

How vegan are you? The impact of audience and organizational value orientation on the evaluation of vegan restaurants.



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Abstract

This paper explores the factors that influence social evaluations of *prosocial categories*. By prosocial categories, we mean market or organizational categories that foreground the moral rightness of certain social, environmental, and ethical values, as in the cases of fair-trade and impact investing.

We argue that audience evaluations of organizations associated with such categories are influenced by both the audience's general understanding of the category as well as the individual audience member's value orientation: While the audience generally evaluates organizations affiliated with a prosocial category based on how well they reflect the category's espoused values, we propose that this relationship is stronger when the category has gained greater currency within the audience and when individual audience members identify more with the category's espoused value.

Introduction

Organizational value orientation



Audience value orientation

Audience Evaluations

- Audience evaluations of organizations associated with a value-laden category depend on the:
 - Organization's value orientation,
 - Audience's overall understanding of the focal category at the macro-level, and
 - Individual audience member's orientation toward the emotional and social values associated with the category at the micro-level

Methodology

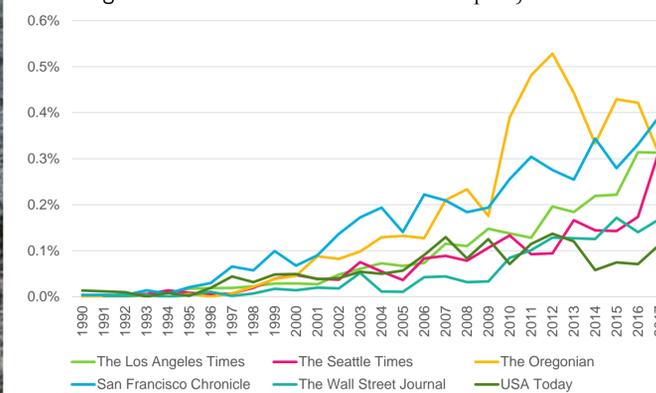
Sample & Data

- Vegan restaurants and their corresponding customer ratings and reviews from four major cities on the West Coast of the U. S. (Los Angeles, Portland, San Francisco, and Seattle)
- Online reviews that consumers have assigned to vegan restaurants (any restaurant that chose "vegan" as one of its categories) on Yelp from 2004 to 2017
- 200+ vegan restaurants and 50,000 reviews



Variables

- Dependent variable: Yelp customer ratings
- Independent variables
 - A restaurant's vegan orientation
 - (a) Whether the restaurant's name contains reference to veganism: Binary variable (1/0)
 - 1: Sweet Lemon Vegan Bistro, Pizza Pi Vegan Pizzeria
 - (b) Whether the vegan category is the restaurant's core category: Binary variable (1/0)
 - 1: "vegan" as first category: "Vegan, Mexican"
 - 0: "vegan" as second or third category: "Indian, Vegan"
 - Category currency of vegan category
 - The prominence and valence of the term "vegan" in the media: Proportion of the number of articles that mention "vegan" to the total number of articles per year



Variables (Cont'd)

- Independent variables
 - A customer's vegan orientation
 - Content analysis of the written section of each Yelp review, where the reviewer sometimes reveals his or her vegan orientation: -1 to 1 (negative, neutral, positive)

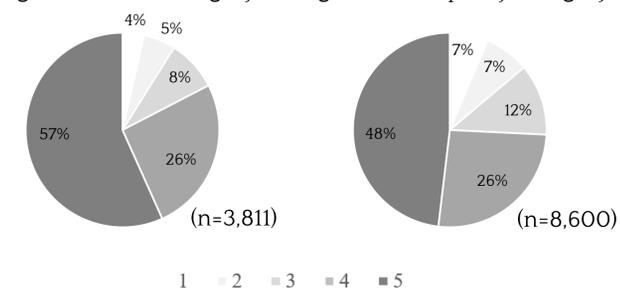
Review Text	Reviewer Vegan Identity	Restaurant's "Vegan" Category Position	Rating
This place is so good that my non-vegan husband asked me when we could go back as we were walking out the door after our first visit... As a vegan for animal rights reasons, I could not love this place more.	Vegan	Core	5
I'm a vegetarian, not a vegan, but found the vegan selection I chose to be utterly satisfying, and well presented...Beyond the food, the overall layout of the place was earthy, warm, and welcoming. I'm a fan.	Vegetarian	Periphery	4

- Control variables
 - The number of cuisine categories to which the restaurant belongs, restaurant age, restaurant popularity, price of food, and the number of reviews by a reviewer...

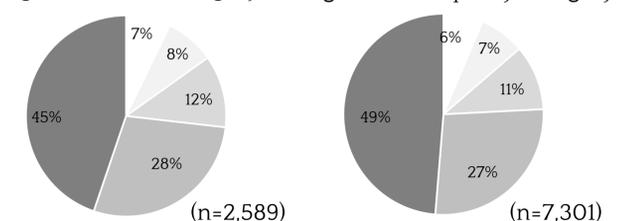
Preliminary Findings

Restaurant Ratings by Core-Periphery Vegan Identity

Portland
Vegan as a Core Category Vegan as a Periphery Category



Seattle
Vegan as a Core Category Vegan as a Periphery Category



Conclusion & Discussion

- Value congruence between the reviewer's identity and the restaurant's value orientation has a greater positive impact on evaluations.
- Supplementary analysis
 - HappyCow: A vegan-run online review service for plant-based and vegan food founded in 1999
 - 1800 HappyCow reviews of 65 restaurants from 2006 to 2017
 - The average rating of vegan restaurants in Portland is higher than in Seattle (Portland M = 4.62, Seattle M = 4.44; $p < .01$)
 - Reviewers who identified themselves as vegan ranked vegan restaurants higher than did those who identified themselves as vegetarian, a tendency that was more prevalent in Portland.
- Next steps
 - The effect of different signals of value orientation: Naming vs. category association
 - Comparison of additional cities with greater variation in audience's vegan orientation

Theoretical Contributions

- Multilevel approach to social evaluations
 - The evaluation of organizations associated with value-laden categories is driven both by the category's currency among audiences at the macro level and audience members' value orientation at the micro level.
- Affect- and morality-based evaluation
 - Value-laden categories
 - Boundary conditions of strategic categorization

Acknowledgements

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