

Why Is the Grass Always Greener on the Other Side? Tourist Bias in Online Restaurant Ratings

Abstract

Online product and service ratings have great value for both sellers and consumers. Prior research, however, often treats online ratings equally even if the individuals who generate these ratings have very different backgrounds. This study examines how tourists differ from locals when they generate online ratings. We find that, relative to locals, tourists exhibit an upward bias when they rate restaurants. More specifically, a consumer as a tourist is at least 13.4% more likely than as a local to give a higher rating (versus all lower ones) to a restaurant. We explore possible mechanisms underlying this tourist bias. Based on data from an online review platform for restaurants, we first confirm the phenomenon of upward tourist bias in online ratings at both reviewer- and restaurant-level with multiple robustness checks. Then we conduct a series of analyses from reviewer-, restaurant-, cuisine- and city-level to identify factors leading to such a bias. We are able to examine the reasons related to consumption pattern such as restaurant price/service/environment, cuisine authenticity, tourists' evaluation process, differences between city sizes, etc. We find that individuals' change in focus (from location, cooking, and price to service, environment, and emotions) and change in evaluation process (from cognitive to affective) can induce the tourist bias in ratings. We also discuss theoretical and practical implications for online review platforms, product retailers, and consumers.

Biography

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Hong Hong is an associate professor in the School of Management at Harbin Institute of Technology. She obtained her PhD in Management and ME in Logistics Engineering from Xiamen University, BS in Management and LLB from Tianjin University. She was a visiting doctoral student in the Pamplin College of Business at Virginia Tech funded by China Scholarship Council. Her research interests are related to the creation, dissemination, and consumption of information in business contexts. Her work has been accepted or published by various prestigious journals including *Information Systems Research*, *Decision Support Systems* and *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology*.

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