

The Influence of New Media and the Internet on Dining Preferences in China

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Abstract: Aligning with national macroeconomic policies (SIC2024), this research analyzes platform logic and user interface design (with a focus on Dianping), consumer choice patterns, and catering industry strategies (in a case study of *Lamdre*, a fancy vegetarian restaurant in Beijing). This article aims to delve into the specific manifestations of various elements in the current Dianping app, analyzing the multiple impacts they have on different entities mentioned earlier (such as businesses and users), as well as the interaction logic among these elements. By comprehensively employing descriptive analysis, theoretical analysis, case studies, and scientific rigor, this research intends to provide a standardized, reasonable, and insightful reference model for platforms like Dianping that continue to scale new heights in the era of internet new media, as well as for consumers pursuing new trends and innovative columns. It is hoped that this study will deepen the understanding of the experience and consumption behavior of China's catering industry and its consumers on Dianping, and impart greater significance to it.

Keywords: Internet and New Media, New Catering Models, Consumer Choices, Consumption Logic, Dianping (Platform)

1. Introduction

With the continuous development of the Internet and the deepening of the O2O concept, more and more offline resources and information can be unified and integrated in front of consumers through the Internet platform. Among various offline service industries, the catering industry is undoubtedly one of the sectors most closely connected to users. Leveraging the advantages of mobile Internet and the strong support of new media platforms, service providers such as *Dianping* have effectively utilized new media and emerging consumer cultures to deliver enhanced services to users. Restaurant selection, as one of the most fundamental activities in daily life, has thus become significantly influenced by these platforms. However, in the development of *Dianping*, existing research and analysis have primarily focused on its commercial scale, business logic, and direct impact. Yet as users who increasingly rely on *Dianping* for convenience, it is important to consider the underlying thought processes that guide our consumption behaviors through the platform—particularly when it comes to restaurant or dining choices. To conclude, this paper will subsequently investigate the phenomena based on user behavior, aiming to enhance the theoretical content and facilitate analysis of this prevalent and practical phenomenon in everyday life. Moreover, it can offer sustainable assistance for the long-term growth of businesses or platforms based on these new media and internet sensations. This study specifically analyzes the platform logic of Dianping, the patterns of consumer

dining choices, and incorporates a case study of "Lamdre," a high-end vegetarian restaurant in Beijing, to illustrate these dynamics in practice.

2. Standards of evaluation and consumer preferences in traditional restaurants

Currently, the research on service evaluation in the catering industry primarily focuses on three key aspects. Firstly, there is a need to define the connotation of the catering industry. Scholars argue that it encompasses a wide range of meanings and cannot be simply defined. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2011), the catering industry refers to a service sector that offers consumers food, dining places, and facilities through instant production and processing, commercial sales, and labor-intensive services. A report conducted by the *Sino Information Center* (SIC) [1] classifies it as a tertiary industry that purposefully and systematically provides catering products and related services to society for economic and social benefits.

Secondly, considerable attention has been given to the development of effective index systems for evaluating catering services [2][3]. These studies suggest that service evaluations should focus on three main indicators: food hygiene standards, culinary characteristics, and dining environment quality. Among these, the characteristics of the dishes are considered the most influential factor, followed by food safety standards, while the dining environment, though important, is relatively less emphasized [4]. Additionally, it emphasizes that taste plays a crucial role in customers' evaluation of catering services.

Lastly, research has also emphasized the various influencing factors that affect service evaluations in the catering industry. It highlights how people have higher expectations regarding food quality as well as cooking techniques when assessing catered offerings [5]. In addition to nutritional balance considerations, colorfulness, richness, taste satisfaction, and food variety have become significant criteria for customers when evaluating service quality within the catering industry according to Han Yi's [6]. findings based on theories related to service industries and service quality from 2008 onward.

3. Customer dining preferences in the Web 2.0 era

Web 2.0, characterized by interactive sharing, has facilitated the transformation of media methodologies. Households have evolved from mere web information consumers to active web content publishers. *Dianping* is China's pioneering platform for local life information and commerce, also recognized as the world's first established third-party consumer review website [7]. It was launched in Shanghai in April 2003. Currently, its primary revenue stream stems from advertising while commission-based earnings are predominantly generated in the United States market. By opting for a merger with the United States Group instead of pursuing financing for expansion in 2015, *Dianping* successfully amalgamated two profitable business models and solidified its platform foundation, resulting in significant user base growth. Today, *Dianping* plays an indispensable role in everyday life by offering users a wide range of convenient services related to dining and local experiences.

Before determining the topic direction, it is essential to examine how individuals logically navigate their choices when consuming these services. By analyzing the operational options and content functionalities within the *Dianping* app's software interface, we can replicate this process. The effectiveness and popularity of this system largely rely on the completeness and reliability of the information provided by the platform.

For instance, Research on *Influencing Factors of Service Evaluation in the Catering Industry: A Case Study in Tianjin's Main Urban Area Based on Dianping* [6] explains that users can access restaurant details such as address, introduction, average consumer price, and other relevant information regarding food, entertainment, hotels, and more through the client application at any time

and from anywhere. *Dianping* not only offers users comprehensive information about catering services, leisure activities, and entertainment options but also encompasses various merchants nearby—providing efficient time-saving solutions that greatly satisfy diverse user needs. The rich information available on *Dianping* includes detailed business descriptions alongside traffic-related data while incorporating both objective and subjective opinions from consumers who have previously patronized specific establishments—ensuring completeness and authenticity.

Furthermore, within *Dianping's* content series over recent years—a period marked by internet development and maturity—an emerging trend has gained momentum in the catering industry: Internet -famous restaurants. As a new form of dining experience distinct from traditional establishments, these internet-famous places offer consumers a unique culinary journey. On the one hand, they enjoy immense popularity among customers in the catering market with many willing to wait for hours just to join a table; however, on the other hand, some internet sensation-driven restaurants are perceived by consumers as unable to sustain their success due to issues such as low grade food quality, and inflated prices. This phenomenon as a starting point for this paper and worth further discussion. Additionally, studying consumers' demand for experience, content, and process at these is crucial for ensuring their long-term viability.

4. A case study of “Lamdre”

Lamdre is a plant-based cuisine restaurant located in Chaoyang district, Beijing, with its name derived from the Zen meditation system of Tibetan Buddhism. The restaurant is positioned as a fancy vegetarian restaurant, emphasizing the concepts of nature, sustainability, and health, exploring the diverse possibilities of plant-based cuisine, and presenting the enchanting and vast natural flavors of the plant world. According to *Lamdre's* detailed page on *Dianping*, *Lamdre* has received significant exposure and positive user reviews. Platform data shows that *Lamdre* scored a 4.8, with an average consumption of about 1231 RMB per person. In addition, the restaurant stands out in the certifications and honors provided by the platform. The information on *Dianping* shows that *Lamdre* has two main recognition and honor displays on the home page, which are Michelin one-star and Black Pearl one-star respectively. These two certifications greatly enhance the authority and attractiveness of *Lamdre* on the platform [8]. With the integration and updating of dietary concepts worldwide, the demand for health-conscious dining has risen sharply. Since consumers' demand for food has significantly increased, vegetarian restaurants, which represent healthy dinning, have gradually developed a certain scale in the industry. According to authoritative data from the vegetarian industry in the Chinese catering industry, it is not difficult to find that the number of vegetarian restaurants has increased, and there is a very good optimistic trend in business operations. Comprehensive industry reports, associations, and data from *Dianping* indicate that, as of 2023, there are more than 3,000 vegetarian restaurants in China, while traditional dining establishments, commonly encountered by consumers in their daily lives, total approximately 5 million [9]. Moreover, since 2018, the annual growth rate of new vegetarian restaurants has been about 10%. *Lamdre*, as a luxury dinning choice, ranking number two on the *Dianping* platform, is undoubtedly the ultimate synergy of brand and platform effects. Finally, what is more important is that consumers have a special fondness for *Lamdre* in real evaluations, and the high scores still reflect its good image and reputation. It can be seen that *Dianping*, as an important and critical internet platform, contributes greatly to consumers' actions and plans in retrieving and making final catering choices.

5. Discussion

In the age of the internet and new media, commercial data has emerged as a critical component of modern business, with platforms like *Dianping* exemplifying its significance. The rankings on

Dianping's lists and the order in which search results are displayed highlight the pivotal role commercial data plays in business competition. However, the misuse of commercial data for unfair competitive practices has become increasingly prevalent. These practices, which vary in nature and are not easily categorized by traditional property or intellectual property laws, not only undermine the rights of consumers and other businesses but also threaten the integrity of fair market competition. This issue is particularly acute on platforms like *Dianping*, which encompass a wide range of services such as dining and lifestyle choices. Consequently, there is a pressing need to establish a robust legal framework to address these unfair practices in the use of commercial data, ensuring healthy market competition and safeguarding the business ecosystem.

6. Conclusion

In the context of the Web 2.0 era, the catering industry has presented new models based on platform development, mainly including information transparency, interactive sharing, the internet celebrity effect, personalized recommendation, and online-offline integration. Using Lamdre, a vegetarian restaurant in Beijing, as a case study, this paper provides a detailed analysis of how consumers make dining decisions on *Dianping*, examining the platform's specific model and operational logic, as well as how the restaurant leverages these factors to enhance its popularity and reputation. Additionally, the paper discusses the impact of these changes on the restaurant's development. However, it also points out that the platform rules still need further improvement, and both the platform and the restaurant should pay more attention to the user experience, providing high-quality products and services, in order to remain invincible in the fierce market competition.

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