



Findings

Restaurant Reviews and Neighborhoods

by Yas Motoyama

Many of us, meaning millions and more, use online restaurant reviews. I am also one of those people who uses online reviews to look for new restaurants. Nobody wants to waste money and time by trying a bad restaurant, if many people already said so. Why don't we borrow knowledge from others?

But how good is the data? [Yelp \(2019\)](#) claims that they provide "unbiased and objective" reviews with more than 100 million visitors per month. That's the worldwide aggregate, and how does it come down to my city and a specific restaurant? In addition, users may not be using the system's full data

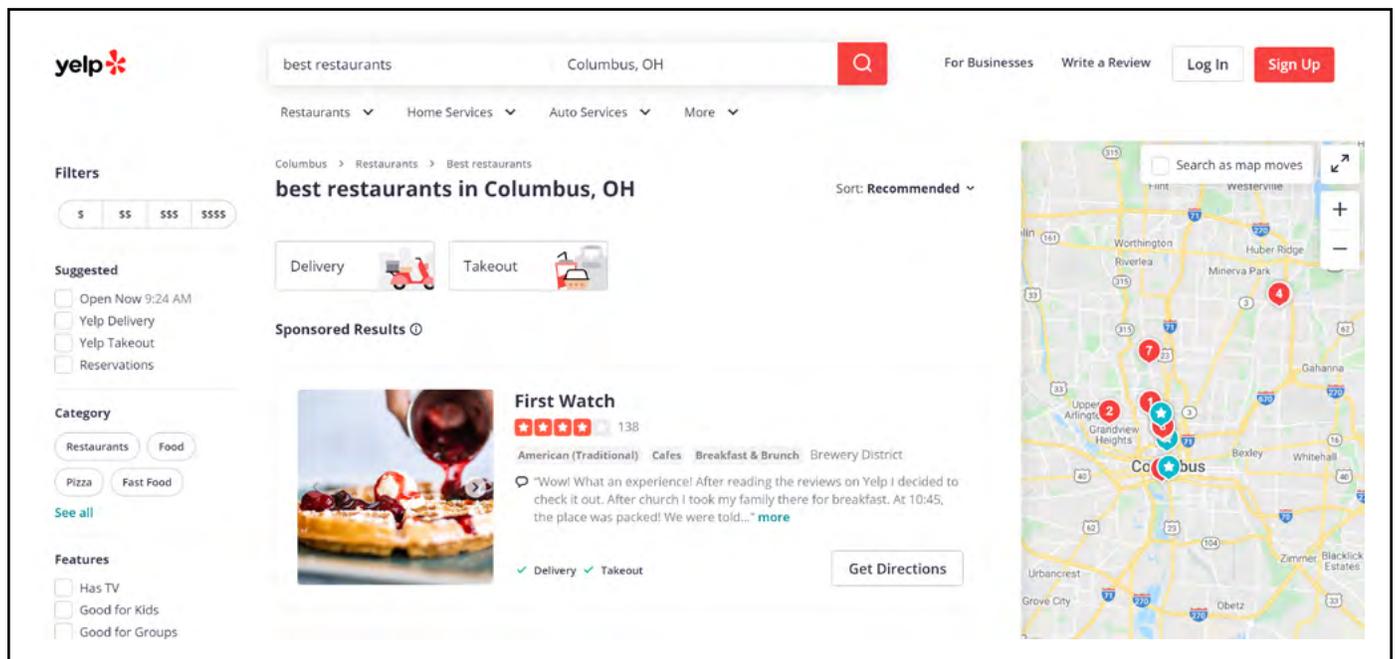
because most people, including myself, are not going through all 240 Mexican restaurants in the search result, but check only the first ten or maybe twenty if you are patient. What happens if some restaurants receive only one good review or ten reviews split between the good and the bad? What if restaurants in a hip and cool neighborhood receive many reviews and sorted high on the list, while restaurants in a poor neighborhood hardly receive reviews and sorted low? My colleague Kareem Usher and I published [an article in Papers in Applied Geography](#), and would like to share some findings here.

The first in an occasional series of research results from academia

Many Restaurants Receive Only a Few Reviews

First, we ought to understand the underlying structure of restaurant reviews: For instance, there are many restaurants that received few reviews: 31% of restaurants in Trip Advisor receive five or fewer reviews, and 17% for Yelp as of May 2019. There is a good portion of restaurants that receive only one review: 9% for Trip Advisor and 4% for Yelp.

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Notes From The Chair

Getting Back Out (Safely)

by Sean M. Maguire, AICP CEcD
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This fall was the first opportunity I had to attend an in-person conference since the Covid-19 pandemic — two, in fact. Here in New York, the state’s Economic Development Council held its first annual meeting since 2019. It was a wonderful opportunity to meet

up with fellow economic developers and planners alike. This event was also the first one that featured a new partnership with the New York Upstate Chapter of APA to provide Certification Maintenance credits to AICP members attending the event. The Chapter, recognized as the conference’s education sponsor, provided immediate access to an economic development program for certified planners which greatly expands opportunities for those who are actively engaged in economic development planning. I want to thank both Chapter President Mark Castiglione and NYSEDC Executive Director Ryan Silva for bringing this opportunity together.

Not even one week later, I was pleased to travel to Nashville, Tennessee for the 2021 IEDC Annual Conference. I applaud IEDC for taking steps to hold a safe event that was respectful of all who chose to participate. I had the opportunity to meet up with our EDD members — and it was the first time that EDD Secretary/Treasurer Morgan Wortham and I met face-to-face! Morgan had suggested that we create a meet-up opportunity at the conference for those who work in planning and economic development. Despite some weather challenges that prevented us from hosting a small group near the conference site, we pivoted and invited nearly 30 conference participants that we identified as AICP members or working in a planning office to meet in person in a conference exhibit hall. Among those that joined us was past EDD chair and the accomplished Bob Lewis, FAICP, CEcD.

I wanted to share some of this with you because despite the pivots to remote and virtual programs, attending these two events reminded me of the

power of personal connection in our work and in life. It’s been both necessary and important for all of us to make changes in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. And while we’ve found ways to improve what we do through new tools and by *force majeure*, at times, it’s important that we all find a way to get out from behind the screen and keyboard to be engaged professionals, albeit with safety plans and protocols in mind. These recent trips didn’t come without having to face some personal anxieties about travel and large groups — but I’m glad I faced them. One of the things that helped me was basic planning, of course.

As we all face similar challenges, remember why planning is so critical to all that we do. It allows us to create a vision for our future, evaluate current conditions, set goals and objectives, implement, and evaluate before starting again. My vision for this fall was to safely be an active, engaged professional expanding my knowledge and experience to do the best I can for my community. I considered the current conditions, established personal expectations, and developed strategies to overcome challenges I would encounter. For example, I knew that in some conference sessions, the room capacities may be more than I was ready for. So, my strategy was to find a space nearby to watch the live stream of that session — and it worked! My goals and objectives were primarily to reconnect — with friends, colleagues, and potential business partners. I scheduled meetings where I could and sought out those I needed to catch up with. And when I returned, I looked back to see how it all went and whether I accomplished what I set out to do. (I would say that I accomplished about 75% of what I wanted to do and what remains can be accomplished back at home.)

I encourage all of you to get back out on the road soon — safely. We’ve missed seeing so many of you in person. So please accept this invitation to safely join me and many other EDD members in San Diego for the 2022 National Planning Conference. We want to see your faces, swap stories, laugh, and learn together. Make a plan to be there and be safe!

— Sean M. Maguire, AICP CEcD is Chair of the Economic Development Division. He’s the Director of Planning and Economic Development for the Town of Colonie, New York and is an adjunct professor of planning and public administration at the University at Albany, SUNY.

RESTAURANT REVIEWS AND NEIGHBORHOODS, CONT. FROM P. 1

Overall, low-rated restaurants tend to receive few reviews. This may sound intuitive and fair, but it has an important implication. If the first few customers were angry about one restaurant, people may not visit there, and the vicious cycle can start with the restaurant. The system is designed to promote winners winning more, and losers remaining losers.

Coverage is OK, But Depends on Neighborhood

In the case of Franklin County, the primary seat of Columbus metropolitan area, Trip Advisor listed 3,125 restaurants and Yelp listed 2,765 restaurants. While we do not know the true population of restaurants, estimating data from InfoGroup (now Data Axle) informs that the coverage of rated restaurants is 74% for Trip Advisor and 78% for Yelp. That level of coverage is up to your interpretation, but things get more complicated if it's broken down to the 27 neighborhood level: the coverage of rated restaurants ranges from 30% to 100% in Trip Advisor and 60% to 95% in Yelp. If 70% of restaurants in one neighborhood are not covered in the system, it may be possible that the same neighborhood may be losing a business opportunity by not being covered and not being visited. Moreover, it is a concern that the four poorest neighborhoods by household income of less than \$35,000 (South Linden, North Linden, Eastland/Brice, and Franklinton) tend to receive more extreme reviews (either five or one star).

Neighborhood Premiums Exist

What if we combine both neighborhood factors and ratings? We also need to control the types of restaurants because it isn't fair to compare a cheap fast food restaurant to an upscale Brazilian bistro. We categorized into six groups of American, Latin American, fast food, sandwiches, pizza, and Asian restaurants. By running regressions to control all these factors, we find that, as expected, restaurants with more reviews get higher ratings, and so do pricier restaurants, even within the same category of restaurants. We are relieved to find that the neighborhood ratio of Black or Hispanic residents is not a significant factor to predict the level of rating. However, poverty requires a nuanced interpretation. It turns out that the poorest neighborhoods do not have any disadvantage in terms of restaurant rating, but semi-poor neighborhoods (i.e. second poorest out of income categories) get a premium in rating. Some of those neighborhoods have high proportion of Blacks or Hispanics, but others do not. So it is not the race or ethnicity, but some other neighborhood specific factors are present. We tried to uncover what exactly those neighborhood

factors are, but our analysis was limited due to limited sample size in some of those neighborhoods.

Takeaways

While more research is needed, there are a few important takeaways from our findings. First, it is clear that the restaurant review system is not unbiased or objective. The system is designed so that people use only a portion of their data, and people pay attention to a small portion of more popular restaurants. The flip side is that the system can leave many others behind. In addition, the system can be further manipulated by introducing sponsored links, which favor large businesses (like First Watch in the image on page 1), or even allowing artificially inflated ratings. In fact, there are apparently paid services to purchase positive reviews

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or false negative reviews about competing businesses, called astroturfing. [Yelp \(2020\)](#) claims to remove or not recommend those reviews, which counts to up to 30% of their reviews. However, such effort does not really address the fundamental structure of the system, not favoring restaurants with few reviews.

Second, while there is no linear relationship with poverty and race/ethnicity, some neighborhood factors are present. In the case of Franklin County, these are neighborhoods between downtown and south or southeast. However, more research is needed over time and at different cities to test those sporadic neighborhood effects. More importantly, we should also be cognizant of the other side of the coin: unlisted or unrated restaurants. The advertisement by the review websites is rather deceptive. Hundreds of millions of listings worldwide does not mean that the coverage is good everywhere. Some neighborhoods miss up to 70% (Trip Advisor) or 40% (Yelp) of their restaurants. The review system

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RESTAURANT REVIEWS AND NEIGHBORHOODS, CONT. FROM P. 3

should be inclusive of all kinds of restaurants.

Third, given this structural flaw, there needs to be some effort to correct the disadvantaged fate of restaurants with few bad reviews. Perhaps neighborhood associations or local restaurant associations can lead and encourage visiting those restaurants with few reviews. This does not mean these associations should promote astroturfing, but promote reviews on a fair basis. Chances are, extreme reviews may be averaged out. Moreover, this gives an important role to planners. We do not recommend planners use these restaurant review sites to track how and what kind of neighborhood is doing better than others. Planners can instead monitor and identify restaurants and neighborhoods that may be left out of the system, either unrated or low-rated with few reviews. Then, planners can call for attention by neighborhood and local restaurant associations to conduct fair reviews.

— Yasuyuki (Yas) Motoyama, Ph.D., is an assistant professor at Ohio State University. His research interests include economic development through innovation and entrepreneurship, and creative integration of urban data analytics. Reach the author at motoyama.1@osu.edu.

Volunteer Opportunities with the Economic Development Division

A team of volunteers keeps the Economic Development Division going. If you've always wanted to "get involved," this is your opportunity to help the planning profession.

Our committees (awards, communications, membership, website, programming, etc.) welcome enthusiastic hands — volunteer your skills for the greater good!

Contact us at info_EDD@planning.org if you are interested in helping out and getting more involved.

Resources

- **The U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) provides grants** for economic recovery and targeted economic development initiatives.
- **EDA Economic Development Directory** — [This link](#) provides information on states' and territories' economic development resources.
- **International Economic Development Council Reports** — If you are not already a member, you can sign up and [download free reports](#).
- **The Redevelopment Institute Webinar Series on Brownfields** — [These webinars](#) are free — one upcoming on October 15 and another on November 19.
- **U.S. Census Bureau Webinars** — The Census Bureau has [weekly webinars](#) on various data topics and many sessions are relevant for economic development. Recorded webinars with slides and transcripts are also provided for past webinars. Some relevant topics include retail sales, manufacturing, and employment.

Please submit any relevant resources for the EDD to feature in our email newsletters or *News & Views* to Vicki Oppenheim, AICP, EDD Communications Chair, at vicki@greenlep.com.

Join the conversation!



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APA-EDD Announces New Partnership With IEDC Volunteer Program

For more than a decade, IEDC has been assisting disaster-impacted communities in the United States facing unique challenges in their overall recovery. Many of these communities lack the capacity, expertise, and resources to take on the challenge alone. Recognizing this barrier, the IEDC has been able to match offers of volunteer assistance from its network of economic development professionals with generous assistance from U.S. EDA who has provided financial support to communities through IEDC and its Economic Recovery and Resilience Volunteer Program.

APA-EDD is pleased to work with the IEDC to lend a hand by connecting planning professionals to work hand-in-hand with economic development professionals to create expert-levels plans to guide communities on their paths to full recovery. This new partnership will provide IEDC with a larger pool of potential volunteers who have specific expertise in various aspects of planning, which has been a common request from communities seeking assistance.

“As a current and past volunteer involved in the Economic Recovery and Resilience Volunteer Program with IEDC, it is both a rewarding and fulfilling program,” said EDD Chair Sean Maguire. “Given the universal disaster of the pandemic and disparities in planning capacity in some communities versus others, I believe that as both planners and economic developers, we should do our best to band together and lend a hand if possible.”

APA EDD will share calls for volunteers from IEDC with its Division members. IEDC will match volunteers with communities whose needs match the expertise of APA EDD volunteers. Generally, the program works as follows:

- The community identifies an economic recovery or resilience need that could use expert technical assistance or capacity building.
- IEDC works with the community or host organization to develop a scope of work, goals, and deliverables for a technical assistance project.
- IEDC identifies and prepares an experienced volunteer or team of volunteers to work on the project.

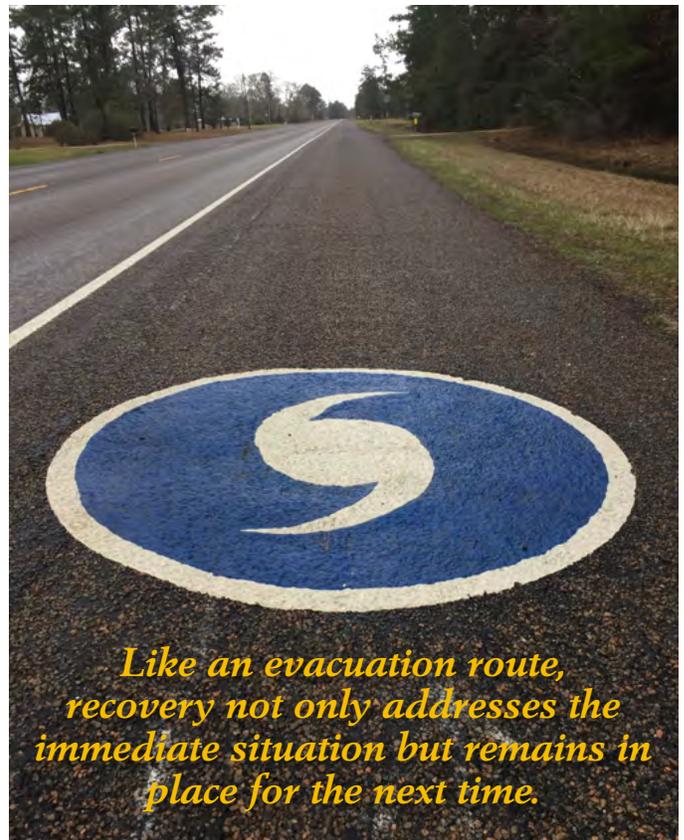
- The volunteer(s) works 20-40 hours on site, or provides up to 40 hours of assistance through virtual engagements.
- The volunteer(s) provides the deliverable or report.

IEDC remains available to provide follow-up support or arrange additional projects.

“IEDC appreciates the vital experiences and skills that economic development professionals contribute as recovery volunteers,” said Frankie Clogston, IEDC Vice President of Knowledge Management and Development. “Our volunteer program offers the opportunity to connect with a diverse range of communities to create lasting impact for recovery and capacity-building.”

Volunteers assist with a wide variety of topics. Examples include:

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PARTNERSHIP WITH IEDC, CONT. FROM P. 5

- Advising and developing action plans for implementing economic recovery
- Assessing economic diversification strategies
- Advising on the creation of an economic development organization or program
- Branding, communication and marketing strategies
- Downtown and main street revitalization
- Strengthening workforce development or entrepreneurship programs
- Small business development and finance

If you have any questions or are interested in participating, please email IEDC's Delaney Luna at dluna@iedconline.org or visit www.RestoreYourEconomy.org to learn more.



EDD Member Meetup Dec. 15!

Join us for an informal virtual gathering of APA Economic Development Division members on December 15th at 3PM CST/4PM ET. Find out about the EDD and how you can get involved. It's a great networking opportunity to meet urban planners and economic development specialists from across the U.S. These occasional meetups are for current members as well as an orientation for new members.

Please [register on Zoom](#) and we'll see you there!



Webinar: *Planning for Economic Justice*

As part of the Planning Webcast Series, the APA Economic Development Division will host a virtual program on *Planning for Economic Justice* on Friday, October 29, 2021 from 1:00-2:30 p.m. EDT.

Any discussion of planning for Economic Justice must begin with identifying the causes of economic inequality.



This session endeavors to provide a historical foundation of economic injustices, define critical terms, develop new lenses for discovery, and focus these lenses on potential pathways to enabling the

Communities of Promise that have been systematically excluded from reaching their potential.

Zero-sum and scarcity assumptions in economics have shaped our understanding of the issues, constrained our policy responses, and continue to obscure the real issues. Transcending the orthodoxy of neoclassical economics and other socially constructed narratives begins with understanding how we arrived at this point, exposing the demonstrably false assumptions, and learning from the past so we can see an alternative, inclusive future that benefits from the contributions of all.

Like other panels in this series, this conversation is a first step for APA to recognize the causes, costs, and corrective actions necessary to assuage economic inequality. We hope you will attend!

[Click here to register.](#)

Be A Better Leader by *Not* Having All the Answers

by April Townsend

This article first appeared on the website of the The American Society for Public Administration (www.patimes.org). It is reprinted with permission of the author.

“**W**hat do you think?” Good leaders ask this question...a lot. Historically, leaders have been expected to have all the answers because their authority was based on the expectation that they knew the most. But now, with government organizations being so complex, it’s unrealistic to expect one person to have in-depth experience and knowledge on every aspect of the business operations they oversee. Effective leaders have realized that their role has shifted from having all the answers to adopting the role of a coach.

What Does That Mean?

First, let’s quickly explore what coaching is NOT. Being a coach is not telling your employees what to do or trying to fix them. It’s also different from providing feedback, where the focus is on looking backwards. Instead, coaching is future-focused on bridging the gap of where the employee is now and taking intentional steps to build toward where they want to be in the future.

As a leader, adopting a coaching style means that instead of always having the answer, you partner with



employees in a way that inspires them to maximize their own potential. You connect with employees to increase their self-awareness, support their ability to choose and inspire them to make change by taking action to reach their goals.

Instead of offering advice, you help employees find their own answers and then help them learn how to use that knowledge to move forward. This creates a self-learning, self-reflective process that is much more sustainable than reinforcing the expectation that they should always turn to others for answers. Coaching employees also means holding them accountable for their actions and supporting them toward their goals. How is that done?

Through the Power of Listening

When an employee comes to you asking what he or she should do, instead of immediately offering a solution, you may want to respond by saying, “I don’t know. What do you think?” or, maybe, “I have some ideas, but I’d like to hear your thoughts first.” Encouraging employees to verbalize and explore their own ideas before offering solutions is one of the most overlooked tools in leadership development.

As a leader, you are able to better connect with people and learn when you intentionally listen and show your curiosity in the person and the situation through asking thoughtful questions. Engaged listening is powerful and starts with intentionally creating space to listen and then reflect on what the employee is saying and not saying. This means your laptop is closed, your phone is set aside and that you aren’t allowing your schedule to be a constant stream of back-to-back meetings.

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BE A BETTER LEADER, CONT. FROM P. 7

Four Benefits of Adopting a Coaching Approach

The most important benefit is that it allows you to improve your own communication skills through intentional listening and tapping into your curiosity by asking probing questions. It also means using silence more regularly. Instead of jumping in with the answer, learn to sit in silence to allow the employee a chance to offer their own ideas and possible solutions. They may come up with something you hadn't thought of that will work just as well, if not better, than what you were going to offer.

A second benefit to a coaching approach is that it allows you to gain new insights by stepping back from being in constant problem-solving mode and instead focus on encouraging others to explore their own insights and ideas. Third, your own thinking is expanded because you're able to consider other points of view as you ask reflective questions. And fourth, using a coaching leadership style is more sustainable by creating an environment where you can empower and develop your team. Through helping your employees find their own answers by reflecting on where they are doing well and where there are opportunities for growth and change, you can help them set goals that contribute to their own — and the team's — success.

How Do I Start?

As you have your one-on-one meetings, try creating time and space for the employee to identify what they would like to focus on that would be helpful for them. Here are just a few sample questions that may provide you with a starting point on adopting a coaching leadership style:

- During our time together, what would be helpful for us to focus on that is important to you?
- What do you think?
- What would be most useful at this point?
- What makes this a challenge?
- What would that mean if you did X?
- What has you coming to that conclusion?
- What would help you know what to do?
- What's making this a problem?
- What do you want to do about this situation?
- What would be most helpful for you to achieve X?
- What has you in this questioning mode?
- What might be some other options?

Being an effective leader isn't about having all the answers. It's about connecting with people and inspiring them to do their best, while helping them discover their own answers.

— Dr. April Townsend worked in local government for over 30 years, holding executive leadership and management positions. She is currently a Scholar-in-Residence with the Utah Women and Leadership Project and owner of Townsend Consulting, LLC, providing leadership coaching and organizational consulting services. She can be reached by email at April@Townsend.Consulting; on Twitter @AprilT2014; and on the web at www.townsend.consulting and www.usu.edu/uwlp/index.

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