?

7. Do you think that engaging in complaining behaviour has any benefit to you as a consumer? What about the Restaurant that you are complaining about?
8. Could you please describe briefly a recent complaint you made to a restaurant provider? What went wrong? What actions did you take? What about the staff members? Other...
9. What problems do you see with complaints or complaining behaviour? Do you feel this is in detriment of Restaurants?
10. Do you feel that there are any valuable insights that managers could learn from Millennials who engage in complaining behaviour (online)?

### **OBJECTIVE 3:**

“To examine if Millennials use e-WOM to make a complaint and develop an understanding about their recovery expectations”

#### **Brief introduction of the theory frame:**

In general, when people take time and effort to complain, they have recovery expectations. They might expect that the company is accountable, respond and act quickly, some other expect compensations in forms of monetary values, or just a simple apology and so on. In terms of ‘Perceived Fairness’ with the service recovery, scholars have identified three dimensions of ‘justice’ Distributive [...] Procedural [...] and Interactional [...]

**Distributive Justice – Outcomes and results** (this should match your level of dissatisfaction based on your individual needs at the time of occurrence) this might differ in time and from situation to situation even for the same person

11. What type of ‘Outcomes or Results’ would you expect from the Restaurant provider to offer?

**Procedural Justice – Polices and timeliness of the complaining process** (assistance required with the problem rather than just having an email or phone number to make the complain)

12. What would your expectations be in terms of ‘Process of complaining’?

**Interactional Justice – Interpersonal treatment during the complaining process**

13. What are your expectations in terms of interactional (interpersonal) treatment from the Restaurant staff or manager when you encounter a problem, or you are making a complaint)



**As research attests, usually there are 4 'Types of complainers' as follows:**

**Passives:** less likely to take any action or say anything to the service provider. Less likely to spread negative e-WOM or complain to 3<sup>rd</sup> parties. Often doubt about the effectiveness of complaining thinking that the consequences will not merit the effort they will expend. Personal values or norms argue against complaining.

**Voicers:** Actively complain to the service providers but less likely to spread negative e-WOM, to switch providers or go to 3<sup>rd</sup> parties. Actively complain thus giving the company a second chance. Complaining has social benefits reason why they engage into complaining actions. Consequences can be positive to provider. Personal norms are consistent with complaining

**irates:** More likely to engage in negative e-WOM communication with friends, peers or any other online communities. Usually switch providers because of failure. Although they are angry on the provider they do believe that complaining have social benefits but there is no second chance to the providers switching to competitor.

**Activists:** above average tendency to complain to all dimensions: complain to provider, to others and more likely than any other category to complain to 3<sup>rd</sup> parties. Complaining fits with their personal norms, with a very optimistic sense of the potential positive consequences of all types of complaining

After today's discussion each participant was identified as belonging to the [x] category which was purely based on your own answers, individual assessments of comportment in case of experiencing a service failure and your personal evaluations of recovery expectations.