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South African restaurant reviewing: a changing landscape?

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South African restaurant reviewing: a changing landscape?

"A convincing case can be made for the cultural omnipotence of the drama, music or dance reviewers, but all this pales into pâté alongside the awesome power of the nation's true tastemakers…the food critics." – New York Magazine 1968:2 (Blank, 2007, p.43)

By Adele Stiehler-van der Westhuizen

A research report submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of the University of Witwatersrand's Master of Arts by Dissertation in Journalism and Media Studies

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the changes that have taken place in the South African restaurant reviewing landscape between 2000 and 2020. Changes in society's relationship with food, together with a changing media landscape and the end of apartheid, have combined to create a colourful cocktail of cultural changes in South Africa, which is currently academically underexplored. A historical methodology was followed to track these changes and included the compilation of an archive of 426 reviews published about three restaurants chosen from *Eat Out* magazine's 20th-anniversary issue. Through a close reading and content analysis of the archive and by drawing on public sphere and cultural consecration theories the study found that the food reviewing field was neither inclusive, not particularly professional if measured by the guidelines set out by the legendary *New York Times* reviewer, Craig Claiborne, and that there were two distinct decades in the archive. The first was dominated by positive reviews in traditional media written mainly by professional reviewers. The second decade represented the "democratisation" of online reviewing with a significant increase in reviews (positive and negative) written mainly by amateurs on rating sites. The fact that white females dominated the reviewing space throughout the 20 years under study is evidence of the legacy of apartheid and confirms that privilege and power still shaped the foodscape. This study also tracked the tensions between players in the restaurant reviewing field and confirmed that amateur reviewers did not reject culinary capital but rather reinforced it, and professional reviewers embraced rather than avoided the digital media platforms. Amateur reviewers applied different reviewing criteria and wrote consumer assessments focused on lived experiences, rather than cultural assessments, like many professional reviewers. This study therefore suggests that their reviews are complementary to professional reviews, not competing. The arrival of Web 2.0 and mobile phones also changed the form of reviews radically during the 20 years, with commenting and sharing functionalities turning some reviews into vibrant conversations and photographs and videos becoming the new way to review.

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts by Research Report in the Department of Journalism, at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.
It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other university.



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Adele Stiehler-van der Westhuizen
22 May 2024

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT 2

1 Introduction and Background 7

1.1 Introduction 7

1.2 Background 8

1.3 Aims and Rationale 20

2 Literature Review 22

2.1 The introduction of amateurs to restaurant reviewing 23

2.2 Tourism and restaurant consumer behaviour 26

2.3 Taste making, cultural capital and distinction in reviewing 27

2.4 Critics, criticism and reviewing 29

2.5 Gaps in the Literature 33

3 Theoretical Framework 34

3.1 Cultural studies approach 34

3.2 Cultural Consecration 35

3.3 Public Sphere Theory 37

4 Methodology 39

4.1 A historical method approach 39

4.2 Selection strategy 40

4.3 Compilation of an archive 43

4.4 Process of Analysis 45

4.5 Limitations of the Study 47

5 Findings 48

5.1 The Restaurants 48

5.2 The number of reviews and where they were published. 50

5.3 Who reviewed the restaurants?.....57
5.4 What were restaurant reviewers writing about?.....64
5.5 How has the form of restaurant reviews changed?.....88
6 Analysis.....106
6.1 In which media outlets were restaurants reviewed and did it change over 20 years? .106
6.2 Who reviewed restaurants in this archive? 107
6.3 Which restaurants were reviewed most?.....111
6.4 The changing form of restaurant reviews over 20 years.....112
6.5 The most common themes featured in reviews over 20 years. 118
6.6 The changes in restaurant reviewing since the introduction of digital media.....121
6.7 Future research 122
7 Conclusion 124
8 References.....127

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 4.2-1: Restaurants Selected for the Archive 41
Figure 5.2.1.....50
Figure 5.2.2.....51
Figure 5.2.3.....52
Table 5.2.1 Total number of reviews per rating sites.....52
Figure 5.2.4.....53
Table 5.2.2 Blog reviews per restaurant.....54
Table 5.2.3 – Publications per Restaurant.....57
Figure 5.3.1.....58
Figure 5.3.3.....59
Figure 5.3.4.....60
Table 5.3.1 Local and International Breakdown of Reviewers per Restaurant. 60
Figure 5.3.5.....62
Figure 5.3.6.....62

Table 5.3.2 Breakdown of Reviewer Names per Restaurant....63
Figure 5.4.1....64
Figure 5.4.1.1....65
Table 5.4.1 1 Reviews that included detailed dishes and mentioned dessert....66
Figure 5.4.2.1....68
Figure 5.4.2.2....69
Figure 5.4.3.1....74
Figure 5.4.3.2....75
Figure 5.3.1.1....76
Figure 5.4.4.1....77
Table 5.4.4.1 The number of reviews that mentioned specific wines and beverages other than wine....77
Figure 5.4.4.1....79
Figure 5.4.6.1....80
Figure 5.4.8.1....82
Figure 5.4.9.2....82
Table 5.4.9.1 Balanced Reviews – Number of positive and negative comments in positive and negative reviews....83
Figure 5.4.9.1....83
Figure 5.4.9.2....85
Figure 5.4.10....88
Figure 5.5.1....89
Figure 5.5.2....90
Figure 5.5.3....91
Figure 5.5.4....91
Figure 5.5.5....92
Figure 5.5.6....93
Figure 5.5.7....94
Figure 5.5.8....94
Figure 5.5.9....96

1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

Food and media are areas that have both seen significant changes since the turn of the millennium. At the same time that the media saw the introduction of digital media, especially Web 2.0 with its interactive capabilities (Hodkinson, 2017, p.43), society's interest in food, driven by media exposure and consumer society, increased exponentially (LeBesco & Naccarato, 2018, p.1).

Thus two fields merge in restaurant reviewing, food and media. This dissertation tracked changes in these two overlapping fields over two decades of South African restaurant reviewing.Whilst the impact of Web 2.0's interactivity on restaurant and hospitality reviewing globally has been researched from various angles (Anderson & Magruder, 2019; Zang, Ye, Law & Li, 2010; Vukusic, Grilec & Mikulic, 2019; Heiman, 1997; Mhlanga, 2015; Filieri, Alguezaui & MaLeay, 2015; Sotiriadis & van Zyl, 2013; Ganzaroli, De Noni & van Baalen, 2017; Lu, Ba, Huang & Feng, 2019; Nilashi et.al., 2018; Tiago, Alaral & Tiago, 2015), South African restaurant reviewing has received minimal academic attention.

The research literature mentioned above focused almost exclusively on digital disruption, but this study took a broader approach by tracking reviewing over time using a historical approach that included both digital and traditional media. The methodology included the compilation of a restaurant reviewing archive or corpus that consisted of 426 reviews of three restaurants published between 2000 and 2020. The restaurants were chosen from *Eat Out* magazine's 20th-anniversary edition (Donnely, 2018, p.73). *Eat out* is South Africa's oldest restaurant reviewing guide. Through content analysis and a close reading of the archive reviews and by applying cultural consecration and public sphere theories, the study found that there were two distinct decades in the archive. The first was dominated by positive reviews in traditional media written mainly by professional reviewers focusing on food quality ambience and atmosphere in restaurants. The second decade represented the democratisation of online reviewing with a significant increase in reviews written mainly by amateurs on rating sites. With white females dominating the reviewing space this study found that the "democratisation" was however reserved for the privileged few. The study also tracked the tensions between "old" and "new" players in the restaurant reviewing field. It found that amateur reviewers did not reject culinary capital but rather reinforced it, and professional reviewers embraced rather than avoided

the digital media platforms. However, amateur reviewers applied different reviewing criteria to those of professional reviewers and treated reviews like consumer assessments, as opposed to cultural assessments, like professional reviewers, and this study, therefore, found that their reviews are complementary to professional reviews, not competing. The arrival of Web 2.0 and mobile phones also changed the form of reviews radically during the 20 years, with commenting and sharing functionalities turning reviews into vibrant conversations and photographs and videos becoming the new way to review.

This study not only contributes by focusing on academically unexplored fields (food and reviewing) in South Africa, but through its cultural studies approach the findings can also be relevant to other cultural fields that are frequently reviewed like film, music and art.

1.2 Background

This study is situated in the disciplines of media studies and communication, but recent developments in food culture have to be considered as they impact restaurant reviewing. The most significant aspect to highlight is that alongside the recent transformation in communication as a result of the arrival of digital media, there has also been a significant change in society's relationship with food.

1.2.1 Food, Restaurants and Society

The concept of eating away from home can be traced as far back as the taverns of Pompei, medieval cookshops and inns and Victorian coffee shops, but the modern restaurant in Western society has only existed for the last 250 years (Freedman, 2019, p. 263, Sitwell 2020, p.10, 58, 48) and has its origins in Paris, France. The first restaurant was opened in 1765 by a baker who served restorative drinks with food (Lane, 2014, p.13). In 1780 Beauvilliers opened his famous restaurant, La Grande Taverne de Londres, with several restaurants following suit, but it was only after the French Revolution in 1789 that the job losses suffered by servants in aristocratic households resulted in a significant increase in restaurants in France. (Freedman, 2019, p.263-4). "The restaurant began and remained for about its first century of existence, as an exclusive place for the wealthy, which served – in London, Paris, New York, Berlin – and international more-or-less French cuisine, with little variation" (Freedman, 2019, p.263).

Lane (2014, p.11) refers to the sociologist Stephen Mennell's research into French society to explain the French dominance of early restaurants and to some extent still fine dining restaurants. Mennel argues that fine dining has a high value in French society and has been a

significant part of national identity and culture to the French court society of Louis XIV, in particular the royal court in Paris. The royal court had a very high concentration of courtiers, which resulted in a highly competitive environment and striving for status. This Menell argues. (quoted in Lane, 2014, p.11) resulted in "conspicuous refinement in manners, clothes and entertaining." It included a refined style of cooking and serving, which became a popular way to indicate status and to promote advancement at court. This focus on gastronomy saw the rise of highly trained chefs in court and various aristocratic households and laid the foundation for haute or grande cuisine. Whilst the chef Carême (1784-1883) is credited for adapting the aristocratic cuisine of France to a bourgeoisie cuisine and envisioning grande cuisine as both an art and science, Escoffier (1847-1935) initiated a renewal of French cuisine and his international career sparked the export of French cuisine to the rest of the world by emigrating professional chefs (Lane, 2014, p.13).

The exclusive nature of restaurants would soon be challenged. American food critic Craig Claiborne wrote in the *New York Times* on March 5, 1964, that there is a "concern with good eating, which first became evident after World War II" and it "has now swept across the nation" (quoted in McNamee, 2012, p.143). The comment was part of an interview with American food writer and chef, Julia Child, and he continues to mention oversubscribed cooking schools, gourmet counters at supermarkets that stocked at least 50 imported cheeses as well as a vast variety of herbs and spices (McNamee, 2012, p.144). What Claiborne observed and contributed to was the development of a foodie society that would come to full bloom in the 1980's.

LeBesco and Naccarato (2018, p.1) write that food and foodways have gained increased visibility across the culinary landscape. They refer to *Time* magazine's 2010 online photo gallery "Bam! How Culinary Culture Became a Pop Phenomenon," which identifies significant food-related moments from 1982 to 2010 (2010 June, 21) that highlight how the role of chefs has evolved, turning them into celebrities, brand ambassadors and social and environmental activists. "While the importance of food across the cultural landscape has a long and rich history, over the last thirty years, with renewed media attention, we have witnessed a remarkable extension of food's influence as it has become intertwined with various facets of popular culture." (LeBesco & Naccarato, 2018, p.1)

American food critic Robert Sietsema (2010, p.46) confirms the change in restaurant dining stating that society's attitude towards food has changed "profoundly" and that eating in

restaurants has gone from an occasional outing to being a primary form of entertainment. “The marketplace is filled with new food, more food, and more expensive food, and eating has become a preoccupation for the millions who consider themselves foodies.”

The term “foodie” was coined in 1982 in the British lifestyle magazine *Harpers and Queen*, who used it in an article to refer to a “cuisine poseur”, a person who uses sophisticated culinary consumption as a means of social status (De Solier, 2013, p.16). Two years later the magazine published *The Official Foodie Handbook,* which proclaimed on its front cover that “food is the opium of the stylish classes” and encouraged their readers to “be modern – worship food” (Bar & Levy, 1984, cover page). The “foodie boom” spread across Western societies from the United States to Britain and Australia and positioned foodies as “consumers who use food as a status symbol in class distinction” (De Solier, 2018, p.16).

Lewis (2020, p.36) notes that this change observed in society’s relationship with food is part of an extended lifestyle and consumer culture of late capitalist modernity and confirms that it emerges from a combination of social, cultural and economic factors. Kuh (2001, p.47) explains that the arrival of the credit card gave people who were not necessarily wealthy, but interested in food and wine, access to expensive restaurants.

> In the travel section of the *New York Times* of Sunday, January 6, 1952, hidden in the pages devoted to Florida resorts, was a brief notice titled “On the Cuff,” which informed readers that ‘anyone who can sign his name and pay his bills can charge his way through some of the better hotels, restaurant and night clubs of the country, under a new card system known as Diners Club’. (Kuh, 2001, p.47)

The second half of the twentieth century saw a significant increase in the number of restaurants in America, especially ethnic restaurants, whilst the number of French restaurants (traditional eating establishments of the elite) declined (Beriss, 2018, p.127). This is, in part, Beriss explains, due to the resistance of the middle classes whose aspirations for social recognition were blocked by “elite dining practices in French dining temples” (2018, p.127). This move from traditional highbrow tastes extends beyond food with Peterson and Kern (1996, p.900) identifying a “qualitative shift in the basis for marking elite status – from snobbish exclusion to omnivorous appropriation” in their research into music. This shift to “omnivorousness” is cited as the reason

for a "more democratic" Michelin Guide[1] that in recent years assigned more stars to restaurants outside Europe and started including ethnic restaurants in their European lists (Vásquez & Chik, 2015, p.234).

Society's increased interest in food is also reflected in newsrooms, writes Brown (2004, p.51), noting that the transformation in food journalism is due to "changing attitudes about food" of society.

> 'Food is coming into American culture in a really strong way, but I started writing about food 30 years ago and everybody thought it was weird. It was seen as 'women's page' stuff,' Gourmet Editor-in-Chief Ruth Reichl says in an interview in her grand Times Square office. 'Food has become a part of popular culture in the way film or theatre is'. (Brown, 2004, p.51)

The history of restaurants in South Africa has received minimal if any, academic attention and the subject is thus very poorly documented. The first western-style guest house which allowed for "eating outside the home" seems to have been established on 18 May 1656 when Jan van Riebeeck's Political Council gave the right to open a guest house to service passing ships to Annetje Boom and her husband, Hendrik, the head gardener in the Company (Claassens, 2006, p.90). "Eating out" in South Africa remained the domain of establishments that offer accommodation, with Veldsman (1998, p.5) confirming that as late as the 1930s and 40s, South Africans were either eating at home or in a hotel.

This does not mean that other kinds of eateries did not exist, with beer halls and pubs all offering meals. The Pig and Whistle Inn in Bathurst was established in 1832 and is one of the oldest continuing licenced pubs in South Africa, with Perseverance Tavern in Cape Town established in 1836, the Fireman's Arms also in Cape Town established in 1864 and De Akker in Stellenbosch receiving its first licence in 1872. Outside of the Cape, the Star of the West in Kimberley opened in 1870 and the Radium beerhall in Johannesburg was established in 1929 (Six of the oldest pubs in South Africa, 2011, September 21).

[1] The Michelin Guide was first published in 1900 in France, by the Michelin tire company, who saw great value to the company if it could encourage customers to travel by car to provincial restaurants. Despite recent criticism, its objective rating system is still one of the most respected by chefs worldwide (Crewe & Blake, 1978, p17).

In the 1960s and 70s, the average South African was not a very discerning eater, and preferred quantity over quality and braai-dinners and potjiekos were popular get-togethers in white communities (Strugo,1999, p. 27; Veldsman 1998, p.5). Travel writer Lawerence Green confirms this statement in his description of the poor dining scene in Cape Town:

> Cape Town was for centuries the gastronomic capital of Southern Africa and I record with sorrow the fact that it has lost that distinction. Nowadays the shrewd diner-out is served better in Johannesburg and Durban and of course, Lourenco Marques. You have to know your way round the Cape Town restaurants to find the elusive old Cape cooking or a trace of English genius. Cape Town has become a city of steak and chips and you do not escape from tough beef and indigestible potatoes by going to foreign restaurants. (Green, 1971, p.32)

It was however also during this period that (mostly white) South Africans really started to drink wine, and cheese and wine parties, sponsored by wine companies, became a regular social feature and eating out started to move from the eating halls of hotels to restaurants (Veldsman, 1998, p.5). The sixties also saw the arrival of a new group of Italians, many opening eateries which, according to Veldsman (1998, p.5), overwhelmed the South African market, and signalled the demise of traditional food. This was also the decade that saw the opening of the iconic South African steak house - Spur and some of the first American and South African fast-food franchises (Ambor, 2021, p.113, Veldsman, 1998, p.5). Strugo (1999, p.27) writes that "apart from fashionable tea rooms and a few restaurants centred in cinema complexes like the Coliseum and Durban's Playhouse, fine dining was the exclusive domain of luxury hotels." These hotels were generally staffed with immigrants from the Italian and German-speaking population and chefs were recruited from abroad. In 1974 one of these young immigrant chefs, Marc Guébert launched the South African Chefs Association (Stugo,1999, p.28).

Whilst the South African hospitality and restaurant industry seemed to grow in line with American and European trends, there was one major difference - Apartheid. From 1950 the apartheid state's Group Areas Acts (Nos 41 of 1950 and 36 of 1966) and Reservation of Separate Amenities Act, No. 49 of 1953 excluded non-white people from restaurants, theatres, hotels and sporting facilities attended by whites and any separate facilities provided for Black, Coloured and Asian members of the population "have almost invariably been inferior" (Mandy, 1984, p.144).

Not only did these policies impact local South Africans, but also the development of the hospitality industry through sanctions and the disinvestment campaigns in protests of apartheid (Viljoen, 1999, p.178). “Hotels became isolated from the rest of the world and international tourism numbers dwindled to non-existent levels,” (Viljoen, 1999, p.178).

Mandy (1984, p.145) writes that the embarrassment and inconvenience of Apartheid’s “petty” discriminative laws were most acutely felt in the larger cities, especially Johannesburg’s Central Business District, which led to pressure on the government to desegregate restaurants. Such pressure included protests by non-white South Africans. One such protest at the fast food outlet, Wimpy, in the Carlton Centre in Johannesburg included a group of coloured men insisting on being served, with one expressing the tragedy of the unfair racial discrimination with this statement:

> I am a Coloured man, the holder of a university degree, deputy principal of a school. The suit which I am wearing was dry-cleaned yesterday, and I had a bath this morning. My forebears did not come to South Africa with Jan van Riebeeck in 1652, but nine months later they were here. Any Greek, Portuguese or Italian who arrived in this country yesterday is permitted to eat here; yet I, a South African citizen, am turned away. Why? (Mandy, 1984, p.148)

George Bizos told Anna Trapido in *Hunger for Freedom: The Story of Food in the Life of Nelson Mandela* (2008, p.66-68), that during the 1950s when he worked with former South African President Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo, lunch in small towns was generally fish and chips eaten in the car, as the three men could not sit together anywhere due to the apartheid legislation, but in cities like Johannesburg restaurants such as Moretsele’s and Blue Lagoon as well as Azad’s and Kapitan’s were frequently visited by young black professionals. Kapitan’s, a family-owned Indian restaurant that was founded in 1887 was widely acknowledged as Mandela’s favourite restaurant.

The continued pressure from business owners and protests by South Africans of different races eventually resulted in the Carlton Centre rebranding their Wimpy restaurant to Wimpy International and becoming the first multiracial sit-down unlicensed restaurant in August 1975 (Mandy, 1984, p.149). The desegregation of licenced restaurants proved more challenging but by 1980 and 1981 several restaurants in Johannesburg such as steak house Mike’s Kitchen were

successful in their application for 'international liquor licences' (Mandy 1984, p.155). Restaurant food culture was thus for a large part of South African history reserved for whites only.

Apartheid's impact on South African food culture reached much farther than excluding non-white South Africans from restaurants, with legislation like the Land Act of 1913 and the Natives Administration Act of 1927 resulting in mass land dispossession with 70% of South Africans confined to 'homelands' which consisted of 13% of the country's land (Tshukudu & Trapido, 2016, p.28). Apartheid's social engineering significantly changed how non-white South Africans acquired, cooked and ate food with traditional methods of cooking and ingredients relegated to special occasions and everyday eating patterns became Westernised.

The end of apartheid and the first democratic elections in 1994 contributed further to changes in food culture. Many South Africans' incomes increased, which introduced dietary changes (Tshukudu & Trapido, 2016, p.19). A 2015 study into food consumption changes since 1994 (Ronquest-Ross, Vink & Sigge, 2015) explains that the political changes in South Africa altered consumption patterns because they resulted in shifts in food availability, accessibility, and choices. The study concludes that the most significant increase in food consumption between 1994 and 2012 was in meat, fats and oils, sauces, dressings and condiments, sweet and savoury snacks, and soft drinks. The study expresses concern that these dietary changes resulted in increased obesity, a condition often blamed on fast food and multinational food companies (Ronquest-Ross et.al., 2015, p.9). This is in line with the post-apartheid arrival of international fast-food companies like McDonald's which opened its first branch in 1995 and now boasts "over 300 restaurants in all nine provinces" (Our History, n.d). Since 1994 the hospitality and tourism industry, which includes restaurants as an essential subsector, has grown exponentially to the extent that it accounted for 9% of the GDP in 2016 (Koufie & Kesa, 2020, p.2).

Similar to the late 20th-century changes in the American restaurant scene, Muellers (2011, p.3) confirms that French cuisine was "highly sought after" in South Africa between the 1960s and 1980s (in "whites only" restaurants), but that this interest waned. The contemporary restaurant scene now includes Thai, Greek, Italian, Chinese, Mexican, Portuguese, French, and other ethnic foods (Muellers, 2011, p.3). Although Muellers suggests that many restaurants serve traditional African dishes, South African cuisine, in particular indigenous South African cuisines, rather than versions of colonial African cuisines, appears to be underrepresented in the dining scene (Govender-Ypma, 2018, August 12; Mutsango, 2011, p.1; Greenblatt, 2016, December

12). The late 1980s *The American Express Restaurant Guide* (1988, p.4) confirms the lack of African food as it lists Gramadoelas as the only African ethnic restaurant in Johannesburg and Pretoria.

Although the *Michelin Guide* is not represented in Africa, South African fine dining restaurants are recognised internationally, especially in The World's 50 Best Restaurants list (World's 50 Best Restaurants, n.d.). The restaurant La Colombe has also on several occasions been rated as one of the world's best restaurants by the crowd-sourced review website TripAdvisor ("TripAdvisor just revealed," 2018, December 4). Further international recognition includes naming Chantel Dartnall, the chef from Restaurant Mosaic, the best female chef in the world by the international Best Chef Awards in 2017 (Naik, 2017, November 4) and designating Kobus van der Merwe's restaurant, Wolfgat, best in the world, at the inaugural World Restaurant Awards in Paris in 2019 (Gibbons, 2019, February 19).

1.2.2 Food Writing and Restaurant Reviewing

Travellers were probably the first food writers and have captured their opinions as far back as the Sicilian poet Archestratus (350BC) who complained that the shark steaks he ate in the Greek City of Torone, had too much sauce and cheese, resulting in an oily dish (Sitwell, 2020, p. 229). The modern foundation of food or gastronomic writing was formed much later and essentially by two texts published in the 19th century (Mathias, 2021, January p.42). First was the *Almanach des gourmands* in 1803 published by Parisian lawyer and gastronome, Alexandre-Balthazar-Laurent Grimod de La Reynière, (Shore, 2019, p.272), effectively founding the field of food criticism. And later followed another lawyer, Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin with his philosophical *Physiology of Taste* which was first published in 1825, and has not been out of print since (Mathias, 2021, January, p.42). The famous *Michelin Guide* was launched in France, in 1900, by the founders of a tyre company, Andre and Edouard Michelin, but only started reviewing and rating restaurants in 1926 (Sitwell, 2020, p.225).

The gastronomic writing established by Brillat-Savarin and de La Reynière was not focused on professional or domestic cooking but was rather an aesthetic and philosophical field because both writers were already "men of letters" and part of a broader literary field (Sevel-Sørensen, 2020, p. 8; Jones & Taylor, 2012, p.98). Jones and Taylor (2012, p.98) refer to Stephen Mennell's (1996) explanation that these two authors did not provide a set of instructions to their readers, but rather blended information with discussions and reflections on etiquette and

nutrition resulting in "a brew of history, myth, and history serving as myth" and nostalgically evoked "memorable meals". Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson (2001, p.10) argues that this writing style redefined the prosaic activity of dining out as a phenomenon of a high moral and intellectual order. Mennell further argues (quoted in Jones and Taylor, 2012, p.98) that it was the appearance of food writers, the gastronome, that turned eating into a social activity, as they first translated public eating into news, which first became national and later international. He describes the gastronome as "more than a gourmet – he is also a theorist and propagandist about culinary taste" (Jones and Taylor, 2012, p.98). Articulating the superiority of a form of culinary taste, as done by gastronomes in these texts, reinforces the class and sex advantages of a social group. "The culinary landscape evoked by the *Almanach* was a public one of shops, restaurants and cafes and this was a sphere open primarily to middle-class men" (Jones and Taylor, 2012, p.98).

A second major development in food writing was the entrance of the so-called "women's press," which brought magazines with cooking columns that focused on domestic cooking and gave advice on all things for the kitchen and the table (Sevel-Sørensen, 2020, p. 8) from the late 19th century. Both developments formed the field of food journalism but indicate the division between the public (eating out) and private sphere (domestic cooking) and the masculinity associated with the first (eating out and reviewing restaurants) and femininity with the second (domestic cooking chores) (Jones and Taylor, 2012, p.99).

Food writing however only developed into "the art" known today after the significant increase in restaurants in the twentieth century and the popularisation of eating out after the Second World War. Lifestyle journalism, the category into which food writing and reviewing falls, is an under-researched field (Fürsich, 2012, p.12; English & Fleischman, 2019, p.93, Jones and Taylor, 2012, p.97), especially in South Africa, (Farah, 2020, p.6) but research suggests that food writing followed the same 1980's "foodie boom" to the American and European publications. The iconic *John Platter's South African Wines* guide was first published in 1980 (Van Zyl, 2001, p.5) and a few years later the publication of *Wining, Dining and Where to Stay*, described by its authors Richfield and Hilton as "South Africa's first (and only) comprehensive, critical guide to all the restaurants and hotels in South Africa" (1983, p.4). Ironically the guide called itself "comprehensive", but then noted that establishments that catered to non-white South Africans had been omitted, due to time and staff constraints, but that the publication planned to

remedy it in future editions. There was ever only one edition of the publication (Richfield and Hilton,1984, p.6).

Women's publications and pages were found in South African Afrikaans media from as early as 1916, with *Die Huisgenoot, Sarie Marais* and *Die Burger* covering "women's news" (Muller, 1990 p.271 & 397). MER, editor of *Die Burger's* women's pages explained to her readers that so-called women's news is found in separate pages, not because it is all that women read, on the contrary, they read all the news that men also read, but this is news that is of particular interest to women, and not at all to men (Steyn,2004, p. 143). *The Star* newspaper launched its cookery column, Angela Day, on 19 June 1964 and it survived for 52 years, until its closure in 2016 (Kay, 2016, December 15).

In 1986 food writer Dora Sithole's first article with styled food pictures appeared in *Bona* and in the following years, she would become a household name with regular features in *True Love, Drum, New Dawn, Pace, City Press* and *Thandi* magazine and television appearances on the SABC African language stations (Sitole, 2020, p117). At more or less the same time Annette Human became the food and craft editor at *Huisgenoot* and her *Wenresepte* [winning recipes] column became the most popular in the country. The column was published in book form of which the first three books sold more than 700,000 copies (Beukes, 1921, 362).

In an attempt to encourage more professional food writing, the South African Chefs Association launched a competition for food critics in 1982, receiving 197 entries from 16 English and six Afrikaans publications (Bolsmann, 2013, p.271), suggesting that food writing and restaurant reviewing was an established field by this time. The quality of South African food reviewing is frequently criticised (Bolsmann, 2013, p.259; Govender-Ympa, 2018, August 12; Stone, 2016, February 8; Smith, 2003, July 18, p.9) and has not produced famous critics like Craig Claiborne, Ruth Reichl or Jonathan Gold, but the late 1990s and 2000s saw the rise of food critics like Lannice Snyman (Parker, 2010, May 10), Victor Strugo (Le GastroGnome) (Strugo, 2010, January 9), Garth van der Walt (The Bandit at Large) (The Bandit at Large, 2011, November 16), Diane De Beer, Anne Stevens (The Mercury), Pat Kossuth (De Beer, 2011, May 6), Hillary Biller (Sunday Times) Abigail Donnelly (Donnelly, 2018) and Gwynne Conlyn (Conlyn, 2005, p.6).

This period also saw the launch of *Eat Out*, billed as South Africa's "definitive guide of where to eat" in 1998 (About Eat Out, n.d.) and *Roussouw's Restaurants* in 2003, an independent

guide that moved to the Diners Club stable in 2015 (Frame-Tolmie, 2014, December 18). In 2016 Jenny Handley launched the *JHP Gourmet Guide* (Books, n.d), "the first ever SA restaurant guide to equate with global restaurant ratings". *Eat Out* professionally reviews about 500 South African restaurants annually, but also offers consumer or "user" reviews on their website, allowing for a larger number and variety of establishments to be reviewed (About Eat Out, n.d.). User reviews are characteristic of interactive digital media where restaurant reviews are now commonly published on rating websites like TripAdvisor, Yelp, Google, Zomato or Dineplan. Reviews also form part of some food blogs and social media groups on Facebook or Instagram posts.

The impact of digital media on traditional forms of journalism is a well-researched subject, that has focused either on the digital transformation of newsrooms (Silverstone, 1999; Deuze, 2005; Luo, 2019, April 10), the impact of citizen journalism on professional journalism (Bowman & Willis, 2003; Wall, 2017; Crompton and Benedetti, 2010; Noor, 2017; Gillmor, 2008) or the impact of generally free content offered on the internet threating the existence of print media (Rousseau, 2012, p. 15).

Food media has not been spared the threat. "Before the digital revolution at the turn of the twenty-first century, the world of print was where the kings and queens of restaurant criticism ruled," (Sitwell, 2020, p.229). But, as Rousseau writes: "The 2009 closure of *Gourmet* magazine – the 'grand dame' of food publications in the US since its inception in 1941 – is a case in point." In South Africa, equivalent examples include the permanent closure, after 52 years, of the Angela Day bi-weekly recipe column in *The Star* newspaper (Kay, 2016) and the temporary closure of Caxton's *Food and Home Entertaining* magazine in May 2020 (Cohen, May 5, 2020). Budget constraints, and the cost of paying for a meal, are cited as reasons that "the once fashionable restaurant critics are not as visible as they were a few years ago" (Bolsmann, 2013, p.259; Govender-Ypma, 2018, August 12; Farah, 2020, p.40).

Social media and amateur reviews have not only impacted the media landscape but also those who are reviewed:

> Every guest is a potential food critic and with the scope of social media these days, their critique can be out in the world within seconds. Sometimes it is not even about the food. It can be the music that they didn't like or the overly attentive staff. To deal with that kind of shit (sic) is really, really difficult. I understand that people are paying a lot of

money when they go out to eat, but sometimes it feels as though people are coming to find fault. (Higgs, 2018, p.165)

1.2.3 "Digital Food"

Digital food is a term coined by Lewis (2020, p.10) and refers to the digital food practices that have been noted since the arrival of the internet, more specifically Web 2.0 combined with society's renewed interest in food. Rousseau (2012, p. 24) argues that Web 2.0 has "revolutionised" food in the last two decades and she singles it out as a subject that has been radically changed by digital media. The numbers on the social media platform Instagram provide perspective and demonstrate Rousseau's argument. By the middle of 2016, there were 180 million posts tagged #food on Instagram and 36 million tagged #foodie (De Solier, 2018, p.56). Three years later there are 345 million #food posts and 127million #foodie posts. At the same time, there were 45.4 million posts of #cars and 12.4 million posts of #gardening (Instagram, 2019, June 27). Food is also the most popular category on Pinterest with the top ten pinned words including chicken, cheese, bake and cake (De Solier, 2018, p.56).

Lewis and Phillipov (2018, p.207) support Rousseau's observations, arguing that in recent years digital food practices have become "habitual", often passing unnoticed in consumers' lives. The digital food activities that consumers take part in range from ordering fast food meals online to searching and reviewing restaurants to using apps to connect with food producers. YouTube food advice channels, foodie lifestyle blogs, as well as sharing "high-end aesthetics" on Instagram, are digital food practices that consumers engage in daily. Lewis (2020, p.245) sums up the popularity of digital food content accordingly: "Alongside porn, celebrity selfies and cute animals, food content reigns supreme on many digital platforms".

In conclusion, it is clear that the interactive Web 2.0, has been a major disrupter not only in the way society communicates, but also in the way which it relates to, connects with, and talks about food. In reviewing the last decade's food scene, Tim Hayward in *The Guardian* (2019, December 9), notes that "most of the decade's excitement in the food world seems to have played out online".

1.3 Aims and Rationale

The primary objective of this study was to track changes in South African restaurant reviews over two decades. By focusing on restaurant reviewing over two decades and compiling an archive using restaurants rather than media outlets or reviewers for sampling as other studies have done, (see, for example, Koufie & Kesa,2020; Mhlanga, 2015; Farah, 2020; Lane, 2013; Kobez, 2019) this research has studied both digital and traditional media in various South African locations across a variety of media outlets. It is therefore baseline research into the broader reviewing landscape in South Africa and highlights not only changes but also identifies directions for future research.

As this study covers a period that saw the introduction of digital, especially social, media it also contributes to the growing academic literature investigating the relationship between food as popular culture and the internet, or "digital food". There is a significant amount of research already available on the impact of Web 2.0 on media and society, but "digital food", despite its apparent popularity among consumers has received far less academic attention (Lewis, 2020, p.14). The period of study starts six years after South Africa's first democratic elections, and so also identifies post-apartheid societal changes, especially in food culture and consumer behaviour. Restaurants form part of the tourism industry which is a key driver of the South African economy (SA's key economic sectors, 2018). Knowledge that sheds light on external forces that impact this sector is therefore an additional contribution made by this study. Several studies have found professional and consumer reviews to impact the financial success of the reviewed establishments (Heiman, 1997; Moloi; 2016; Anderson & Magruder, 2012). Vukusic, Grilec and Mikulic (2019) have also found that the introduction of respected reviewers, such as the *Michelin Guide,* can encourage higher standards in restaurants and ultimately contribute to the tourism industry and economy.

Although a growing field worldwide (LeBesco & Naccarato, 2018, p.1), food as popular culture and food reviewing especially receives minimal scholarly attention globally (Johnston & Baumann, 2015, p.45). Johnston and Baumann (2015, p.45) argue that this academic neglect stems from "Western intellectual dualism that prioritizes cognition over embodiment, and denigrates the material practical nature of human life." They further suggest that academic interest in food has a gendered dimension: food is significant when it is part of the domain of men when it relates to markets and production, but somehow is less important when food resides

in the private sphere of everyday eating and sustenance, related to the world of women. This study thus contributes to a generally under-researched field of food.

Wahl-Jorgensen and Hanitzsch's research further concluded that "specialist journalists that are removed from the excitement of the newsgathering process" receive far less consideration in academic research and as a result, the work of arts, music and features journalists is seldom explored (2009, pp.12-13). Supporting this argument Fürsich (2012, p12) suggests that "lifestyle journalism has been relegated to the backburner of journalism studies," and deserves greater academic attention to evaluate its public role. This proposed study thus further contributes to the lesser explored areas of media research by focusing on journalism away from general news gathering. Focusing on food as popular culture also has implications for other cultural forms that are frequently reviewed, such as art, film, and music.

Research Question:

In what ways has the South African restaurant reviewing landscape changed between 2000 and 2020?

Sub Questions:

- Where, in which media outlets, are restaurants reviewed and how has this changed?
- Who is writing restaurant reviews and how has this changed? (E.g., gender, race, professional or amateur, regular reviewer)
- Which restaurants in the sample are reviewed more frequently and has this changed over time?
- Has the format of reviews in South Africa changed over time, and, if so, in what ways? (E.g., length, rating systems, images)
- What are the most common themes in restaurant reviews, and has this changed over time?
- How has the introduction of digital media changed the reviewing landscape?

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

As discussed in the Aims and Rationale, restaurant reviewing in South Africa is an academically underexplored field, but this study identified some of the subjects related to this field such as food and digital media and reviewing (restaurants and other fields) locally and elsewhere in the world, to draw from as an entry point into the discussion on restaurant reviewing in South Africa.

Existing literature on restaurant reviewing focuses overwhelmingly on the digital disruption of food reviewing. The majority of studies investigate the subject from a consumer behaviour and marketing angle, exploring the impact that consumer and professional reviews have on sales and restaurant popularity (see Anderson & Magruder, 2019; Zang, Ye, Law & Li, 2010; Vukusic, Grilec & Mikulic, 2019; Heiman, 1997; Mhlanga, 2015; Filieri, Alguezaui & MaLeay, 2015; Sotiriadis & van Zyl, 2013; Ganzaroli, De Noni & van Baalen, 2017; Lu, Ba, Huang & Feng, 2019; Nilashi et.al., 2018; Tiago, Alaral & Tiago, 2015). Others try to ascertain consumer's motivation for sharing and rating their dining experiences (Cheung & Lee, 2018; Muchnik, Aral & Taylor, 2013; Kuehn, 2016; Hennig-Thurau et.al., 2004; Koufie & Kesa, 2020). The impact of the significant increase in amateur reviewers on professional reviewing is another well-researched angle, especially the "democratisation of reviewing" (Rousseau, 2012; Kobez, 2019; Kobez 2016; Sietsema, 2010; Chiou, Hsiao & Su, 2013; Mellet et.al; 2014; Vincent, 2018).

Focusing only on professional lifestyle journalists Farah (2020) explores the digital disruption and the role of South African lifestyle journalists in the Tiso Blackstar Group's newsrooms while Goodsir, Neill and Brown's (2014) case study into New Zealand's food critic Peter Calder illustrates the importance of professional restaurant critics.

With less of a focus on digital disruption scholars like Levina and Arriaga (2014), Vasquez and Chik (2015), Johnston and Baumann (2007) and Lane (2013) explore the cultural aspects of reviews, studying how eating and reviewing are used as culinary capital and a form of distinction. None of these studies however combined the digital and cultural aspects of eating and only four focussed on South African restaurants or lifestyle reporting. Culinary capital explains Naccarato and Lebesco (2012, p.11) draws on Bourdieu's multiple forms of capital which is built on Karl Marx's work on economic capital, to explain how economic, social, and symbolic capital circulate across the social field. "Bourdieu argues that by accessing these

multiple forms of capital, individuals acquire status and power." Culinary capital therefore recognises that food and food practices are markers of social status.

This Literature Review grouped the studies according to core subjects: (1) The introduction of amateurs to restaurant reviewing, (2) Tourism and restaurant consumer behaviour, (3) Taste making, cultural capital and distinction in reviewing and (4) Critics, criticism and reviewing. The aim was to cover research in restaurant reviewing in general, as well as digital media and reviewing and food as culture approaches to compare similar research to identify the gaps to address in this study.

2.1 The introduction of amateurs to restaurant reviewing

2.1.1 The impact of "democratisation" on professional reviewing

The arrival of the internet since the 1980s has brought about significant changes in the way society communicates. Similar to the invention of the printing press, television and radio the internet, as a new medium, introduced radical changes in communication, with participation as one of its most significant attributes (Gilmore, 2012, pp.5-6).

Lupton (2018, p.69) explains that the internet in its initial stages (1993-2003), known as "Web 1.0," focused on the development of websites, discussion forums, blogs and wikis (websites developed collaboratively by a community of users). Google Search assisted users in finding information on the web and online shopping allowed consumers to purchase from books to groceries through the internet. The characteristic of participation, which allowed anyone to publish on the internet, was already a radical change, but the functions of interactivity introduced by the advent of mobile computing, social media, and apps, (coined "Web 2.0" in 2004), revolutionised communication (Lupton, 2018, p.70; Gilmore, 2012, p.6).

With the launch of Facebook (2004), YouTube (2005) and Twitter (2006), social media became a widespread phenomenon in the 2000s (Salikov, 2018, p.89), empowering anyone anywhere in the world with access to a mobile phone, tablet or computer and an internet connection, to publish their thoughts to be read or seen by anyone else in the world at any given time. This has resulted in what Gilmore (2012, p.6) calls a "radical, even bewildering shift" in terms of who is in control of information as the lines between interpersonal and mass media, or private and public communication, are blurred.

This new system has the traditional media consumer taking part in the production process, turning them into what Alvin Toffler (1980, p.278) defined as a "prosumer" (producer

and consumer). Prosumerism in media promised a fundamental cultural change leading to a better society. Theorists like Negroponte went as far as predicting that this new technology would "liberate individuals from the constraints of place, the operation and control of societies would be decentralised and that the community and global relations would be transformed for the better" (Hodkinson 2017, p.48). Gilmore (2012, p.6) similarly argues that freedom of expression is required as "a basic building block for an open and free society". It is this freedom of speech that is celebrated by some scholars as the "democratisation" of the internet and has given rise to the term "citizen journalism" to describe those who are now partaking in producing the news (Goode, 2009, p.1288).

Whilst the arrival of the internet significantly increased access to reviewing for amateurs, it did not introduce the concept of amateur reviewing. Kuh (2002, p.199) writes that the potential for corrupting influences in reviewing gave rise to the *Zagat* survey, already in 1979 when it was launched in the United States by Tim and Nina Zagat as a restaurant rating newsletter for their friends. The concept was based on having frequent diners complete a questionnaire and score certain aspects of the meal and send it to *Zagat* for tabulation. Whilst the 1500 contributors by 1985 provided "statistical accuracy" the system failed when it requested its contributors to write "pithy quotable reactions," writes Kuh (2002, p.200), providing an amateur reviewers description of Le Cirque restaurant in *Zagat* ("the place to go if you want to go where it all is") as an example. "To really nail a scene, one needed an old fashioned undemocratic reviewer, one with an inimitable voice and a full arsenal of rhetorical devices, one like Gael Greene or Ruth Reichl" (Kuh, 2002, p.200).

In South Africa, restaurant guides were also asking for public comment and contributions as early as 1988 (Caddick & Caddick, 1988, p.234) and *Rossouw's Restaurants* (Rossouw, 2005, p.69) published a number to SMS and website address in 2005 requesting the public to "comment on a restaurant".

Mellet et.al. (2014, p.5) found that French review websites contributed significantly to the democratisation of restaurant criticism, by both including a greater variety of restaurants and by broadening participation. This is in contrast to the *Michelin Guide* which represents an elitist model where access to the market is restricted to a limited group of consumers (Mellet et.al. 2014, p.12).

Rousseau (2012, p.58) on the other hand argues that the interactive web has turned "people who happen to eat and are able to type" into "the new food experts" resulting in professional food critics defending their livelihoods against a sea of amateur voices. Rousseau wrote in 2012 (p.15) that Web 2.0's free access to produce one's own reviews is good news for those who want to participate, but less so for those interested in safeguarding the professionalism of the practice. Keen (2010, p.29) is an outspoken advocate for preserving professionalism as one of the most forthright critics of the rise of the amateur. Keen states that the blurred lines between audience and author in new media have made it increasingly difficult to differentiate between the reader and writer, artist, and spin doctor and the amateur and the expert. "The result? The decline of the quality and reliability of the information we receive, thereby distorting, if not outrightly corrupting, our national civic conversation" (Keen, 2010, p.29). Hollows (2022, p.56) writes that despite the "admissions of mistakes and mishaps" amature expertise can appear trustworthy because it is accompanied by a sense of 'ordinariness; and 'authenticity' from people who appear "more like us".

Keen's concerns are not unfounded, as amateur reviewers are not bound by the same rules and ethics as professional reviewers. Sietsema (2010, p.42) explains the "ethical and procedural framework" for professional reviewing that was set in place by legendary *New York Times* food critic Craig Claiborne in his 29 years as food editor and food critic: Only one person would conduct restaurant reviews at a publication to ensure consistency. The reviewer would put their own name to the work, although they must remain anonymous to the restaurants when dining out. A restaurant needs to be visited at least three times before a review is written and always by a party of three or four, to sample a variety of dishes. The publication would pay for meals and accept no free offers. Claiborne's ethical framework, argues Sietsema, made the reviewer accountable to the diner and "lifted the restaurant out of the realm of marketing and made it a public service" (2010, p.46). Claiborne joined the *New York Times* in 1957 as its food editor and intermittently its restaurant critic (Miller, B. 2000, Jan 24).

Morag Kobez's Doctor of Philosophy thesis (2019), exploring the digital disruption of the gastronomic field in Australia, found that the proliferation of amateur reviews resulted in professional critics "profoundly" changing their norms and practices in reviewing restaurants. These changes included the immediacy with which a new restaurant is reviewed, instead of giving it a "grace period" to establish itself. Professionals also gave up their anonymity to instead

develop a public profile to compete on online and digital platforms. Long-form critical writing has also been replaced by shorter "listicles" and there has been an erosion of the detachment and integrity that generally allows for "objective" and especially negative criticism (Kobez, 2019, p.3).

Jones and Taylor (2013, p.103) are however confident that the rise of participatory journalism will not impact food writing significantly as the internal structure of food journalism rests on "a sense of authority". They argue that the journalists and celebrity chefs or cooks who contribute to the traditional media operate as cultural intermediaries, telling their readers what and where to eat and acquiring status by presenting food as a site of pleasure and play.

While citizen journalism potentially turns everyone into a cookery columnist or a restaurant reviewer, the important relationship between food, celebrity and lifestyle media ensures that the forms of expertise upon which the authority of food journalism depends look set to endure. (Jones & Taylor, 2013, p.104)

2.2 Tourism and restaurant consumer behaviour

2.2.1 Impact on sales

The economic impact of online reviewing is one of the best-explored areas of reviewing, with researchers using online consumer reviews to gain greater insight into consumer behaviour, often resulting in recommendations to improve the hospitality business. Several studies have focused on the crowd-sourcing website Tripadvisor specifically, studying how effective the site is in its hotel recommendations to tourists (Nilashi et.al., 2018, p.168), to understand how consumers judge their meal experience (Tiago, Amaral and Tiago, 2015, p.162), and why travellers trust TripAdvisor's recommendations (Fillieri, Alguezaui, McLeay, 2015, p.174). Ganzaroli, De Noni and Van Baalen (2017, p.501) studied TripAdvisor as a site that could possibly force better quality and more authentic food in Venice's tourist restaurants. The study however concluded that the tourist reviewers did not have enough knowledge of local cuisine to force quality rather than market share in Venetian restaurants. Whilst these studies tell us significant amounts about reviewing on Tripadvisor, these findings cannot be generalised and do not represent the broader field of reviewing.

In one of the few studies into South African online restaurant reviews, Mhlanga (2015, p.1) analysed reviews on Cape Town restaurants to identify the gap between consumer expectations and their perceptions. Results showed that the gaps, apart from the attribute of staff

knowledge, were not statistically significant, indicating that guests' expectations were generally met. Mhlanga notes that the majority of the online reviews in her study were positive and therefore suggested that a good product and service is often rewarded by guests "in terms of word of mouse" (positive online reviews, as opposed to the traditional "word of mouth" WOM)). The study also concluded that females had the highest meal experience, and the taste of food was the top attribute of guest's expectations, followed by value for money (Mhlanga, 2015, p.8).
The most common theme in economic research into online reviewing is the impact of consumer reviews on purchasing intent or business popularity. Lu et.al. (2013, p.607) explain that due to the intangible nature of their services, restaurants are the ideal ground to study the effectiveness of word-of-mouth and e-word-of-mouth. Several studies note a positive connection between purchase intent or increased bookings and consumer reviews (Moloi, 2016; Lu et.al., 2013; Anderson & Magruder, 2012; Hu, Liu, Zhang, 2008, p.2; Zhang, Ye, Law & Li, 2010). Anderson and Magruder (2012, p.957) also identify this connection as an incentive for restaurants to write fake reviews. Vásquez, however, cautions that "a few review-related scandals" are not representative of the vast number of reviews available online, as her discourse analysis study of 1,000 online consumer reviews, found less than one per cent of reviews have the characteristics associated with fraudulent reviews (2014, p.161).

2.2.2 Motivation for sharing dining experiences

The second aspect of consumer behaviour relates to the motivation of the general public or amateurs to share their dining experiences in reviews or ratings. Hennig-Thurau et.al (2004) found a combination of reasons for consumers' eWOM behaviour. These included the desire for social interaction and economic incentives, their concern for others, but also the potential to enhance their own self-worth. Cheung and Lee (2012, p.224) also concluded that egoism, altruism, and collectivism are motivations. Kuehn (2016, p.1) found that consumers on the American reviewing site Yelp, thought the site to be a primary space through which they could craft their personal brand and maintain it. In contrast Koufie and Kesa's (2020, p.17) local study into a group of millennials from Johannesburg, found altruism to be the main motivation for sharing dining experiences.

2.3 Taste making, cultural capital and distinction in reviewing

Lane (2013) studied the perceived power of gastronomic guides in Europe in establishing the rules of what constitutes good or legitimate taste and their influence on chefs and audiences. She

found that more elitist guides such as the *Michelin Guide* apply more unified standards, producing consistent results and a less ambiguous ranking order and therefore were considered more legitimate by chefs than guides that included the views of diners (2013, p.361). Chiou, Hsiao and Su (2014) took a similar approach but focused on online reviews of cultural offerings. They found that the credibility of professional commentators was "significantly higher" than that of consumer commentators across both elite and mass cultural offerings (2014, p.364).

Online restaurant reviews of Michelin-star restaurants are used to display culinary capital by amateur reviewers, found Vásquez and Chick (2015). "By asserting their right to participate in a larger conversation about Michelin standards, online reviewers place themselves on equal footing with culinary elites and professional food reviewers." They argue that digital media challenge the well-established hierarchies in food culture, but also found that they reproduce some existing forms of culinary capital (2015, p. 231). Levina and Arriaga (2014) also studied cultural capital in online fields and by applying Bourdieu's theory of cultural production, showed how status is desired and achieved by online reviewers and suggested that digital businesses can use consumer's desire to distinguish themselves (2014, p.35). Naccarato and LeBesco (2012, p.107) also found that the amateur model of reviewing does not reject culinary capital as one might have thought but has adapted it rather to a neo-liberal model of "self-governing" that celebrates freedom and personal choice.

Feldman (2021, p.1341) compared restaurant reviewing on the image-sharing application Instagram, to reviewing in the *Michelin Guide* to determine what constitutes 'good food' in the digital age and to investigate how new and old technologies are used in culinary representation. She found that both platforms contributed to the popular understanding of 'good food', but that they differ significantly in how they do it. Instagram reviews were focused on photographs and lacked linguistic narrative, experiential complexity and social relations. Feldman also found that Instagram is increasingly professional, having battled to find non-professional foodie accounts as most big food accounts belonged to food media and restaurants. Feldman (2021, p.1355) concluded that Instagram is more economically and culturally inclusive, but that their reviewers are not anti-elitist and that although this technology allows anyone to be a critic, it does not mean that all culinary voices will be heard, "or that all ways of 'speaking' about food will carry equal weight." This confirms Lane's argument (2014, p.239) that despite significant democratisation in eating and reviewing in recent decades, there remain important differences between social

classes and educational groups concerning the form, place and frequency of eating out as economic and cultural barriers to fine dining restaurants persist. "However, these have become less formidable today than they were decades ago. A tension between elitism and democratization nevertheless permeates all interactions of customers frequenting fine-dining restaurants. (Lane, 2014. 239)" Johnston and Baumann (2015, p.50) make the same argument emphasizing that power and privilege still shape participation in the gourmet foodscape, as the influence of a middle-class person who saved up for dinner at an acclaimed restaurant and then reviews it, cannot be equated with critics who are "heavily endowed with cultural and economic capital" and better positioned to recommend which restaurants or cuisines are fashionable.

2.4 Critics, criticism and reviewing

Understanding the role of critics in society is crucial in this proposed dissertation, as it is ultimately the focus of the proposed study. The word critic stems from the Latin *criticus* and Greek *kritikos* derived from *kritēs*, a judge, and *krinein* to judge or decide. (Pearsall, 1998, p.435). The critic is further defined in the *New Oxford Dictionary* as "a person who judges the merits of literary, artistic or musical works, especially one that does so professionally." Debenedetti (2006, p.31) notes that it is only since the 17th century that art criticism acquired this contemporary meaning, and she elaborates on it by referring to media criticism as a form of evaluative journalism that both informs about and evaluates work. Blank (2007, p.7) supports this definition, highlighting that the difference between a regular news report and a review, is that the review is not just a summary, but it also evaluates.

The practice of interpreting or evaluating the world is an ancient one which can be traced back to the earliest "learned men" - those who mastered literacy. Nimmo and Combs (1992, p.3) write that a new class formed from those who developed the skill of writing – the intellectuals of today. They generally included priests, scribes and prophets who earned a living through the mastery of their new skill as they advised kings and the ruling class. From this practice arose a type of political intelligence, a new form of power. "That power rested in control over the resources of discourse and a claim to be the only valid authority to interpret that discourse" (Nimmo & Combs, 1992, p.3). These so-called masters of intelligence became known for having knowledge and abilities that were denied ordinary people, for understanding things that the unlearned could not see. By the time the cradle of civilization expanded with city-states and new empires, these learned men or "discourse experts" were well positioned in the circles of power

(Nimmo & Combs, 1992, p.3). This was the birth of the early political pundit. These pundits are still recognised as important role players in society but rather find themselves reporting via mass media than through religion and to the rich and influential. “If ancient punditry emerged out of the history of religion, modern punditry emerged out of the history of journalism, and especially the news reporting via the mass media” (Nimmo & Combs, 1992, p.11).

One of the oldest forms of this punditry in print journalism is the column. Whilst Nimmo and Combs (1992, p.12) focus on political punditry they recognise that newspapers offer a variety of columns with “columnists writing about virtually everything: music, hunting and fishing, baseball, cars, food and drink, and most certainly, politics”. The requirement to partake in these discussions as an intellectual has remained unchanged since ancient times - one must possess special knowledge. These pundits writing columns about various subjects usually have a reputation for expertise in a specific field, they are people who have undertaken special training or time to develop their expertise and whose abilities are superior compared to others (Levitin, 2017, p.130).

Keen (2010, p.117) and Perullo (2016, p.82) however both warn that new communication technology is threatening this expertise as Web 2.0 makes it possible for every artistic expression from the most highbrow to the vulgar to attain “pop” fruition. Bauman (2011, p.6) explains that although elites are not as easily distinguishable as in the past (where one might expect to find them at the opera), the cultural elite is “alive and kicking”. There has however been a significant change in that they are no longer connoisseurs in a specific field looking down on the taste of the common man but have rather become “omnivorous” - they can appreciate “both opera and heavy metal or punk”. Bauman (2011, p.7) quotes Richard A Petersen, who coined the term omnivorously: “We see a shift in elite status group politics from those highbrows who snobbishly disdain all base, vulgar or mass popular culture… to those highbrows who omnivorously consume a wide range of popular as well as highbrow art forms.” Warde, Martens and Olsen (1999, p.124) confirm similar observations in British society, claiming that experience of foreign cuisines is considered “a mark of refinement, the possession of which is class related.”

Johnston and Baumann (2015, p.48) analysed how food is framed and socially constructed through discourse and concluded that although the ‘omnivorousness era’ supports more inclusive and democratic ideas of what constitutes good taste and culture and abolishes the traditional cultural hierarchy and discriminatory standards, it does not signify the end of social

status distinctions, but rather an alternative strategy that applies frames of authenticity and exoticism to legitimise and reproduce status.

> To be clear, we do not think that an omnivorous food culture is straightforwardly democratic or straightforwardly hierarchical. Instead, our argument is that, within the gourmet foodscape, democratic ideology operates *in tension* with ideologies of status and distinction, suggesting that foodie culture cannot be dismissed as simple snobbery repackaged, or unequivocally praised as indicating a new era of cultural democracy. (Johnston & Baumann, 2015, p.49)

Feldman's (2021 p.1342), comparison between Instagram and *Michelin Guide* reviews of London restaurants also confirms "omnivorous dining" among Instagram reviewers. Still, at the same time they "engage with and legitimise *Michelin's* three-star ranking system."

Whether dining at highbrow or everyday eateries the challenge with regards to expertise in the field of food, as Perullo (2016, p. x) points out, is that everyone eats. "What does it mean to be an expert – or cultured person in a domain immersed by its nature in everyday life?" He continues to explain the complexity of taste judgement by saying that taste does not just refer to pleasure that an individual might experience, but also the recognition of the quality of the food that is consumed. But it is only through the acquisition of certain expertise that one will be able to distinguish "I like" as an expression of preference from "good" as a judgement of quality. Those who do have the expertise will thus be able to discuss the quality of a dish, even if it is not to their personal liking (Perullo, 2016, p. ix).

Aronson's distinction between "true criticism and mere reviewing" (Nimmo & Combs, 1992, p.143) confirms Blank (2007, p.7) and Debenedetti's (2006, p.31) definitions and touch on the difference mentioned by Perullo, suggesting that reviews impart information on a simple-minded level. It reports what happened and what it was like, whilst criticism is an inspection of work in relation to larger issues. This seems to be the difference that Kobez (2020, p.114) identified when she concluded that online consumer reviews "focus overwhelmingly on personal preference and they do not engage with abstract discourses that are the hallmark of the critical reviewer." De Solier (2018, p.58) distinguishes between professional and amateur reviewers by suggesting that the judgement of the expert (professional) is final, whilst the verdict of the amateur on the other hand is open to debate, transforming the restaurant review into a "more dialogic genre." Sitwell (2019, p.233) confirms this viewpoint, claiming that the opinion of a

few critics and the *Michelin Guide* is still what most chefs care about: “no chef has yet stuffed his head in an oven because of what a blogger wrote.”

MacKenzie and Dominic (2023, p.2) position the food critic as an intermediary, between the artists and the consumer at the centre of a system of material and symbolic relations, which make them key actors in the cultural industries. In this role, they suggest that the critic is in a symbiotic relationship with the producer of art, as the critic requires their work to be evaluated and thus becomes a spokesperson for the artist. At the same time, the critic is a spokesperson to the consumers as the critic should not only be able to decipher and understand cultural works but should translate them for a broader audience (MacKenzie & Dominic, 2023, p.2).

Nimmo and Combs (1992, p.3) identified the power that comes with the practice of punditry or being a critic and Chomsky (2017, p.2) reminds society that this power comes with a responsibility. “Those who qualify for the title have a degree of privilege conferred by this status, yielding opportunity beyond the norm. Opportunity confers responsibility – which in turn poses choices, sometimes hard ones”. Claiborne, the famous food critic from the *New York Times*, did not revel in the power that came with his position, writes Sitwell (2020, p.231). He admitted to tossing and turning at night worried about the impact that a piece of writing could have on the course of someone else’s life.

One such example of a review impacting someone’s life is the suicide of Bernard Loiseau, a three-star Michelin chef. Loiseau shot himself with a hunting rifle on 24 February 2003 after his restaurant La Cote d’Or was downgraded by the *Gault-Millau* restaurant guide from 19 points to 17. Although his restaurant maintained its three Michelin stars, rumours suggested that he might lose a star. The famous French chef, Paul Bocuse, blamed the media for Loiseau’s death: “*Gault-Millau* took away two points, and along with two or three press articles, that is what killed Bernard” (Blank, 2007, p.1).

Blank (2007, p.8) identifies “four actors” in the reviewing process: the reviewers or critics, the publishers, the producers, and the audience. Whilst all parties are influenced by the apparent power of opinion, it appears to be the creators, whom the reviews are about that have the strongest reactions, especially if reviews are not in their favour. “Critics have been flailed with menus, received death threats and had a load of manure dumped on their lawn. Several years ago, in Turkey, after receiving a negative review, a chef shot and killed the critic” (Blank,

2007, p.62). Debenedetti (2006, p.36) similarly identifies reviews as a tool to establish an artist's reputation.

Reconfirming the requirement for some form of expertise, Hu et.al. (2008, p.2) found that when consumers read online reviews, they not only consider the information in the review but also the reputation of the reviewer: "The market responds more favourably to reviews written by reviewers with a better reputation and higher exposure." An expert of some sort, in other words. Vásquez (2014, p.7) also confirms the importance of reviewer identity and their expertise to users.

2.5 Gaps in the Literature

The literature discussed above has revealed a significant gap in research, especially concerning the South African market. Only four of the studies (Koufie & Kesa, 2020, Mhlanga, 2014; Farah, 2020; Sotiriadis & van Zyl, 2013) included South Africa, and only two (Mhlanga 2014 and Koufie & Kesa) focused on restaurants specifically, rather than the broader fields of lifestyle (Farah, 2020) and tourism (Sotiriadis & van Zyl, 2013). None of the South African studies followed a cultural studies approach as they were either concerned with consumer behaviour or the changing role of lifestyle reporters in the newsroom and the impact of digitalisation on their work.

The majority of the studies above also focused their research on only one or two platforms, like Twitter, Yelp, Tripadvisor, Instagram or one specific media house (Tiso Blackstar) or publications (*Michelin Guide*). By compiling an archive through South African restaurants, rather than reviewers or media outlets, as the studies mentioned above have done, this study produced a broader view of restaurant reviewing that included both traditional and digital media reviews across a variety of media outlets. With the *Michelin Guide* not present in South Africa (and most of the global South), this study additionally presents research into food reviewing beyond the reach and influence of the famous '*Red Guide'*.

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework that has been applied in this study included a cultural studies approach that explored reviewing in terms of Habermas' public sphere and Bourdieu's cultural consecration and distinction theories.

3.1 Cultural studies approach

In studying restaurant reviewing and media, an overarching cultural studies approach was applied as both food and media as "lived experiences" fit comfortably in the field. Dahlgren (1998, p.52) explains that cultural studies' main focus is to understand the features of our contemporary historical situation. It considers culture not just as a body of text or art, but as a lived experience.

Cultural studies, an academic field that developed in the late 1950s, is the title for a set of theories and practices within humanities and social sciences and is a multi-theoretical and interdisciplinary approach (Pitout, 2007, p. 275). Contemporary culture, write Durham and Kellner (2006, p. xiv), constitutes "a set of discourses, stories, images, spectacles, and varying cultural forms and practices that generate meaning, identities and political effects". It can include artefacts such as newspapers and popular music, but also practices like shopping, watching sports or going to a coffee shop. Pitout (2007, p.274) elaborates on this by explaining that cultural studies aim to understand how all cultural practices, such as the ones mentioned above, construct our lives and how the media as carriers of this culture, shape their subjects.

A further motivation for taking a cultural studies approach is that it is particularly concerned with the products of pop culture, "marginal discourses" such as music, sport, and fashion, subjects that were traditionally not regarded as worthy of academic or scientific research (Pitout, 2007, p.275). However, ideas of what constitutes culture changed with the counterculture movements in the 1960s and 1970s (Parasecoli 2008, p. 12).

> Western societies have witnessed the crisis of the grand narratives that sustained the rift between what was deemed valuable enough to be admitted to the pantheon of culture (especially national culture) and what was often considered as amusement for the masses or as a reflection of the less dignified aspects of our societies (including food). (Parasecoli, 2008, p.12)

Food, as popular culture, thus fits comfortably under the cultural studies umbrella. Parasecoli (2013, p.567) draws similarities between food studies and cultural studies, highlighting that they both focus on the connections between lived bodies, imagined bodies and structures of power. LeBesco and Naccarato argue that food is a particularly effective vehicle for studying popular culture. They quote Peter Atkins and Ian Bowler, who suggested food is a "barium meal for x-raying social, political, economic and cultural issues, a kind of marker dye for broad structures and processes" (2018, p.3). Johnston and Baumann (2015, p.45) agree that despite the historical neglect, socialists have now come to appreciate the significance of food in social life. They quote sociologist Gary Alan Fine who said that "the connection between identity and consumption gives food a central role in the creation of community, and we use our diet to convey images of public identity". Similarly, Belasco (2002, p.2) argued that "to eat is to distinguish and discriminate, include and exclude. Food choices establish boundaries and borders."

3.2 Cultural Consecration

Similar to prior research discussed in the Literature Review, this proposed study will also draw from Bourdieu's (2021) theory of the field of cultural production and will study restaurant reviewing in South Africa as a field to examine the consecration of cultural producers (restaurants) through the judgements made by their audiences or customers. Webb, Schirato and Danaher (2008, p.x) describe Bourdieu's cultural field as "a series of institutions, rules, rituals, conventions, categories, designations and appointments which constitute an objective hierarchy and which produce and authorise certain discourse activities." They continue to explain that a cultural field also emerges when there is conflict in a group, trying to establish what constitutes capital in that specific field and how it should be distributed. Cultural capital is further defined as a form of value that is associated with culturally authorised tastes, consumption patterns, attributes, skills and awards. "Within the field of education, for example, an academic degree constitutes cultural capital" Webb et.al. (2008, p.x).

Johnson summarises Bourdieu's cultural field (2021, p.9) by explaining that it encompasses the set of social conditions of the production, circulation, and consumption of symbolic goods. "This field includes the recognition of the functions of artistic mediators (publishers, critics, agents, *marchands*, academies, and so forth) as producers of meaning and value of the work" (2021, p.11).

Cattani, Ferriani, and Allison (2014, p.3) explain that Bourdieu's work on cultural fields highlights the role of different audiences or customers as agents of consecration with the authority to produce symbolic capital.

Bourdieu identifies three competing audiences through his principles of legitimacy: firstly, the recognition given by peers ("art for artists"), secondly the principle of legitimacy that responds to "bourgeois" taste and the consecration bestowed by the dominant class and lastly "popular" legitimacy, consecration which is bestowed by the choice of the ordinary consumers (2021, pp.50-51).

> The ability to impose judgments of symbolic legitimacy, or the power to consecrate, in cultural fields allows participants to reproduce their positions – thus influencing the choice of (and return to) different aesthetic strategies. Because these judgements produce prestige hierarchies and affect field evolution, cultural fields are in an incessant state of struggle between established and emerging actors who compete for symbolic distinction based on subjective rules of merit and the vested interests and social objectives they embody. (Cattani, Ferriani & Allison, 2014, p.3)

Bourdieu (Johnston & Baumann, 2015, p.46) further argued that the consecration of cultural preferences reflects the ability of the dominant class to legitimate their tastes as superior and suggested that it is difficult for those born outside of a privileged socio-economic milieu to the develop such "good taste" or acquire the cultural capital that will allow them to appreciate "good taste".

Studying the consecration of films in Hollywood, Cattani, Ferriani and Allison noted that different audiences apply different criteria. Allen and Lincoln (2004, p.877) also applied cultural consecration to American films and suggested that the "competing discourses of value" are likely an explanation for why films that receive professional recognition from peers are not always the same films that receive recognition from critics. Their study concluded that the retrospective consecration of films is affected by the discourse produced by film critics and scholars "who function, in effect, as reputational entrepreneurs" (2004, p.871).

Drawing from the examples applied to the film industry, this study explored the consecration of restaurants by tracking changes in reviews and reviewers over time as well as the criteria that they applied.

3.3 Public Sphere Theory

The public sphere, according to Habermas, emerged in eighteenth-century European societies during the transition from feudalism to capitalism and it consisted of public assemblies in pubs, coffeehouses, literary salons, and meeting halls where public opinion would develop through the discussion of ideas, values, and events (Wessler 2018, p.9). These discussions, Habermas argued, would then feed into government and commercial operations to influence their direction and the public would thus hold them to account. According to this vision, Hodkinson (2017, p.214) explains, that societies are supposed to improve collectively as a result of the public agreement that is reached through "inclusive, rational discussion, free from the corrupting influence of pragmatism, money and power".

Habermas's theory of the ideal public sphere and its decline has been a well-debated and studied subject, with critics highlighting early on that its most obvious flaw lies in the contradiction that the public sphere requires inclusivity, yet Habermas focussed on a bourgeois public sphere that automatically excluded women, proletariat classes including ethnic groups (Fraser, 1990, p.59; Downey and Fenton, 2003, p.186; Negt, Kluge and Labanyi, 1988, p.63). Despite this criticism, Cowling and Hamilton (2020, p.21) write that the concept of "discussions in a notional public sphere" remains a key process through which society can mediate collective public life. They cite Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor who identified the public sphere as one of three "social imaginaries" that constitute modernity. "The idea of the public sphere, he argued, knits together discussions in a range of locations – a newspaper report, a discussion in a coffee shop, a radio debate – through the understanding of the participants that they are involved in a greater, collective discussion" (Cowling & Hamilton, 2020, p.21).

Thus, whilst a public sphere of some form remains relevant, contemporary discussions are around its inner workings and shape – or lack thereof. Alternative public spheres that Habermas later recognised stem from critics arguing that he was overly pessimistic of the public, not considering the possibility that civil society could exert influence over mass media, e.g., forming alternative media or opposing groups (Downey & Fenton, 2003, p.186). Fraser (1990, p.61) refers to these alternative publics as "counter-publics" and argues that they are not a later development, as Habermas claims, but have been in existence at the same time as the bourgeois

public sphere and included working-class publics to elite women's publics. Fraser thus concludes that there never was *the* public sphere, but rather a plurality of competing publics.

Away from the political arena, Rousseau's (2012, p.30) observations support this view, suggesting that blogs especially have become "online coffeehouses" for people who share similar interests and have created a sense of community and belonging in the virtual space. Dahlgren (2006, p. 272) argues that a cultural studies approach is particularly useful to understand the notion of civic agency and the public sphere as it centres around the processes through which people become "social members, creating themselves and their cultural patterns and being shaped by them, particularly with regards to public life". Hollows's study into celebrity chefs and food (2022, p.47) partly attributes the changes in society's relationship with cooking to a new public sphere. She argues that the first change was due to television channels such as the BBC moving cooking programmes from daytime television, which traditionally included instructional cooking programmes aimed at women, to nighttime entertainment programmes where chefs like Jamie Oliver showcased domestic masculinity, making cooking youthful, fun and masculine. This change in the portrayal of cooking from domestic to lifestyle was however accompanied by the "democratization of an old public service discourse, dominated by experts and a very official kind of talk and the creation of a new mixed public sphere where common knowledge and everyday experience player a much larger role."

Habermas' public sphere was based on deliberations in coffee shops, pubs and literary salons, but with the internet as a "new venue", several scholars now refer to a "virtual space" (Papacharissi, 2002, p.9; Downey and Fenton, 2003, p.199). Cowling and Hamilton (2020, p.22) suggest that the notions of counter-publics, "sphericules" and virtual spaces rely on metaphors of fixed spaces and do not consider the moving nature of public engagement over time and space. Considering how the terms of debate about collective life have been contested globally through protests including the Occupy movement in the United States, to the *gilets jaunes* or yellow vests in France to the #RhodesMustFall movement in South Africa, Cowling and Hamilton (2020, p.8-22) suggest that publicness is rather a "capillaried network" in which ideas are constantly circulating. This circulation of ideas does not happen along established routes but rather creates networks as they move in the social world.

De Lanerolle (2020, p.98), elaborates further on the concept of movement, suggesting that it will serve us best to consider the publics as a *fluid*, as a dynamic act, rather than a fixed

place. Investigating the public making through hashtags, considering movements such as #FeesMustFall, #Occupy or #MeToo De Lanerolle suggests that social media platforms such as Twitter (Now called X) are not the hosts of these publics, they only contribute to their formation. The concept of hashtags originated with Twitter as a way to tag information to make it easier to find, but unlike other sharing functions on many social media platforms, hashtags form a part of the actual message. What also sets hashtags apart is that, unlike other online distribution actions, they move beyond groups of "friends" and "followers" and also move between platforms. Hashtags have as a result evolved to "enable users to create an idea, to contribute to the curation of ideas and to *construct or grow the public for that idea*", argues De Lanerolle (2020, p.95).

Considering the debates discussed above of what constitutes a public sphere, this study drew on these concepts to track and understand how and where conversations about restaurants were taking place in South Africa over two decades and who was involved in these discussions.

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 A historical method approach

Lange (2013, p.22) explains that the historical method or historiography is generally used to "explore either what happened at a particular time and place or what the characteristics of a phenomenon were like at a particular time and place." Burke (1992, p.2) defines history as the study of societies, emphasising the differences between them as well as the changes that have taken place in each society over time. As the aim of this study is to track changes over time in restaurant reviewing in South Africa, these descriptions confirm the historical method as an appropriate approach.

One of the disadvantages of historical research (Lange, 2013, p.23) is that it does not produce its own data, but rather relies on the presence of historical sources. The method, therefore, requires sufficient quantities of valid, existing data. As Schrag (2021, p.125) explains, works based on secondary sources aim to present new insights into facts, but the purpose of work based on primary sources, especially those not consulted before, is often to present foundational facts of a story, and the argument stems from newly discovered facts.

To ensure validity, the data for this study relied on primary sources and consisted of an archive of reviews from three restaurants that were compiled from South African English and Afrikaans print and digital media, including social media, between 2000 and 2020.

Historical research includes two distinct genres: narrative and analysis (Shafer, 1980, p.11; Schrag, 2021, p.38). Shafer explains that the bulk of scholarly research applies the analytical rather than narrative approach resulting in monographs, which focus on meticulous research into source materials or evidence (1980, p.13). "Often it is an exhaustive treatment of a narrow subject," (Shafer, 1980, p.13). With a narrow focus on restaurant reviewing in South Africa, this study also applied an analytical rather than narrative approach. Following the analytical approach allowed me to combine different methods of analysis to interpret the archive. Sager and Rosser (2015, p.1) note that interpretation is a key element of the historical discipline "where the inquirer needs to accord meaning to actions and occurrences on a strongly individual and contextualized basis."

4.2 Selection strategy

The selection strategy included identifying appropriate restaurants for the archive, defining reviews for the study and setting out the time frame to track restaurant reviews.

4.2.1 Restaurant selection

The word restaurant is a term used to refer to a wide variety of food service operations, with varying styles of food and service (Lillicrap & Cousins, 2014, p.8). For this study, Lillicrap and Cousins' more formal definition was applied, and restaurants were considered as establishments that provide food and drink, generally at a high price (compared to fast food) with high levels of service (2014, p.4). Prices may differ between establishments, but for this study, restaurants were defined as full-service licenced restaurants that offered an à la carte or degustation food menu and beverage menu that included a selection of alcoholic beverages. Restaurants further had to offer customer seating and table service (Mhlanga, 2015, p.5).

The restaurants for this review archive were chosen from the *Eat Out* restaurant guide. Published annually (except for 2021) since 1998 (About Eat Out, n.d.). As the aim of the study was to track changes over time, the most significant criterion for restaurants to include in the study was that they had to have been operational between 2000 and 2020. In their 20th issue *Eat Out* identified 23 restaurants that were featured in their first edition and were still included in their 20th issue in 2018, (Donnely, 2018, p.73). This list was used to identify restaurants that fit the criteria of the archive. As the study applied a historical method that required the compilation of archives, the sample of restaurants needed to be small to ensure a manageable research sample. It was therefore decided to choose three restaurants.

Several studies into restaurant reviewing (Kobez, 2020; Kobez, 2019; Lane, 2013) seem to focus on high-end restaurants only but Johnston and Bauman's (2007, p.165) evidence of the broadening of eating habits in society, as discussed in the Literature Review, together with arguments for the 'democratisation of eating', informed the decision to further apply *Eat Out's* award categories to select three restaurants for the archive. The first category, "Top 10 Restaurants" (generally fine dining service style and chosen by professional food experts and restaurant critics), is an award category that has been in place since the magazine's inception. In 2016 *Eat Out* added, "Everyday Eateries" or "The People's Choice Awards" (casual, bistro-style restaurants chosen by a 50-50 vote between the *Eat Out* readers and professional critics) (Awards, n.d). It was therefore decided to choose one "Top 10" style, fine dining, restaurant and two "Everyday Eatery" restaurants from the *Eat Out* list of 23 restaurants in the 2018 edition (Donnelly, 2018, p.73). The list included restaurants from six provinces, and it was further decided to choose the three restaurants from different provinces. This selection process resulted in the restaurants listed in Table 4.2-1

Restaurant	**Province**	**Awards Style**
De Oude Kraal	Free State, Bloemfontein	Everyday Eatery
Hartford House	KwaZulu Natal, Mooi River	Top Ten Restaurant
Illovo Mastrantonio	Gauteng, Johannesburg	Everyday Eatery

Table 4.2-1: Restaurants Selected for the Archive

4.2.2 Defining reviews

The *New Oxford Dictionary of English* (Pearsall, 1998, p.1588) defines reviews as "a critical appraisal of a book, play, film, exhibition etc. published in a newspaper or magazine." The Merriam-Webster Dictionary ("Review", n.d.) is less specific about where it is published and simply defines it as "a critical evaluation (as of a book or play)". Blank (2007, p.7) clarifies the concept of reviewing by distinguishing it from news articles:

> "News reports summarize an item that interests readers. Reviews differ in that they do not just summarize; they also evaluate. They summarize the qualities of an item for an audience, and they evaluate the extent to which the item meets a purpose for the particular audience."

"Critique" and "review" have further been identified (Blank, 2007; Debenedetti, 2006; Perullo, 2016; Kobez, 2020) as two different approaches to evaluating an experience or product, with "reviews" simply reporting what happened and what it was like, whilst "criticism" inspects the work concerning larger issues. To compile this archive, both criticism and reviews were included as assessments of dining experiences and news and marketing content were excluded.

To ensure a manageable sample and sufficient text to analyse it was initially decided to include only reviews that consisted of a minimum of a hundred words. However, as the compilation of the archive commenced it became clear that there are changes in media forms, and that the exclusion of shorter texts may not allow the research to explore the changes introduced by the use of new technology such as applications and smartphones.

Another type of review was also identified: the "recommendation". Reviews were identified that shared the reporting aspect of reviews but were much shorter. They however still evaluated several elements of their dining experience. These texts often included the text "recommend or don't recommend".

It was therefore decided to narrow the definition of a restaurant review to the following parameters:

- A minimum of 60 words.
- It needed to evaluate at least two elements of the dining experience.
- It had to be either a recommendation, a review or a critique.

4.2.3 Tracking over time

The decision to base the study on the period between 2000 and 2020 was firstly informed by changes that took place in society concerning food and media, as discussed in the Background. Secondly, a pilot study conducted in May 2021 into the reviews of two restaurants between 2010 to 2020, suggested that significant changes in reviewing were more likely to have taken place between 2000 and 2010, a period that saw the introduction of Web.2. The second version of the world wide web is characterised by content that is created by users on platforms like Tripadvisor, YouTube, and Facebook, rather than by providers, as was the case with its predecessor Web 1.0 (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2015, p.19). This feature allows audiences to not only consume the news, but also to comment on it, or even create their own content, and has precipitated a dramatic shift in the relationship between media producers and their audiences (Hodkinson, 2017, p.43).

4.3 Compilation of an archive

Langtree, Birks and Biedermann (2019) explain that the historical research process consists generally of four stages: understanding sources, searching and collating sources, source criticism and analysis and finally interpreting. To compile a thorough restaurant review archive a meticulous system thus had to be followed to first identify the possible sources of restaurant reviews. The process started with a very broad digital search which led naturally to narrower and narrower digital searches and ultimately physical searches in the National Library and concluded with chefs', restaurants' and reviewers' personal review collections or portfolios.

4.3.1 Google and Social Media Search:

1. The three restaurants were searched by their names on the Google internet search engine and all results pages were scrutinised to find relevant reviews.
2. Social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram and Twitter as well as rating sites Google Reviews, Tripadvisor and Zomato were searched individually if they appeared in the Google search.
3. On Facebook, reviews appeared on the restaurant pages, as well as in Facebook groups dedicated to reviewing restaurants. These groups were further searched separately per year.

4.3.2 Compiling and Searching a Media List:

As Google search results are determined by algorithms that prioritise the freshest news (Ranking Results – How Google Search Works, n.d.) an archive spanning twenty years needed a deeper and more methodical digital search, especially of the traditional media. Therefore a media list of Afrikaans and English newspapers and magazines that were published between 2000 and 2020 was compiled (See Annexure A).

The media list was compiled from the following publications:

1. Audit Bureau of Circulations of South Africa (ABC) Quarterly Report July-September 2021 (ABC Magazine – Business July-September 2021, 2021 November, 10; ABC Magazine Consumer July -September 2021, 2021, November 10; ABC Magazine - Custom July -September 2021, 2021, November 10; ABC Newspaper – Daily July - September 2021, 2021, November 10; ABC Magazine – Free July-September 2021, 2021, November 10; ABC Newspaper - Free July -September 2021, 2021, November 10; ABC Newspaper - Hybrid July -September 2021, 2021, November 10; ABC Newspaper

– Local July -September 2021, 2021, November 10; ABC Newspaper – Weekend July - September 2021, 2021, November 10; ABC Newspaper - Weekly July-September 2021, 2021, November 10).

2. The South African Government's Media Contact List (South African Government Media Directory: South African Newspapers and Magazines, 2021, March 12)
3. Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia lists of South African newspapers, magazines and periodicals (List of newspapers in South Africa, n.d., List of magazines in South Africa, n.d.).
4. The South African Audience Research Foundation's (SAARF) 2015 Average Issue Readership Report of Newspapers and Magazines. (Average Issue Readership of Newspapers and Magazines, 2015, April 22)
5. The *Ad Review's* South African Media Facts 2005 (Koenderman, 2005).
6. Publications that were featured in the initial Google search.
7. The media list was further expanded by taking photographs and recording publications from current magazine and newspaper stands in bookstores and retail stores as well as publications found in second-hand bookstores.

This process resulted in a media list of 325 newspapers (national, regional and local) and 443 magazines. The media list was digitally searched for the names of all three restaurants, but it was also used to note where reviews appeared, and whether it included the three restaurants under study at all.

Publications that no longer exist and therefore do not have websites were searched through the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine (About the Internet Archive, n.d.) for any indications that they may have published restaurant reviews between 2000 and 2020. Publications that featured reviews were added to the media list to search for printed copies in libraries and private collections.

Schrag (2021, p.197) highlights the limitations of the internet in historical research. He recognises it as a helpful tool to start research but warns firstly against the possible forgery of documents, the "false positive" and secondly about a "false negative" – a belief that sources don't exist if they cannot be found on Google or Wikipedia. "A vast amount of digital material is stored in databases inaccessible to Google's algorithms. And, of course, there are yet vaster troves of material that have never been digitized" (Schrag, 2021, p.197).

4.3.3 Searching Printed Copies

Whilst the digital search has delivered vast amounts of reviews, especially for rating sites, it became quite clear that the digitisation of publications was done selectively and some publications started the digitisation process much later than 2000. It, therefore, was paramount to search the content of as many as possible printed copies of publications that carried reviews between 2000 and 2020. To ensure a thorough search and avoid repetition, a notebook was used to record the publications and the dates of the publications that have been physically checked. Before consulting the National Library in Pretoria, significant collections of culinary and hospitality publications were found and searched in the South African Chefs Association's Centre for Culinary Excellence in Johannesburg, as well as the Prue Leith Culinary Institute Library in Centurion.

The three restaurants were also visited and asked for copies of reviews that they may have collected over the past 20 years. Past chefs at the restaurants were also contacted separately and asked if they kept any reviews. Similarly, professional reviewers were contacted and asked for access to their private portfolios, collections of reviews, magazines and guides.
This process resulted in a 20-year archive comprising 426 reviews. I aimed to produce an extensive archive but Schrag (2021, p.123), by quoting Louis Gottshalk, reminds historians that sources and archives are not exhaustive and represent only a "fragment of the human experience." "Most of history-as-recorded are only the surviving part of the recorded part of the remembered part of the observed part of that whole" (Gottshalk, 1950, p.46).

4.3.4 Criticising Sources and Cataloguing Reviews

Once reviews were collected, they were read and word-counted to ensure that they met the definition as set out in this study and their publication name and date were recorded to ensure the validity of each review. Reviews which did not include publication names or dates were noted as such and the publication year was estimated based on descriptions in the review. Some private collections omitted this information, as discussed in the limitations of the study. Reviews were numbered and filed according to the restaurants and the year of the review's publication.

4.4 Process of Analysis

Sager and Rosser (2015, p.2) explain that Collingwood's argument that the perception of human actions is fragmented (Collingwood, 1993, p.312), creates two categories – "an outside and an inside event" in history. The outside event is the "observable physical properties" whilst the

inside event is the “thought processes”. Different levels of assessment and different methods of analysis were thus required to interpret the archive.

Whilst this study applied a historical rather than empirical research approach, Shafer and Burke (1980, p.15; 1992, p.33) recognise “quantitative history” as a significant method and highlight that it is often applied by communication scholars.

> Students of communication practice what is called ‘content analysis’, which often takes the form of a quantitative study of newspapers, journals, books or television programmes, examining how much space is allotted to a particular topic, how often certain keywords occur, and so on. (Burke, 1992, p.33)

Content analysis was thus applied to assess the “outside events” and a close reading of reviews was used to assess the “thought processes.” Once the archive was compiled an initial reading of reviews was done to determine together with the Aims of the study, the areas of analysis that were required and the following levels of analysis were identified :

- Level 1: Who reviewed, when and where? (“Outside event”)
- Level 2: What the reviewers were writing about, including the most common topics in reviews. But also how they were writing about it. (“Inside event”)
- Level 3: Assessing media forms and recording changes in review writing. (“Outside event”)

4.4.1 Levels 1 and 3 of analysis

Levels 1 and 3 of the analysis were done by capturing information from reviews in a spreadsheet (See Annexures B, C and D) that allowed both for the recording of numbers, as well as examples of content. Reviews were initially captured per year per restaurant, and once the details from the entire archive were recorded, the results were used to populate another spreadsheet that captured the total data per year, allowing for an overall assessment over time comparing the three restaurants.

4.4.2 Level 2 analysis

The initial reading of the archive as well as the pilot study into the reviews of two restaurants conducted in May 2021 was used to identify potential topics and common themes in restaurant reviews. Level 2 of the analysis thus included the topics which were also captured per year in a spreadsheet (See Annexure A). This once again allowed for results to be added up easily but also

to capture examples of content for closer reading. Similar to the Level 1 and Level 3 analyses, the results were captured in a final spreadsheet that allowed the tracking of themes over time and is at the same time a comparison between the restaurants.

4.4.3 Close reading

A close reading of each review was done to assess the more qualitative elements of the reviews or the "thought process" and to read for deeper meaning, which was required in both Levels 2 and 3 of the analysis. This included assessing the tone and formality of reviews and understanding how reviewers related to and used the reviews to claim cultural (culinary) capital.

4.4.4 *Ethics*

Whilst this study made use of publically available information, to ensure ethics compliance the identities of reviewers on social media sites were protected if they did not write reviews under a pseudonym. All reviews in the archive were numbered, and where the Analysis or Findings referred to social media reviews written under real names they were referenced according to the archive numbers.

4.5 Limitations of the Study

"Because they are so heterogeneous and so scattered around the world, it is not easy to locate every source – or any source- relevant to a topic. Indeed, locating this material is one of the more challenging tasks of historical research and historians applaud each other for especially clever finds" (Schrag, 2021, p.192). In line with Schrag's warning, the greatest challenge of this study was the compilation of a comprehensive archive. Although the volume of relevant online reviews exceeded expectations, the digital resources proved incomplete, especially for the period between 2000 and 2010. This could be an indication of the lack of focus on food and reviewing in South Africa when newspapers and magazines digitise and archive parts of their publications but omit restaurant reviews or the National Library does not preserve restaurant reviewing guides.

Personal collections from chefs, restaurants and professional reviewers, helped to close the gap in the lack of digitisation of reviews in the early 2000's but presented their own challenges. Very few reviews were preserved in the actual publications and were often turned into "scrapbooks" where reviews were cut out and pasted, making it difficult or in some cases impossible to verify the publication, page number and date of a review. Personal collections of chefs and restaurants also only included positive reviews.

Access to earlier published reviews was not unique to print media, as some reviews "disappeared" from the internet, most notably Zomato reviews as the business ceased its operations in South Africa and removed the South African platform. This provided a challenge in double-checking reviews that were printed before the platform was removed. Some digital amateur reviews on Facebook also seemed to have been removed by the authors as they could not be revisited.

Apart from the impossible task of compiling a complete archive, a further limitation of the study is the fact that historical methods cannot be used to generalise as they are limited to specific cases, in which particular phenomena in particular places and times are analysed and interpreted (Sager & Rosser, 2015, p.9).

The last limitation of the study is that it does not include a restaurant from the Western Cape, which is commonly regarded as the country's culinary capital as it has the most restaurants listed in review guides such as *Eat Out* and dominates the awards lists (Jackman, 2022, November 25). An additional Top Ten restaurant from this province was initially included, but the number of reviews in the archive was not manageable for this methodology. It was omitted based on the number of reviews and the fact that early observations indicated that the review archive followed similar patterns to Hartford House, another Top Ten restaurant in KwaZulu Natal.

5 FINDINGS

5.1 The Restaurants

De Oude Kraal Restaurant is situated in a country estate and spa on a working sheep farm 30km outside Bloemfontein, in the Freestate. Owned by a sixth-generation family the farmhouse was renovated and turned into a restaurant and accommodation in 1992 and has received various accolades over the years for owner and chef, Marie Lombard's "boerekos[2] [farmer's food] with French flair." (About De Oude Kraal, n.d.; Janeke, 2012, May 25). Since its inception, the restaurant served elegant four to six-course set menus, and in 2017 the family opened a second, more informal bistro-style restaurant, Feast. The farm and restaurants also host an annual venison festival. (Dining, n.d.).

[2] Directly translated boerekos means farmer's food, but in this context, it refers to a specific cuisine or food culture associated since the 18th century with Afrikaners, white South Africans of mainly Dutch descent (Claassens, 2006, p.11).

Mastrantonio is an Italian restaurant group that was founded in 1996 by Italian diaspora partners Gianni Mariani and Paolo Scalla, with the original and flagship restaurant in Illovo, Johannesburg. The restaurant brand evolved to include country-wide M&A franchise restaurants and corporate canteen catering that was eventually sold to the Bidvest group. Over the years the Illovo restaurant especially has developed a loyal following among politicians, celebrities and business decision-makers (Shevel, 2022, January 27-February 2). The current brands include Mastro, a deli and catering service, two Italian à la carte restaurants (Mastrantonio Illovo, the original restaurant in Johannesburg and Mastrantonio Il Leone in Cape Town), two Argentian-inspired restaurants, (Don Armado) and Gabbiano, a coffee brand. The group also has an art, cultural exchange and food support initiative called Artevita, (About us, n.d.). The restaurant group attributes its longevity and popularity to WOM rather than "PR hype or social media." Shevel (2022, January 27-February 2) notes that the restaurant does not have a social media presence, but might place some of its products digitally in future.

Hartford House Restaurant is part of the Hartford House Country Hotel, situated on the Summerhill Estate and Equestrian near Mooi River in KwaZulu Natal. The property is steeped in local history dating back to the 1870s when it was home to the last prime minister of old Natal. Seventy years later Raymond Ellis founded a thoroughbred enterprise on the property and in 1979 Mick and Cheryl Goss took over the stud farm and also turned it into a country hotel and top-rated restaurant. The Summerhill Stud and Hartford Hotel was sold in 2019 to Henning Pretorius (About, n.d.). Unlike Mastrantonio and De Oude Kraal, the owners were not chefs, and the business employed several chefs over the years, but under one chef, who led the team for 12 years, the restaurant achieved numerous awards, including the Eat Out Top Ten restaurant on four occasions (Scarborough, L. 2014, June 18; Accolades, n.d.). The manor house restaurant has since its inception served set menus with wine pairings and in Tuinhuis/Tijn Huis a bistro-style menu is served (Berko, 2016, September).

All three businesses included more than one restaurant on the property or in the group, but only the original restaurants, as mentioned in the *Eat Out* article of 2018 (Donnelly, 2018, p.73), were included in the archive.

5.2 The number of reviews and where they were published.

The archive compiled from the three restaurants comprises a total of 426 reviews that matched the definition as set out in the Methodology. As per figure 5.2.1 De Oude Kraal was the least reviewed with 86 reviews, followed by Mastrantonio with 135 reviews and Hartford House with 205 reviews.

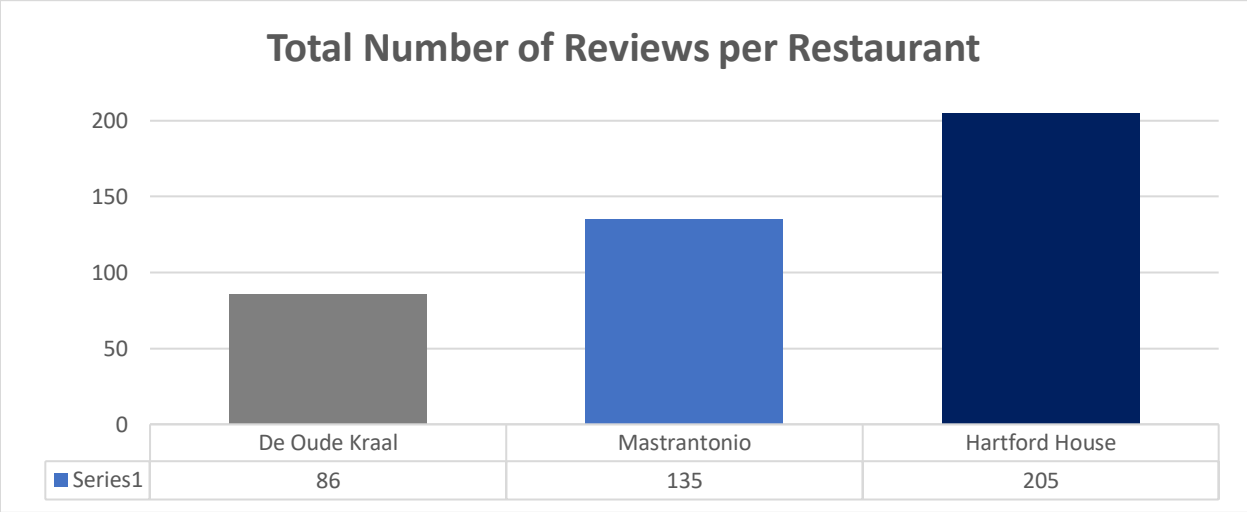
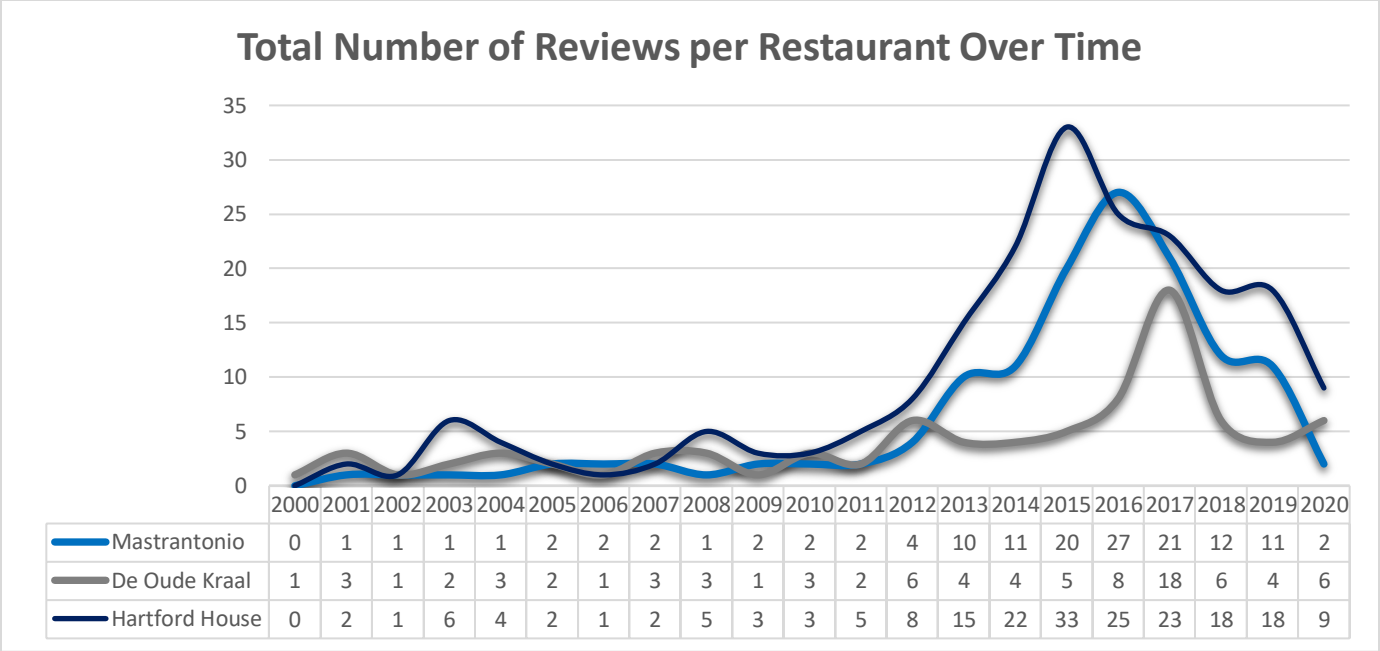


Figure 5.2.1

Comparing the number of reviews written over the 20 years (see Figure 5.2.2), there is a sharp rise in the number of reviews for all three restaurants between 2012 and 2015 (Hartford House peaks with 33 reviews), 2016, (Mastrantonio peaks with 27 reviews) and 2017 (De Oude Kraal peaks with 18 reviews) and then a steep fall after those peaks until 2020. It needs to be considered that the COVID-19 pandemic brought the world to a standstill in 2020, with a national lockdown that was effective in South Africa from 27 March 2020 and restaurants could only offer deliveries or collections until 15 August 2023, when lockdown Level 2 was announced and restaurants could open again to on-site customers, with limited restrictions still in place (Lebuso, S., 2022, March 27). As indicated in Figure 5.2.2 the decline in reviews started several years before 2020 and can thus not be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic.



	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Mastrantonio	0	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	4	10	11	20	27	21	12	11	2
De Oude Kraal	1	3	1	2	3	2	1	3	3	1	3	2	6	4	4	5	8	18	6	4	6
Hartford House	0	2	1	6	4	2	1	2	5	3	3	5	8	15	22	33	25	23	18	18	9

Figure 5.2.2

Rating sites completely outnumbered the total reviews (272), as indicated in Figure 5.2.3. It also explains the steep increase in reviews from 2012, as indicated in Figure 5.2.4 which shows a rise in reviews on rating sites between 2012 and 2016. Rating sites peaked in 2016 at 49 reviews, before it declined to 28 reviews in 2019 and 10 in 2020. As per Table 5.2.1 Tripadvisor dominated, with Zomato in second place and Google Reviews and Booking.com as the third most popular sites. Restaurants that included accommodation were both reviewed on Tripadvisor's Restaurant and Hotel sites and only Hartford House was reviewed on Booking.com. The main reason for the low number of Google reviews is that the reviews generally did not meet the required 60-word length, and were often as short as only a star rating. For example, in 2019 there were six Google reviews for Mastrantonio, but only one longer than 60 words. Zomato is an Indian restaurant delivery and rating business that entered the South African market in 2013 but announced in January 2022 that it was closing down its services in the country (Zomato Alternatives in South Africa, 2023, July 26). The South African review site was removed and it posed some challenges to revisit reviews that were printed earlier for this archive.

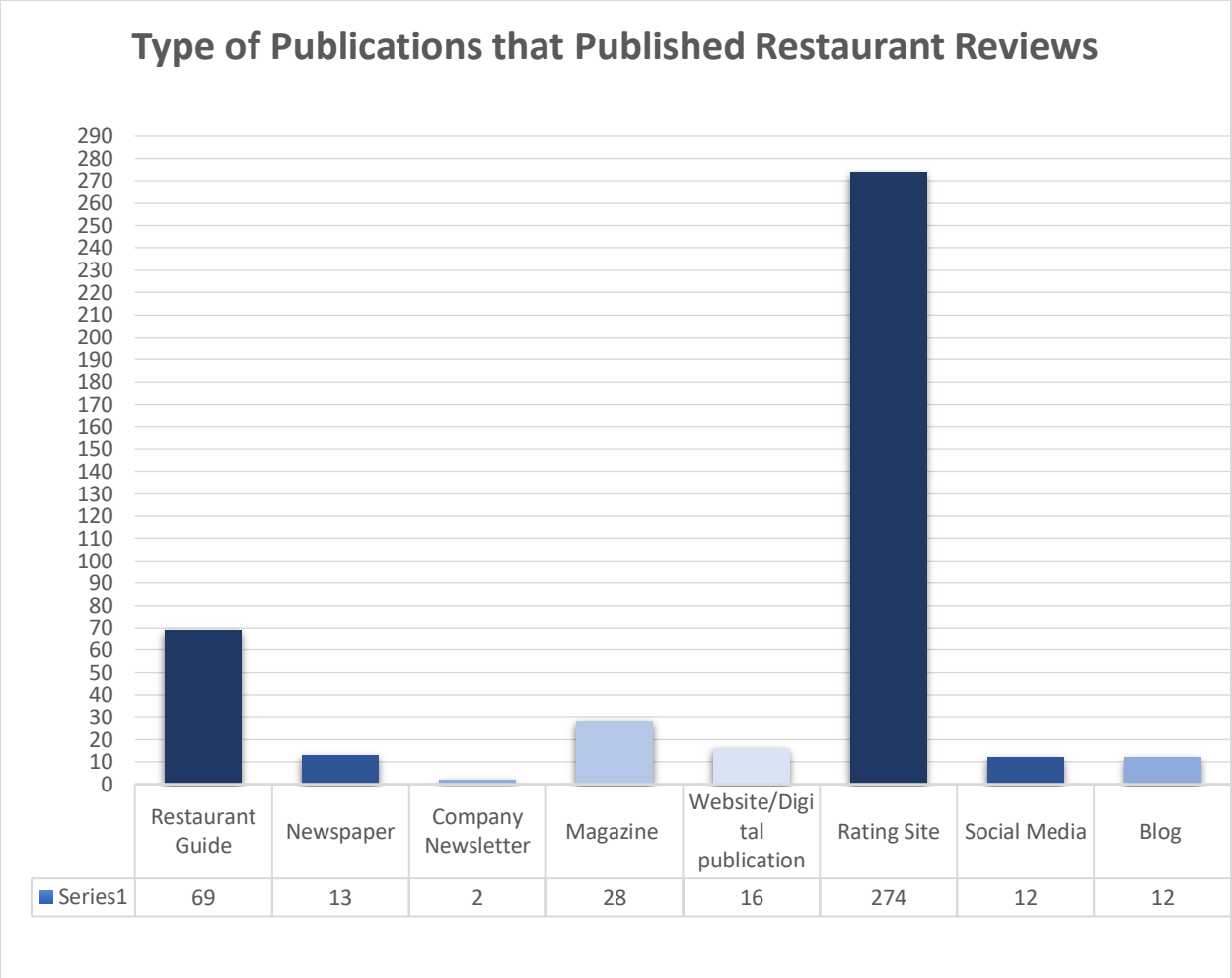
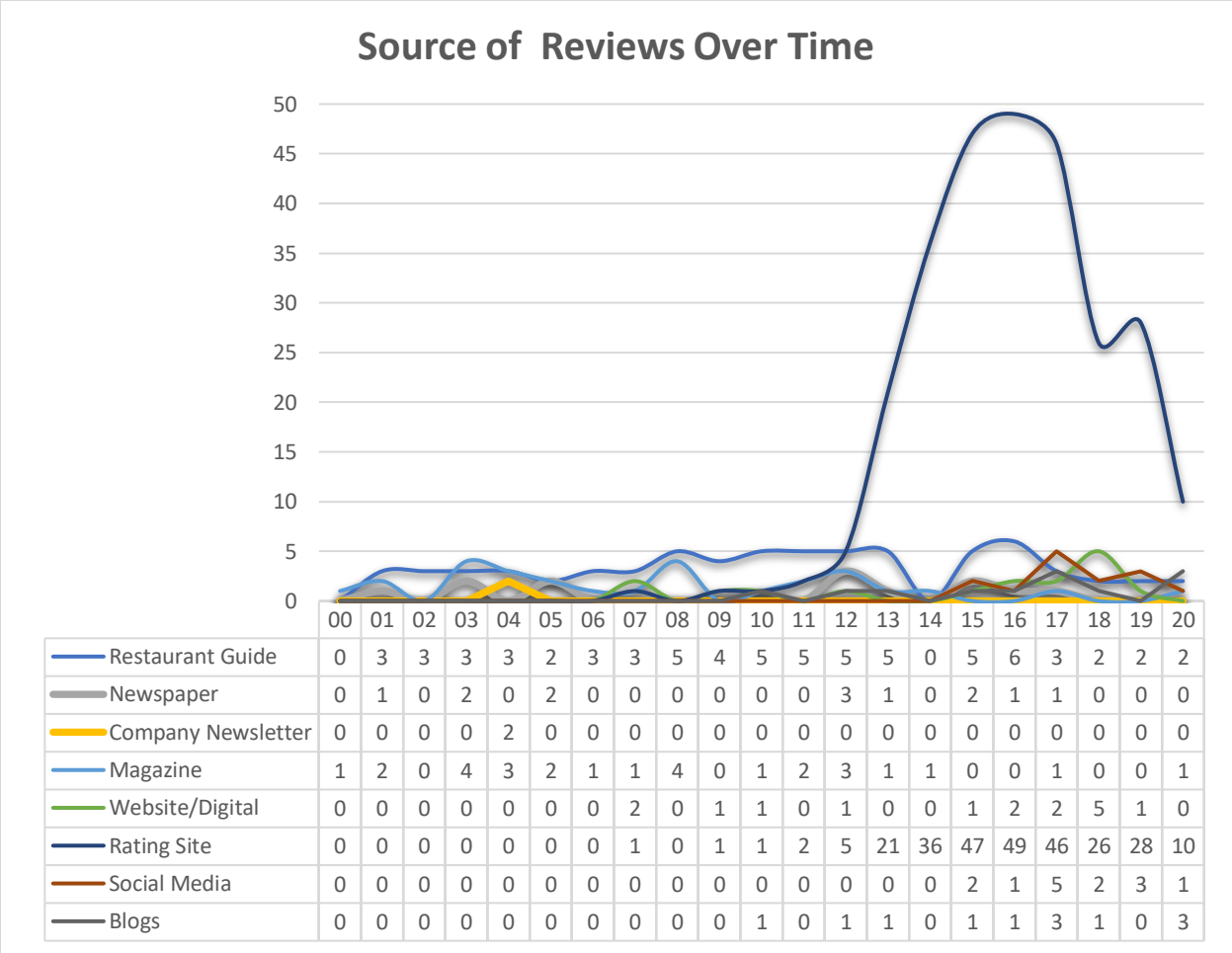


Figure 5.2.3

Rating Site	Total number of reviews per site
Tripadvisor.co.za	217
Eatout.co.za (Online user reviews)	4
Google Review	11
Diningcity.co.za	1
Booking.com	11
Readytotrip.com	2
Hellopeter.com	3
Zomato.com	25

Table 5.2.1 Total number of reviews per rating sites



	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Restaurant Guide	0	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	5	4	5	5	5	5	0	5	6	3	2	2	2
Newspaper	0	1	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	0	2	1	1	0	0	0
Company Newsletter	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Magazine	1	2	0	4	3	2	1	1	4	0	1	2	3	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1
Website/Digital	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	2	2	5	1	0
Rating Site	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	2	5	21	36	47	49	46	26	28	10
Social Media	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	5	2	3	1
Blogs	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	3	1	0	3

Figure 5.2.4

The number of reviews in restaurant guides remained fairly stable over the twenty years, with a minor decrease from 2018, as did the reviews in newspapers, but reviews in magazines steadily declined, particularly from 2015. As magazine reviews decreased the reviews on social media sites (Facebook and Instagram), personal blogs and websites or digital publications increased. Rating site review numbers started to spike in 2012, but this year also saw higher numbers of reviews across nearly all publications.

The only social media sites that featured in the archive were Instagram and Facebook. Instagram posts are generally quite short and are more image- than text-driven and only one review from Instagram qualified for this archive. Facebook reviews were found on the profiles of the individual restaurants as well as in the Facebook group Jozi Restaurants - The good, the bad, the ugly (a Johannesburg group, and thus only Mastrantonio was reviewed here).

The first blog review was published about De Oude Kraal in 2010 (See Figure 5.4.2), and the number of reviews increased slowly towards 2020. The blogs included in the archive were generally food and travel-focused, but only the two restaurants that included accommodation were reviewed by bloggers, as per Table 5.2.2 below.

Blogs	Restaurants Reviewed	
Durbanite	Hartford House	
Dear Travellure	Hartford House	
Travel Kid	Hartford House	
Foodingit.com	Hartford House	
Drizzle & Dip	Hartford House	
Hospitality Hedonist	Hartford House	
Chrisvonulmenstein.com	Hartford House	
Foodandthefabulous.	Hartford House	
Suitcaseandchardonnay.co.za		De Oude Kraal
Hello Smart Blog		De Oude Kraal
Reis in Afrikaans		De Oude Kraal
Explorer.timeslive.co.za		De Oude Kraal

Table 5.2.2 Blog reviews per restaurant

In the print media, the three restaurants in this archive were reviewed across a very wide range of publications, especially magazines. Whilst it was expected to find reviews in women's magazines, lifestyle, food and wine and travel publications it was interesting to discover reviews in *Top Car*, *Destiny Man, TaxTalk* and *Farmers Weekly* (see Table 5.2.3). The two destination restaurants that offered accommodation were reviewed across a wider range of publications, especially travel magazines. Similar to the reviewing patterns of blogs discussed above, Mastrantonio was the least reviewed in the print media (see Table 5.2.3), although it appeared frequently in the news in the initial media list search where they were often mentioned for their involvement in events and community work (see Annexure A)**.** The newspapers that featured reviews were either regional newspapers like *Die Volksblad* and *The Mercury* or Sunday papers like the *Sunday Times* and *City Press*. The reviews were all found in the lifestyle sections of the newspapers.

Eat Out, *Rossouw's Restaurants*, *Dine* and *JHP Gourmet Guide* were the only restaurant guides included in the archive and restaurant guides of magazines or newspapers, for example, *Style Magazine*'s restaurant guide or *The Mercury's Eating Out* were counted under the

publication, rather than Restaurant Guides, as per Table 5.2.3. Interesting to note is the involvement of credit card companies in the restaurant guides space with *Dine* published by *Wine Magazine*, in partnership with Diner's Club International (Trapido, 2008), who also purchased the *Platter's South African Wine Guide* in 2013 (Diners Club acquires acclaimed Platter's Guide, 2013, March 19), and *Rossouw's Restaurant Guide* also moved under the Diner's Club banner in 2015 (Mathews, 2015). Similarly, American Express was a sponsor in the early days of *Eat Out* (Strugo, 2002).

Company newsletters or publications were included in print media as they were distributed to their members in print format. Only two were included, *Drum Beat: Diplomatic Travel Club News* and a *Standard Bank* Publication. The title of the Standard Bank publication could not be determined, as the review was part of a private collection that only included one page, but it did state that it was a publication for its platinum card holders.

The digital publications followed a similar pattern to the newspapers and magazines, covering community news, food, wine, and lifestyle. All digital publications were local, except Worlds50best.com. *Wine* magazine was printed from 1993 until September 2011 when it moved exclusively online (Who we are, n.d.). In this archive, it has been the magazine and online publication that published restaurant reviews consistently and also in a longer critique format (see section 5.5 below). It has been noticed however that the most recent restaurant review on the site was published on 6 April 2021 (Trapido, 2021, April 6), suggesting that they no longer publish restaurant reviews.

Professional Publications	Type of Publication	Restaurants Reviewed		
Restaurant Guides				
Eat Out	Restaurant Guide	Hartford House	De Oude Kraal	Mastrantonio
Rossouws Restaurants	Restaurant Guide	Hartford House		Mastrantonio
Dine	Restaurant Guide	Hartford House	De Oude Kraal	
Magazines				
Fair Lady	Women's Magazine	Hartford House	De Oude Kraal	
Habitat	Property and Lifestyle Magazine	Hartford House		
Food & Home Entertaining	Food Magazine	Hartford House	De Oude Kraal	Mastrantonio
Style Magazine (Restaurant Guide)	Lifestyle Magazine	Hartford House		
Wine Magazine	Wine Magazine	Hartford House		Mastrantonio

Classic Feel Magazine	Music, Arts and Culture Magazine	Hartford House		
Taste Magazine	Food Magazine	Hartford House		Mastrantonio
Getaway Magazine website	Travel Magazine	Hartford House		
Elle Magazine	Women's Magazine	Hartford House		
About Time	Inflight Magazine of One Time Airline	Hartford House		
Prestige Magazine	Luxury Lifestyle Magazine	Hartford House		
TAXtalk	Industry Business Magazine	Hartford House		
Destiny Man	Men's Lifestyle Magazine	Hartford House		
South African Country Life	Country Life and Travel magazine		De Oude Kraal	
Top Car	Car Magazine		De Oude Kraal	
The South Africa Magazine (City Lodge)	City Lodge Magazine in Rooms		De Oude Kraal	
Get It Bloemfontein	Free community Magazine		De Oude Kraal	
Mango Juice	Inflight Magazine of Mango Airline		De Oude Kraal	
Lig	Christian Magazine		De Oude Kraal	
Farmer's Weekly	Farming Magazine		De Oude Kraal	
Newspapers				
The Mercury	KZN Daily Regional Newspaper	Hartford House		
Sunday Times (Life Style)	Weekly National Newspaper	Hartford House	De Oude Kraal	
Die Volksblad	Freestate Daily Regional Newspaper		De Oude Kraal	
The Saturday Star	Weekly Newspaper - Johannesburg		De Oude Kraal	
City Press: i Vol 2 Issue 11	Weekly (Sunday) Newspaper - Johannesburg		De Oude Kraal	
Bloemnuus	Local Community Newspaper		De Oude Kraal	
Digital sites				
Gourmetguys.co.za	South African Digital Food Newspaper, Magazine and Blog	Hartford House		
Thebugle.co.za	Local KZN Digtal Magazine	Hartford House		

Worlds50best.com	Fine Dining Lovers International Restaurant News Site	Hartford House		
WineMag.co.za	Wine Magazine - Went online only in October 2011	Hartford House		
Netwerk24	Naspers Afrikaans Digital News site	Hartford House	De Oude Kraal	
Eat Out Website	Magazine's Digital site (Not user reviews)	Hartford House	De Oude Kraal	Mastrantonio
IOL.co.za	Independent Media's Digital News Site			Mastrantonio
Crush Magazine	Online Food, Travel and Lifestyle Magazine			Mastrantonio
Company News Letters/Publications				
Standard Bank Publication	Publication for its Platinum Card Holders	Hartford House		
Drum Beat: Diplomatic Travel Club News	Society News Letter		De Oude Kraal	

Table 5.2.3 – Publications per Restaurant

The data on where restaurants in this archive were reviewed indicate a distinction between the first 12 years and the last eight. Between 2000 and 2012, magazines and restaurant guides were the main publishers of restaurant reviews, with occasional reviews in newspapers, digital publications and rating sites, but from 2012 there has been a digital reviewing explosion with rating sites completely dominating the scene and social media, blogs and online publications gradually reviewing more restaurants as well. This second period saw a decline in magazine publications, whilst restaurant guide reviews remained fairly constant with a slight decline from 2018. Whilst the number of reviews in online publications peaked in 2018 (see Figure 5.2.4), all other publications showed a dramatic decline in reviews, almost similar to the rise in 2012. Rating sites saw the biggest decline from 46 reviews in 2017, to 26 in 2018.

5.3 Who reviewed the restaurants?

To answer this sub-question in this study, the reviewers were recorded according to sex, population group, professional or amateur reviewer status and whether they were South Africans or international visitors.

Profile photos or photo bylines of reviewers played a significant role in determining their sex and race (150 reviews included the reviewer's photo), but Tripadvisor’s profile structure also allows users to state their sex, age and where they are from, which helped to determine these

details. Where profiles did not include images, the personal profiles of reviewers were scanned for their dining and holiday photos as an indication of their sex and race. In certain cases, especially where pseudonyms were used or reviewers remained anonymous, the profile details gave little indication of the reviewer, and these were recorded as “undetermined”.

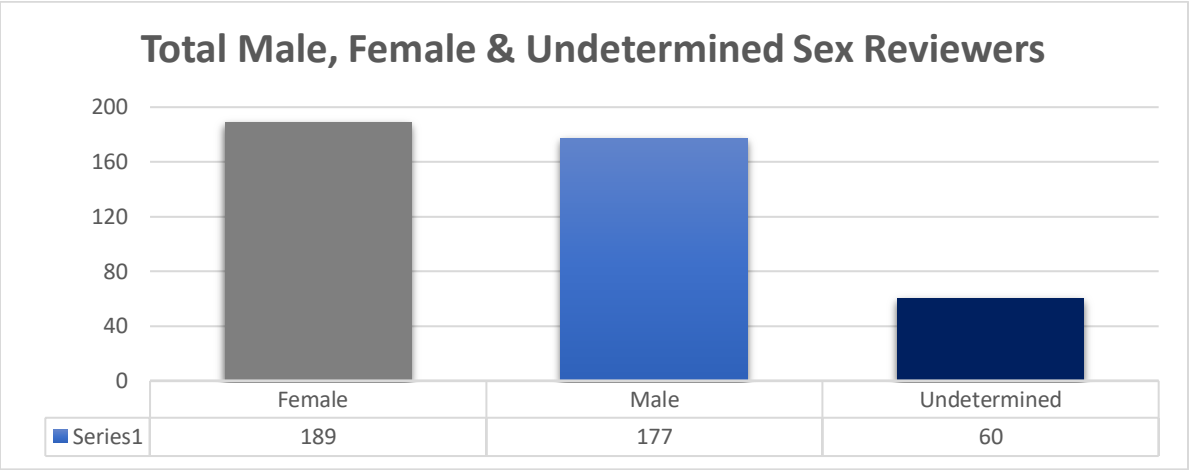


Figure 5.3.1

As indicated in Figure 5.3.1 most reviewers were female (188), but with such a narrow margin (177 males) and 60 undetermined these numbers do seem inconclusive, especially for the second decade, as the number of undetermined reviewers, increased steadily from 2011. What is however quite clear is how these numbers change over time (See Figure 5.3.2), with a clear increase in male reviewers following a similar curve as the reviews on rating sites. As the review numbers increased from 2012, both male and female reviewers increased, but from 2014 until 2018 male reviewers outnumbered females quite significantly (30:18 in 2016) and then dropped by more than half by 2019 (12).

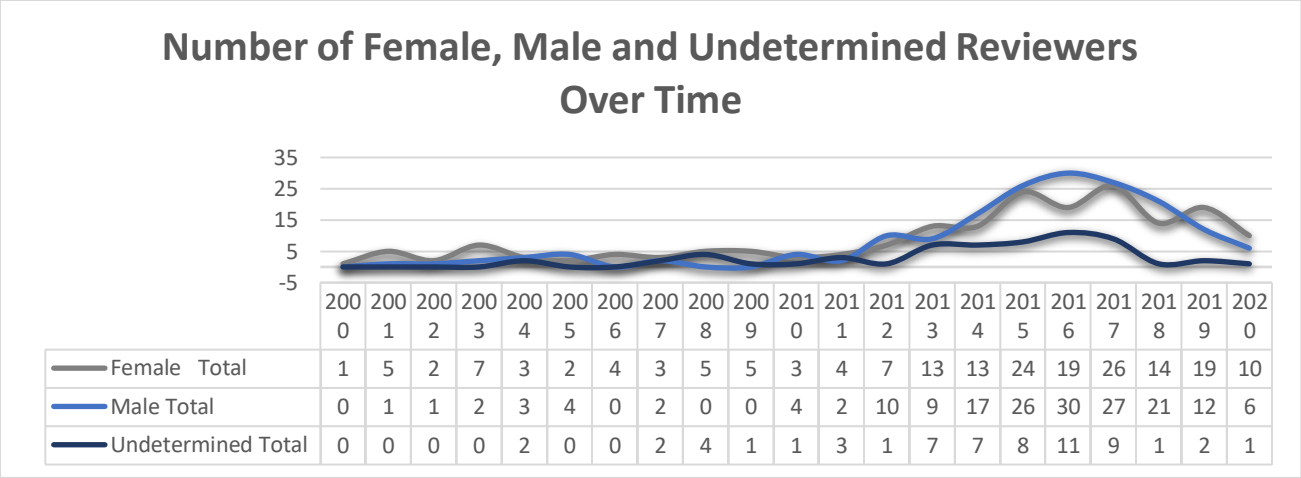


Figure 5.3.2

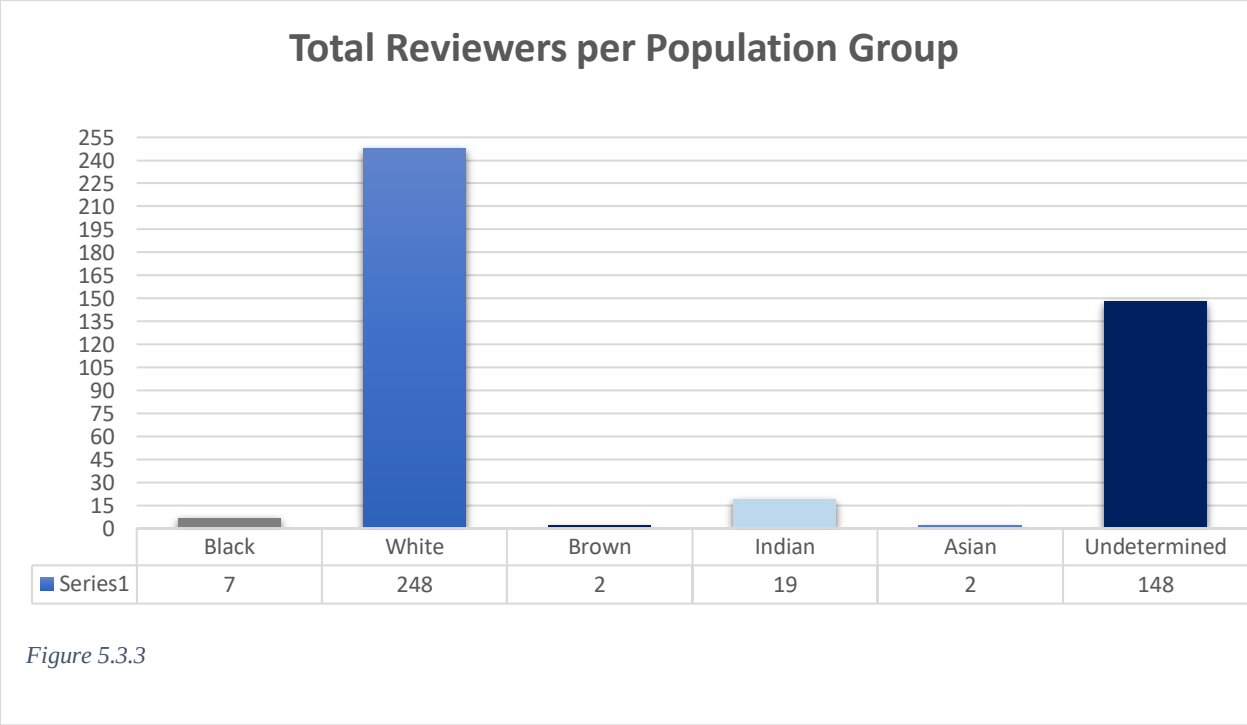


Figure 5.3.3

Whilst a significant number of the reviewers (148) could not be classified according to population groups, the overwhelming number of reviewers were white (248), as indicated in Figure 5.3.3. Indian reviewers followed (19), then black (7) and brown and other Asian (each 2).

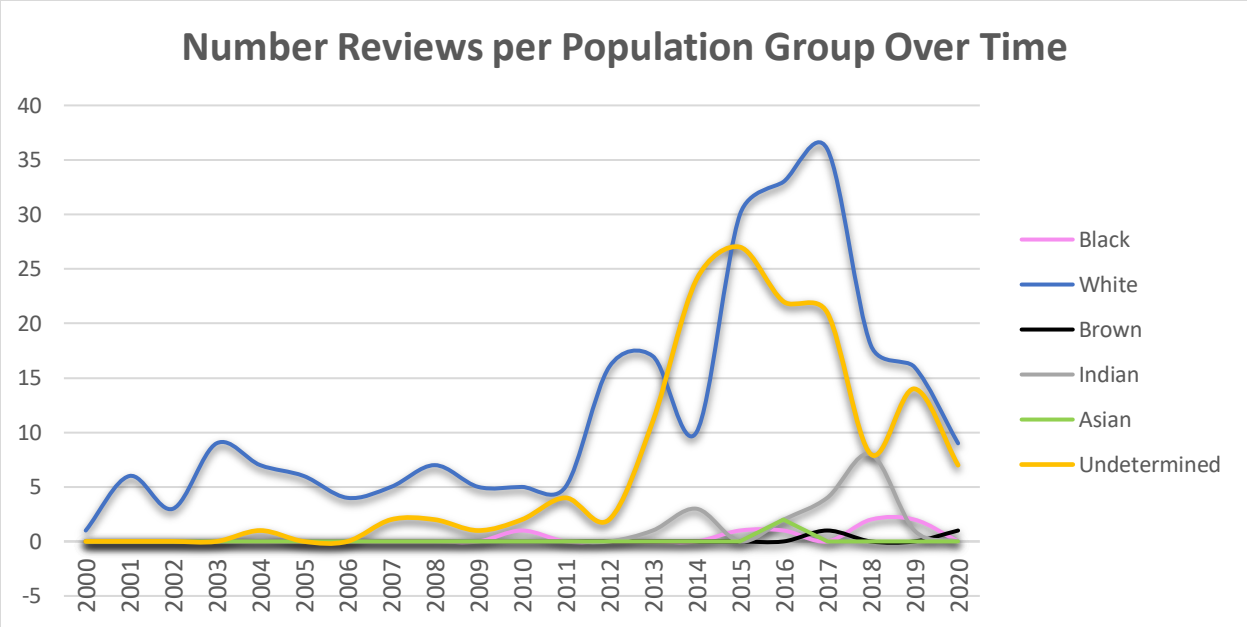


Figure 5.3.4

Whilst white reviewers have dominated throughout the 20 years (see Figure 5.3.4), Indian, black, brown and Asian reviewers entered the reviewing scene of these restaurants in 2013 with Indian reviewers especially gradually increasing.

As indicated in Table 5.3.1 below the majority of reviewers were South African, with almost 15% of reviews written by international visitors. Amateur reviewers' profiles were checked on rating sites and they also frequently mentioned their occupations and country of origin in their restaurant reviews, and this was used as further confirmation. Writers of South African publications were recorded as local reviewers. Reviews by international reviewers were all written on Tripadvisor, Zomato, and Booking.com, as well as one review written in *Drumbeat -The Diplomatic Travel Club News*.

	De Oude Kraal	**Mastrantonio**	**Hartford House**	**Total**
South African	77	115	172	**364**
International	9	20	33	**62**

Table 5.3.1 Local and International Breakdown of Reviewers per Restaurant.

The differentiation between professional and amateur reviewers was based on where the reviews were published. Rating sites, social media and blogs are open for the general public to publish, and reviewers were thus recorded as amateurs unless a profile suggested otherwise or it is the

profile of a known professional critic. Restaurant guides, magazines and newspapers employ or pay specific writers and it is a closed and edited process (though found not to be faultless), and these reviewers were classified as professional, even if the reviewer was anonymous, as was often the case with *Rossouw's Restaurant Guide*.

There were however exceptions to this assumption, and reviews and profiles were closely read for accurate classification as blogs were a publishing space where both amateur and professional reviewers were commonly found. Jens Friis (http://reisinafrikaans.blogspot.com/) and Ishay Govender-Ypma (www.foodandthefabulous.co.za) for example are both freelance writers and published authors who have personal blogs. Friis reviewed De Oude Kraal in March 2012 for *Bloemnuus* (Friis, 2012, March 24), and published the same review a few days later on his personal blog, Reis in Afrikaans (Friis, 2012, March 27). Govender-Ypma also reviewed Hartford House on her personal blog (Govender-Ympa, 2013, February 28) as well as for a professional publication (Govender-Ypma, 2018, January 23). Similar to Friis, *The Mercury* food critic Frank Chemaly regularly, between February 2014 and August 2016, published restaurant reviews that he wrote for *The Mercury* also on Tripadvisor (Frank_Chemaly, 2014, February). Facebook groups such as Jozi Restaurants: The Good, the Bad, the Ugly, also seem to attract both professionals and amateur reviewers, with professional food critic Gwynne Conlyn spotted in the comments and conversation on a Mastrantonio Review (Review M201910). A further search of Conlyn's profile showed that she also regularly posted restaurant reviews on the group.

Not only did professional reviewers seem to embrace the so-called "new media" or amateur reviewing spaces, but the traditional media also seemed to find value in showcasing two different voices in reviewing. *Eat Out*'s website publishes its critic's review as per the print version of the magazine, but below that offers a space for "User reviews", where readers can add their voices (Hartford House,n.d.). Similarly, the *City Press* lifestyle supplement *i* based its Eat Review column on the opinions of both the critic and the *i*-reader. Reviews started with the professional critic's review, followed by the *i*-reader's reviews, with big bold red VS letters in between them (Fisher & Henning, 2012).

Once all the exceptions were sifted through, it transpired that amateur reviewers (301) far outnumbered professional reviewers (124) as indicated in Figure 5.3.5, but only in the second decade under study (see Figure 5.3.6).

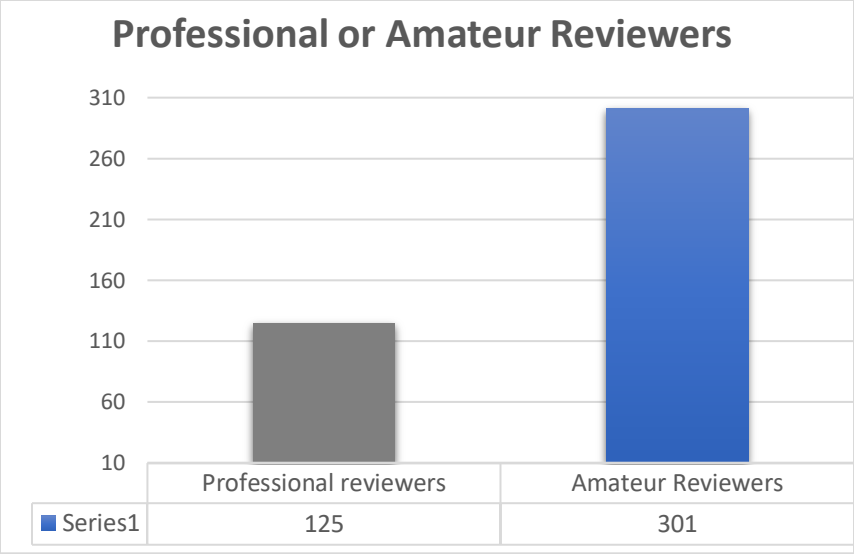


Figure 5.3.5

Not unexpectedly, the curve of amateur reviewers is similar to the curve for rating sites, with the number of amateur reviewers overtaking professional reviewers in 2013 (See Figure 5.3.6). What is interesting to note is that although there has been a significant increase in amateur reviewers, and then a significant decline from 2018, the number of professional reviewers, has remained fairly constant with a slight decline from 2018.

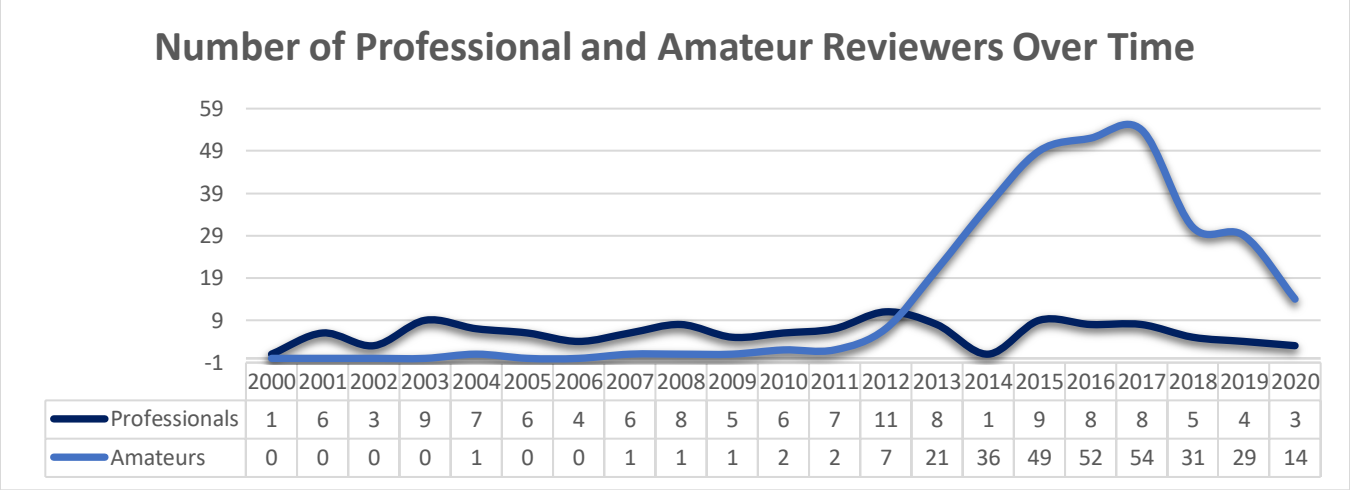


Figure 5.3.6

Studying the names and publications, it was perceived that in the traditional media, some reviewers were very regional and mainly reviewed in their province resulting in the same reviewer's opinions echoing in several publications, or for a long time in the same publications.

For example, Anne Stevens reviewed Hartford House nine times in the 20 years, mainly for *The Mercury* and its restaurant guide, but also for *Eat Out* on three occasions and once for *Taste.*

Between 2001 and 2004, Nonnie Dedekind reviewed De Oude Kraal five times, for both *Eat Out* and *Die Volksblad* and Janine Walker reviewed Mastrantonio five times for *Eat Out.* Similar to the professional reviewers, many amateurs were also active on more than one platform and frequently posted the same review. For example, the reviewer of Review M20181 reviewed Mastrantonio on Eat Out's website, but the same review was posted, on the same day on Zomato (Review20183) and four days later on Tripadvisor (Review M201890). Anna Trapido and Victor Strugo are the only two reviewers who reviewed all three restaurants in the archive.

Not only did reviewers often publish on more than one platform or publication but they also reviewed regularly with 314 out of the 426 reviews being written by regular reviewers. Professional reviewers were considered regular if they were featured more than once in this archive and the publications in the archive. Rating sites indicate the number of contributions of its users, and a user had to have a minimum of 20 reviews to qualify as a regular reviewer for this study. The number twenty was chosen as contributions on rating sites were generally very high, for example, "Kardoesie" who reviewed Mastrantonio in 2015 had written more than a thousand reviews on Tripadvisor (Kardoesie, 2010). Blogs and Facebook Group users needed to show at least five reviews on their profiles. The majority of reviewers were thus very active, at least for a while.

The majority of amateur reviewers on the rating sites Tripadvisor and Zomato wrote their reviews under a pseudonym (see Table 5.3.2), whilst professional reviewers wrote reviews under their real names, even when participating in rating sites, social media sites, or blogs. The majority of anonymous reviewers stem from *Rossouw's Restaurant Guide* which specified that "our reviewers are anonymous 'civilians,' not food media darlings" (Trapido, 2015, p.5).

	De Oude Kraal	**Mastrantonio**	**Hartford House**	**Total**
Anonymous	2	7	8	**17**
Pseudonym	33	79	123	**235**
Real Name	51	49	74	**174**

Table 5.3.2 Breakdown of Reviewer Names per Restaurant

To answer the research question addressed in this section, the three restaurants in this study were reviewed in the first decade by mainly professional, white female South African reviewers who produced reviews under their own names often for a variety of publications. The second decade still has predominantly white reviewers, but members of other population groups, especially Indians, joined the reviewing community. In the second decade there was also a shift to amateur reviewers dominating the reviewing scene, but whether they are male or female seems inconclusive, yet, the changes over time suggest that the majority of reviewers on rating sites were male. These reviewers sometimes reviewed on more than one platform or publication, preferred to use pseudonyms (mainly Tripadvisor and Zomato), and were active reviewers, especially between 2012 and 2017 (see Figure 5.2.3).

5.4 What were restaurant reviewers writing about?

Based on a 2021 pilot study on two restaurants, six core areas of discussion in restaurant reviews were identified: food, beverages, service, ambience, information about the reviewers, facilities, and value or price. In this archive, as per Figure 5.4.1, the most frequently mentioned of these subjects were food, service, and information about reviewers, followed by ambience, wine or beverages, its facilities, and price or value for money.

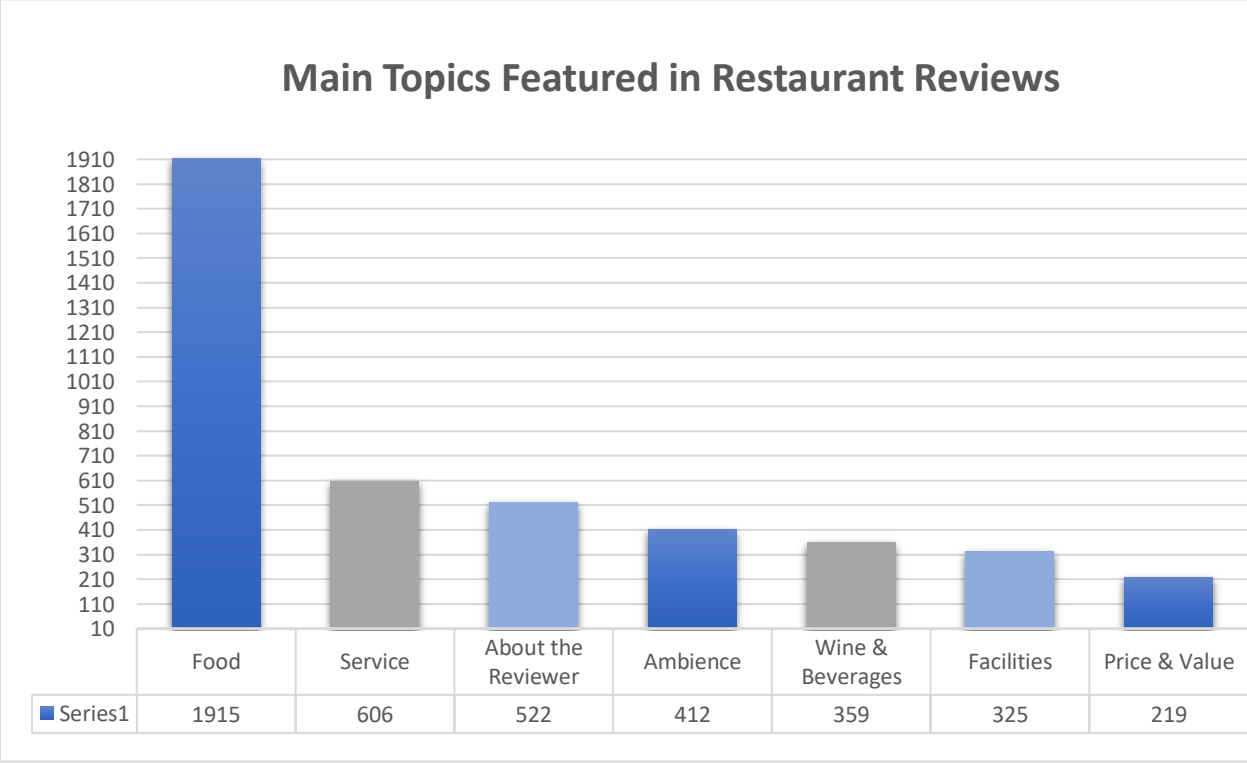


Figure 5.4.1

5.4.1 Food

Under food as the main subject, a further 17 topics related to food were identified (see Figure 5.4.1.1). Most reviewers mentioned the menu (378) and the taste of the food (279), followed by the style of the menu (247) and the food quality (241). Culinary skills (121), food comparisons to art (11) and the geographic origin of ingredients (79) were noted almost exclusively in Hartford House reviews. The number of courses (180) and presentation of the food (91) were mainly noted in the two restaurants that offered set tasting menus. Authenticity (50), on the other hand, was mentioned almost exclusively in Mastrantonio reviews. Declarations of disappointment (63) seem to go hand in hand with negative reviews and declarations of surprise (24) with positive reviews. Special dietary requirements and how they were dealt with, were mentioned in 35 reviews, seasonality in 28 and signature dishes in 15 reviews. Sustainability and environmental practices were noted by eight reviewers and the rarity of ingredients was mentioned only on four occasions.

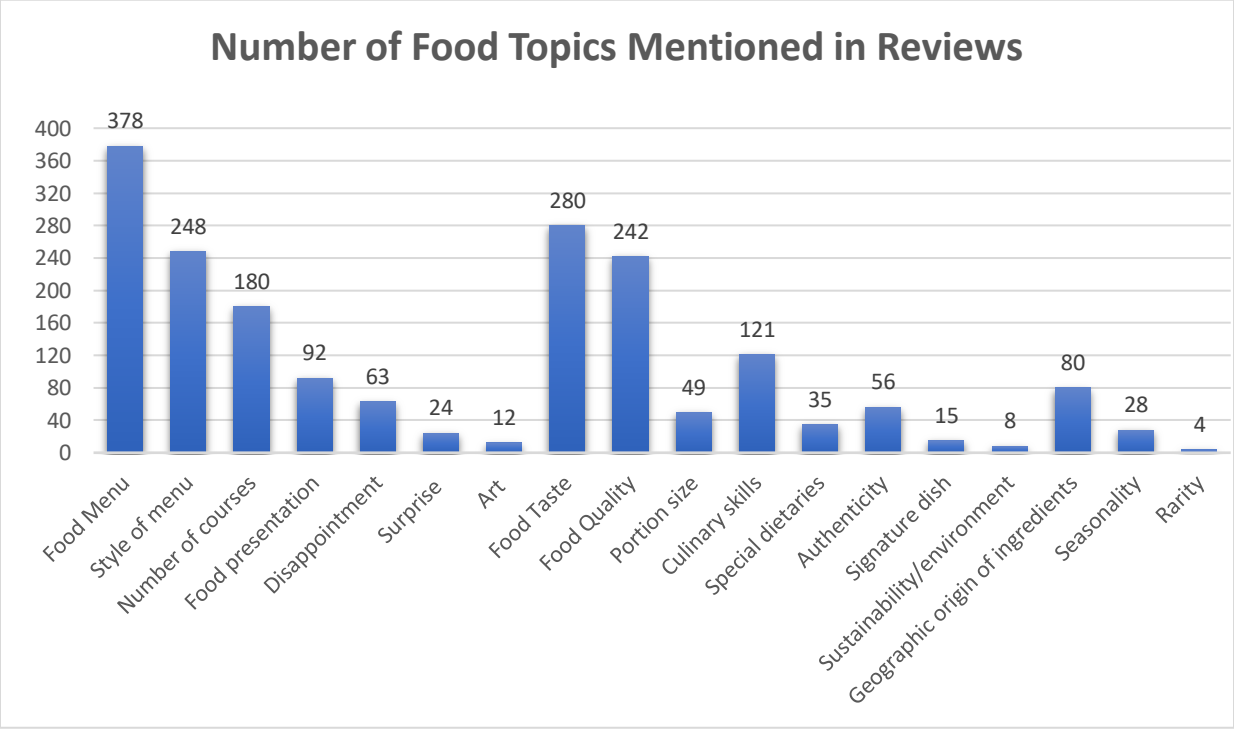


Figure 5.4.1.1

Whilst food was the most popular subject in the reviews, it is interesting to observe how few reviews actually mention specific dishes or ingredients. As per Table 5.4.1.1, barely more than half of the reviewers made specific mention of dishes or ingredients that they ate and less than a

quarter of the reviews mentioned specific desserts. What is unexpected is that the two more "fine dining" restaurants with set tasting menus have the least dish descriptions, whilst 70 per cent of the reviews about the Italian restaurant with an à la carte menu include descriptions.
Reviews for these two restaurants, especially on rating sites, were often very general, for example: "Hartford House is an all round experience which offers world class cuisine in elegant fine dining restaurant with an option of 4 x course or 6 x course Tasting menu. The extensive wine list should appeal to even the most discerning connoisseur, " (Sandy H, 2020, February 3). Or, "the gourmet 5 course meal was simply heaven in the mouth served by an amazing team of people," as written on Google Reviews about De Oude Kraal (Review D20183).

	De Oude Kraal	**Mastrantonio**	**Hartford House**	**Total**
Total number of reviews per restaurant	**86**	**135**	**205**	**426**
Reviews that mention ingredients or specific dishes	43	105	85	**233**
Reviews that mention specific dessert	22	23	48	**93**

Table 5.4.1 1 Reviews that included detailed dishes and mentioned dessert

A closer reading also indicated that when dishes were mentioned, these were seldom detailed food descriptions, but rather a list of dishes or ingredients: "Classic dinner is a 5 course fine dining event, we opted for a shortened 2 course meal with main course and desert (sic). Kudu steak and lamb chop with 4 kinds of vegetables were out of this world " (Fymoh, 2017, July). Or, "Expect the traditional classics (no pizza) like melanzane alla parmigiana, panzanella, great grilled calamari and all the manner of pastas and veal, chicken and meat dishes," (Mastrantonio, 2011, p.250).

Detailed food discussions and assessments were rare in this archive and seemed to be written more frequently by professional reviewers:

> Nothing beats the romance of 'making eyes' at one's dining companion over ginger-infused, caramelised sweet potatoes, denning vleis lamb and angelically-light malva pudding served in a farm house that dates back to 1885. However, the food is considerably less good when the chef strays from Free State classics into pseudo-Italian fare such as pesto-topped fillet and the like… (De Oude Kraal, 2008)

When detailed food descriptions were written by amateurs, they seemed to be negative reviews describing exactly why the reviewer did not like it:

> Starters- Trout dish was smoked I believe, served cold. Not great for this time of year. Dish was okay. The beef tongue was superb, dish of the day easily. Mains- Sirloin steak was over done, veg was ordinary. The sauce (jus) was good but not enough on the plate. The prawn and risotta was average at best. The flavours were not to my liking, too much bitterness. Desserts- Chocolate dessert and Cheese cake with compote were disappointing. The dishes did not meet the menu description. The chocolate mousse as single element was the only good thing on the plate. The chestnut ice cream lacked flavour. (Alcinodp, 2018, May 30)

Food was thus by far the most frequently mentioned subject and written about under many different related topics, but most of it was just a mention or report, not a detailed discussion of the food experience.

5.4.2 *Service*

Service was the second most common subject mentioned in reviews and among the service topics (see Figure 5.4.2.1), the quality of service was mentioned most often (265). To be more specific some reviews mentioned the meet and greet process (49) as well as the pace of service (34) and mentioned corrective actions (19) when issues occurred during the dining experience. More than a third of reviews (145) also mentioned the chef by name, and 22 referred to the chef's experience or training (the majority of these comments were made about Hartford House chefs -16). Waiters or managers were mentioned by name in 46 reviews and 26 reviews mentioned a change of staff in the restaurant. Six of these reviews were published in 2015 about Hartford House, after its chef of many years left (Scarborough, 2014, June 18).

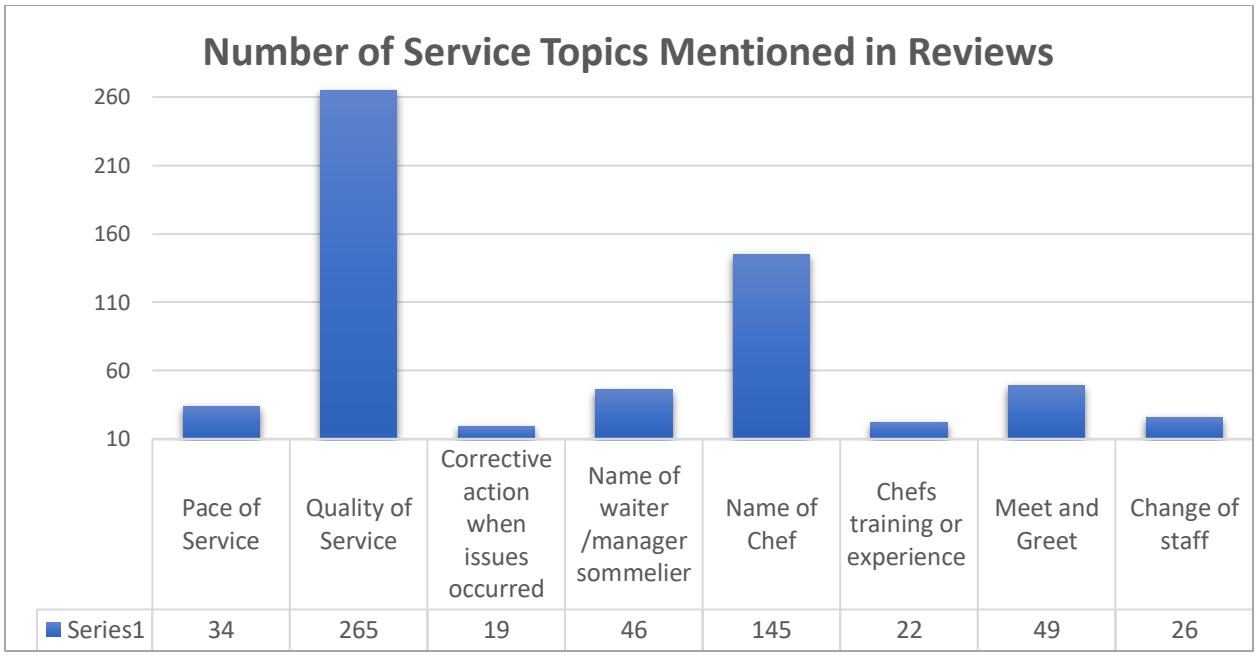


Figure 5.4.2.1

Service is overall the second most important topic in reviews in this archive, but it was not always the case, as the quality of service, compared to wine and food is only mentioned consistently for all three restaurants from 2008 as per Figure 5.4.2.2. Service competed from 2008 to 2012 for third place with the quality of food and the wine list until it confidently outnumbered food quality from 2013 to 2020, second only to mentions of the restaurant menu, which was the most common subject throughout the 20 years.

This late introduction of service in reviews is confirmed in *Eat Out* reviews of Hartford House, with reviews from the 2002 edition written under two main topics “The Place” and “The Winelist” (Stevens, 2002), but by 2020, this expanded to “Best For” “Food,” “Service,” “Drinks” and “Ambience” (Horler, 2020).

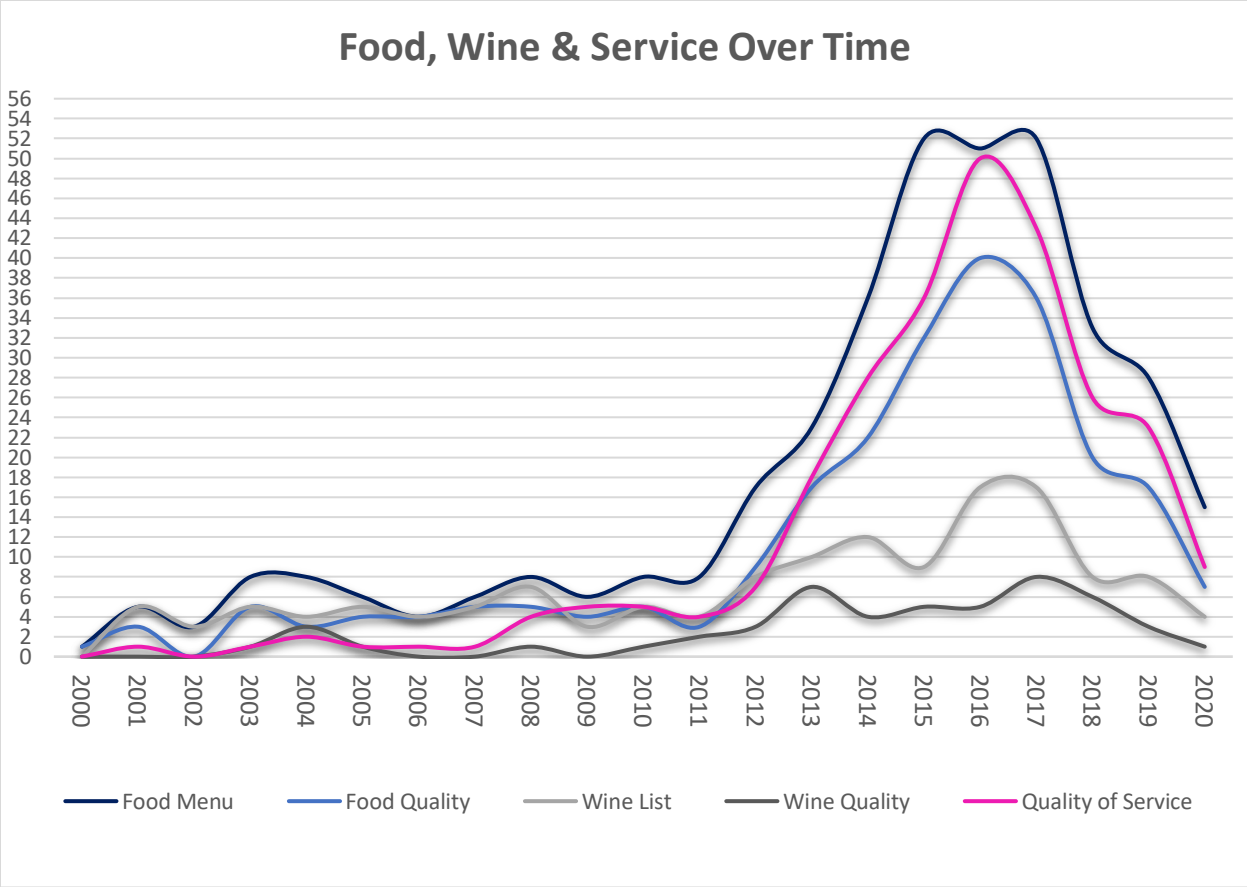


Figure 5.4.2.2

5.4.3 About the Reviewers

The closer reading of this archive allowed for finer detail to be noted and recorded and much of it revealed information about the reviewer, rather than the restaurants that they reviewed. Topics that could be easily tracked through content analysis (see Figure 5.4.3.1) included mentions of holidays or travel (42), if the meal was a special celebration (52) if the reviewer had dined in the restaurant before (85) as well as comparisons to other restaurants (42) and the judgement of whether or not, they would return to a restaurant (98).

The close reading method took the archive analysis beyond identifying specific topics and allowed me to discern how Bourdieu's cultural fields can emerge in reviews and what is regarded as capital within this field. Additional information in reviews was categorised according to reviewers claiming expertise, reviewers confirming expertise in food and wine or dining out, or other indications of distinction which is used as culinary or social capital.

Expertise seems to be a requirement for professional publications as reviewers were often introduced to the readers, especially in guides and magazines: “Andrea Burgener is a food writer and chef. She owned and ran the Johannesburg restaurants Superbonbon and Deluxe in Johannesburg and also worked as a food stylist, television food presenter and restaurant consultant” (Burgener, 2008, August, pp.62-65).

> Jessica has a love for food. She also has a love for writing. After spending three years at a Cordon Bleu cookery school she decided to spread her wings and check out London’s food scene. There she wrote for a popular online magazine by night and cooked at the famous Books for Cooks by day. Three years passed, however, the pull of home was too strong to bear. So here she is, ready to take Cape Town down, one bite at a time. (Spiro, n.d.)

Similarly, rating sites allow reviewers to introduce themselves in their profile where information can be as detailed or vague as they prefer. Most reviewers at least reveal their sex and where they are from and others additionally use the platform to market their personal blogs (ShareKahn, n.d.) which can be seen as additional claims of expertise. Personal blogs, like many magazines and guides, introduce the readers in detail to the author:

> Hi I’m (full name removed) Chanz for short. A 29 year old Foodie from Sunny South Africa. I’m no Pro by any means, but have found a complete obsession with all things food. From starting out baking cupcakes, I have slowly ventured into many different aspects of food. Amateur, newbie who loves to bake, cook, eat and travel. (sic) (Jones, 2017, July 5)

Whilst these formal statements of expertise were noted, it was the claim of expertise and actual evidence thereof that were mentioned or indicated in reviews themselves that was the main focus. As per Figure 5.4.3.1, reviewers claimed expertise in 85 reviews. These ranged from comments that confirm the expertise as a reviewer “after many columns” (Strugo, 2005, January 15) to their experience as a diner in general “I have dined all over South Africa and would not rate this as a place to spend the exorbitant amount of money they are charging,” (Review D20151) or as a diner at award-winning restaurants: “Being a foodie myself (I have dined at 9 of the SA Top 10 restaurants in the last year) I was looking forward to dinner,” (Emile_12, 2013,

January), “We have eaten in a number of Michelin star restaurants around the world, so were really looking forward to the "South African" version” (Lynn, 2014, June).
Sometimes the experience was with the specific restaurant: “being a regular over the past ten years…” (Review M20171). Expertise also related to reviewers' own cooking skills “As a chef I can say Marie and her team…” (Patso-Plamen, 2017, November) or experience from working in hospitality “Having owned and operated a number of establishments in Johannesburg for a more than 20 years….” (Geoff W, 2016, October 27).

Sometimes expertise was stated in defence of judgements of authenticity or lack thereof: “I used to come here, when living in Johannesburg, mainly for nostalgia . now living back in italy, invited here by friends, i realized in full how far this food is from real italian food” (sic) (Nicolas S, 2013, August 4), or “as an Italian, I consider this to be one of the few real Italian restaurants in Johannesburg” (Luca W, 2013, May 1), or being married to an Italian (Clive999, 2014, October 14).

The expertise was also declared in terms of specific dishes, “The pasta I've ordered approximately 8 times over the years..” (Bongitole, 2017, June 18) or “The chocolate cake was the best chocolate cake I have ever had – and I have had a lot of chocolate cake!” declared a young reviewer on his blog (Review H20181).

Expertise was also specific to ingredients: “I travel and have been to Greece. from the creamiest Greek yoghurt I’ve enjoyed outside Greece,” (Govender-Ypma, 2013, February 28) or cooking methods: “As a consumer of extremely blue steak it is always a delight to find a chef who understands exactly what is required - so many good chefs still consider they know better than me how I should eat their fillet - Constantijn is a real winner!” (Wineaway 2017, January 13).

Some denied expertise, but in doing so, in fact, made a strong claim for it:

> And then I have to mention the dessert... I will be the first to confess that I am not a food critique...hard to say I am even a foodies (sic), but I will be honest when I say I am totally obsessed with real food made real good... To my mind, there are three dishes that have stood out in my memory for whatever reason ove (sic) the course of our last few trips in the quest for good food. the first being the oyster starter at Le Bernadin in New York, the second being the liver fruit starter at Dinner in London and the third being the lavender

> sherbet, turkish delight, lemon verbena Pana cotta and berry sorbet at Hrtford... (sic) (The Nagle, 2013, March)

The claims of expertise in this field (see Figure 5.4.3.1) were the most obvious forms of culinary capital claimed by reviewers, but an additional 51 comments indicating social and culinary capital were also identified. These included statements of education or special knowledge in the field by using of foreign language terminology, or phrases, expressions for preferences of certain restaurants or judgments against others and indicating personal relationships or special treatment by chefs or management. Finally, outright declarations of being a foodie, epicure or gourmand were markers of distinction that reviewers used to claim culinary capital.

Foreign food terminology or phrases were sometimes also evidence of expertise, but in most cases did have a simpler English translation suggesting the foreign term was used intentionally. This included descriptions such as "*coup de grace*" and "*haute* cuisine" (Wasserfall & Comins, 2003, November) or "*table d'hôte* dinner" (KMK GBC, 2011, June), "fillet medallion perfectly *blue* as ordered" (Strugo, 2005, January 15), "not a *demi-tasse* or *objet d'art* out of place" (Review H20177), "*aguri*" and "*carcioffi* artichokes" (drpaulfoodlover, 2016, July). The inclusion of a title into his pseudonym by this author is an additional status claim.

Statements of preferences for certain restaurants and denouncing others included Anna Trapido's confession of having a "family eatery phobia" explaining "I am a childless woman with a gastronomic bent towards cloches and silver service. Mastrantonio's recent radio advertisement pertaining to a 'best Italian family restaurant' award have left me with a sense that they are not my scene." (2006, December). Another mention of family-style restaurants includes the franchise restaurant, Spur, which was featured in a Mastrantonio review in the Jozi Restaurants Facebook group as an example of poor quality: "We ordered crepes as desert and it arrived without the chocolate sauce and honestly looked like something from spur" (sic) (Review M201520). It resulted in a group member commenting, tongue-in-cheek: "Hey what is wrong with Spur? lol!!!", to which the author responds "Hahaha absolutely nothing." In contrast to the comments above made about Mastrantonio, another reviewer chose specifically to dine there because he believed it would reflect his status to co-workers:

> When you invite colleagues or clients to a lunch, it has to be somewhere good. After all the venue and meal reflect on you. I like this restaurant for that reason. Its classy and

> classic (in the sense that it still uses traditional starched white linen table clothes). At the same time the food is timeless, classic Italian cooking. (Kevin H, 2017, November 23)

As discussed under Service in the section above, knowing the chef or owner's name was not uncommon (see Figure 5.4.2.1). Some reviewers however went beyond mention and claimed familiarity, such as this reviewer's very detailed assessment of Hartford House, where she notes that she was there by invitation:

> About two months ago Chef [name removed] paid me the most amazing compliment, by inviting me to visit Hartford House, to evaluate the restaurant's lunch and dinners, having valued that I was the first to write about him when he still worked [Restaurant name removed] in Franschhoek. (Review 20154)

The review continues to include details not only of the head chef's career but also of his team, with all chefs mentioned by name. The reviewer highlighted that she was on a first-name basis with everyone, including the general manager. Similarly, the writer of Review D20101 had a more intimate experience that included rare offerings: "We wined and dined with the owner, Gerhard Lombard, who offered us good wine from his private cellar. Lerato chose a 2009 Sauvignon Blanc, 'bottle number 2828 of the 5000 bottles in the country,' he said" (Review D20101).

It was not only familiarity with the restaurant teams that were used to claim culinary capital but also being close with known food critics with David Bullard referring to Victor Strugo as his "occasional; lunch partner" in his review of Hartford House (2013, May).



Figure 5.4.3.1

Whilst 85 reviews included claims of expertise, 75 actually included evidence of such expertise, and it was rarely shown by those who claimed it. A reviewer was considered to have expert knowledge when they discussed the qualities of food, wine or service in detail, especially with regards to technicalities, offered additional relevant and educational information on products, or used culinary or service terminology, such as Frank Chemally's description of croquettes: "Croquettes are so often bland, solid affairs, served cold and lumpy. This was light, crisp on the outside and packed an explosion of flavour" (2016, November, 7). Or Anna Trapido's explanation of porcini and requirements for tender artichokes: "Porcini means 'little pigs' in Italian and the plump, meaty charm of my Porcini Trifolati in Padella was evident in every mouthful. The gratinated artichokes were small enough to be perfectly tender" (Trapido, 2006, p.82).

Evidence of culinary expertise was found more often in detailed critiques written by professional reviewers, but it was not exclusive to these reviews: "Then a plain jane cream of potato soup – surprisingly light and tasty, but not thin," wrote Skyhigheagles (2015, December) in her De Oude Kraal review on Tripadvisor, later claiming it to be: "The most extraordinary well balanced and integrated combination of fine dining and home cooking I have ever experienced." MonPeach showed similar expertise in pointing out the poor execution of her specially requested vegetarian meal at Hartford House, identifying the repetition of ingredients, and comparing it to the non-vegetarian meal enjoyed by her partner (2014, October).

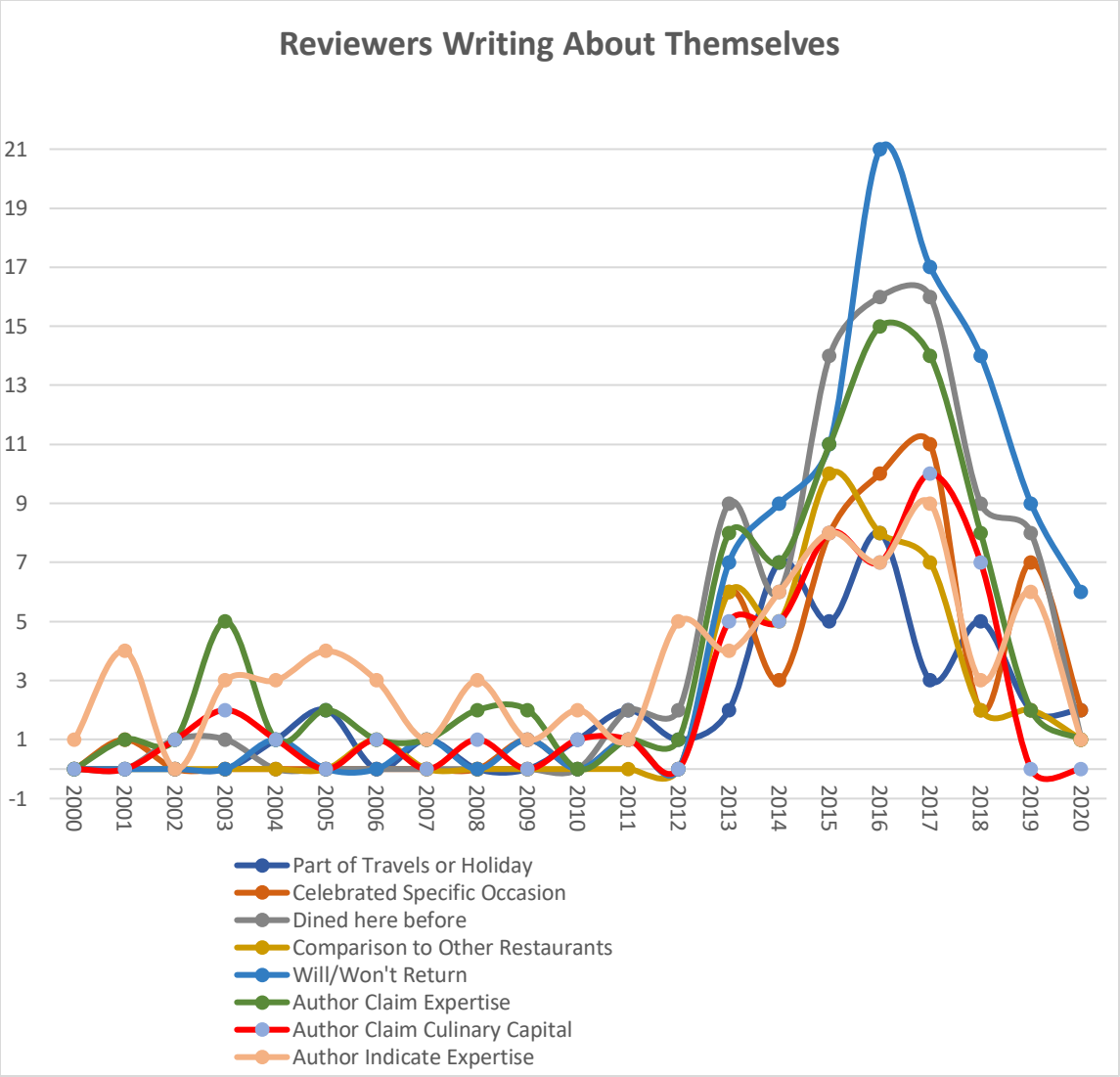


Figure 5.4.3.2

Considering the information that reviewers shared of themselves over time (see Figure 5.4.3.2) it is clear that claims of expertise and evidence thereof were evident from the first decade, but the second decade saw a much steeper increase in more personal information such as reasons for eating at a restaurant, mentions of prior experiences at the restaurants, comparisons to other restaurants as well as judgements on whether or not the reviewers will return. These are all in line with the increase in amateur reviewers and reviews on rating sites over the same period. Figure 5.4.3.2 thus shows that whilst personal information is more common in reviews written by amateurs, culinary capital and displays of expertise were found throughout.

5.4.4 Ambience

The style of a restaurant was by far the most popular topic (180) under ambience (see Figure 5.4.3.1) followed by the décor (96), view (52), the table arrangements (43) and other guests (23). The temperature was mentioned (13) most often by people sitting on the verandah at Hartford House or Mastrantonio. Noise (8) in the restaurant and music (4) was also mentioned. Most of the mentions of noise were found in Mastrantonio reviews, where it was a complaint for some, but for others added to the authenticity of a 'vibey' Italian restaurant.

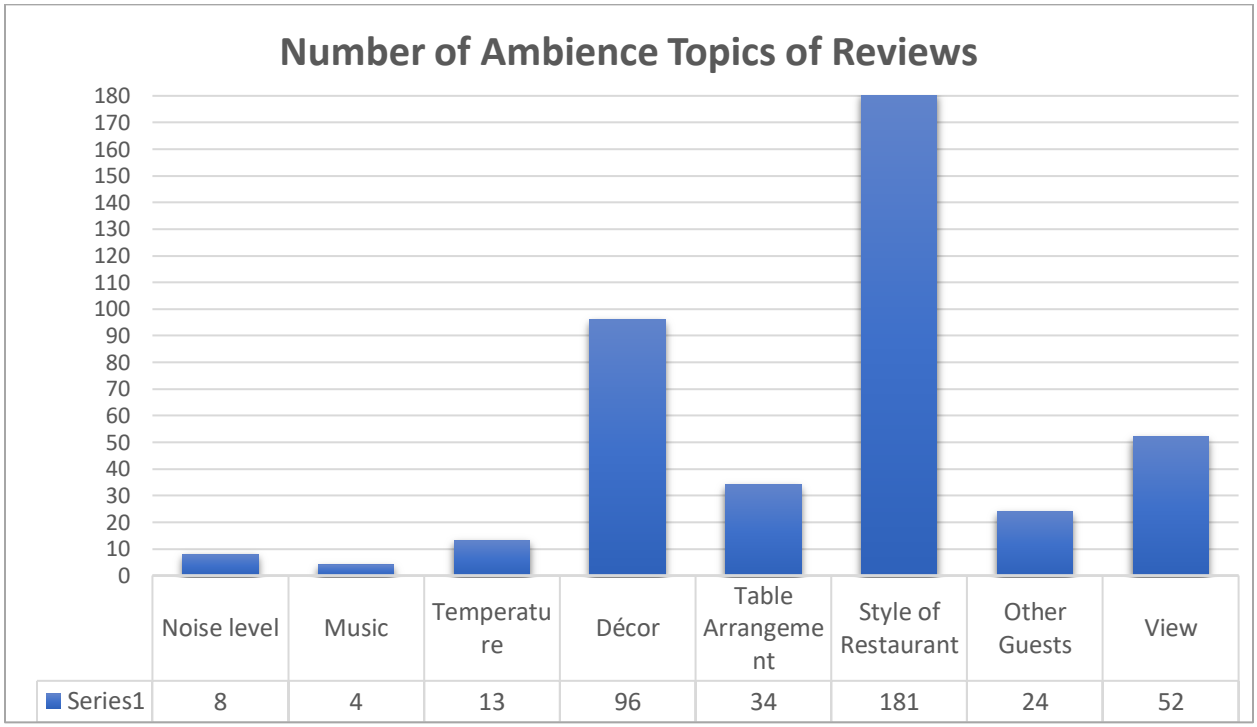


Figure 5.3.1.1

5.4.5 Beverages

Wine lists are mentioned in 33 per cent of reviews (see Figure 5.4.4.1), but unlike food quality, the quality of wine was a fairly neglected topic in reviews in this archive (51). Food and wine pairings received more mentions (65), but it needs to be considered that two of the restaurants offered set tasting menus, with the option to include paired wines.

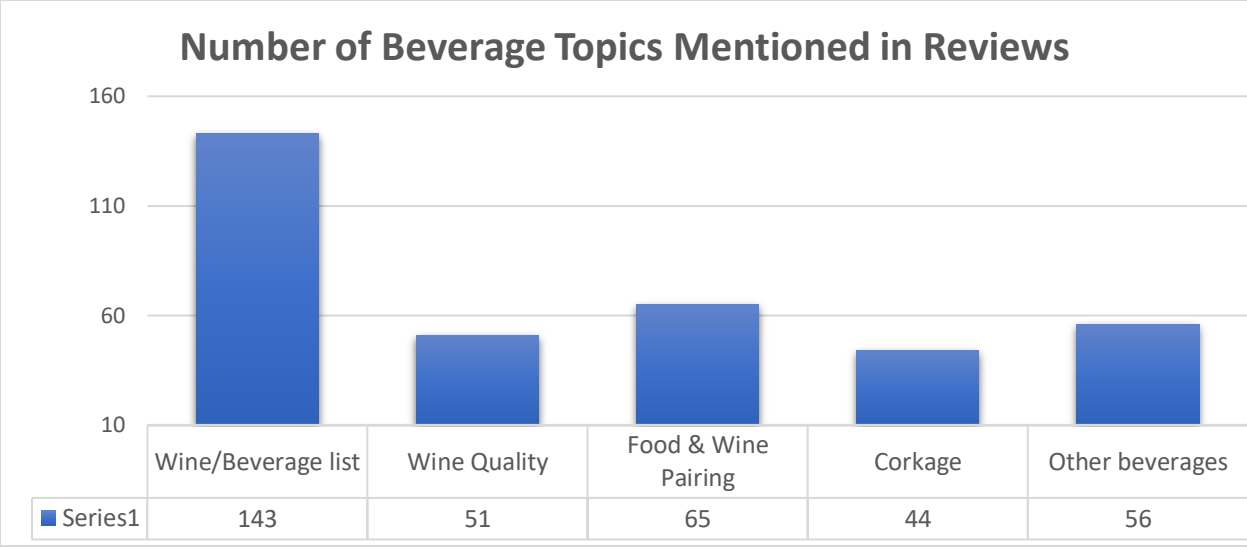


Figure 5.4.4.1

Corkage (44) was mainly mentioned in *Eat Out* reviews, and only 56 reviews mentioned beverages other than wine, with coffee as the most commonly mentioned second beverage and cappuccino frequently mentioned in Mastrantonio reviews, especially in the early 2000s when the restaurant also served breakfast.

	De Oude Kraal	**Mastrantonio**	**Hartford House**	**Total**
Total number of reviews per restaurant	**86**	**135**	**205**	**426**
Reviews that mentioned specific wines	1	7	8	**16**
Reviews that mention beverages other than wine	15	18	23	**56**

Table 5.4.4.1 The number of reviews that mentioned specific wines and beverages other than wine.

The Winelist is frequently mentioned but through very general descriptions. “Full bar, excellent wine list, (Diner’s Club Merit award 2001). Corkage R25” (Stevens, 2002). With more detailed descriptions specifying wine list awards, local and international wine selections, suggested food pairings and wine by the glass as well as Bring-Your-Own options (De Oude Kraal, 2008).

It is interesting to note that although dinner at two of the restaurants is in “fine dining” style with award-winning wine lists, only four per cent of reviews mentioned specific wines (see Table 5.4.4.1) enjoyed with the meal. Similar to the food descriptions, beverage descriptions were even more generalised, if mentioned at all: “Two bottles of Montepulciano d'Abruzzo from

the great wine list also helped," (Phillip the Foodie, 2017, August 6). "Hartford tries to pair appropriate wines with each course. With the first two came Iona chardonnay and Mulderbosch Steen Op Hout. With the next Haute Cabriere Pinot Noir and Waterford, the Heather-Leigh were recommended" (Stevens, 2009, March 14.). Very little is mentioned about the taste or the quality of the wines, or even the success of the pairings. Columnist David Bullard is one of the very few reviewers to deliver a critique on wine pairings and the only one to suggest alternatives (2013, May).

Unlike service that saw a late bloom, wine quality, wine lists, or beverages mentioned in reviews remained fairly constant and low in number throughout the 20 years, apart from a minor increase in 2016 and 2017 (see figure 5.4.3.2).

5.4.6 Facilities

In the overall assessment of comments on facilities, I removed the contact details and the mentions of accommodation, as only two of the restaurants offered accommodation, and in most cases, the contact details were part of the pre-determined structure or form of the reviews, not a conscious contribution of the reviewer. With those subjects removed the location of the restaurants was the most important factor mentioned among facility topics (257) (see Figure 5.4.4.1). With two of the restaurants situated in fairly unique locations (a working sheep farm and a stud farm), it was not unexpected. Getting to the location and the parking it provided was mentioned in 54 reviews whilst general hygiene comments (10) and the restaurant bathrooms (4) were topics that least concerned reviewers.

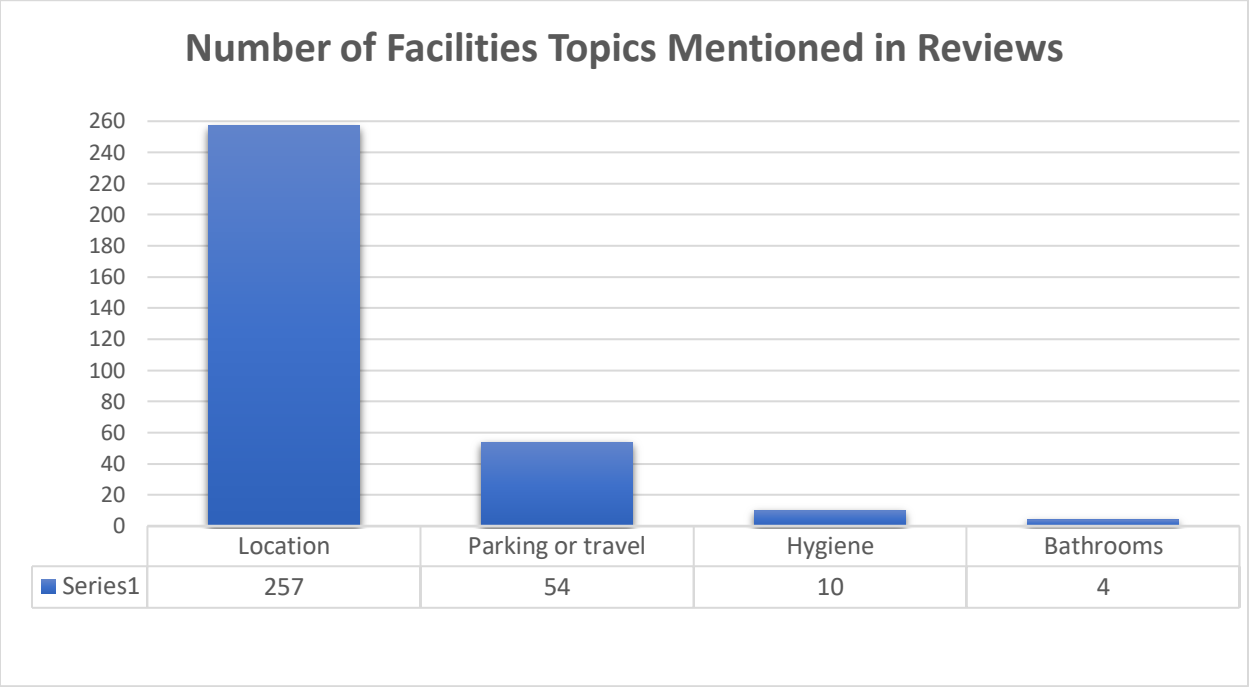


Figure 5.4.4.1

5.4.7 Price and Value for Money

A bit more than 30 per cent of reviewers (132) mentioned the price of meals in the three restaurants (132) (see Figure 5.4.6.1) with 70 reviews making specific mention of the value they perceived the dining experience to be. Only reviews from Mastrantonio referred to specials (15) and only two reviews mentioned the payment process. Service fees or "tips" were also included as a topic, but it was never mentioned in any reviews in the archive. Whilst price and value for money were mentioned consistently throughout the 20 years, mention of special offers only started appearing in 2012, in line with the arrival of rating sites and amateur reviewers.

Comments about who paid for a meal (or not) were included in the initial subject assessment, but not in the price and value breakdown presented here, as policies about paying for meals were often stated by the publications in advance (Horler, 2020, p.8; McDonald, 2006, July, p.68; Trapido, 205, p.5) and therefore not an intentional inclusion of the reviewer. What however transpired from these recordings was that apart from professional publications that included the comment in their policy on reviewing, personal bloggers were the only other group to make intentional statements about paid or sponsored visits to the restaurants (Von Ulmenstein, 2015, August 27; Linsell, 2017, July 24; Jones, 2017, July 5). Harford House had the most overall

reviews from bloggers (8) with five of the blogs written since 2015 noting that they were guests of or received free accommodation from the establishment. Stating that they received free accommodation, but claiming independence the authors of Dear Travellure end their Hartford House review accordingly:

> This post was not sponsored, but we did receive free accommodation for the duration of our stay. We approached Hartford House ourselves for the purpose of making this informative blog. We only partner with brands and products that we are passionate about and have tested ourselves. We always give our honest opinions and beliefs on products and services (Experience the Magic of Hartford House, 2020, January 16).

The Travellure website does however offer reviews as part of digital content that they advertise under "press trips and events" to tourism destinations. David Bullard is the only professional reviewer to confirm that he did not pay for his visit to Hartford House, ending his review with: "David and Jacquie Bullard tried very hard to pay for their stay at Hartford House but never quite managed it. They plan to rebook as Mr and Mrs Smith" (2013, p.58).

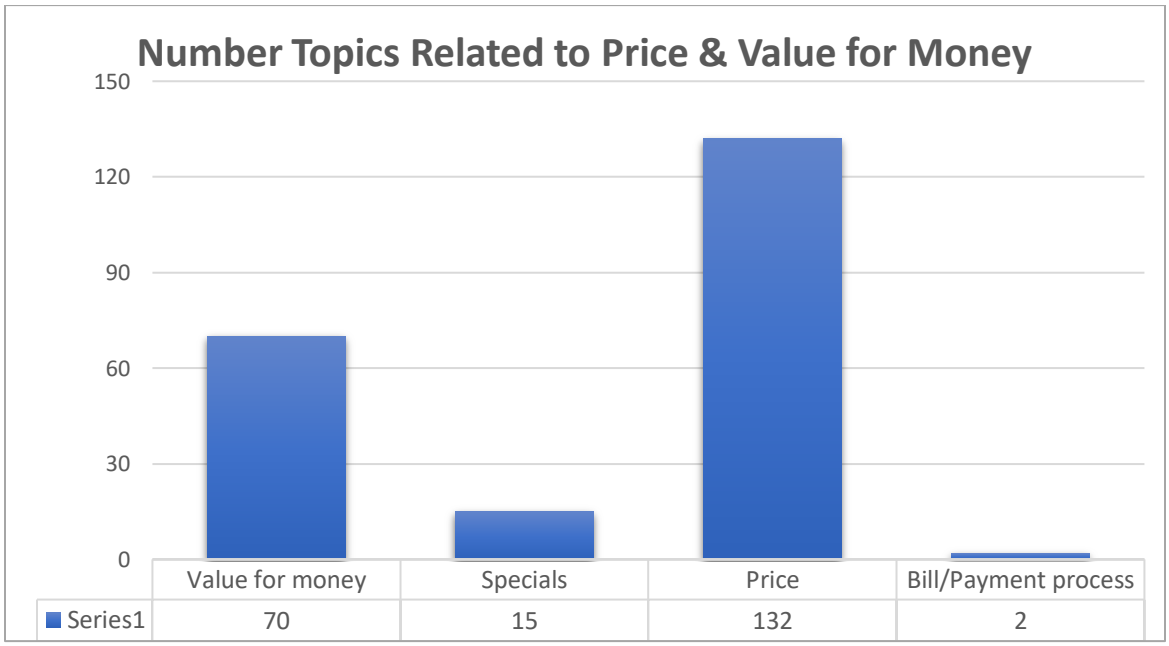


Figure 5.4.6.1

5.4.8 Other Topics Mentioned

Additional subjects that were mentioned in restaurant reviews, included restaurant awards (110) (see Figure 5.4.8.1), other reviews (21), the booking process (25), advice on making bookings (27), children (14), dress code (3) and the COVID-19 pandemic (3). It needs to be noted that only four of the 2020 reviews in this archive were written after the South African pandemic lockdown that was implemented from 27 March to 15 August 2020 (Lebuso, S., 2022, March 27).

The mention of awards by more than a quarter of reviews, as indicated in Figure 5.4.8 was often general, but sometimes specific achievements of the restaurant were mentioned, or comparisons were made to European Michelin star or San Pellegrino 50 Best Restaurants in the World lists. Whilst only one of the three restaurants was on *Eat Out*'s Top Ten list during the 20 years, all three restaurants (Mastrantonio to a lesser extent) were mentioned under awards. The local Eat Out Restaurant Awards are mentioned most often, but only mentioned consistently from 2011, with Diner's Club/American Express Awards mentioned more often in the first decade of the archive (see Figure 5.4.8.2). Tripadvisor awards of excellence or their most popular restaurants are often seen on restaurant websites, but they were not mentioned by reviewers. Other awards included mentions of the Chaine des Rotisseur's blazon which is awarded to restaurants or local professional publications awards such as *Topcar*'s preferred destination or voted by *Fairlady* as the No.1 Romantic Rendezvous (Shelly, 2020, March 3). Professional reviewers generally only mentioned significant awards and they were mentioned as a fact (Bullard, 2013, May, p.55; Trapido, 2006, December, p.82), whereas amateur reviewers seem to refer to the awards status of a restaurant, explaining their expectations: "We have eaten in a number of Michelin star restaurants around the world, so were really looking forward to the 'South African' version" (Lynn, 2014, June). The review would then also mention if these expectations were met.

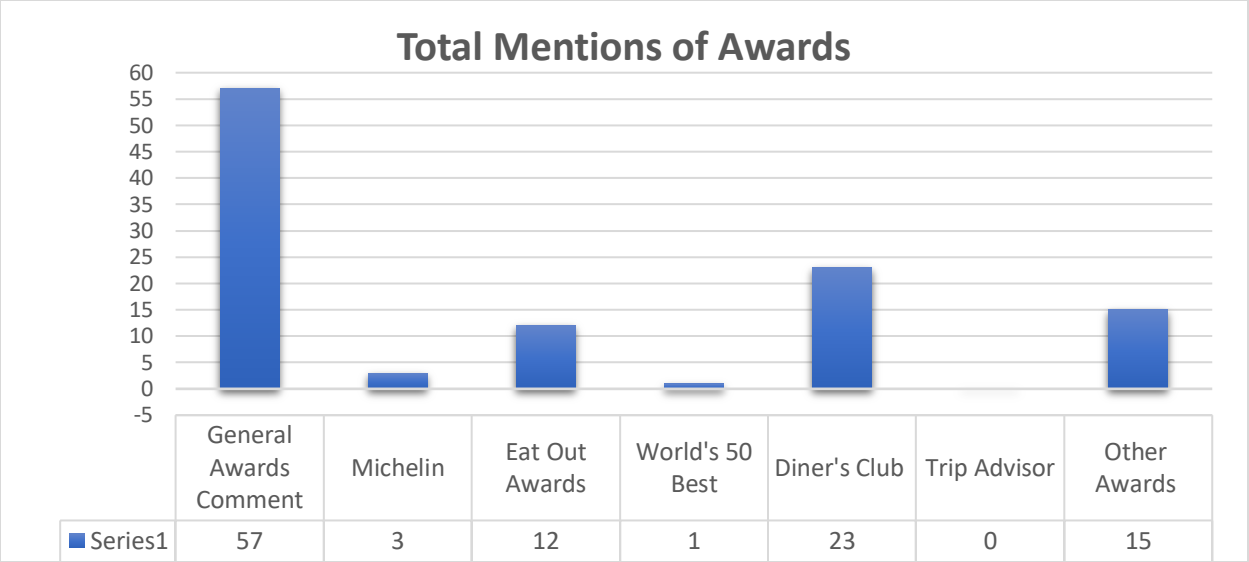


Figure 5.4.8.1

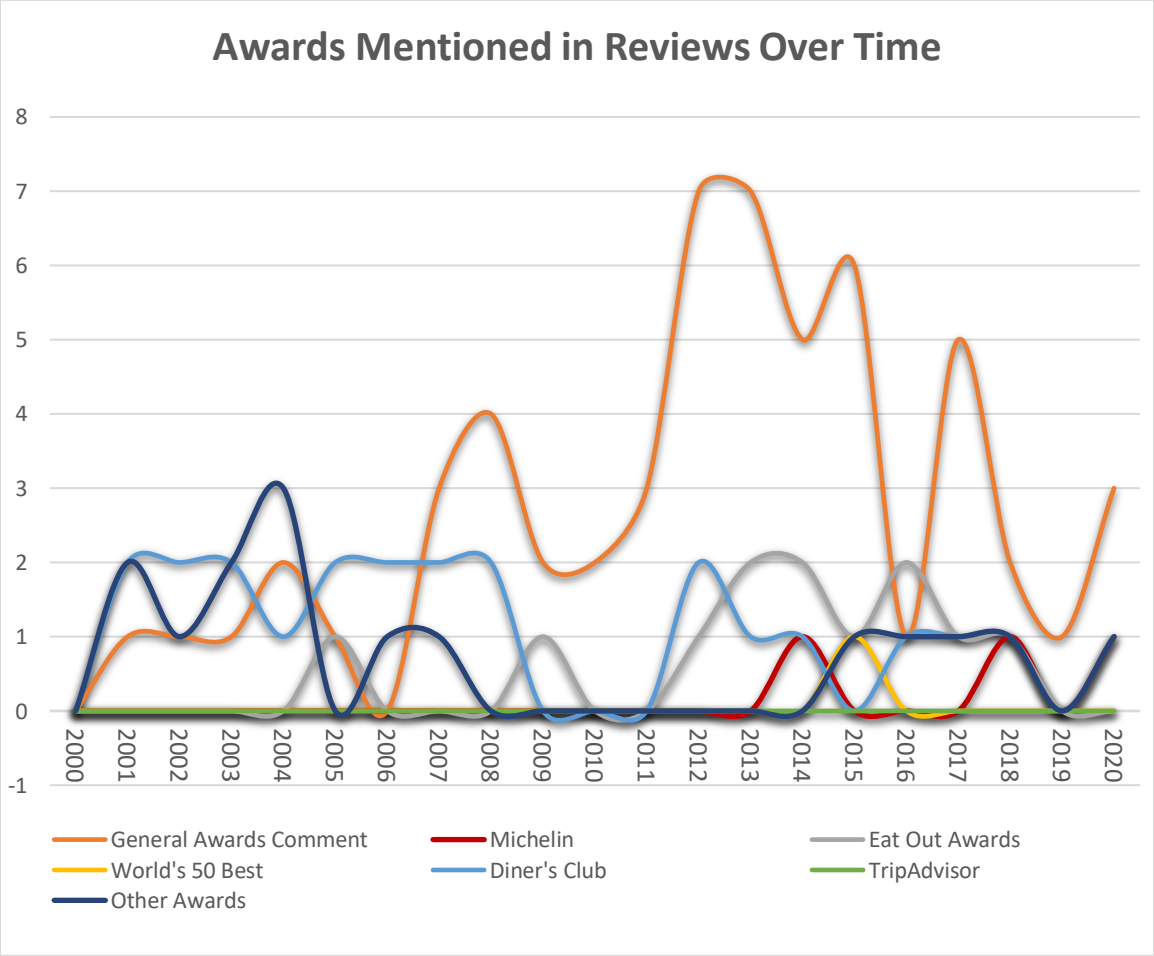


Figure 5.4.9.2

5.4.9 Were Reviews Positive or Negative?

The vast majority of reviews in this archive were positive (347) with less than 20 per cent of negative reviews (78) as indicated in Figure 5.4.9.1. The reviews were not only assessed for overall positive or negative judgments, but also for balance, looking at how many positive reviews included some critical statements, and how many negative reviews also mentioned some positives (see Table 5.4.9.1).

	De Oude Kraal	**Mastrantonio**	**Hartford House**	**Total**
Positive Reviews	76	98	173	347
Positive with Negative Comments	13	21	35	69
Negative Reviews	10	37	31	78
Negative with Positive Comments	5	21	23	49

Table 5.4.9.1 Balanced Reviews – Number of positive and negative comments in positive and negative reviews

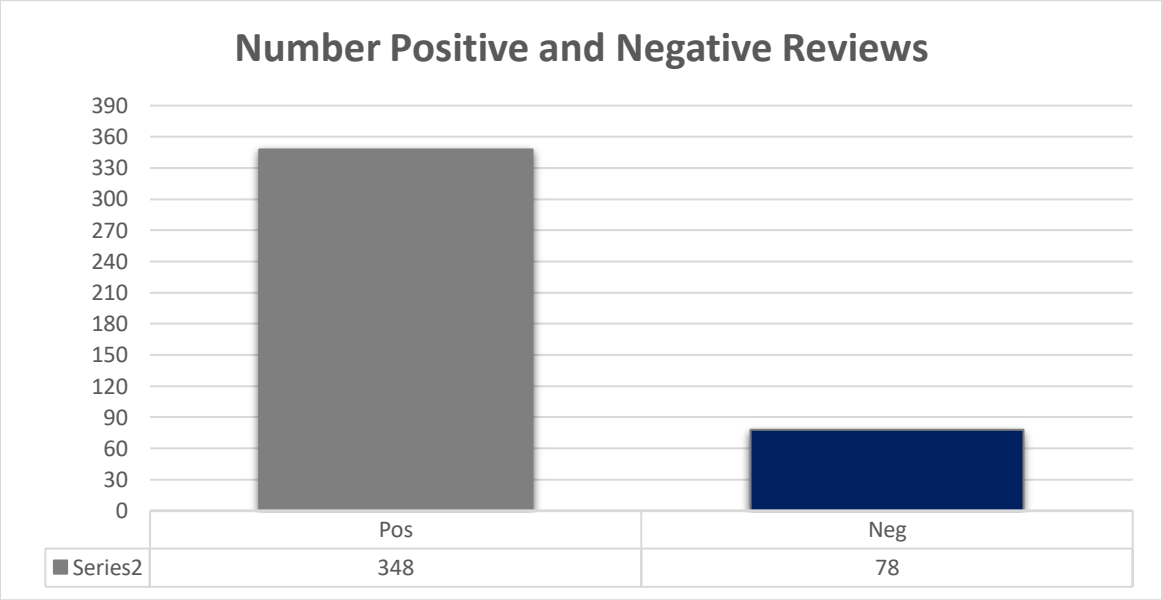


Figure 5.4.9.1

The data suggest that positive reviews were overwhelmingly positive with less than 20 per cent including any negative comments, whilst negative reviews seemed more balanced with 62 per cent also mentioning positives that the writer experienced.

Looking at the positive and negative reviews over time, it is very interesting to note that between 2000 and 2011, there was only one negative review, with the rest of the 77 negative reviews between 2012 and 2020, in line with the period that saw the introduction of rating sites and

increase in amateur reviewers. The first negative review in the archive was also the first Tripadvisor review in the archive and it was a contribution by an international reviewer from London (according to the profile, but the name suggests it might be a South African expat now living in the UK). “The five-course meal was most disappointing - the ingredients not local to the area” (Dassie & Bunny, 2007, January).

The first decade where professional reviewers reigned in the traditional media was thus a fairly uncritical period for the three restaurants in this archive. Whilst not one of the archive reviews written by a professional reviewer was outright negative, they were not unbalanced with 12 of the positive reviews during this time providing some critique. *Eat Out* reviews in this archive especially were overwhelmingly positive, but two reviews did include some critical comments, for example, Lisa van Aswegen suggested that "Meat is a good choice as some of the more elaborate dishes fail to deliver on taste" in her 2006 review of Hartford House (Van Aswegen, 2006, p.214).

The most critical professional review was written about Mastrantonio by Anna Trapido, commenting negatively on both the food and service, yet ends on a positive note: “Overall, Mastrantonio in Illovo is a pleasant restaurant. There is an unpretentious use of good quality ingredients. The food wasn’t perfect, but most of it was jolly nice and being there reminded me of what life should be” (Trapido, 2006, December, p.82).

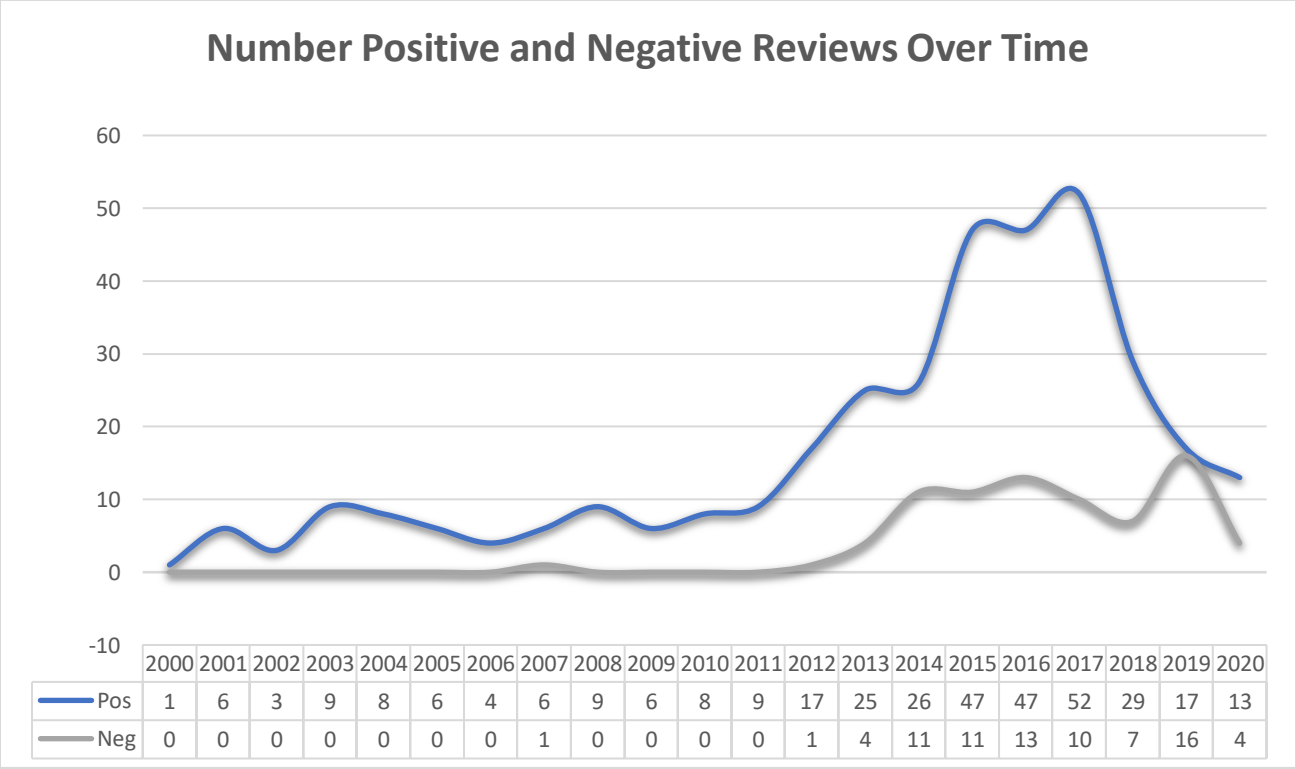
Negative comments by professional reviewers largely focused on the food seasoning, flavour, and technical execution with comments such as “a memorable meal, my only criticism being rather a heavy hand throughout with the salt, though not heavy enough to spoil the pleasure” (Strugo, 2005, January 15). Or service: “Warm greetings by management don't match the lacklustre table service” (Steinfeld, 2019, p.104). All the negative reviews in the archive were written by amateur reviewers and their comments were far more varied in topics, including complaints about the food, service, value for money, price of wines, portion size, special requests that were not adequately addressed, ambience or the fact that children are not allowed in the fine dining rooms.

> Dinner for two tonight, my partner ordered a special without asking the price, big mistake, the summer pasta, prawns tomatoes and rocket not sauce, wait for it R250 the biggest rip-off in history. The service was non existent and the toilets had no soap or hand towels, this pretentious restaurant has a cheek and I will never be back to which was

once my favourite restaurant." (Foodie Lover, 2018, February 2)

When arriving for dinner, there were nobody at the door, no ice in the bar for drinks and no Johnny Walker Black Label either. After ordering drinks, we walked into a cold drawing room and had to light the fireplace ourselves. Dinner were served on the patio and not in the dining room- it was cold. We booked a wine pairing experience and found the wine glasses dirty on the table and were told that it's the machine's fault. With the second pairing the glasses were also dirty and we sent it back. The third time we received dirty glasses, I asked the waiter to inform all the staff to make sure it will not happen again. (Look at the picture where lipstick is still on the rims on glasses in cabinet) However the food was excellent it cannot make up for the disappointing experience. (JjB, 2019, June).

In 2019 the number of negative reviews almost equalled positive reviews with 10 negative reviews written about Hartford House and five about Mastrantonio.



	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Pos	1	6	3	9	8	6	4	6	9	6	8	9	17	25	26	47	47	52	29	17	13
Neg	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	4	11	11	13	10	7	16	4

Figure 5.4.9.2

5.4.10 Conclusion: What were restaurant reviewers writing about?

Food, service and the reviewers themselves were the three most popular topics found in reviews in the archive compiled in this study. Whilst food reigned supreme throughout the 20 years (see Figure 5.4.10.1), it was seldom discussed in great detail, but rather reported on or listed with a simple taste judgement. Service was the second most popular, but only featured significantly in the reviews in the second decade, which suggests that it was of greater importance to amateur reviewers. As per Figure 5.4.4.2, the quality of service received more attention than the quality of food, although general mentions of the food menu remained the most popular subject. When writing about themselves, reviewers often revealed information such as their reason for dining at a restaurant, where else they eat and whether they will return to the restaurant they were reviewing. To support their judgements about a meal or restaurant amateur reviewers often made statements of expertise, whilst professional reviewers more often provided evidence of expertise through detailed discussions. Statements of expertise together with other statements of distinction indicated that experience, special knowledge, high brow, as well as omnivorous tastes, authenticity and a close association with chefs were all markers of capital in this cultural field that reviewers used to try and assert themselves.

Following the top three popular subjects were ambience, wine and beverages, facilities and price and value for money. The ambience was in the first decade of this archive at times the second most popular subject, and although it also increased in the second half of the decade, it was not at the same rate as service and information about the author. The style of the establishment as well as the décor were the most frequently mentioned under ambience.
Even more scarce than detailed food descriptions were wine or beverage descriptions, even though two of the restaurants offered wine pairings with set menus. The wine list was mentioned often, but very simple judgements were made on the list, and only four per cent of reviewers mentioned specific wines and even fewer discussed their quality. This was the trend throughout the 20 years, suggesting that wine and beverages were not significant to either professional or amateur reviewers. With regards to facilities the location was the most frequently mentioned subject and whilst price was the most commonly mentioned in its category, judgements in terms of value for money also featured, whilst several bloggers confirmed that they did not pay for the experiences that they reviewed.

Also discussed in reviews were awards, reservation processes, children, dress codes and COVID-19. Of these subjects only awards received significant attention and were often mentioned, especially by amateur reviewers, to explain their expectations of a restaurant and whether or not they were met.

In terms of positive or negative reviews, the data above showed that professional reviewers in this archive wrote only positive reviews, but not uncritical reviews and then mainly criticised the food or service. Negative reviews on the other hand were written exclusively by amateur reviewers who critiqued a wide variety of services and products offered by the restaurants in the archive.

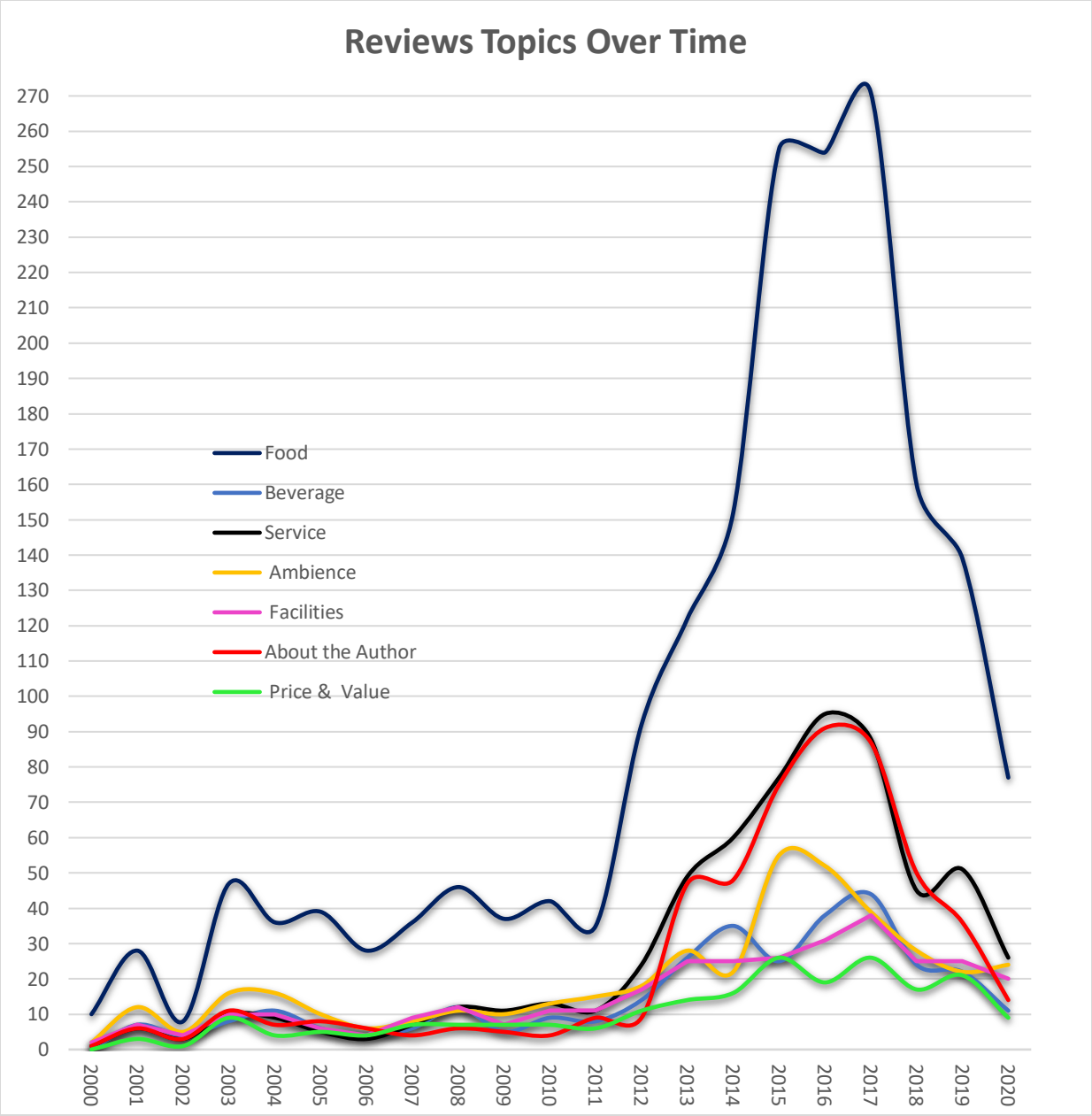


Figure 5.4.10.

5.5 How has the form of restaurant reviews changed?

Similar to who reviewed the restaurants, the form of reviews was also significantly impacted by the introduction of Web 2.0 which brought rating sites, social media and blogs as new "environments" to review restaurants. Barnhurst and Nerone (2001, p.3) explain that "forms" include what is traditionally labelled as layout, design and typography, but that it also includes the use of illustrations, genres of reportage, and schemes of departmentalization.

The form of reviews differed quite significantly depending on the type of publication and therefore general findings will be discussed as an introduction to this section, whereafter the forms in the different publications will receive individual attention.

As discussed in the Methodology the definition of a review in this study included three types of reviews: critique, recommendations and reviews. Reviews dominated (289) the types of restaurant assessments in this archive (see Figure 5.5.1), followed by recommendations (116) and then critiques (21). Reviews varied in length but generally included some discussion (and criticism) on various parts of the dining experience (Steinfeld, 2019, p.104), whilst recommendations were often simply a report of what was eaten, a comment on service or ambience and a judgement like “highly recommend” or, “will be back” (Phillipinlondodn2017, 2018, March 7). Critiques were the longest and most detailed discussions of the dining experience and were the only type of review that was dominated by professional reviewers (Strugo 2005, January 15; Trapido 2006, December, p.82).

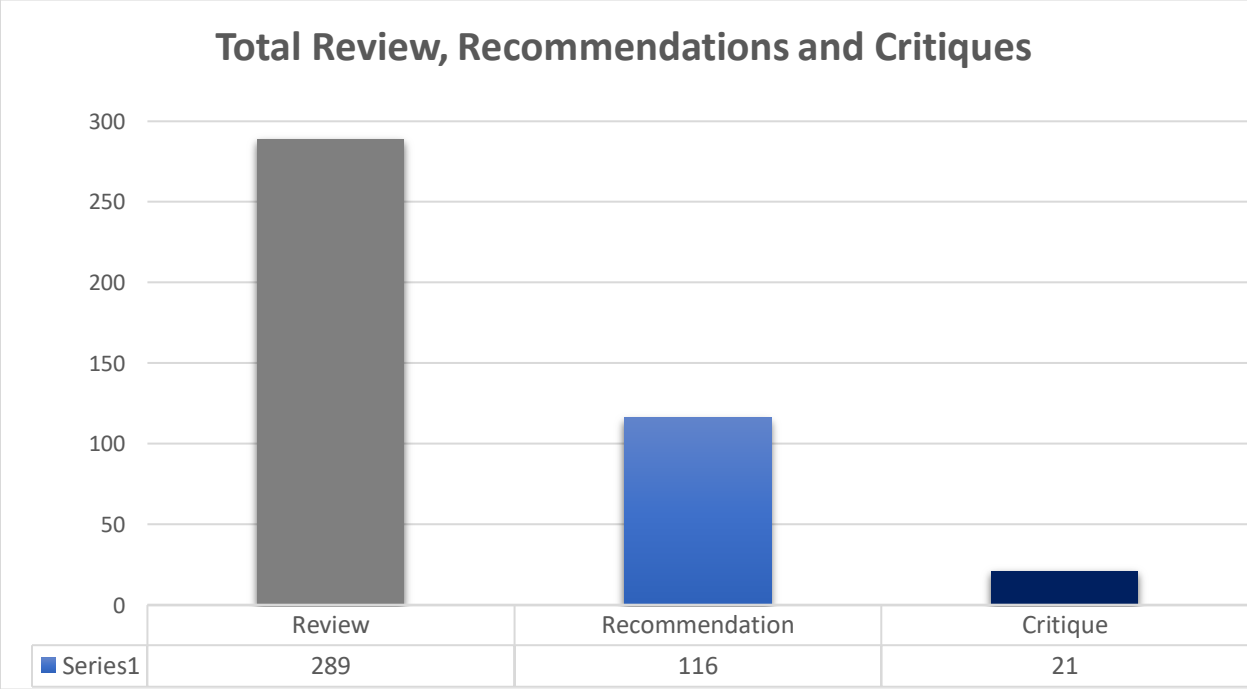
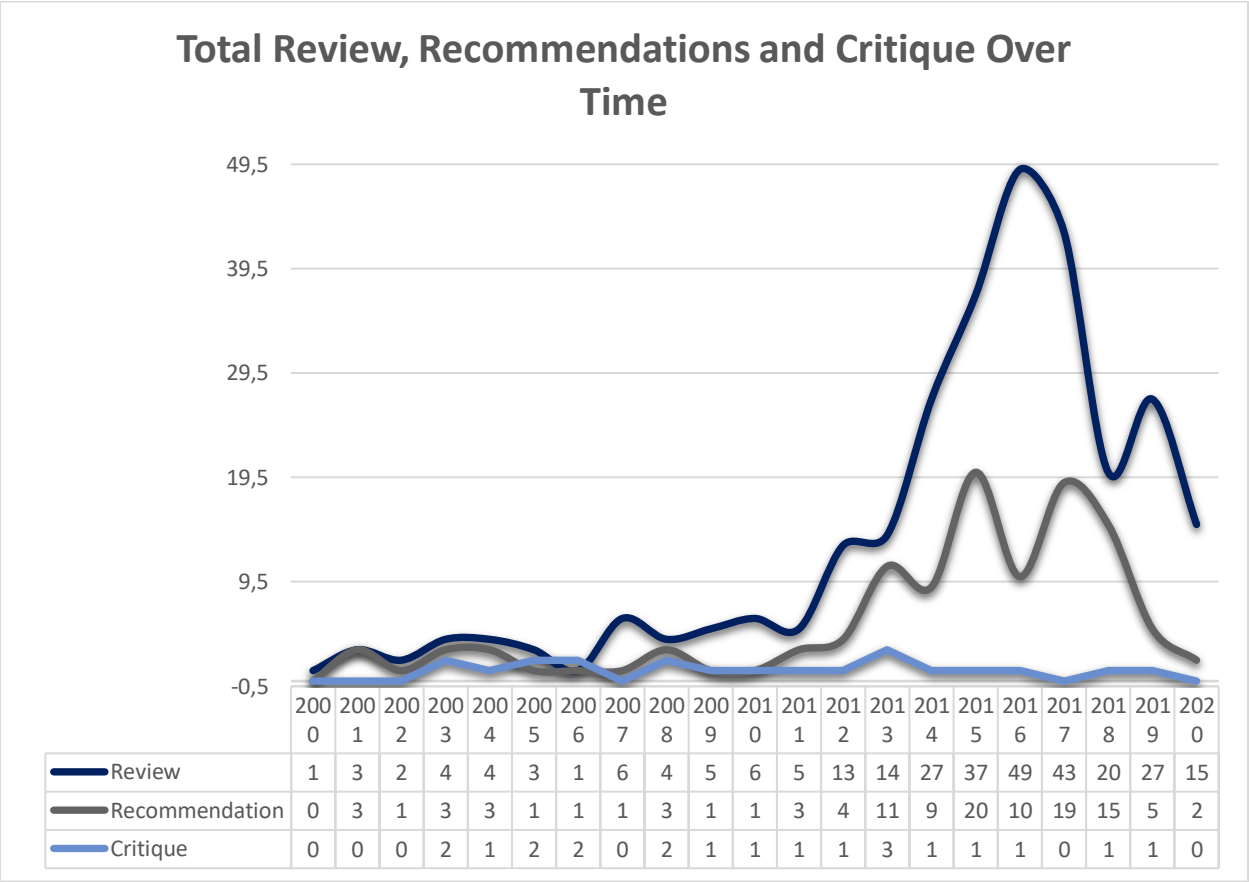


Figure 5.5.1

Figure 5.2.2 below indicates the movement of the different types of reviews over time, with critiques slightly increasing in 2013 and declining towards 2020. Reviews dominated throughout the period except 2006 when it was outnumbered by critiques, but between 2013 and 2017 it increased rapidly before it declined in line with the drop in rating site reviews and amateur

reviews. Similarly, the curve of critiques follows the curve of professional reviewers seen in 5.3 Who Reviewed the Restaurants?



	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Review	1	3	2	4	4	3	1	6	4	5	6	5	13	14	27	37	49	43	20	27	15
Recommendation	0	3	1	3	3	1	1	1	3	1	1	3	4	11	9	20	10	19	15	5	2
Critique	0	0	0	2	1	2	2	0	2	1	1	1	1	3	1	1	1	0	1	1	0

Figure 5.5.2

Considering that the length of reviews varied according to form, it is difficult to generalise the length of reviews, especially when measured over time, as per Figure 5.5.3. However, most of the review lengths ranged between 400 and 600 words, but 2005 and 2020 saw drastic increases. 2005 is due to one magazine and one newspaper review about De Oude Kraal which were both longer than 700 words and in 2020 the increase is due to an increase in blog reviews (3) and a general decline in other reviews due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

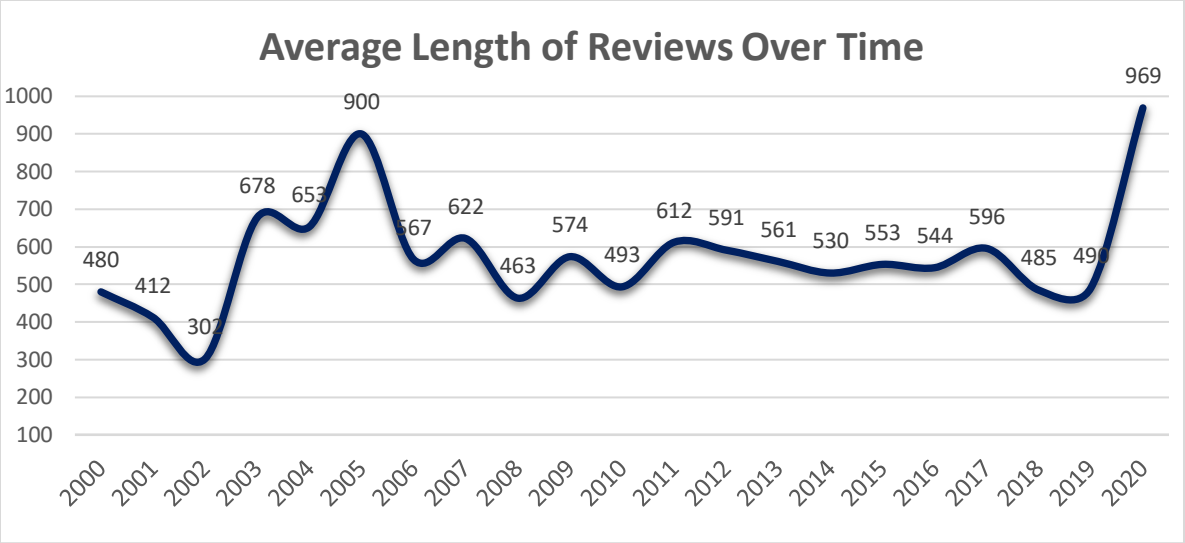


Figure 5.5.3

It is interesting to note that De Oude Kraal was the least reviewed of the restaurants but had the highest average length of reviews (266 words) followed by Hartford House (210 words) and Mastrantonio with 128 words. To put these numbers into perspective, it needs to be considered that both De Oude Kraal and Hartford House offered accommodation, and reviews were generally combined and not only focused on dining. However, reviews that did not include sufficient information about the restaurants were considered accommodation reviews and were not included in the archive.

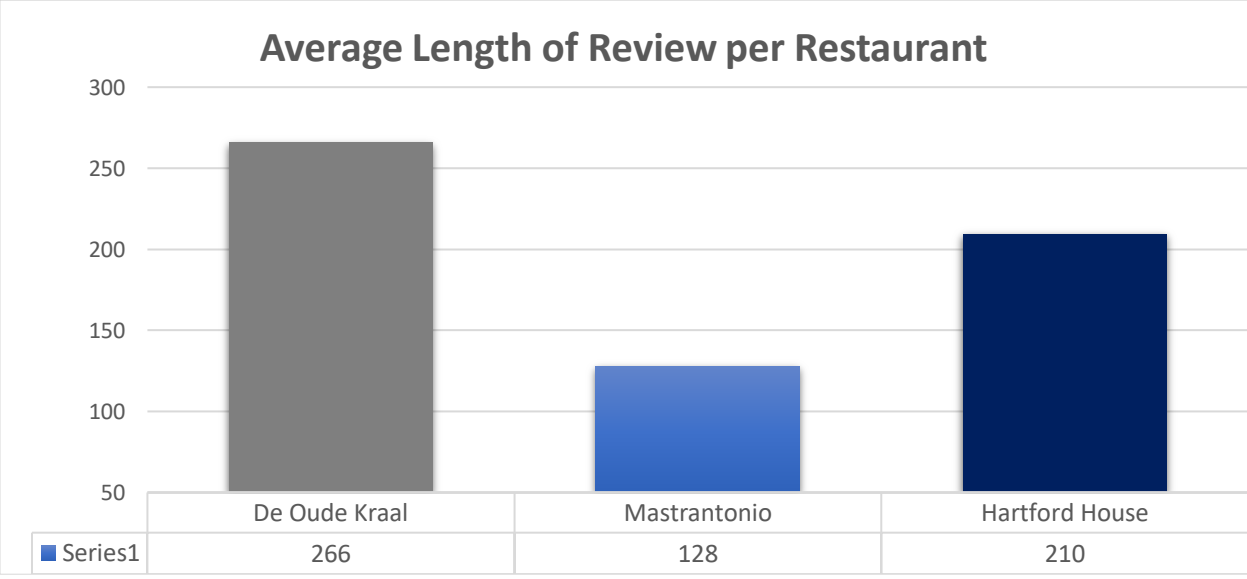


Figure 5.5.4

All reviews were assessed according to their tone and categorised as formal, (professional and edited) or informal (unedited) discussions. Spelling mistakes, poor grammar and the excessive use of punctuation marks were the most common indicators of informal reviews, as well as the excessive use of adjectives and the inclusion of emojis. Descriptions in informal reviews were often missing articles and filled with adjectives like “amazing”, “delight,” exceptional,” “yummy,” and “beautiful,” whilst formal reviews included fewer adjectives and more detailed descriptions of the food and atmosphere. Two of the most common spelling mistakes found in reviews included the words dessert and restaurant.

The number of informal reviews outnumbered (231) formal reviews (195), as per Figure 5.5.5 but when assessing the numbers over time (see Figure 5.5.6) the tone of reviews was formal in the first decade under study and only increased significantly in 2013 and declined significantly in 2018, in line with the curve of rating site reviews, discussed earlier (see Figure 5.2.4). Formal reviews also increased and declined during this period, but not as radically as informal reviews.

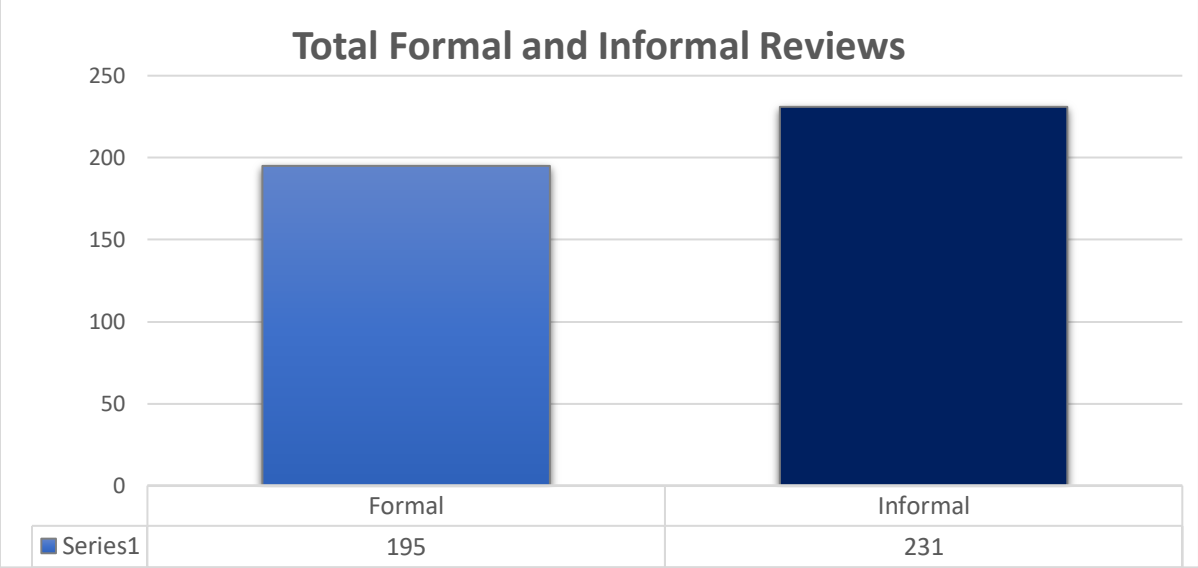


Figure 5.5.5

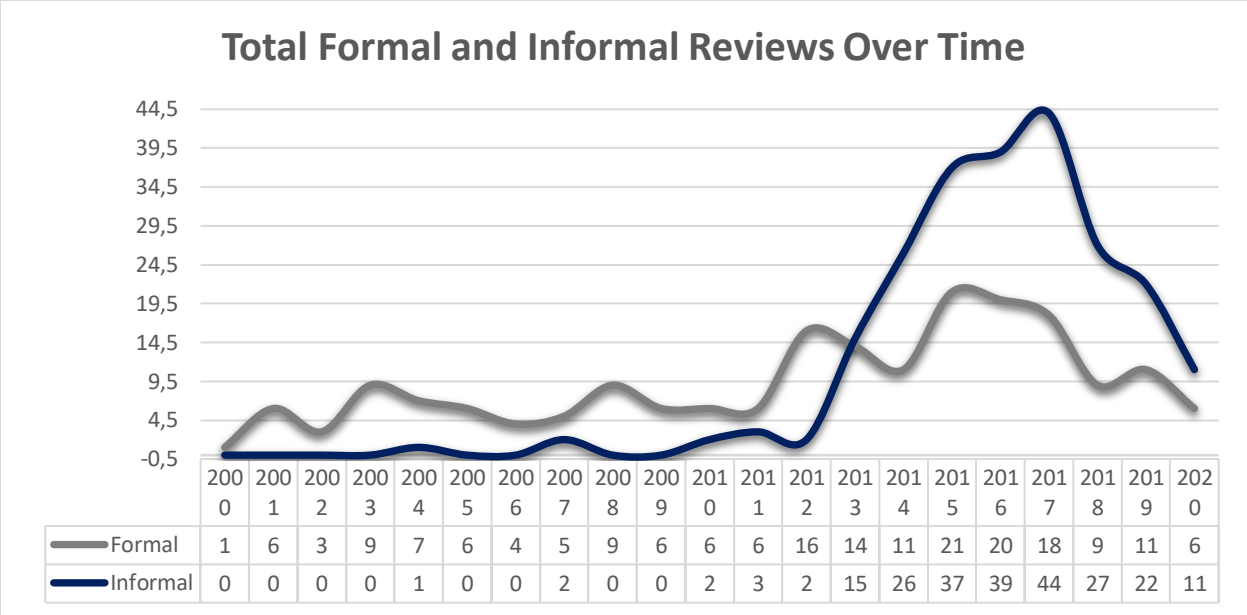


Figure 5.5.6

Like the length of reviews, the publication of images was also dependent on the form dictated by specific publications. Whilst restaurant guides rarely included images, magazine reviews and blogs almost always included at least one image of the restaurant or a dish. De Oude Kraal had the longest average reviews, but Hartford House reviews included more images (53) followed by De Oude Kraal (23) and Mastrantonio (15) as indicated in Figure 5.7.7. Hartford House is also the only restaurant whose reviews included four videos (see Figure 5.7.8). In terms of publications, the greatest contributor of images in the last quarter of this archive has been blogs. The combination of copy and text might suggest that the form of blogs is similar to that of traditional media magazines, but images seem to play a far more important role, for example, Sam Linsell's blog review of Hartford House included 37 images (2017, July 24).

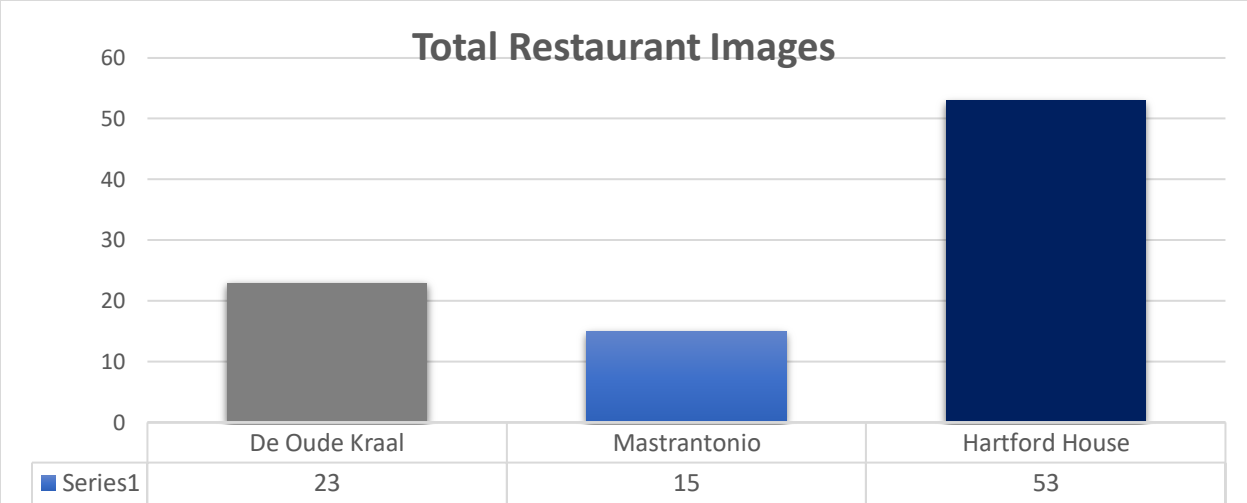


Figure 5.5.7

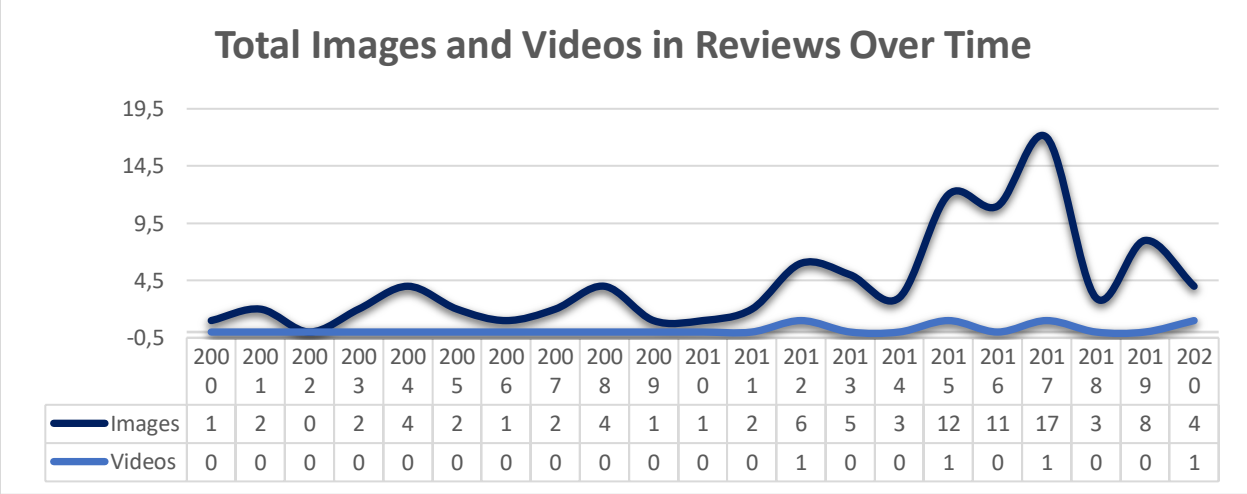


Figure 5.5.8

Another form feature of reviews that were recorded in this study was reviews that included some type of rating system. The data shows that the vast majority of reviews (300) included a rating or score, ranging from the Tripadvisor score system that requires users to rate Value, Service and Food (The Nagle, 2013, March), to *Rossouw's Restaurant Guide*'s five-star system (Trapido, 2015), Anne Stevens' hats in the *Eating Out* guide in *The Mercury* (Stevens 2003, December, p.2), as well as Google Review's five-star rating (Tau,2018) and *JHP Gourmet Guide*'s new plate system (Handley, 2016, p.8). *Eat Out* did not subscribe to rating systems other than the top ten awards and everyday eatery recognition, but their user reviews on the websites did include a five-star rating system similar to Google reviews. In 2022 however, the restaurant guide

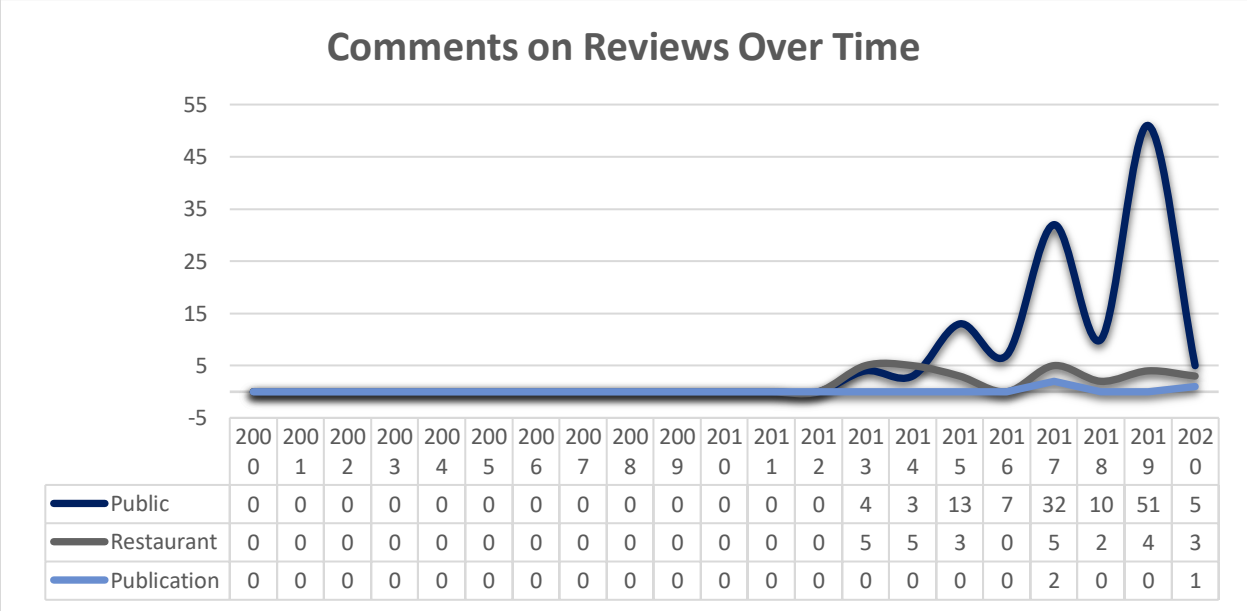
announced a new scoring system which saw 40 restaurants receiving either one, two or three stars (Smith,2023, p.58) similar to the *Michelin Guide*.

The introduction of Web 2.0 brought an additional change to the reviewing landscape and form of reviews as it allowed users and restaurants to respond to the reviews. Whilst there always have been letter columns in traditional media, commenting directly and instantly on reviews is an element that in the second decade of this archive (see Figure 5.5.9) enhanced the "democratisation" of media. This function was especially popular on social media platforms like the Facebook group Jozi Restaurants - The good, the bad, the ugly. It is also this platform that is responsible for the steep rise in comments in 2019, where a single Mastrantonio review (Review 201910) resulted in 45 comments and an in-depth discussion and almost a lecture in service, which even resulted in its own hashtag "#belikelesley". Whilst this was a back and forward conversation within a group of people, the 45 comments were made by 30 different individuals.

After the Facebook group in this archive, most other comments were in blogs, followed by rating sites. Apart from Zomato, rating sites did not allow users to write comments, but they could give a "thank you," "helpful vote" or "like". Restaurants could however respond in writing to reviews if they "claimed" their listings, and as per Figure 5.5.9, although comments were not made often, restaurants did use the opportunity from 2013 on, especially Hartford House and on two occasions, De Oude Kraal. Mastrantonio never responded to comments on social media platforms, although the owners did join the Facebook group, Jozi Restaurants. The decline in comments in 2020 follows the overall decline in the number of reviews as discussed earlier in the findings. The three comments from publications were from two bloggers who thanked readers for their comments and one response to a review posted on a personal Facebook timeline in which Hartford House thanked the reviewer and shared the review to their official Facebook page. Restaurant comments not only allowed establishments to thank guests for good reviews but also seemed to be a platform to resolve issues, where guests complained. For some, it seemed to be a platform to share complaints already raised with the establishment (Jj B, 2019, June) whilst others were using it as a "last resort" to get the attention of the restaurants: "P.s. this is my last resort - I normally would not post such a comment but have no choice as I have not heard back from you. Please treat you prospective guests better when they raise an issue over emails!" (sic) (Plume, 2019, April 24).

Restaurant's responses to reviews additionally raised issues of authenticity, for example, Hartford House's comment on Bernice B's review (2020, February) that they could not find her booking details and had never served the food that she mentioned in the review: "Chef [Name removed] and I are particularly concerned about the comments regarding dinner as we have not served Chicken Potjie, nor rice in this restaurant."

Whilst it would take a different methodology to investigate fake reviews, only two reviews stood out as obviously fake, the one mentioned above, as well as a review written on the rating site Dining-Out about De Oude Kraal. The very short review: "Great Dinner" and the five-star rating was written by a family member of the restaurant owners and also an employee of the establishment (De Oude Kraal, 2017, August 21). This review was however not included in the archive as it did not meet the minimum word count.



	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Public	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	3	13	7	32	10	51	5
Restaurant	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	5	3	0	5	2	4	3
Publication	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1

Figure 5.5.9

5.5.1 Restaurant Guides

Restaurant guides have been some of the most consistent contributors of reviews to this archive, and it has been interesting to observe the changes in form in these publications over two decades. Restaurant guides in this archive included *Eat Out*, *The Mercury's Eating Out*, *Rossouw's Restaurant Guide*, *Dine: Where to Eat* and *JHP Gourmet Guide.*

Except for *JHP Gourmet Guide* reviews, which published significantly fewer reviews than other guides, the length of reviews in restaurant guides was generally short, ranging from 44 words (Stevens, 2003, December) to 156 (Steinfeld, 2019, p.104). Accompanying the short

descriptions in *Eating Out* and *Eat Out*, were a list of symbols or a review legend that supplied additional information to the reader such as price, awards, special views, whether a restaurant was licenced, allowed corkage, and smoking, and whether it was wheelchair accessible, had baby changing facilities, and secure parking. The *Eat Out 2017* even included a symbol to indicate restaurants that were operational during load-shedding and included a symbol for Wi-Fi access (Donnely, 2017, p.12). *Rossouws Restaurant Guide* and *Dine* did not use symbols but did include the information in texts as a short introduction for each restaurant. For all guides, the restaurant name, address and contact details were always included, but assessment criteria varied in terms of symbols but also the focus in the short texts.

As already discussed under the Service findings in 5.4. *Eat Out* 2002 for example divided the review up under "The Place" and "The Wine List" (Snyman, 2002) but by 2020 it includes the headings "Best for," "Food," "Drinks," "Service," and "Ambience," (Horler, 2020), ensuring consistent reviewing throughout.

Rossouw's Restaurant Guide did not add headings to the short descriptions and wine list assessments were notably absent from the guide until 2013, when it added the basic description "Good wine list" (Hartford House, 2013). *JHP Gourmet Guide* addressed the lack of wine focus in its guide by stating: "There is also little emphasis on wine as we believe that it is a guide all on its own, and there are many reputable ones" (Handley, 2016, p.7).

Whilst reader interaction through commenting on reviews, was really the domain of rating sites, it was interesting to note that *Rossouw's Restaurant Guide* invited readers to comment on restaurants by sending emails or an SMS to a cell phone number in the 2005 edition (Rossouw, 2015, p.68), but by the following year only the website address was left to comment to and eventually, the request to comment was completely removed from later editions.

A concerning observation in two of the restaurant guides was that reviews some years, hardly changed, despite being sold as an annual update. This included reviews about Hartford House in 2010 and 2011 in *Rossouw's Restaurant Guide* in which there is a 6-word difference (additional filler words added to the 2011 review), yet the star rating of the restaurant changed from one star to two and a half (Rossouw, 2010, p.292; Rossouw, 2011, p.298). This is one of numerous examples, and it therefore seemed to be common practice for the guide. In *Eat Out,* differences between Peter Feldman's 2010 and 2011 reviews of Mastrantonio were also minimal, with two

paragraphs of food descriptions added to the 2011 review dish descriptions, but everything else was word-for-word the same (Feldman, 2011, p,68).

The form in the *JHP Gourmet Guide* (launched in 2016) has been quite different, as it combined the restaurant reviews with chef interviews as well as recipes and featured less than 100 restaurants in their launch edition (Handley, 2016), with the 2020 guide exclusively featuring the 36 restaurants that they rewarded plates to, and thus recommend (Handley, 2020). This form allowed for several images of each restaurant, something that is noticeably absent from all other restaurant guides. Embracing new technology the 2016/17 guide concluded with a list of QR codes for readers to access the websites of the restaurants; these were however omitted from the 2020 guide.

5.5.2 Magazines

Magazines had the most varied forms of reviews in this archive but three distinct categories of form were identified: the column, the combined themed feature where restaurants were reviewed alongside other businesses or the stand-alone feature which was only written about the destination restaurants. Columns could further be divided into restaurant or travel review columns. Restaurant columns included *Wine Magazine*'s Eat Beat (Trapido, 2006, p.82.), *Habitat*'s Mouthpiece: Eating Out (Sharp, 2003, August, p.148), and *TAXtalk*'s Eat.Drink.Read (Franklin, 2014, p.76). Review forms in columns varied in length but in general travel, columns were longer. Travel columns included *Destiny Man*'s Hot Spots (Siddall, 2017, September, p100), *Farmer's Weekly's* Lifestyle: Rural Tourism (Berkman, 2020, October 9, pp.58-59) and *Lig*'s *Ontspan: Vat Pad* (Relax: Hit the Road) (Pretorius, 2012, March, pp. 30-31.) *Top Car*'s Impression combined travel or dining destination reviews with car reviews (Els, 2014), and although not a column, but rather a series *Woolworths Taste* had a similar feature sponsored by Mercedes called Foodie Drive in which restaurants were featured alongside cars as part of "Gourmet Road Trips" (Roberts, 2008, March, p.106-109).

When not reviewed in a dedicated column, restaurants in this archive were often reviewed alongside other restaurants or businesses as part of a larger story, with a specific theme. Themes were often an overview of regions or cities, like the Natal Midlands (Hoepfl, 2003, p.115; Burgener, 2008, pp.62-65), or Bloemfontein (Popper, 2000, pp.108-111) or even a neighbourhood, with Lisa van der Knaap reviewing Mastrantonio in *Food & Home Entertaining* as part of an "Out and About: Illovo" feature (2012, June). Other themes included a focus on

romantic destinations (McArthur & Liackman, 2011, February, p144; Hilton-Barber, 2001, p.124-125.) or Italian cuisine in Johannesburg (Sleet & Diederiks, 2005, p.31).

The stand-alone features of the destination restaurants were generally one or two-page features with the restaurant as the focus, but they included an extensive context discussing the larger estate (Wasserfal & Comins, 2003, p.52; Stugo, 2005, July; Janeke, 2007, July; Bullard, 2013, May, pp55-58. Strugo, 2004, pp.48-50).

Some magazines like *Style* also had their own restaurant guide, but these forms followed those of other restaurant guides and were considered as a guide rather than a magazine review (Davidson, 2003, pp.113-114).

5.5.3 Newspapers

Newspaper coverage of restaurant reviews, especially in the first decade of the archive, seemed specific to columns which were written by dedicated food writers. *The Saturday Star*'s Le Gastronome column was written by Vitor Strugo (Strugo, 2005, January 15), *Die Volksbad* had a column Nonnie Eet @... written by Nonnie Dedekind (2001, August 3) and *The Mercury* had Eating Out, which was first written by Anne Stevens (2003, May 9), and later by Frank Chemaly (2016, November 7). As discussed under guides, *The Mercury* also had its own restaurant guide. *The Sunday Times* had a column called Food Reviews, but it was written by a variety of reviewers (Seid, S. 2015, October 21), as was the *City Press'* Eat Review (Fisher & Henning, 2012) which formed part of their *i* lifestyle supplement.

As discussed in 5.2, newspaper reviews declined towards 2020, and the forms also changed, with less evidence of dedicated review columns, but reviews were rather presented as more general articles under a food and lifestyle section of the publication, such as Mart-Marié du Toit's "Farm-to-table fare goes gourmet at this Bloemfontein eatery" in the *Sunday Times* (Du Toit, 2017, April 16.)

5.5.4 Websites and Digital Publications

The form of reviewing on websites and digital publications differed significantly and specific categories could not be identified. Some were the websites of print publications such as *Eat Out* or restaurant award websites, World 50 Best, whilst others were online community magazines like *The Bugle*, or "food newspapers" (The Gourmet Guys) or food and wine online magazines such as *Wine Magazine*, *Crush Mag Online* and *Food 24*. Whilst they all shared a common

digital home, the intentions of the publication seemed to determine the form of reviews, similar to the differences in print newspapers and magazines.

Interesting to note that although the *Eat Out* website represented the annual print publication, the website is an extension of the print version, rather than a digital copy. Apart from regular news, the critics' reviews for restaurants were longer than the versions in the printed publication and as discussed earlier under 5.3 Who Reviewed the Restaurants they included a section for User Reviews which functioned like a rating site (Hartford House, n.d.). Reviews on *The Bugle*, the website of the printed weekly community magazine, however, represent the publication's print version.

Wine Magazine's digital version has a similar form to its original Eat Beat print column, where the longer text (729 words for Anna Trapido's 2018 review of Hartford House (Trapido, 2018, October 16)) is accompanied by a single image. The most significant difference however is that the review ends with a comment section, which allows readers to contribute their opinions, be it about the review or the restaurant itself. *Crush Mag Online* is a food and travel magazine which reviewed restaurants under their Restaurant column. The form included shorter text and more images than *Wine Magazine*, but it seems that similar to *Wine Magazine* their last restaurant review was published in 2020 (Blanko Restaurant at the Alphen Hotel, 2020, September).

Food 24 is the sister site to Eat Out and specifies that they do not review restaurants (How to pitch, n.d.), but similar to the print magazines they also include themed features that ultimately include reviews, such as Jared Ruttenberg's "5 Midlands eateries worth visiting on your Meander" (2018, January 22), instead of images, though, the site includes the Instagram profile and images of each of the eateries discussed. Ruttenberg is a freelance writer and the review ends with "Follow Jared Ruttenberg on Instagram and visit his website for more SA food and travel adventures!" linking to his personal website or blog, @JaredinCPT, where the same article is published. Similar to the Food 24 review, The World 50 Best also combined several restaurant reviews under the umbrella article of "Four South African dining gems to visit in 2018" (Govender-Ypma, 2018, January 23).

Gourmet Guys has not been updated since 2013 and is perhaps more a blog than an online newspaper, although the focus is food, rather than a specific person. The site contains some original content, but much of it appears to be lifted from various food news sites, which

does question the authenticity of its Harford House review. Although there are observations about the menu, there is not a clear indication that the author, Ander Lieber, ate there. The review also includes a YouTube video made by Expresso explaining the awards, not his own dining experience (2012, December 7).

Independent Online (IOL) is the website of the Independent Media's newspapers and the review featured in this archive was published under Lifestyle and Food Drink but combines an interview of a celebrity with a restaurant review of Mastrantonio: "Doing Italian cuisine with SA's very own Judge Dread," (2007, July 12). With no author or profile photo like many articles on the site, it does seem like it could be a poorly digitised version of a review that appeared in print and was not written specifically for the digital publication.

5.5.5 Rating Sites

Rating sites are named after their most significant feature. Whilst some newspaper, magazine and digital publication reviews include a score or rating system as discussed above, this is the main purpose of these sites to rate and tally up the scores of user reviewers, almost like a never-ending live polling station. As explained in the Tripadvisor guidelines, the ratings "may have an impact on the property's position in Tripadvisor's popularity rankings and/or how a property appears on our platform," (Review Guidelines, 2022, October) and therefore the scores matter to businesses.

Rating site reviews generally start with an introduction which is provided by a restaurant itself if it "claimed" the restaurant. This is a marketing platform that allows the restaurant to introduce users to its services. Often restaurants would post images as well as their current menus. This introduction is then followed by user reviews.

Whilst all review sites in this archive require reviewers to give an overall score, Google reviews require reviewers to specifically rate the food, service and atmosphere (Illovo Mastrantonio, n.d.), whilst Tripadvisor also includes a rating for value (Braintrust777, 2019, October 4).

Apart from guiding reviewers in the elements of the dining experience to rate, rating sites also provided a template for reviewing the restaurants. Most templates require an overall rating, a heading for the review when the restaurant was visited, a space for the body of the review and lastly images. Tripadvisor also requires reviewers to write a minimum of 100 characters for their review to be published. Tripadvisor additionally requires reviewers to confirm authenticity by ticking a terms and conditions declaration stating:

> I certify that this review is based on my own experience and is my genuine opinion of this restaurant and that I have no personal or business relationship with this establishment, and have not been offered any incentive or payment originating from the establishment to write this review. I understand that Tripadvisor has a zero-tolerance policy on fake reviews. Learn more about the consequences of review fraud. (Tell us, how was your visit, n.d.)

Booking.com had a different strategy to ensure authenticity as only people who booked accommodation through their site can review the accommodation that they booked for. Reviewers are required to supply their booking details (Enter your booking details, n.d.) (booking number and pin provided by the site) before they can access the reviewing platform, providing evidence that the reviewer did stay in the accommodation. They also advertise on their site that they have "100% verified reviews". All rating sites however included guidelines and policies to encourage fair and authentic reviewing (Guidelines and Policies, n.d.; Prohibited & restricted content, n.d.; Review Guidelines, 2022, October).

Tripadvisor is the only platform that requires reviewers to specify when they visited a restaurant and it records the date on which the review is published. This indicated the timeframe within which reviewers wrote their reviews, and whilst the majority of reviews were written soon after, or within a month of the experience, some reviewers waited for nearly a year (Kardoesie, 2015, Jun 21; cape-town-best, 2012, May) to share their thoughts.

Google Reviews did not require a minimum number of characters for reviews to be published, but it did seem to guide reviewers even more with a variety of buttons that could be selected to complete the review, ranging from the meal type and money spent to specific dishes to recommend or additional information about wheelchair access, children, vegetarian options, parking and dietary restrictions (Illovo Mastrantonio, n.d.). Booking.com seem to encourage balanced reviews requiring guests to write something good and bad about the establishment in a template that includes a smiley face emoji and an unhappy face emoji in their template (Niki-Jay, 2019, May 6).

Whilst users review the restaurants, the sites also review the users and encourage them to participate as much as possible through level systems aligned to the number of contributions they make to the sites resulting in recognition through badges. On Google you can become a "Local

Guide" (Points, levels, and badging, n.d.) or on Tripadvisor be recognised as a "Level 6 Contributor" (LindaH475 Profile, n.d.). These systems attempt to create experts in an amateur reviewing space, with Tripadvisor calling some of their Level Categories "Luxury Hotel Expert" or "Restaurant Expert" (LindaH475's TripCollective Progress, n.d.). In addition to this recognition that users can achieve, they can also follow each other on the rating sites and each person's profile is accompanied by the number of reviews they have written as well as the number of helpful votes and people following them (LindaH475 Profile, n.d.).

As discussed in the introduction to this section, the review form on rating sites allowed readers to comment with a "helpful vote" on Tripadvisor or a "like" on Google and written comments on Zomato. Restaurants who have "claimed" their listings could however respond in writing on all platforms. Although reviewers could not comment on each other's reviews, there was evidence of reviews being written in response to other reviews, where reviewers call each other by their name and either confirm or deny similar experiences.

> The food standard is always very high, so, frankly, I was very surpised (sic) to read that another reviewer, Mr Khan, was not so happy with it. Accidents happen, for sure, but sometimes authentic Italian food does not satisfy the palate of those who are not accustomed to it and maybe expect some domesticated or "africanised" taste. (Enrico d, 2014, September 11)

Despite the form allowing it to comment, the reviews on rating sites were not spaces of great culinary discussion, but rather one-directional thoughts expressed.

5.5.6 Blogs

Whilst rating sites in this archive shared similar features to restaurant guides, blogs to a large extent seemed to copy magazine-style review features. All blogs in this archive included restaurant reviews as a section of their blog, similar to a column in a print or online magazine (Linsell, 2017, July 24; Engelbrecht, 2023) and combined text, images and videos to share their opinions. The greatest difference between print or digital media magazine reviews and blogs is the personal tone in the unedited writing and the number of images. As discussed above under images, reviews on blogs like Drizzle and Dip (Linsel, 2017, July 24) included 37 images, and Llewellyn Lambert's (2016) review 20 images.

Most, but not all blogs in this review included a comment section where readers could interact, but most comments seem to be compliments on a good review or the blog: “Love your blogs Tammy! This place is absolutely stunning!” (Tammy & Byron, 2020, January 16), rather than an in-depth discussion.

5.5.7 Social Media

Facebook and Instagram were the only two social media platforms that featured in this archive. The form of Instagram reviews was unique and could not, like blogs and rating sites, be compared to a traditional or other online form of reviews. The only Instagram review was @Jaredincpt’s review of Hartford House (2017, December 23) which included a 94-word description, in which the chef was “tagged,” accompanied by one video and three images. The text also included a plate, knife and fork emoji.

Emojis seemed quite common not only in Instagram posts but especially in comments or responses, with six out of 23 comments to this review including emojis. They are described as “a small digital image or icon used to express an idea, emotion, etc., in electronic communications” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023). The comment section on Instagram allows readers to simply “love” a post or comment in writing, which could include emojis. Both Hartford House and their chef commented on the review.

Another feature of social media reviews was the inclusion of “hashtags.” Jaredincpt’s review included 15 different hashtags, mainly indicating the area of the restaurant for example #midlands and #midlandsmeander, #southafrica, whilst others were reaching out to *Eat Out* with #eatout or said something about the experience with #localislekker or the reviewer - #travelwriter. As explained in the literature review, hashtags on social media and applications are a hash sign followed by phrases or words that help to relate a post to specific topics. On Instagram users can choose to follow specific people or topics through hashtags. Readers were also given the option to share reviews on other platforms or as personal messages on Instagram. Similar to rating sites Instagram requires the writer to complete a profile which can reveal as little or as much as the author chooses, but the standard form tells readers how many posts have been published, how many people follow this account and how many accounts or people the author is following. In this profile, authors could add links to personal websites or blogs, which seemed quite common, with Jaredincpat sharing the website details of his blog and travel business.

Unlike Instagram, Facebook had different review forms which depended on where a review was posted. In this archive three different types of Facebook reviews were identified: reviewers could review by either recommending or not, a restaurant on the establishment's Facebook page (Sherwood Smith, 2017, September 5) writing a review on their personal timeline (Naidoo, 2017, December 7) or joining a private group that focuses on restaurants and share their opinions there (Friedman, 2019, June 20). Reviews posted on the business's Facebook page seemed similar to posts on review sites, with most of them very short (in 2017 for example, Hartford House had 12 recommendations, but only one was longer than 60 words and qualified for this archive), some including a few images and only the restaurants themselves commented on the posts. Reviews on private pages could differ, but Review H20177 for example was a detailed 270-word review accompanied by 30 images and it resulted in 20 comments. Similar to the comments on Instagram, Facebook comments also include emojis and the posts could also be shared within Facebook or externally with individuals.

As discussed in the comment section in the reviews above, Facebook groups were the spaces for the most vibrant restaurant conversations. Posts varied in length with Review M201910 for example, being 643 words, and Review M201520 66 words and were not guided by any templates as with rating sites, resulting in fairly free conversations between group members. Fairly free, as the group, similar to rating sites, has rules (About this Group, n.d.) and an admin team that enforces them. Unlike the comments to reviews in the archive published on blogs and rating sites, the comments in the Facebook group and timelines contributed to the content of the reviews, with people sharing more details of their own experiences resulting in reviews that one could say were written by a community, rather than an individual. Reviewers in the Facebook group could add images to their reviews, but the rules were quite strict that group members should focus on restaurants and "No blogs, links, vlog, tik toks, Instagram, short videos, shared posts etc" are allowed on the group (About this Group, n.d.).

The form of reviews in this archive changed significantly during the period under study, especially in the second decade when rating sites, blogs and social media became prominent players. Whilst some of the new reviewing platforms resembled familiar traditional media forms, others like Instagram and Facebook introduced vibrant conversations through comment sections and included more visual forms of communication ranging from videos and photographs to

emojis. Functions such as “tagging” and “sharing” or the creation of topic-specific hashtags also allowed the conversations to move beyond their platform and initial audience.

6 ANALYSIS

The data compiled from the archive in this study indicated two very specific periods of restaurant reviewing: 2000 to 2011 and 2012 to 2020. The first period was characterised by a fairly low number of positive reviews published mainly in the traditional media (magazines and restaurant guides), written by white South African females. The second period, which saw the introduction of Web 2.0, was on the other hand dominated by a significant increase in positive and negative reviews, written mainly by amateur reviewers on online rating sites, social media and blogs. This period saw a significant increase in white male reviewers and the introduction of Indian, black, brown and Asian reviewers. The significance of these findings will be discussed in detail below according to the research questions that this study aimed to answer.

6.1 In which media outlets were restaurants reviewed and did it change over 20 years?

The first half of this archive (2000-2010) was dominated by reviews in the traditional media (See Figure 5.2.4), especially restaurant guides and magazines, with newspapers paying less attention to restaurant reviews. The fact that this picture changed drastically in the second half of the archive from 2011 when the majority of reviews were written by amateur reviewers on restaurant rating websites confirms that Alvin Toffler’s prosumerism (1980, p.278) and the global democratization of both reviewing and eating in high-end restaurants (Mellet et. al, 2014, p.5; Hodkinson 2017, p.48) is also alive and well in South Africa. The overwhelming number of reviews on rating sites compared to traditional media supports Rousseau’s (2012, p. 24) argument that Web 2.0 “revolutionised” food and also provides evidence that Lewis’s “digital food” (2020, p.10) is as popular in South Africa as elsewhere in the world.

This study also gives a clear timeline of when democratization was really embraced (since 2011) and the digital platforms (rating sites) that amateur reviewers preferred to voice their opinions and join the restaurant reviewing conversation. Whilst rating sites were, since 2011, by far the most popular new media reviewing sites social media, blogs and digital publications also featured.

How these new platforms for reviewing changed the format of reviewing will be discussed below under the Form of Reviews, but it could be argued that the rise in blog reviews

was related to the decline in traditional magazine reviews, as only bloggers really tried to imitate the professional reviews found in magazines, with longer travel and meal descriptions accompanied by images. The period that saw a significant decline in magazine reviews (see Figure 5.2.4) coincided with a steady increase in blog reviews. Throughout the archive, *Wine* magazine was the only magazine that published restaurant reviews consistently and in a longer critique format but seems to also have seized reviewing from 2021.

This study also found that restaurant reviews published in both the traditional and digital media moved beyond "the women's pages" which were traditionally the home to all things food as discussed in the Background. However, it does not seem to have reached the status in South Africa that Claiborne aspired to with his *New York Times* reviews (McNamee, 2012, p.69) as restaurant reviews were never found alongside art and theatre reviews (apart from in Classic Feel) magazine, but rather published in "Lifestyle" sections. With restaurant reviews in this archive also published in men's, car, business, and farming magazines, it can be confirmed that although reviews were written mainly by women, they were reaching a far wider audience.

6.2 Who reviewed restaurants in this archive?

Whilst the determination of sex and race of reviewers in this archive was a challenge as discussed above in Archive Analysis 5.3, the majority of reviewers were found to be white (248) women (189), with white men (177) entering the conversation in the second half of the archive, in line with the increase in reviews on rating sites. The second most reviewers (still only 19) were of Indian descent with black, brown and other Asian reviewers representing the rest of the minorities in this archive (see Figure 5.3.3). Professional reviewers initially dominated the reviewing scene, but in the second half of the archive, there was a drastic increase in amateur reviewers (see Figure 5.3.6). In the early 2000s award-winning restaurants like Hartford House could be expected to be reviewed by professional international reviewers, but the introduction of Web 2.0 introduced international amateur reviewers (62) to the South African reviewing scene for all restaurants, resulting in the local restaurant scene being measured and commented on in a global context.

6.2.1 Sex

Despite the origin of food writing, as discussed in the Background, being founded and generally dominated by men in the past (Jones & Taylor, 2012, p.99), the majority of restaurant reviewers in this South African archive (all be it by a fairly narrow margin) were women. Unlike Jones and

Taylor's (2012, p.99) findings, discussed in the Literature Review, that food writing had a distinct division between masculine food activities (eating out and reviewing restaurants) and feminine activities (domestic cooking), this South African archive showed that in contrast restaurant reviewing, especially in the first decade of the archive was dominated by professional female writers, with more male reviewers only entering the field as amateurs in the second decade. It is only the second decade that seems to resemble the culinary landscape evoked by the 1800's Almanach des gourmands – a public sphere of restaurants and cafés mainly open to middle-class men (Jones & Taylor, 2012, p.99). The late arrival of male amateur reviewers could be supporting evidence of the influence of Hollow's new public sphere where celebrity chefs like Jamie Oliver were promoting cooking as youthful domestic masculinity on television from the mid-2000s. It is however clear from this archive that female food writers in South Africa moved beyond the "women's pages," the traditional home of food and recipes.

6.2.2 Race

The noticeable absence of black reviewers among both professional and amateur reviewers suggests that the impact of Apartheid and its "petty legislation" as discussed in the Background lasted longer than might have been anticipated. The first black reviewer in this archive was noted in 2010, with a slow increase in black reviewers only from 2015, and a total of seven black reviewers in the entire 20-year archive. Whilst 148 reviewers's race could not be determined, it was clear that black South Africans were completely underrepresented in this archive, especially as the most recent Census 2022 indicated that 81.4% of the 62 million South Africans are black (Mbalo Brief, 2023, October, p.i). Whilst petty Apartheid legislation like the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act, No. 49 of 1953 may have robbed the majority of South Africans from growing up with restaurant culture, it is more likely that their noticeable absence is due to the lasting economic impact of Apartheid. The World Bank reported in 2022 that South Africa is the most unequal country in the world (Sulla, Zikhali & Cuevas, 2022, p.1) stating that "the legacy of colonialism and apartheid, rooted in racial and spatial segregation, continues to reinforce inequality of outcomes." The report further noted that unequal opportunities were still based on race which contributed to 38.9 percent of overall inequality (Sulla, Zikhali & Cuevas, 2022, p.3). This study thus confirms Johnston and Bauman's (2015, p.50) argument, as discussed in the Literature Review, that power and privilege still shape participation in the gourmet foodscape. It also supports Lane's findings that despite the democratisation of eating and reviewing, economic

and cultural barriers to fine dining (whilst all three restaurants were not 'fine dining' they did represent high-end dining) persist as differences between social classes, and educational groups determined the form, place and frequency of eating.

The fact that even Indians, another minority group in South Africa, represented the second most reviewers in this archive can also be explained by the economic barriers and inequality discussed above, but it also needs to be considered that Hartford House is situated in KwaZulu Natal, the province with the greatest concentration of Indian population in South Africa, and therefore it is not surprising that almost half of the Indian reviewers (9 out of 19) reviewed Hartford House.

The underrepresentation of the majority of South Africans in this archive suggests that there may have been "democratisation" of eating and reviewing, but that it is still reserved for the privileged few.

6.2.3 Professionals and Amateurs

The majority of reviewers in this archive were amateur reviewers (See Figure 5.3.5), people who reviewed restaurants as a leisure activity, unlike professional reviewers who are paid to do so, by formal publications. As discussed in Archive Analysis 6.1, the media outlets where the most restaurant reviews were published, are directly related to who wrote them, as the majority of reviews written by amateurs were published on restaurant rating sites. This is one of the most significant changes noted in the reviewing landscape represented by this archive and initially seems to validate Rousseau's (2012, p.58) argument that Web 2.0 has professional food critics defending their livelihoods against a sea of amateur voices.

This study however did not find that the introduction of the amateur reviewer led to the demise of the professional reviewer as mentioned by Rousseau (2012, p.58) and feared by Keen (2010, p.29). As per Figure 5.3.6, the number of amateur reviewers fluctuated with a significant increase in 2017, but the number of professional reviewers remained fairly consistent, with a slight decline from 2019. It rather showed that except for a few professional reviewers like Anna Trapido, Victor Strugo and Anne Stevens who wrote cultural critiques worthy of comparing to the legendary *New York Times* reviews, South African restaurant reviewing was not of a particularly high standard in the early 2000s. As discussed in Archive Analysis 5.4.2 very few reviews in the first period of the archive mentioned the service or the wine quality of the restaurants and all reviews written by professional reviewers were positive, even if balanced with

some critique. What the professional reviewers wrote about in this archive confirms Titz, Laza-Abbot and Cruz's (2004, p.49) findings of their study into US food critics who also rather focused their comments on food quality, ambience and atmosphere. Images of professional reviewers were frequently published, so incognito dining in line with Craig Claiborne's ethical and procedural framework for reviewing (Sietsema, 2010, p.42) would not have been possible. In contrast to the tension described between professional and amateur reviewers in studies in the Literature Review (Sietsema, 2010; Rousseau 2012; Keen 2010, Mellet et.al, 2014) this study found that the so-called "new media" platforms were embraced by professional reviewers who participated on all platforms, from blogs to Facebook, Instagram and Tripadvisor, whilst traditional media like *Eat Out*'s website added user reviews alongside their "Critic's Review" as did *City Press* in their *i* lifestyle magazine's restaurant review column. This supports Feldman's (2021, p.1355) findings, as discussed in the Literature Review, that digital platforms are increasingly "professional" as they are embraced by traditional media and restaurants using them for both reporting and advertising. The movement of professional critics into the digital amateur space exposes readers who may not have followed legacy publications to professional voices and potentially acts as a marketing tool for these publications.

Evidence of poor reviewing ethics which amateur reviewers are frequently accused of (Sietsema, 2010, p.42) did surface in the findings of this study with several bloggers confirmed to have reviewed sponsored experiences, and at least two (Bernice B, 2020, February; De Oude Kraal, 2017, August 21), possibly three (Lieber, 2012, December 7) fake reviews were identified. Some reviewers also took almost a year before writing their reviews but considering that only about 20 out of 426 reviews were identified to have ethical transgressions (according to Claiborne's guidelines), this was not a significant issue, and as mentioned in David Bullard's review of Hartford House (2013, May) sponsored experiences were not exclusive to amateur reviewers. This archive also highlighted evidence of unprofessional practice in the traditional media, with review guides hardly changing their listings from one year to the next, or making serious mistakes such as confusing chefs' names and having to place corrections the following week, despite professional reviewers being edited in the traditional media.

6.3 Which restaurants were reviewed most?

It can be argued that Mastrantonio is a city restaurant, which welcomes far more diners through its doors than De Oude Kraal and therefore would have more reviews, but Hartford House is also situated on a farm in a remote location, and yet it has received the most attention from professional and amateur reviewers. This suggests that similar to the power of the *Michelin Guide* in Europe as discussed in the Literature Review (Lane, 2016, p.311) the *Eat Out* guide in South Africa functions as a significant agent of consecration, especially with regard to its Top Ten Restaurant Awards. De Oude Kraal has also received several awards over the years, but none are as prestigious as the Eat Out Top Ten Restaurant Awards. This argument is further supported by evidence in this archive of professional reviewers functioning as "reputational entrepreneurs" similar to Allen and Lincoln's findings in film reviews (2004, p.871). This reputational entrepreneurship became evident after *Eat Out* bestowed the Top Ten Restaurant Award to Hartford House and its long-time chef on four occasions. Following this recognition, The chef was not only mentioned regularly by name in reviews, but professional reviewers especially showed detailed interest in the chef frequently referring to the chef's age, culinary education, career experience, mentors and achievements, and even physical appearance (Furniss, 201, February, p. 86-88; Bullard, 2013, May, p.55-58; Stevens 2009, March 14). This discourse produced by the critics was echoed by amateur reviewers who also mentioned the chef by name but were more focused on the chef's reputation as an award-winning chef:

> Fine Dining: We went with our sons from overseas - all of us are "foodies" and certainly were impressed with the quality of food, service and ambience of Hartford House. [Name removed] is very well known and her reputation as a talented chef was evident in our experience here. We all tried different starters, mains and dessert and were not disappointed in any of our choices. Thank you for a wonderful lunch, will certainly return, as we are lucky enough to live close by. (Diane D, 2014, April 16)

The consecration of Hartford House's chef was even evident when it was announced that the chef was leaving with one amateur reviewer sharing their disappointment at not getting a seat at the table before the chef left (Funincpt, 2014, August 10).

This chef was also still mentioned in reviews of the restaurant several years after having left (Trapido, 2018, October 16; Von Ulmenstein, 2015, August 27), confirming the continued discourse in which reviewers connected *Eat Out* to this chef and Hartford House. The fact that

the Eat Out Restaurant Awards were the most frequently mentioned restaurant awards in the second decade of the Archive (see Figure 5.4.9.2), is additional evidence of its consecration of restaurants.

6.4 The changing form of restaurant reviews over 20 years.

The form of restaurant reviews changed quite significantly during the 20 years under study and is mainly due to the interactivity of the internet and especially Web 2.0 which brought a variety of new environments and digital functionalities that ultimately impacted how South Africans shared their views on and talk about restaurants. These new environments are important to consider, as they introduced a new medium and with it new forms of news and as Barnhurst and Nerone (2001, p.9) state, news forms have an impact by "establishing the environment of power". McLuhan (1973, p.16) in his theory that the medium is the message, also argued that it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action.

6.4.1 Predetermined and guided forms in digital media

Rating sites were the most popular form of restaurant reviews in this study, and as discussed in the Background, they were celebrated by some scholars for their "democratization". However, their pre-determined templates that guided the reviewers in their restaurant assessments represented a similar form to printed restaurant guides with a similar focus on what should be featured in a review. They, therefore, reinforced the traditional criteria of restaurant reviewing established by professional reviewers like Claiborne and the *Michelin Guide*, rather than offering a completely democratized space where reviewers can establish their own criteria. These forms of rating sites support Barnhurst and Nerone's (2001, p.6) argument that the form of news creates an environment that invites readers and in this case also the writers into a moulded and variegated world that fits the conscious designs of journalists and the habits of readers but also the dominating values in political and economic life. Rating sites, additionally include systems that reward regular contributors, bestow special titles on them and in essence create "new experts".

Social Media on the other hand allows for a less moulded response, especially on platforms like Facebook and Instagram, where reviews are written without templates. Whilst reviewers were not prompted in terms of the reviewing requirements, Facebook groups which had some of the liveliest restaurant discussions rather than just reviews, were still moderated by "Group Admin" and Facebook policies as discussed in the Archive Analysis 5.5.7. Jozi

Restaurants – the good, the bad, the ugly group not only stipulates the rules of posting in their group but also requests members to include at least one dish they enjoyed or recommend when writing a review. Reviews posted outside of groups are only governed by Meta's policies and terms of use which also apply to Instagram (Terms of Service, n.d). Instagram does not have spaces or communities dedicated to restaurant reviews or encourage reviews like rating sites and Facebook and does not prompt its users to write about certain topics, but as Feldman explained (2021, p.1355), it is an application that is driven by visuals and you cannot post a review on the application without including either an image or short video (reel).

Personal blogs had the most freedom to publish and review without any templates, prompts, or guidelines, yet, as discussed in the Archive Analysis 5.5.6, bloggers imitated the form of magazine reviews, combining longer text and images, with the only difference being their personal tone and in some cases the addition of videos.

Thus, although digital media are regarded as sites of democratization that allow for opinion that is supposed to be freed from professional critics the designers of these sites and users themselves to a large extent reinforce rather than disregard the forms designed and used by critics in professional reviewing. In addition sites reward reviewers, by turning them into the new new critics and confirming their platforms as sites to acquire Bourdieu's social capital. This is in line with findings by Vásquez and Chick, (2015, p.231) that online amateur reviewers place themselves on equal footing with professional reviewers and although digital media challenge the traditional hierarchies of reviewing and food culture, they also reproduce some of the existing forms of culinary capital.

6.4.2 Are changes in professional reviewing a sign of economic challenges?

The most significant impact of new media on traditional media is not only the democratization that allows for citizen journalism but more so the impact of freely available information which has resulted in significantly reduced readership for traditional print media (Rousseau, 2012, p. 15) and as a result a reduction in advertising and the introduction of budget cuts. As discussed in the Background the cost of a meal and budget cuts are often mentioned as the reason for cuts in professional restaurant reviewing (Bolsmann, 2013, p.259; Govender-Ypma, 2018, August 12; Farah, 2020, p.40).

Additional research and interviews with editorial teams would be required, but some of the changes in reporting noted in the traditional media in this archive, seem to point to the

economic challenges that the print media faced since the introduction of digital media. Restaurant guides may have been the most consistent publication of restaurant reviews in this archive (see Figure 5.2.4), but they seem to have significantly reduced the number of restaurants they reviewed. *Eat Out* for example reviewed "900+" restaurants in its 2006 edition (2006, cover page) to only 500 restaurants in 2015 (Eat Out, 2015, cover page). Whilst not part of the archive the 2023 (Eat Out, 2023, cover page) edition included only 250 restaurants, suggesting a continuing trend. Similarly, new restaurant guides like the *JHP Gourmet Guide* launched in 2016 reviewed less than 100 restaurants (Handley, 2016). The concerning evidence of reviews not being updated from one year to the next, as discussed in the Archive Analysis 5.5.1 suggests that the restaurants were not visited again, which not only points to unethical and gross unprofessionalism but possibly also to financial pressures.

Magazine reviews not only gradually declined towards the end of the period under study (see Figure 5.2.4), but the formats seemed to change as well, with the dedicated review column in magazines such as *Taste* making space for sponsored features that combined, similar to the *Michelin Guide* concept, cars, travel and eating (Roberts, 2008, March p.106-109). Stand-alone restaurant features and reviews were more common in the first half of the archive, whilst shorter combined reviews produced generally themed copy featured in the second half of the archive. Whilst *Wine* magazine continued to produce restaurant reviews, it seized to publish its restaurant guide *dine* in the second half of the archive. As mentioned in the Archive Analysis 5.2 *Wine* magazine ceased restaurant reviewing in 2021.

The media list compiled for this study to ensure a thorough search of publications to locate reviews for the archive indicated that the majority of magazines that closed during the period under study, closed in the second decade. Many of these magazines were women's magazines, including *Essentials, Cosmopolitan*, *Marie Claire, Your Family, Vrouekeur, Bona, People Magazine, Elle, Femina, Good Housekeeping, Grazia SA, Heat,* or lifestyle magazines like *Countrylife, House and Garden Gourmet, Good Taste, Ginja Food and Lifestyle, Elle Decoration, Avocado Magazine* and *Real Simple*. This has implications for reviewing and also for the lifestyle and women's space they facilitated, which most likely moved online.

6.4.3 Mainly informal reviews, some recommendations, and very few lengthy formal critiques

The changes in review forms as discussed above, directly impacted the content presented in the reviews. As discussed in the Archive Analysis (see Figure. 5.5.1) lengthy critical reviews of dining experiences represented less than five per cent of the reviews, and were written almost exclusively by professional reviewers in the first half of the archive. The majority of the reviews were however written by amateurs and were either classified as "reviews" – which varied in length but were generally shorter and included some discussion on various parts of the dining experience or "recommendations" – a simple report of the dinner with some statements of recommendation. The informal tone of most of the reviews and the significant number of spelling and grammar mistakes provide evidence of the fact that the majority of reviewers are unedited.

The length of reviews was dictated by the form of publication, which for example included 80-100 word summaries in review guides (except for the *JHP Gourmet Guide*) and longer detailed discussions in magazine columns or features. TripAdvisor, the platform that contributed the most reviews to this archive, required reviews to be a minimum of 100 characters, but Google Reviews, which entered the archive in the last quarter of the two decades did not limit reviewers and even allowed them to only give a star rating. Therefore as discussed in Archive Analysis 5.2 the introduction of Google Reviews may be responsible for the considerable drop in the number of reviews from 2017 as numerous reviews were found on Google when compiling the archive, but they did not meet the required minimum length of 60 words for this study, and therefore this study was not able to track its impact. In addition to the introduction of Google Reviews, the "mobile revolution" where the use of smartphones became more popular than computers (Think with Google, 2016, September) could also explain the drop in reviews in this archive since 2017, as Melamud, Tuna Pham and Inman (2019, p.266) found that user-generated content, including reviews on TripAdvisor, produced through smartphones, were shorter compared to content produced with computers and it resulted in "lower linguistic specificity" and the inclusion of more emotional content because of the "real-time" nature of smartphones.

Most reviews (300) throughout the archive included some form of rating system, but the introduction of rating sites like Tripadvisor and Google saw ratings take on a much stronger

marketing dimension for businesses as ratings for restaurants were added up and overall ratings impacted the visibility of a restaurant on these sites. This form feature of rating sites therefore encourages restaurants to obtain as many positive ratings as possible because as many as 81% of consumers rely on user-generated content when they make purchase decisions (Melamud et al. 2019, p.259).

A similar study to English and Fleishman's (2019), as mentioned in the Literature Review, might find that the strong marketing incentive that comes with rating sites produces content that is closer linked to marketing than citizen journalism and even more so the content on blogs in South Africa, which were almost all sponsored experiences (despite imitating magazine reviews), and yielded positive reviews.

6.4.4 Increasing visual communication

The term "food porn" was coined in the late 1970s, to describe the fetishisation of food by producing mouth-watering images that showcase a decadence that is removed from food's primary function – nourishment (Andersen, Byrne, Wang, 2021, p.2). Whilst this supports the finding in this archive that food photography was part of the form of reviews in traditional media, (apart from restaurant guides), the introduction of digital media combined with the later arrival of quality cellphone cameras, shifted the focus, particularly in blogs and Instagram reviews in the last five years of the archive to photographs, rather than written reviews. This also supports Feldsman's (2021, p.1355) research into Instagram, concluding that visual communication is becoming increasingly important, also in restaurant reviewing.

Looking at the images over time, they follow a slightly different curve to the number of reviews over time (see Figure 5.5.8), indicating that images did not accompany the fastest-growing review publications as images only increased from 2015 and peaked in 2017, before declining in line with the number of reviews. A closer look at Tripadvisor reviews confirmed that very few included images in the first part of the second decade with a gradual increase towards 2020. This is more in line with the development of camera phones than the introduction of restaurant rating sites, as higher resolution camera phones were only becoming available in the 2010s (Wikipedia contributors, 2023, September 16) equipping every diner with a camera. The findings of this study support Heyman's (2015, July 29) findings that the number of photos taken each year has tripled since 2010 and that by 2015, 75 per cent of all images were taken with a phone.

Ibrahim (2015,p.9) argues that food porn produced and shared through the smartphone offers a performance medium which is part of a complex process of the creation of self-identity, community, an invitation to gaze, memory making and a form of culinary capital, in other words, an example of Bourdieu's cultural field where consecration is bestowed by the choice of the ordinary people (2021, p.51). It also confirms Hennig-Thurau et.al's (2004) findings that one of the reasons amateurs shared reviews was the potential to enhance their own self-worth. These are at the same time sites of distinction where images are used to indicate "cultural possession" and thus provide social capital.

> In the process, it provides a mechanism to create social capital and currency online and to produce these to document the everyday and to renew connections with a wider community. Smartphone food porn democratises the production of desire and in doing so taps into representation of self and identity while being intertextual with our consumerist world and consumption cultures. (Ibrahim,2015, p.10)

6.4.5 The introduction of comments and the movement of conversations

The first period in this archive was dominated by one-directional reviews published mainly in traditional print media and the fact that the same reviewers were often writing for various publications as they focused on specific regions, it produced an echo chamber with the same opinions on the same restaurants shared through various publications. However, the introduction of rating sites, blogs, and social media, in the second period of this archive brought new and different voices to restaurant reviewing in South Africa. As discussed in the Background, the introduction of amateurs to restaurant reviewing was not new, as publications like *Zagat* in the USA have relied on consumer reviews long before the arrival of the internet, but the fact that people can directly comment and respond to each other's reviews is a new feature that Web 2.0 introduced.

As discussed in Archive Analysis 5.5 rating sites, social media, and blogs allowed for responses and interaction with readers, but the most vibrant conversations and lively food communities were found in the Facebook groups (Jozi Restaurants: the Good, the Bad, the Ugly). Whilst Rousseau (2012, p.30) suggested that blogs were "online coffee houses" for people with similar interests, this study found that interaction in blogs was minimal and that Facebook groups rather fit that description, representing what Habermas would recognise as a public sphere. But similar to the criticism of exclusion that Habermas'original theory faced, the South

African public sphere of restaurant reviewing, as discussed in 6.2.2 Who Reviewed Restaurants seems equally exclusive, as the vast majority of reviewers were white South Africans.

As discussed in Archive Analysis 5.5.7, Facebook Review M102910 about Mastrantonio became a discussion among 30 different people and resulted in the hashtags #belikelesley and #makelesleyfamous that were formed by members of the group.

Hashtags were a particular feature on Instagram and although only one review in this archive was published on it, it also indicated lively comments and discussions and seemed to function as a space to connect to different platforms, as reviewers often linked their blogs to Instagram or in this case the reviewer provided links to his website and blog on his Instagram profile. It also allows users to follow specific subjects through hashtags and not only people. Apart from the fact that conversations could move between platforms and people through sharing, tagging and hashtags, this study also found that reviewers "manually" shared their reviews by publishing the same review on more than one rating site, or professional reviewers published their work from digital or print media to personal blogs or rating sites. It is a good example of what Barnhurst and Nerone (2001, p. 2) describe a medium should be: "A medium is, after all, something 'in between,' something that mediates among and connects other things".

Whilst the #belikelestley or #makelesleyfamous hashtags could not be traced beyond the specific Facebook group, it indicated the potential for restaurant reviews and their subsequent discussions to move between platforms and people and thus supports the notion that the public sphere, is not a single place, but rather as Taylor (2004) suggested the a greater collective discussion in a range of different locations. Considering the wide variety of functionalities that encourage the sharing of information between as many platforms and with as many people as possible, Cowling and Hamilton's (2020, p.8-22) "capillaried network" or De Lanerolle's "fluid public" (2020, p.98) is perhaps more appropriate.

6.5 The most common themes featured in reviews over 20 years.

In terms of the content of restaurant reviews, the most significant changes that amateur reviewers brought to the reviewing landscape were the topics under discussion. Professional reviewers focused on food, ambience, and the occasional mention of wine lists in the first period identified in this archive with service, price, and value for money as well as the facilities becoming additional discussion points in the second period. This archive showed that amateur reviewers applied different criteria and had a more consumer-focused critique of restaurants and assessed

them as lived experiences. It needs to be considered, however, as discussed in the Archive Analysis 5.5, that the majority of these reviews were written on rating sites that provided a template for reviews and guided reviewers, especially in terms of the most important aspects of their experience to rate. In the assessment of criteria applied by different reviewers, this study not only looked at what was mentioned but also what stood out for being omitted from reviewing criteria. Whilst food and food menus were mentioned most often, detailed descriptions of meals or dishes were lacking, surprisingly more so for the higher-end set menu restaurants (Hartford House and De Oude Kraal). This leads to the question if people are taking less note of what they are eating if they don't specifically order it. Dessert, in particular, was mentioned very seldom (and also one of the most frequently misspelt words). For a wine-producing country, it was further surprising to find that wine quality was a neglected subject in restaurant reviews in this archive throughout 20 years as it was practically ignored by both professional and amateur reviewers.

The different criteria in assessing restaurants support Cattani, Ferriani, and Allison's (2014, p.3) findings, that in cultural consecration different audiences apply different criteria. Negative reviews in this archive which were only written by amateur reviewers further support Allen and Lincoln's (2004, p.877) suggestion that the "competing discourses of value" by different audiences in cultural fields explain why recognition from different audiences often differ.

Another point of discussion that amateurs, especially, brought to restaurant reviewing in this archive was themselves. As discussed in the Archive Analysis 5.4.3 this was the third most popular theme and is in line with Kuen's finding (2016, p.1) that consumers on the American rating site Yelp used the site to craft their personal brand and maintain it. This is specifically the case of the 136 reviews that either claimed expertise or indicated other forms of distinction as cultural or culinary capital. With the majority of these reviews written by amateur reviewers, it confirms Naccarato and LeBescos's (2012, p.107) findings that they do not reject culinary capital as might be expected in a "democratised" field. For example, in Esther1606's review of Harford House, she places herself on equal footing with a Michelin inspector when she writes: "Wow the chef can cook. Really beautiful dishes of high quality and compared to Europe at very reasonable prices. We felt it was close to 1 Michelin star restaurant"(2020, February 13).

The 85 statements of varied forms of expertise in reviewing in this archive are an indication that the rise of the amateur did not eradicate the need for expertise in restaurant reviewing and this is further supported by the reward systems introduced by rating sites that attempt to turn amateurs into a new form of expert. Reviewers can achieve recognition by earning "badges" through regular contributions on these sites, supporting Vasquez and Chic's (2015, p.231) argument that digital media may challenge the hierarchies of food culture, but at the same time, they reproduce existing forms of a culinary capital. As discussed in the Archive Analysis, the statements of expertise in reviews in this archive were generally used to justify a judgment, confirming that knowledge or experience is required to make a judgement on a restaurant's success.

This Archive provided clear evidence of the democratisation of restaurant reviews, but at the same time the confirmation that culinary and social capital is claimed in numerous ways, rather than overlooked showed the tension in the cultural field, confirming Johnston and Baumann's (2015, p.49) argument that the tension between ideologies of democratisation and ideologies of distinction and status makes for a complex field that cannot be simply described as "snobbery repackaged" nor can it be celebrated as a new dawn of cultural democracy.
The reviewer comments regarding family restaurants and Spur specifically, discussed in Food 5.4.1 support Johnston and Baumann's (2015) argument that good taste still constitutes high-brow tastes, but Trapido's comments on Freestate classics and pseudo-Italian cuisine (De Oude Kraal, 2008), together with The Nagle's (2013, March) preference of "real food, made real good" also supports their argument for an omnivorous era. Trapido's comments together with the numerous comments on the authenticity of Mastrantonios Italian cuisine further support Johnston and Baumann's argument that frames of authenticity and exoticism are now used to legitimise taste.

In Perullo's (2016, p.x) attempt to define an expert such as a food critic, he mentions that such a person would not only be able to identify the quality of the food that is consumed but also be able to discuss the qualities of a dish, even if it is not to their personal liking. This study found that although food was the most popular subject in reviews, with the food quality mentioned in 242 reviews, only 233 of the reviews mentioned actual dishes. These were mentions only, with detailed dish discussions mostly (but not exclusively) limited to professional critiques. This suggests that the majority of reviewers may be experienced diners (the findings also indicated

that they were regular reviewers) but that there were few food critics among them (including professional reviewers).

Considering the different criteria of assessment and areas of focus between professional and amateur reviewers, this study supports Lane's findings (2014, p.309) that diners consider amateur reviews as complementary to professional reviews, not an alternative.

The lack of food critics, according to Perullo's definition might to some extent explain the criticism that even South Africa's most significant consecrator, *Eat Out* magazine, has experienced from the industry (top chefs Chantel Dartnal and Luke Dale-Roberts asked in 2019 not to be included in future awards (Biller, 2019, December 80) and this study seems to echo Lane's findings that local and national critics, although not without influence, lack the features of authority such as the *Michelin Guide* to rendering them tastemakers. This is not encouraging for the South African restaurant and tourism industry as Vukusic, Grilec and Mikulic (2019) found that the introduction of respected reviewers, such as the *Michelin Guide* (although not without its own critics), can encourage higher standards in restaurants and ultimately contribute to the gastro tourism industry and economy.

6.6 The changes in restaurant reviewing since the introduction of digital media.

The divide in the two distinct periods in this Archive highlights the most significant change that digital media and Web 2.0 specifically introduced to restaurant reviewing in South Africa. The number of reviews drastically increased from 2012 (see Figure 5.2.2) as restaurant rating sites especially contributed hundreds of new, amateur voices via a variety of different platforms. The new voices seem to focus on different restaurants with Mastrantonio which received fairly little attention from professional reviewers in the first decade of the Archive, reviewed regularly since 2012, even more than De Oude Kraal which received a fair amount of professional attention (see Figure 5.2.2). The introduction of international amateur reviewers allowed for South African restaurants to be more frequently judged and commented on in a global context. They were not only compared to other South African restaurants, but rather someone's last experience in Italy, London or New York. This could benefit the tourism industry, as this might put South African chefs under pressure to align their offerings to global standards.

The introduction of amateur reviewers also introduced a wider demographic of reviewers, with Indian, black, brown and other Asian reviewers featuring far more in the second half of the archive, than the overwhelming white reviewers of the first decade (see Figure 5.3.4). As

discussed in 6.2 Who Reviewed the Restaurants in this Archive, reviewers of colour were still significant minorities in this archive, but should this increase, as the archive suggests, this certainly could lead to different perspectives in future (a more inclusive foodie public sphere) and perhaps a better representation of the local food culture in South African restaurants if the diners and reviewers are more representative of the population. With Johnston and Bauman (2015, p.49) finding that authenticity and exoticism are the new markers of status in food, a greater focus on local food offerings could further benefit tourism.

Amateur reviewers applied different criteria when they reviewed restaurants. Whilst professional reviewers mainly focussed on food and ambience, amateur reviews frequently included references to lived experiences with a stronger consumer angle including service, the location of restaurants, their facilities including safe parking and the perceived value of their experience.

The new Web 2.0 technology also introduced the feature of sharing or commenting on reviews turning restaurant reviewing into a vibrant public sphere (although not fully representative of South Africa) where opinions are shared and discussed as opposed to only being written by one critic and read by the readers, with very little opportunity to comment or give feedback.

The mobile revolution combined with the features of Web 2.0 brought even more changes to restaurant reviewing with food photographs and videos becoming a very significant feature of reviews in the last quarter of the reviewing Archive. As discussed in Archive Analysis 6.4.4 the increase in photographs was in line with the arrival of quality cameras in cell phones. Melamud, Tuna Pham and Inman (2019, p.266) also suggested that reviews written on phones rather than computers tend to be more emotional and shorter, but this study did not differentiate between reviews written on different devices and therefore could not confirm this, although many short Google Reviews written towards the end of the two decades did not meet the required length to be included in the archive.

6.7 Future research

This study aimed to investigate the broader landscape of restaurant reviewing, and in doing so also identified potential areas for future research.

Whilst this study included the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, other than a significant drop in reviews, it did not identify any other impacts. Studies extending the review

period to include the years after the pandemic could however investigate this in more detail, as this was one of the hardest hit industries as the drop in the number of reviews confirmed (see Figure 5.2.2). The indication that some professional digital publications seized their reviewing columns by 2020 (Crush Mag Online) and 2021 (Wine Magazine), is further motivation to explore this angle.

The decline in restaurant reviews in this archive, started however already in 2017, several years before the pandemic, and whilst this study could confirm the decline through the reviews in this archive, it is possibly related to the introduction of Google Reviews that became very popular in 2016 or the popularity of mobile phones that increased as devices to access the internet and share information. As discussed in Findings 6.4, very few Google reviews met the criteria of the archive as they were generally shorter than 60 words. Future studies could therefore investigate the impact of Google Reviews on other rating sites and restaurant reviewing in general.

The decline in reviews could however also be due to the mobile revolution, as Melamud, Tuna Pham and Inman (2019, p.266) suggested that mobile devices not only changed how we communicated, but also what was said. By differentiating between content produced on different devices, future studies can explore how the introduction of mobile devices impacted reviewing.

Whilst not a focus of this study, the broad landscape investigation did note that credit card companies were regular sponsors of industry prizes (in line with the suggestion that the credit card assisted in the democratisation of dining out (Kuh, 2001, p.470)), and owned some of the restaurant guides with luxury car brands frequently sponsoring review features. Add to this the rating sites that motivated restaurants to get positive reviews for better positions on the sites and bloggers mainly writing about sponsored experiences and there are enough reasons for future studies to explore the relationship between marketing and restaurant reviewing in South Africa similar to English and Fleishman's study (2019) that asked the question if food reviewing is lifestyle journalism or an extension of marketing?

This study only looked at three restaurants as it was limited by the Historical methodology and manual collection of reviews. It would take another kind of research to see whether the restaurants being reviewed in the new era of social media have changed or if certain restaurants are now getting the spotlight that never would have been mentioned before.

The media list that was produced to compile a structured search for the compilation of the archive provided preliminary evidence of a change in where food writing is published in the traditional media in South Africa. Whilst the research into reviews showed that it has moved beyond women's pages, future studies could look at food writing in general, especially recipes and general food features, considering the increased interest in food in society as discussed in the Background. It could also investigate the different beats that food has infiltrated in recent years. As such, I lastly hope that this research will inspire and support future studies in South Africa to use food to think with – reiterating Peter Atkins and Ian Bowler's argument that food is a "barium meal for x-raying social, political, economic and cultural issues, a kind of marker dye for broad structures and processes" (2018, p.3).

7 CONCLUSION

The theoretical contribution of this study is a broad overview of the South African food reviewing landscape between 2000 and 2020 through the analysis of 426 reviews written during this period about three restaurants. The study applied a qualitative historical method and drew on cultural studies, especially Bourdieu's theories of cultural consecration and Habermas's public sphere theory.

Despite political democratisation, online media democratisation and a confirmation of an increased interest in food, the South African restaurant foodscape remains a space of power and privilege. But even within these largely white circles of power and privilege, the lack of critical cultural food reviews and detailed descriptions and assessments of restaurant meals suggest that gourmandism as introduced by Brillat Savarin, and restaurant food as culture are as new to South Africans as digital media.

Although there has been a significant increase in reviews in digital and social media, the study found that the consecration of restaurants still lies with traditional media, as *Eat Out* magazine's annual Top Ten Restaurant Awards for Hartford House was followed by increased attention from both professional and amateur reviewers, and also resulted in significant coverage about its chef, providing evidence of Allen and Lincoln's (2004, p.877) reputational entrepreneurship practised by reviewers in Bourdieu's process of consecration.

This would make *Eat Out* South Africa's most influential guide that can legitimately claim the function of consecration, but the criticism it received from the restaurant industry in recent years together with the general lack of critical restaurant reviewing in South Africa,

suggests that its role as consecrator does not guarantee it a position as trusted tastemaker, such as the *New York Times* or *Michelin Guide* in other countries.

This study showed that the introduction of digital media brought about a significant change in how and where South Africans engaged with the subject of food and restaurants, confirming that Lupton and Feldman's (2020) digital food culture is as alive in South Africa as elsewhere in the world. This also confirms Dahlgren's (1998 p.60) argument that media is becoming more central to the organization and experience of social life, with everyday culture increasingly becoming media culture.

Facebook restaurant groups especially have become examples of Habermas' "public coffee houses" of lively restaurant discourse but similar to the criticism of Haberma's Victorian coffee houses, the South African one is exclusive, with very few reviewers of colour - a legacy of apartheid and its economic impact. These restaurant groups in particular also changed the review form from a one-directional opinion of a critic to a "more dialogic genre" a public discussion, which at times included both professional and amateur reviewers. The functionalities of social media (hashtags and sharing) also allowed these restaurant conversations to move beyond individual groups and sites confirming that the modern South African public sphere of restaurant reviewing is rather a network of conversations on various platforms, than an individual coffee house.

South Africans engaging in these online restaurant conversations also use these digital public spaces as sites of distinction to showcase their personal brands and claim cultural capital. These markers of distinction showed evidence of Johnston and Bauman's (2015) omnivorous reviewers suggesting that South Africans are also denouncing the snobbery associated with high-brow dining and also attach value to comfort food and use their ability to identify authenticity in these cuisines as a status marker. Montanari (2004, p.13) suggests that food is culture when it is eaten because food is chosen according to economic, nutritional or symbolic values, which shapes human identity and makes it an effective way of expressing and communicating that identity.

This study thus ultimately confirmed food and restaurant reviewing as an ideal Bourdieusian cultural field, to examine the social dynamics of a society as it includes the economic, social and cultural characteristics that make up the topography of Bourdieu's cultural field (Anheier, Gerhards and Romo, 1995, p.859). With food culture and media culture

intersecting in digital food culture, both food and media studies are likely to make significant contributions in future to the field of cultural studies.

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