

## Reactivity without legitimacy? Online consumer reviews in the restaurant industry

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### ABSTRACT

In recent years, web sites where individual consumers can rate and review goods and services have mushroomed all over the Internet. Restaurants are particularly affected by online reviewing. If the impact of online consumer reviews (OCRs) on the demand side of markets is now well understood and measured, few studies examine the reception of this new evaluation method by those who are assessed. Based on interviews with French restaurant managers, our research shows that OCRs systems reconfigure relations of accountability in the restaurant industry. We use the notion of reactivity to describe the mechanisms through which the new evaluation system transforms the activity of restaurants. We also examine the affects surrounding the reception of ratings and reviews by restaurant managers and the moral criteria that accompany their discourses on online reviews. Many restaurants consider online reviews as a brutal and hypocritical mode of judgment. The judgment produced by online ratings and reviews is not easily borne by restaurant managers, because it challenges the conventions of quality they had previously internalized as legitimate, that is, those produced by professional experts. We interpret this ambivalent reception as the unfinished movement of transforming a performative reputation device into a legitimate evaluation institution.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 22 December 2015  
Revised 3 May 2016  
Accepted 4 July 2016

### KEYWORDS

Evaluation; reviews; online consumer reviews; reactivity; restaurant industry

For the past three decades, rankings and evaluations have become ubiquitous in social life. In many fields, such as management (Meyer 1994), education (Sauder 2006), health, sports and arts, actors have specialized in producing public evaluations of individuals and organizations. These evaluations play a growing role in the valuation of actors and in the allocation of resources and outcomes among them. This evolution is related to a social demand for accountability, coming from public and private actors as well as from the civil society and the media. It can be understood as part of a more general social shift toward an ‘audit society’ (Power 1997) or an ‘audit culture’ (Strathern 2000).

An important dimension of these evaluations is their reactivity (Espeland & Sauder 2007). Actors who are subject to public evaluations and rankings tend to adjust their behavior in order to improve their value. They discover the different effects of variations in their value (universities receive better or more mediocre student applications, athletes get more or less rewarding sponsorship offers) and establish different strategies in order to improve their ranking. Most of the time, this reactivity was not intended by the producers of the evaluation; but the fact that actors in the field bend their strategies according to their criteria, reinforces their position.

In this study, we focus on an evaluation format that has emerged on the Internet, based on consumers' online ratings and reviews – the so-called online consumer reviews (OCRs). These evaluations come from a large number of customers. Then, they are aggregated by a website or an application, and summarized into an average rating and a list of reviews. OCRs have mushroomed all over the Internet; today they provide valuations for a wide range of products and services, from music CDs to beauty products, from hotels to funeral services (Beauvisage et al. 2013). We will focus on the restaurant industry, which is particularly concerned with online reviewing.

OCRs offer an interesting challenge to the question of accountability and reactivity. First, as they focus on consumer products and services, they often face pre-existing valuations; in the case of restaurants, guide books and food columnists have been providing valuations in the field for more than 50 years. It is worth examining the reactivity of this new valuation system by keeping in mind that the evaluated entities may be used in another form of valuation, or could have to establish their strategies in relation with different rating systems and criteria.

Secondly, OCRs allow us to address the question of articulation between reactivity and legitimacy. In their classic case study about the rating of law schools in the US, Espeland and Sauder show that rankings have strong effects on the strategies of schools, even though most of the actors seem to assign them very little legitimacy, considering them 'a bunch of hooey' (2007, p. 13). In our case, the evaluation has stronger claims for legitimacy; it is the product of (supposed) paying customers and it aggregates large amounts of ordinary opinions, in a manner similar to democratic votes (Mellet et al. 2014). Websites operating these ratings very often put forward that democratic claim, as they give voice to the authentic opinions of consumers (Jeacle & Carter 2011; Orlikowski & Scott 2014). It is, therefore, interesting to study to what extent, and under what conditions, a valuation device is perceived as legitimate within a given field.

Our goal is to study the reactivity of online reviews, by examining the reception of this form of evaluation by those who are assessed. This paper, which builds upon an empirical study of the French restaurant industry, is structured as follows. First we review sociological works related to valuation systems on markets in general and online reviews in particular. Next we present our methodology. Results are structured around three issues. In Section 3, we examine how restaurant owners perceive and measure the effects of online reviews. Then we analyze how the new judgment device transforms the practices of suppliers on this market, from cooking to staff management (Section 4). Finally, we focus on the justifications associated with this evaluation mode and highlight the wide variation of moral registers at work when these professionals speak of lay reviews.

## 1. Theoretical framework

We focus in this article on the reception of a new evaluation system by those who are evaluated using a configuration where this evaluation is produced by a more or less anonymous crowd of Internet users and made public on online websites. In this section we present a survey of the literature that is interested in the construction and impact of evaluation devices, and especially in the effects on the supply side of markets. Subsequently we focus on OCRs.

### 1.1. Market intermediaries and evaluation

Since the 1990s, works grounded in economic sociology and institutional economics have investigated the way in which intermediaries have a fundamental influence on the social organization of markets as well as on market outcomes (Bessy & Eymard-Duvernay 1997; Callon & Muniesa 2005; Karpik 2010; Bessy & Chauvin 2013). This research stream has focused on the role of market intermediaries in reducing uncertainty and coordinating exchanges. These studies have shown that intermediaries are not neutral information transmitters; rather, they are active participants in the qualification and valuation of goods. The empirical study of intermediaries was an important entry point for the criticism of the standard economic theory. Market intermediaries participate

in the genesis, diffusion and stabilization of the frames and conventions of valuations in markets. In recent decades, a category of market intermediaries has become very important. These are the ‘evaluators’ that Bessy and Chauvin (2013) define as market intermediaries whose main activity consists of producing evaluations, rankings or ratings. Evaluators have been the subject of sustained effort of conceptualization. We are specifically interested in how the literature examines the relationships between the evaluators and those evaluated.

A first series of work looks at how the evaluators manage to establish themselves and the basis of their authority. A set of research that studies the history and influence of restaurant guides deals with this issue (Karpik 2000; Rao et al. 2003; Bonnet 2004; Ferguson 2008; Lane 2013). This research is particularly interested in the production and distribution of the guide as a knowledge device, and in the role of expertise and codified evaluation procedures in building trust. Blank (2007) systematizes this approach and develops a sociology of reviews. Reviews ‘are produced by institutions with institutional memory and standard procedures’ (2007, p. 7). These institutions, which he also calls ‘systems,’ ‘can be thought of as the short answer to the question “why is this assessment credible?”’ (Blank 2007, p. 28) According to Blank, product makers are part of the system that produces reviews.

All four actors [*i.e.*, *the reviewer, the publisher, the product maker and the audience*] have to cooperate for the review to happen. The review only emerges as a joint product of the interactions between the organizations and the individuals who staff them’. (p. 8)

This said, as far as they are concerned, producers have a diffuse and largely passive influence on reviews since they typically cannot refuse to be evaluated, and also because the credibility of the review is first estimated by the audience, that is, the consumers who read them.

The second body of work explores the mandatory dimension of evaluation, and what it produces on the evaluated actors. As previously mentioned, Espeland and Sauder (2007) have shown that rankings foster social reactivities in the worlds they evaluate. Conventions of valuation are interiorized by evaluated actors, who may modify their organizational and external strategies in order to best conform to the criteria fostered by rankings. They, therefore, not only show the difficulty of escaping from the discipline of rankings but also the strategic manipulation of evaluation criteria.

In the field of gastronomy, many studies have focused on the joint transformations of producers, consumers and evaluation systems (Ferguson 1998; Karpik 2000; Johnston & Baumann 2007). However, empirical investigations are mainly focused on the work of guide experts and critics, not on the reception of the reviews by the producers. Regarding the impact of reviews on restaurateurs, they bring only anecdotal evidence, which we also find in the media, namely the anguish of the chefs at the approach of the publication of guides and their efforts to acquire the second and then the third star in the Michelin Guide.

## **1.2. The OCRs as an evaluation device**

Online valuation systems that are based on the aggregation of lay judgments are now widespread. They allow consumers to rate brands, goods or services, and to write reviews. The extension of these valuation devices is backed by entrepreneurs in ‘online valuation’ who pose it as an alternative to traditional valuation methods produced by experts (Jeacle & Carter 2011; Orlikowski & Scott 2014). They often resort to an ideological discourse that associates OCRs with the democratization of markets and the empowerment of consumers. This is particularly the case in the restaurant industry where the democratic claim carried by websites frontally opposes the elitism of guides and critics. The nature of this new form of assessment is still uncertain and depends both on the specificities of OCR websites (Mellet et al. 2014) and on the valuation practices within markets (Orlikowski & Scott 2014).

What is certain is that this new evaluator causes a deep transformation of the distribution of ‘power of valuation’ in a number of markets. Academic research has taken on the measure of the changes produced by online ratings and reviews. There is now a cumulative body of empirical

research in marketing science that focuses on the relationship between ratings and sales. These studies extend the work of cultural economics, studying the impact of (print) reviews on sales (see Blank 2007, for a survey). Various studies show that OCRs have a significant effect on book sales (Chevalier & Mayzlin 2006; Berger et al. 2010), movie box office (Liu 2006; Larceneux 2007; Chintagunta et al. 2010) and restaurant sales (Luca 2011; Anderson & Magruder 2012). In fact, most of the academic literature in this field is interested in the impact of reviews on demand, which means that producers are only indirectly affected by consumer ratings and reviews resulting in changes in their turnover. However, this literature is not interested in how OCRs may have different effects depending on the characteristics of the business or products assessed.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, this literature considers that online evaluation imposes on professionals, who are, therefore, not able to influence the results (apart, of course, from improving the quality of their products and services). Nonetheless, anecdotal evidence suggests that some restaurant owners and managers express their frustration with OCR websites, or that some businesses actively try to improve their ranking using various techniques, such as suggesting that consumers write reviews, responding to reviews or even buying fake reviews. However, this issue is starting to receive some attention from scholars, mainly in the fields of organization and accounting theory.

Curchod et al. (2014) have investigated professional and semi-professional sellers on eBay. They have observed a range of different responses to buyers through the discipline of customer-based evaluations. Some responses are very negative and mobilize an emotional register ('It's awful'; 'Buyers tend to behave in an unpredictable and irresponsible way'). These sellers express a feeling of powerlessness. Others, however, maintain a form of emotional detachment ('It doesn't hurt me ... I don't need that to live well'; 'I don't expect recognition, except some reputation for my sales') and set up a sound and distant management of reviews. The authors link these different perceptions to the status and identity of the sellers on eBay, some being private sellers, others being business sellers.

Scott and Orlikowski (2012) have examined how OCRs overflow offline onto organizational practices. They built upon a thorough case study of a hotel whose business and relations of accountability were largely reshaped by the use of TripAdvisor as a major customer recruitment channel. They identified several 'reactivities': distributing a brochure explaining what TripAdvisor is and how to post a review; incorporating reviews within hotel's internal staff training and development; and using reviews as a sanction/reward tool vis-à-vis the staff.

Wang et al. (2015) have focused on a particular modality of the reactivity of hoteliers: responding to negative consumer reviews on TripAdvisor. Noting that 'organizations face a tension between the benefits and risks of publicly responding to consumer devaluations', they show that hoteliers are more likely to engage in a public response when confronted with severe devaluations and if they have a high reputation as measured by their ranking on TripAdvisor. The authors relied on a dataset of all reviews and responses for all London hotels listed on TripAdvisor. Wang et al. indicated that nearly 16% of 210,000 reviews posted between 2002 and 2012 were responded to by hoteliers. This high response rate is an indicator of the high degree of maturity of hoteliers vis-à-vis TripAdvisor.

In light of these works, we can assume that facing (offline and online) evaluations, professionals use two registers. The first register is related to reactivity, because by orienting consumer choices, valuation devices have an impact on their activity. The second one is related to moral judgment and legitimacy, because as an institution, an evaluation system can be durably established only if it obtains the cooperation of both sides of the market. Here we address the superposition of and the entanglement between these two levels as an empirical question that we examine in a moment of innovation where a new valuation technique is proposed, used and possibly contested.

## 2. Methodology

In this article we build upon an empirical study of the supply side of the restaurant industry in France.<sup>2</sup> From July 2012 to April 2013 we conducted 27 in-depth interviews, ranging from thirty minutes to two hours, with persons in charge of restaurants (owners, managers or chefs). We asked questions about the history and the characteristics of the restaurants, the professional career of the interviewees, their level of digital literacy, their perception and use of OCR websites, and the marketing tools they mobilized to be visible online and offline. All interviews were transcribed, coded and analyzed using a qualitative data analysis software (QDAMiner).

Restaurants were methodically selected. First, they were categorized according to price range, cuisine, reputation (as measured by online visibility and offline visibility in guides) and their competitive environment. Second, they were located in three different locations: 12 were located in Paris, 8 in Orléans, a middle-sized town with 115,000 inhabitants, located in the city and its surroundings and 7 in Honfleur, a very touristic small town in Normandy with approximately 2 million annual visitors. These three locations allowed us to diversify our observation, and thus the analysis of the impact and perception of OCRs in various business and market contexts. Third, all restaurants had a minimal online presence, and have reviews on at least one OCR website. Thus the number of relevant platforms, the volume of received reviews and the average rating varied significantly, reflecting the variety of online assessments received by the restaurants. The table summarizing the interviewed restaurants is presented in the [Appendix](#).

We met with 11 women and 16 men. Their level of digital literacy varied. Using QDAMiner, the specific component ‘digital literacy’ was coded by counting in interview transcriptions the references to the Internet and technologies in general (use of digital tools, Internet and social networks), knowledge of OCR websites and relations to these websites (ignoring reviews, simply observing them or participating by soliciting online reviews from customers or responding). This digital literacy component is important, because it affects the way the interviewees perceive the impact of reviews on their activity.

## 3. The economic impact of ratings and reviews on restaurants

### 3.1. Perception of economic impact

Most of the respondents talked about the impact of the Internet in general, and OCR websites in particular on their business, because they recognized that customers increasingly used this method to select a restaurant. However, they are not always able to accurately measure it.

For one-third of the sample, the economic effect of online reviews on income is marginal. In this category we find a corner bar-restaurant whose clientele mainly consists of regular customers (E9, Paris), a Mexican fast food restaurant located in the Parisian ‘Quartier Latin’ (E10, Paris), an inexpensive creperie (E15, Orléans), a brasserie well located in a tourist town (E23, Honfleur), a modest restaurant near a cathedral in Normandy (E27, Lisieux), and two fine dining restaurants listed in the Michelin Guide (E20, E26).

Thus, it seems that the location characteristics and the related business catchment area (touristic or bustling district) are essential in the perception of positive or negative consequences of online reviews. As E23 (Honfleur) stated,

There are nearly 2 million tourists per year who come to Honfleur. If a guy doesn’t manage to work here, he has a serious problem ...

In addition, the price range makes the restaurants more or less sensitive to OCRs: cheap establishments remain attractive regardless of their online evaluation. For example, a creperie in Orleans is poorly rated on TripAdvisor (13 out of 31 reviews are classified as ‘terrible’), but the owner thinks that this has no impact on the revenue.

Q: Despite all that is said about you, it hasn't necessarily had an impact. A: No, because anyway, what they say ... even compared to the number of customers we have, that's a long time since we would not have a single customer anymore. (E15)

For their part, fine dining restaurants listed in the Michelin Guide have sufficient reputation capital to not economically suffer or benefit from online reviews; at least they do not notice an impact.

Another group of restaurants indicates that OCRs certainly have an effect, without being able to precisely assess it. Eight respondents (see Table 1) think that this is not (yet) a phenomenon which affects their business.

[OCR] I think it may have an effect ... I think, but we don't feel it. For six years we were continually developing, and we go on; so for now, I don't think there is a negative effect in any case. (E16)

Finally, those who clearly estimate the effect of online reviews on their business are mid-range establishments from varying locations. Two criteria stand out here: the age of the restaurant (E8, E22, E24) and the level of competition.

It's true we are still quite numerous in Honfleur. We are 80 restaurants. So in a small town of 8,000 inhabitants, this is just enormous. Hence the interest to stand out from the crowd; so we said, 'TripAdvisor, that's great; it gives us visibility and suddenly, people come see us ... that's not bad.' (E22)

Nine of these restaurateurs also have or have had a partnership with LaFourchette (thefork.com, a TripAdvisor subsidiary), a website combining online reviews with a booking service. Customers book a table via this platform and then are asked to rate their experience after eating in the restaurant. LaFourchette offers management tools to restaurant owners who can better appreciate the effect of online reviews on revenue. They can monitor the booking rate depending on the period, characteristics of customers, etc., via a synthetic dashboard generated through the website.

For us, La Fourchette, I think it represents 600 diners in the month. That is 10% of my activity. (E22)

For those who work a lot with LaFourchette, a dependency bond can appear, making the restaurant very sensitive to a shift in its assessment.

On LaFourchette, as soon as you have one score below 5 (over 10) ... One time I think this customer rated me a 3. Right away, you have fifty diners less the next week [ ... ] That plays tremendously; this is true. (E12)

However, the correlation between level of rating and turnover is not always perceived. For example, E14 has been happy to see several 10/10 ratings for his restaurant, but after that, he did not notice an increase in the number of bookings.

To summarize, perceived impacts of OCR on turnover are associated with specific restaurant features. The recently opened, mid-range establishments, those which do not benefit from a particularly favorable location, are for one or more of these criteria economically more affected by consumer ratings. Thus, they naturally pay more attention to them. This is the case for one-third of respondents.

**Table 1.** Summary of the perceived economic impact of OCRs.

	Perceived economic impact of OCRs		
	Strong and measured	Noticeable	Marginal
Number of restaurants	12/27	8/27	7/27
Price range and location	Mid-range restaurants : E1, E2, E3, E4, E12, E14, E19, E21, E25	E5, E6, E7, E11, E13, E16, E17, E18	Cheap restaurants, touristic areas : E9, E10, E15, E23, E27
Existing reputation	Recently Opened: E8, E22, E24		High existing reputation (Michelin), high prices : E20, E26
Monitor OCRs every day	E1, E2, E3, E8, E12, E22, E24	E13	E15
Use of OCRs as a marketing and CRM tool	E1, E3, E8, E13, E14, E22, E24, E25		

### 3.2. From monitoring to marketing appropriation

We asked respondents what they were concretely doing with OCR websites. We observed various types of intervention, ranging from regular monitoring to the establishment of an elaborate marketing strategy.

The first activity consists in surfing OCR websites to monitor the online reputation of the restaurant. Some occasionally type the name of their restaurant in a search engine and look at the results without memorizing the name of the platforms; others can name the sites in which they are listed; sometimes they even reply to them. This monitoring activity is now common among the respondents. One-third monitor their reviews every day.

In general, I check every morning, but I don't answer right away, because I have my work to do; I go back to the Internet in the afternoon during my break, and I reply to reviews. (E24)

At times this monitoring relies on notifications proposed by these websites as soon as a review is published (E13 and E19). For those respondents worried about their online reputation, this activity has become routine or a full-blown task, in addition to the usual activities of the restaurant.

It takes eight hours of work per week to manage SEO [*Search Engine Optimization*], to administer the website, to manage the reviews... (E22)

We also noted that respondents sometimes had a thorough knowledge of their ranking on OCR platforms. One-third of the respondents knew their rankings on different websites and the evolution of their average score, confirming a sharp interest in their online reputation. As a consequence of this attention to rankings, five restaurant owners said that they suggested their customers write an online review after their meal. This approach represents a step further in the appropriation of platforms, as they are used as a real communication tool.

Q: And you encourage your customers to write a review? A: Yes, I tell them. I tell them, 'We are on Linternaute.com' [...] Reviews are advertising. That's mostly the reason why we do that. (E21)

Creating an administrator's account allows the control and the management of the restaurant's profile information. Professionals can provide photographs, describe the place and update the menus. This action represents a willingness to appropriate the platform as a kind of personal website. This was the case of E19 in Orléans, who noticed by accident that the photographs of his restaurant displayed on TripAdvisor were related to a school canteen without any relationship to his business. The manager immediately created an account to restore the truth and control online information about his restaurant.

Furthermore, the administrator's account on TripAdvisor allows business managers to reply to reviews. The respondents are not unanimous in this activity. Some of them think that it is a further step in mastering customer relationships. E3 and E24 do particularly care about the way customers are welcomed and the relationship professionals must engage in to satisfy them beyond the quality of food. (During the service, they systematically check the tables, speak with the customers, etc.) According to them, replying to online reviews is a way to maintain the link, thank customers or explain what they did not understand. It also allows them to display a positive image of the restaurant for future customers on the Internet.

However, in most cases, replying to an online review happens very occasionally, typically as a response to a negative review, in a fit of anger or indignation. Most respondents consider that responding on the Internet is a condescending way to justify oneself, an approach that finally damages the image of the profession.

Replying on the Internet—it's a bit like justifying yourself. Honestly, it bothers me. [...] No, I don't want to get into that game. I've seen cases where sometimes it verges on ridiculous, and that scares me. In particular, [E24] replies to everyone. That's too much. We have to stop. That's not our job. Frankly, that's not my job. (E25)

Ultimately, eight restaurants perceive Internet and OCRs as essential tools for marketing and customer relationship management (CRM). By regular monitoring, by adding content, by soliciting reviews and responding to them, restaurants keep a high level of visibility on the web to catch the attention of customers, maintain the link after their visit and control their online reputation. Not surprisingly, these are mainly respondents who are comfortable with digital tools.

However, these maximalist ways of appropriation concern a minority of respondents. The dominant figure is that of a restaurant owner who monitors reviews without seeking to mobilize them to his advantage, either because she does not need positive reviews for her business, or because she still feels uncomfortable with digital tools.

### **3.3. Online rating and review sites as (disputed) knowledge on local markets**

Our interviewees were business managers or owners with fewer than 15 employees.<sup>3</sup> Eighteen of the restaurants were considered very small businesses (VSB), that is, with fewer than 10 employees. For those organizations, the vision of the ‘market’ is consistent with that described by Mallard (2011) in his sociology of VSB, and with the analysis proposed by Eloire (2010) regarding restaurant networks in Lille. The competitor is referred to as ‘colleague’; the term ‘customer’ comes up more commonly than ‘demand,’ and the relationships among professionals blend competition and cooperation activities (e.g. sending customers to a colleague, assisting others, etc.). According to Mallard, if VSB managers rarely mention their own experience using formalized marketing concepts, they are, nevertheless, very knowledgeable about their ‘market’. Mallard conceptualizes the market experience of these managers with two ideas: mapping a territory and exploring an environment. Knowledge accumulated by a VSB manager is more a matter of daily exploration and builds the market as a localized environment.

From this point of view, online reviews represent additional knowledge about the economic environment for five interviewees, because they can easily get free information on their competitors.

I monitor sometimes those who are in the neighborhood, why they are behind us, why they are above us. It helps, too. See restaurant [X]; they have plenty of clients and when you read their reviews, one wonders why, but we are in a tourist district. (E2, Paris)

Nevertheless, very few restaurant managers consider online reviews as a relevant resource for increasing knowledge of their market. On the contrary, the majority is rather hostile toward this idea and rely on knowledge accumulated from customers and colleagues. First, OCR websites produce a cartographic vision away from the market environment they are used to, especially since they provide rankings and, therefore, offer a competitive vision of the environment that is not consistent with their own experience. VSB managers prefer to talk about peaceful coexistence rather than competition, because acquaintanceship networks are relatively strong in these small markets and discourage potential conflicts (Eloire 2010; Mallard 2011).

In addition, some professionals have trouble with the principle of substitutability encapsulated in these ratings; they see colleagues’ offerings, as well as their own, as something fundamentally unique and not relevant for the same customers. In their minds, market territories are well separated and no one treads on colleagues’/competitors’ toes. Restaurants in the same city are often very knowledgeable that the new creperie is unlikely to threaten the neighboring gastronomic restaurant. However, the TripAdvisor ranking produces a hierarchy of institutions in a city on a single scale, that is, without *a priori* categorizing restaurants. A pizzeria can precede a two-star ranked Michelin restaurant in the ranking, as if these institutions played in the same category or were part of the same market. This tool provides a part of the market that offends some restaurant managers, as one restaurant manager in Honfleur who thinks it is unfair that TripAdvisor ‘blends’ all categories of restaurants in their ranking.

The only thing that really bothers me about these things—it is mostly the way restaurants are made visible. [...] They should be sorted by price range or category. I think it would be essential. For traditional restaurants,



brasseries, creperies, it is important that customers can quite knowingly choose the best restaurant in its category, within a price range, which is absolutely not the case today. (E25, Honfleur)

According to Espeland and Sauder, commensuration is a dimension of rankings which has to be treated as a reactivity mechanism: ‘Commensuration *unites* objects because all entities measured bear a common relationship to each other derived from their shared metric’ (2007, p. 19). This mechanism generates cognitive shifts, by challenging a former fragmentation of a field, ‘by reducing distinctiveness to magnitude’ (Espeland & Sauder 2007). Through its unique comparison scale, the TripAdvisor ranking flattens out singularities between restaurants of the same town and accordingly creates a homogeneous market, conflicting with the segmented vision entrepreneurs experiment every day.

In order to understand the economic impact of online reviews on restaurants, we have successively grasped them as a visibility tool, as a CRM device and as (contested) market knowledge. Online reviews are, therefore, an evaluation method with which all surveyed restaurant managers are familiar, although its economic effect on their business is not always precisely assessed. Finally, the display of restaurants within classifications provides a mapping of the competition that does not always correspond with the market experience of restaurant managers.

#### 4. Effects on activity

We now examine how consumer reviews are used by restaurant managers and owners to support the management of the organization of production and work. Scott and Orlikowski (2012) have shown that the accountability performed online by Internet users overflows offline into organizational practices. In their case study of a hotel in a remote geographical area they show that

moving beyond the marketing appeal of TripAdvisor reviews, the owners begin to pay attention to the content of reviews and to use specific subjective experiences not only to evaluate and revise their own organizational practices but also as part of staff appraisals’. (2012, p. 38)

Our empirical investigation allows us to balance and to refine this result.

Our data indicated that 15 respondents, slightly more than half of the sample, said they took into account customer returns on OCR websites in their productive activities. The others were either not aware of the content of reviews, or, more rarely, pointedly ignored them. ‘At least three, four times a month, they tell us that, but I really don’t give a shit.’ (E16; small creperie in Orléans with poor reviews). On the contrary, respondents who care often rely on specific anecdotes explaining how one day, after one or more reviews, they took particular actions. Two dimensions of the impact on the productive activity are explored successively: the quality of service and staff management.

##### 4.1. A way to improve the quality of service and products

Reading reviews can have concrete implications on the organization by leading to productive adjustments. Nine of our respondents indicated concern in our sample. At the start, it was a way of assessing the quality of production, either by confirming and objectifying known elements (‘We know our weaknesses better’, E11) or making problems visible (‘It’s a small warning’, E18). That said, when constructive, these customer reviews require a reaction from the establishment. Several interviewees emphasized the need not to let these remarks go unanswered. ‘It allows me to improve service’ (E11); ‘From the moment we take on the positive things we can only evolve’ (E19) and present concrete examples of improvements they made following negative comments. For example, a restaurant owner in Honfleur has changed a side dish after several congruent reviews:

We made a gratin of Saint-Jacques. We used small shells that we also call pilgrim scallops. People did not dare to tell us face-to-face, but they wrote it in their reviews, you know, that the Saint-Jacques were too small. So, we read three or four times this kind of comment, and so, we told ourselves, ‘Let us stop the little Saint-Jacques; let us use big shells even if we use less of them.’ (E22, Honfleur)

This consideration of reviews may as well relate to the food or to the environment like here in the 11th arrondissement of Paris.

There is a young woman who wrote something on the cleanliness of the toilet on a Saturday night, and it's true. We probably did not pay enough attention, at this time, to hygiene. [...] We must be more vigilant. So we [...] have put sanitized wipes in self-service". (E9, Paris)

Following the preceding examples, the adjustments made by restaurants are both very concrete and rather marginal. The changes made are inexpensive, easy to implement and do not involve a transformation of the organization. From this perspective, several restaurateurs emphasized that customer expectations should not always be met, either because they are too expensive to implement ('renewing the tablecloths, this means six tablecloths for one table' E24) or because they are in contradiction with the chef's choice:

Afterwards, there is what the customer wants and there is what the chef wants. We must not let this drift toward a complete change of what we fundamentally do. (E17)

#### **4.2. OCR and management: observation, encouragement, punishment**

Reading reviews can also, in a more continuous and regular way, serve as a staff management tool. This dimension concerns 8 of the 27 restaurant managers we interviewed. This use of customer reviews applies particularly to owners and managers who cannot be present during all opening hours, and who cannot see everything that is going on in the dining room. This is the case of this room leader who uses reviews as a report of the activity of the institution.

Yes, I monitor OCR websites quite often, especially when we had big weekends to make sure everything went well. (E2, Paris)

This remote monitoring mainly concerns servers who are on the front line. However, this raises a particular problem for the manager: matching a critical account with the appropriate employee. She must base her inquiry on indications such as the date, the list of employees, and other clues left in the comment.

Often, when I hear of a bad review, I try to know what day they came. If I can see who was working that day, I ask, 'Do you remember a table...?' (E6, Paris)

Another technique consists of shifting responsibility to the team as a collective entity.

The person said that the staff was not friendly and I have a meeting on Thursday and I'll tell them about it... because I print all that stuff and then I say 'That's good; that's not good.' (E10, Paris)

For most managers concerned with this practice, to simply present customer feedback to employees must in return produce a change in behavior. The customer review is a self-sufficient incentive mechanism. To the extent that this manager believes she can delegate surveillance to customers: 'I tell my employees, "You are being watched. I do not need to watch you anymore..."' (E1, Paris). From a similar but opposite perspective, the room leader stressed the importance of congratulating and encouraging employees by showing them positive reviews.

We must also congratulate, because we always say to people when it's not good, but when it's good, it also must be said [...] For example, if someone writes in a review: 'the waiter that served me, super nice, really!' I will tell him: 'Laurent, look at the website; there is a message for you. The person was super happy.' (E2, Paris)

Overall, when mobilized as a monitoring tool, online customer reviews turn out to be an extremely powerful staff management tool. Reviews may help identify mistakes, refocus an employee or even justify a dismissal.

We had some time ago a waiter, someone that I really trusted, who rounded up the credit cards numbers without asking customers. [...] And someone wrote it on the Internet [...], you know, that he put a euro on each

card for the tip... That's how I got the alert. A client told me that it was written on the Internet, and so I fired the waiter. (E2, Paris)

## 5. The disputed legitimacy of online evaluations

The fact that reviews transform the activity of restaurants does not imply that they are well received and perceived as a legitimate evaluation device. Blank describes the general attitude of restaurateurs toward professional critics. 'Anxiety, lots of anxiety, is often the dominant emotion that restaurateurs feel when they think about reviews' (2007, p. 62). Reviews, especially negative ones, are yet most often seen as legitimate when they come from professional critics. Indeed, quality conventions that were built by guides, first and foremost by Michelin (Karpik 2000), are now collectively shared and have built clearly defined expectations on what makes the quality of a gourmet restaurant. The emergence of online ratings and reviews entails two fundamental changes: first, a much broader spectrum of restaurants is now subject to criticism (Mellet et al. 2014); and second, restaurant owners have to deal with publicly written critics coming from ordinary and unqualified customers.

Their first reaction is emotional. Most of them vividly describe the feelings induced by this public evaluation and how they deal with it. A debate then ensues about the legitimacy of consumer expertise. Many restaurant owners and managers discuss the skills of ordinary customers and the categories they use to assess a gastronomic experience. However, some see consumer reviews as a new form of recognition and as an alternative to the guide system. What filters through is the definition of what the professionals retain as a legitimate evaluation.

### 5.1. Dealing with the emotions caused by anonymous public judgments

Whether considered legitimate or not, public evaluations from customers have an emotional impact on restaurant owners and managers. A majority of interviews (18) contain long descriptions of the feelings that correspond with OCRs: irritation, anger, pain, etc., but also recognition and pleasure.

Though reviews are most often positive (the average rating is 4 over 5), restaurant owners and managers focus first on bad reviews, even when restaurants are highly rated. This observation is in line with results from economic psychology experimentations, showing that the cost of a loss is often much stronger than the benefit of a gain (Kahneman 2011). Similar to most social beings, restaurant owners are subject to this cognitive bias and are more sensitive to a negative review than to a positive one. In this sense, negative reviews are often perceived as violent, hard to receive and discouraging.

The problem is that I don't know how to stand back and deal with it. It makes me sick; it comes over me... I can't bear it [...] A customer who says, 'I came to your place. It was not too great; I waited.' It makes me sick. (E2, Paris)

Several elements are combined in this overall negative feeling strongly expressed by interviewees. The first one is the understanding of the bad review as a personal attack, coming from someone whose intention is to 'hurt', 'lynch', 'take revenge', 'bash' or 'slam'. Another element is the anger caused by these ratings understood as attacks. There may be the inclination to strike back, but the restaurateur is unable to 'give back the punch in the face'. Interviewees also often express the 'humiliation' and the feeling of 'being put down' by these attacks.

And in contrast we have people who are horrible and get into their dissatisfaction and vent their spleen on us. [...] It hurts so much." (E13, Olivet, 5 km from Orléans)

You'll always have jerks who want to hurt you. Everywhere there are assholes who will have fun tearing you down on TripAdvisor. (E18, 20 km from Orleans)

The last aspect of negative reviews, as drawn by restaurant owners, is their 'hypocrisy'. Many interviewees regret that dissatisfied customers do not dare express their dissatisfaction face-to-face

and would rather criticize anonymously on the Internet, ‘hidden behind their screens’. When they read a negative review on the web even though the client seemed happy when leaving the establishment, restaurant managers feel deceived and insist on the hypocrisy produced by the reviewing method.

Customers say, ‘Yes, that was fine, thank you very much,’ but they really are two-faced bastards, in fact. In fact, they are not capable of really saying it face-to-face.” (E20, Fontainebleau)

Interviewees are often as one with their business and take the criticism directed at their restaurant very personally. This is especially true for people combining the role of chef and owner for criticism affects both their culinary skills, which they often perceive as an art, and their global investment as an entrepreneur for whom pecuniary and personal investment in the management of the restaurant is often considerable. Therefore, most of them have to learn to deal with the emotional impact of the poor reviews, which, contrary to professional reviews, may come at any time of the year. Along with the obvious tactic of avoiding the comments, several restaurants describe the process through which they put negative reviews into perspective and learn to cope with them.

Symmetrically, restaurant owners acknowledge the pleasure of receiving positive reviews; many of them express their satisfaction for laudatory comments. They share them with their team, and in general understand them as recognition of their competence and dedication to their work.

### **5.2. Lay reviews vs. expert reviews**

Restaurant owners express strong reservations about the legitimacy of consumer reviews. They put forward a lack of expertise and the absence of professional detachment and objectivity that characterizes expert reviews. Although they scarcely mention explicitly professional reviewers, restaurant owners continually assess lay reviews by comparison to expert ones. According to them, online reviews lack precisely the qualities that expert critics have progressively built during the process of professionalization (Bonnet 2004; Blank 2007). Ordinary consumers are said to lack technical expertise and knowledge of the dining market, as well as the reflexive ability to produce an objective judgment,

First, according to restaurant owners, most customers lack technical expertise and are not able to assess the execution of a plate regardless of their personal tastes. Whereas professional critics have the skills to assess the experience provided by the restaurant, following explicit criteria, consumers are not able to extract themselves from their immediate feelings.

People don’t make the difference between not liking a flavor and saying that it’s not good. But it’s not the same. It is not because it doesn’t suit you that it’s not good. If you can recognize that the product is good, well cooked, well dressed, and very fresh, then you cannot say it’s not good. It’s just a taste you don’t like. You don’t like the harmony built by the chef in this meal, but nobody can criticize that. (E3, Paris)

Moreover, restaurant owners feel that online reviews are not objective, because users do not know how to adapt their expectations to the price range and culinary genre. They do not distinguish between a mid-range traditional restaurant and a gourmet, high-end, restaurant.

People mix everything. They compare us to [Michelin] starred restaurants, where they want the service...The inspector from the Michelin, when he goes to a restaurant, he knows the price of the meal. He’s able to make the link between the price and what he’s going to eat. Sometimes, a client, when he comes into our place, maybe because the setting is nice, somehow sophisticated, he thinks that he will get some amazing meals, explosions of flavors, etc. (E25, Honfleur)

Another type of criticism toward consumer reviews is that reviews come from individual clients who do not represent the average customer. Professional critics are supposed to be able to represent the ordinary customer. They visit the restaurant anonymously and put aside their personal tastes and moods. On the contrary, according to restaurant owners, OCR sites are especially appealing to people with anger issues, who like to be critical in everything, that is, ‘professional moaners.’

This customer [who left a bad review], yes I remember who it was – the kind of person for whom everything was bad. She came in the restaurant with a face... really, no smile at all. She had clearly come in order to criticize the restaurant. (E21, Honfleur)

Finally, ordinary customers are too quick to generalize from an isolated personal experience ('a sick server, a mistake, and everything goes wrong forever'). Whereas professional critiques (supposedly) pay several visits to a restaurant, and bring 'designated eaters' with them in order to have a broader experience of the menu, lay reviews often focus too much on an unlucky detail.

You mess up a dish, it can happen, ruined cooking. And for this, there is no forgiveness. If the guy wants to post a review, 'I ate a meat, really overcooked, though I asked for it rare.' Most of the time, customers generalize, instead of thinking that the cook made a mistake. They generalize: 'He's bad.' (E6, Paris)

### **5.3. A new mode of recognition**

To sum up, what we observe is the emergence of a market valuation device, that is reactive (it affects the distribution of demand and the nature of the work), but whose legitimacy is still contested among suppliers. Producers and promoters of online customer review websites present it as a democratic tool, building a relevant evaluation through collective intelligence, relying on the law of great numbers (Mellet et al. 2014; Orlikowski & Scott 2014). The interpretation grid of the method by many restaurant owners, who emotionally view poor reviews as personal attacks and who contest the soundness of the judgment of the consumer in regard to professional expertise, is not in line with the definition provided by its producers.

Finally, restaurant owners display a variety of opinions toward the respective legitimacy of professional expertise (guides) and consumer reviews, depending on the assets of their restaurant and on their ability to understand the mechanisms of distributed online valuation.

On the one hand, some restaurant managers see online reviews more as a potentially flawed but legitimate mode of recognition (E1, E2, E3, E6, E8, E14, E17, E19, E21 and E24). They may be critical and have difficulties receiving negative reviews, but they acknowledge the right of consumers to give their opinions and admit the fact that the aggregated evaluation of their restaurant is fair. They recognize that the knowledge of the paying customer, though different, is as relevant as that of 'an inspector, from Michelin or anything else, who claims to have the truth.' (E3, Paris).

One shared characteristic of these owners and managers is their digital literacy. Internet and OCR websites are perceived as essential tools of professional activity. They are comfortable with the web, they understand the functioning of OCR websites, their rankings and how the algorithms produce them. They realize a systematic monitoring of their online reputation and seek to be better ranked in search engines thanks to OCR websites. They may solicit customers to write online reviews and often reply to them. For most of them, this recognition through OCR websites is combined with more traditional professional recognition. Some consider that online reviews are more accurate and will eventually overtake all previous valuation systems, but still make what is necessary to be listed in guides such as Michelin and Gault and Millau (E3). Others, such as restaurant E24 near Honfleur, invest heavily in the management of their visibility and reputation on OCR sites and then convert this reputational capital in the arenas of traditional recommendations. The manager of this restaurant summons up a lot of energy to take good care of her relationship with customers, providing them a lot of attention in the dining room and then encouraging them to write reviews on TripAdvisor. As a result her restaurant now enjoys over 300 reviews; the manager reads them on a daily basis and answers each and every one of them. This customer satisfaction visible on review sites is also a springboard for a more traditional professional recognition: her ultimate goal is also to appear in guidebooks (which she eventually did), to be recommended by the city's tourist office and to receive labels such as 'Maître Restaurateur' (Master Restaurateur).

On the other hand, some managers deny any legitimacy to online review sites and consider professional expertise as the only legitimate form of recognition, along with economic success and direct

returns from satisfied customers (E4, E9, E12, E13, E15, E18, E22, E25 and E26). They view online reviews as an unavoidable evil.

Yes, it [online reviewing] became more important than the guides, than everything we had before. [...] The formulation of critics on the Internet looks like people are small guides though they are not Michelin inspectors. And they don't necessarily have the culinary culture of an inspector. But that's how it is now; you have to deal with it. (E25, Honfleur)

Symmetrically, this global dismissal of online reviews is associated with a low digital literacy. These managers have a distant and passive relation to the Internet and technologies. Some of them blame their generation, other their education: they feel too old and/or unskilled. They often ignore the names of the OCR websites and do not have a clear understanding of their functioning.

For highbrow restaurants, the impact of reviews is still considered limited, and managers focus mostly on their listings in professional guides just to keep an eye on reviews. For smaller local restaurants, however, poor ratings and reviews can lead to feelings of deprivation and powerlessness, the impression of being torn down by an unreachable enemy.

I wanted to close my account. I asked them, at this pigsty website, to close my account. They don't want to. So, they can write all the filthy stuff they want on your back, and you, you can't reply.<sup>4</sup> (E15, Orleans)

## 6. Conclusion

In this article, we focus on the reception of a new evaluation system by those who are evaluated. Following a stream of research initiated by Espeland and Sauder (2007), we observe the reactivities fostered by online ratings and reviews in the restaurant industry. Restaurant owners have gradually become familiar with OCR systems, by monitoring the rankings, observing correlations between ratings and bookings, supervising their staff with OCR, and adapting their menus and marketing strategy. These observations are in line with research displaying the mechanisms through which new ranking systems, as soon as they build momentum, transform the activity they are measuring by reorienting the strategies of actors in the field. Around this main statement, we make three additional contributions to the study of reactivity and to valuation studies, whose scope goes beyond the specific case of the restaurant industry.

First, we have shown that OCR systems do not affect all restaurants in the same way or to a same degree. In their study of Law Schools, Espeland and Sauder identify 'five key sources of variation in rankings effects [...]: whether schools are on the cusp of tiers, their relative position in the rankings, a dean's commitment to improving rankings, geographical location, and mission' (2007, p. 32). We have stressed the importance of structural factors, such as the geographical location and the seniority of the restaurant. A restaurant located in the immediate vicinity of a tourist attraction will be less affected than an isolated restaurant; a new restaurant will be more sensitive to online reviews. But another factor plays a very important role: an established reputation mitigates the effects of consumer reviews. Restaurants highly rated in guides tend to dismiss the importance of online reviews, based on their experience and the observation of their turnover. At the other end of the market, cheap restaurants attract a local clientele with the price argument and say they are immune to OCRs. But many restaurants occupy an intermediary position; for them, a large part of the economic activity is usually made with customers situated in the local environment, and formal recommendation through a guide plays very little role in the development of a profitable business. For those restaurants working mainly at the local scale, the customer base is constituted through processes of 'word of mouth' and personal recommendation. For this category of restaurants, OCR are disruptive because they transform (some of) these local evaluations, previously informal and embedded in social networks, into a public critique about the quality of their production and service.

Second, studying restaurants reactivity sheds a new light on OCR devices, whose evaluation stems from the participation of a more or less anonymous crowd of Internet users. Academic research, as well as the discourse of OCR websites, focus mostly on the promise of democratization, through the

articulation of participation, voting and the ‘collective intelligence’ of the crowd (Orlikowski & Scott 2014; Mellet et al. 2014). Yet restaurant owners insist on less discussed but crucial properties of the valuation device.

This helps to account for what makes the singularity of this form of valuation, vis-à-vis the format of valuation of expert guides, of course, but also vis-à-vis traditional forms of reputation embedded in social networks. OCR produce valuations in relationship with transactions that are to some extent traceable (which can give rise to new management practices). They produce recommendation information that may change every day, while traditional valuations happen perhaps once a year, transforming the evaluation temporality. OCR also produce a public space of valuation that is also, for the professionals themselves, a previously unavailable image of their ‘local market’, which changes the image they have of their business and its competitors. Last but not least, with OCR come new figures of the ordinary consumer that are difficult to cope with.

Finally, we examined the affects surrounding the reception of ratings and reviews by restaurant managers and the moral criteria that accompany their discourses on online reviews. Many restaurants consider online reviews as a brutal and hypocritical mode of judgment. The judgment produced by online ratings and reviews is not easily borne by restaurant managers, because it challenges the conventions of quality they had previously internalized as legitimate. Here we see the unfinished movement of imposing a new evaluation method that online reviewing promoters struggle to define as the most just, legitimate and fair. Most of the interviewees seem to be unwilling to play the game, whereas a minority of them talks about a salutary turning point for the industry. The increase in the traffic on OCR websites, the multiplication of reviewed restaurants, the spread of ‘certificates of excellence’ that restaurants display on their door, outline its growing influence, at least for middle-range restaurants. Consultants and web marketing agencies have also realized the importance of online reviews. They provide OCR management tools in the web strategy packages they sell to small businesses like restaurants. Additionally, professional associations advise restaurant managers to take advantage of online reviews in order to improve their reputation.<sup>5</sup> These activities should gradually legitimize the OCR ranking principles and reinforce the mechanisms of reactivity.

## Notes

1. Dellarocas et al. (2010) investigate the consumers’ propensity to contribute online reviews for different products of the same category (motion pictures). They show that moviegoers appear to be more likely to contribute reviews for very obscure movies but also for very high-grossing movies. This explains why the distribution of reviews on products (depending on their popularity) has a U-shaped curve.
2. As part of a broader research program on the impact of online consumer reviews (see Beauvisage et al., 2013; Mellet et al., 2014), we also rely upon primary interviews with managers of OCR websites; web data, and secondary analysis of the trade press and market studies produced by the industry between 2011 and 2014.
3. In 2012, there were around 71,000 restaurants in France; 84% of them employed between 0 and 5 people (Xerfi, 2014).
4. All websites do not provide the opportunity for businesses to respond to consumer reviews. This is the case of *linternaute.com*, contacted by this restaurateur.
5. e.g. <http://www.lhotellerie-restauration.fr/journal/gestion-marketing/2013-01/Dix-astuces-pour-inciter-les-clients-a-deposer-des-avis-en-ligne.htm> for the French case. See also the (American) National Restaurant Association (NRA): <http://www.restaurant.org/Manage-My-Restaurant/Marketing-Sales/Brand-Management/How-to-Monitor-Your-Restaurant%E2%80%99s-Online-Reviews>

## Acknowledgements

We are very grateful for the insightful comments and suggestions made by the two anonymous reviewers of our paper. Usual caveats apply.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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## Appendix – Summary of interviewed restaurants

	Location	Price range	Customers	Cuisine	Opening/ takeover	No. of covers	No. of employees
E1	Paris, 2nd arrondissement (central, bars around)	€15–30	Young and festive clientele, groups	Lebanese cuisine	2008	35	5–6 (+ extra on weekends)
E2	Paris, 6th (Quartier Latin)	€15–30	Senators (near the French Sénat), students, American tourists	South-west French cuisine	2007	50 (lunch) 180 (dinner)	12
E3	Paris, 7th (fancy district)	€30–60	Regular customers and tourists.	Gourmet French cuisine	2008	54	7
E4	Paris, 8th (fancy district, touristic sightseeing)	€15–30	Tourists and business (lunch)	South-West French cuisine	2009	130	17
E5	Paris, 16 <sup>th</sup> (fancy, international district)	€15–30	Business (lunch), regular customers and foreign residents	Brasserie- restaurant	2011	24	2
E6	Paris, 17th (quiet residential area)	€20–35	Local clientele (dinner and brunch); business (lunch)	French cuisine	2008	65–70	10
E7	Paris, 1st (in the heart of Paris)	€15–30	Business (lunch); young regular customers; tourists (Japanese and American)	Tapas	2005	50 indoors + 60 on the terrace	10
E8	Paris, 9th (theater district)	€15–30	Business, theater clientele	World cuisine	2010	30	8
E9	Paris, 11th (residential)	€15–30	Locals and regulars	French cuisine	2006	45 indoors + 15 on the terrace	Unknown
E10	Paris, 5th (Quartier Latin)	<€15	Students, tourists	Take-away – TexMex	2010	Take-away	8
E11	Paris, 8th (near Champs Elysées)	€15–30	Business, tourists	Burgers	2003	35	5
E12	Paris, 9th (theater district)	€15–30	Theater and hostel clientele, regulars	World Cuisine	2010	55	2
E13	Olivet (suburb of Orléans)	€15–30	Business (lunch) ; families (weekend)	Pizzeria/brasserie- restaurant	2007	100 indoors + 60 on the terrace	12
E14	Sandillon (small town in the countryside near Orléans)	€60-90	Business clientele (lunch), local clientele (dinner), Parisians and tourists (weekends and holidays)	Gourmet, molecular cuisine	2007	20	Unknown
E15	Orléans (center, touristic)	€15	Popular clientele (lunch) and tourists.	Creperie	1989	From 50 to 100	3–4
E16	Olivet (suburb of Orléans)	€60–90	Clientele from Orléans, Michelin, tourists.	Gourmet	2007	50	9
E17	Orléans (center, small quiet street)	€25–50	Business clientele (lunch), local families (diner and weekend)	French traditional cuisine	1996	45	11

(Continued)

## Appendix. Continued.

	Location	Price range	Customers	Cuisine	Opening/ takeover	No. of covers	No. of employees
E18	Beaugency (countryside near Orléans)	€15–30	French and international tourists.	Brasserie-restaurant (high quality)	2010	32	4
E19	Orléans (north, near a secondary train station)	€15–30	Business and local clientele, few tourists.	French cuisine	Unknown	50 indoors + 20 on the terrace	Unknown
E20	Fontainebleau (between Paris and Orléans)	€30–90	Diverse clientele (families, business and tourists)	Gourmet cuisine, blending French and Japanese cultures	2012	30	Unknown
E21	Gaillon (in the countryside, not touristic, on a main road)	€25–30	Local clientele (business for lunch) ; Parisians during the weekend)	French traditional cuisine	2009	70	5
E22	Honfleur (near the harbor, hyper-competitive area)	€30	Tourists and local customers (off season)	Traditional cuisine, local produce	2006	150	15
E23	Honfleur (near the harbor, hyper-competitive area)	€22	Occasional tourists and local regular clientele.	Brasserie-restaurant	1996	80 indoors + 60 on the terrace	12
E24	Equemauville (3 km from Honfleur)	€25	Diverse clientele	Fusion	2008	From 100 to 150	2+ extra
E25	Honfleur (center)	€29–55	Tourists and local customers	French gastronomy	2004	50	Unknown
E26	Honfleur (center)	€120	International and wealthy clientele	Fine dining, haute cuisine	2005	26	14
E27	Lisieux (small town in Normandy, a cathedral)	€15–30	Regular customers and pilgrims	French Traditional Cuisine	Unknown	From 100 to 150	3