

The Adversity of Asian-Owned Family Businesses and the Negative Effects of Yelp

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Abstract: Though the adversity immigrants and minorities have had in society since the genesis of time, the impact of such inequality of privileges in the United States is preposterous. The fact that families are struggling to provide food on their tables, worrying about every penny they earn and spend, and trying to find the path to success. The minority population tends to stay at an unstable level of wealth, while the rich become wealthier through generations. The extreme growth of hate and discrimination towards immigrant and minority families has created disproportionality in the United States. Not only does this add additional adversity for families of lower socioeconomic status, but it also creates a hierarchy in society. Hierarchy in society can lead to unbalanced and unjust power that can ruin nations. These families undergo newcomers' denial of authentic foods, difficulty adapting to American culture, and torturing racism.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the struggles of finding an opportunity to succeed as an immigrant and minority family/individual. Furthermore, this paper explores the influence of a customer review application called Yelp, illustrating how their algorithms were designed to unfairly force disadvantages on small businesses. In this paper, I will go over the personal experiences of Asian immigrants and how apps like Yelp, despite being designed to give businesses greater visibility, can negatively impact the success outcomes of Asian-owned businesses in the United States.

This paper aims to inform people worldwide about the difficulty in adapting to a new environment and finding success through small businesses, even with the manipulations of "supportive" applications.

Illustrating the authentic scenes and scenarios of what adversities come in the way of these families/ individuals. Moreover, highlights the recent decline in the support given to minority and immigrant-owned businesses in the United States.

Keywords: small business, immigrant families, Asian Americans, minorities, discrimination, Yelp.

I. INTRODUCTION

Many nations have been trying to make a profit by solving the pressing needs of low-income/minority communities. Companies, preoccupied with their social goals, have embarked on ambitious projects with optimism, only to be disappointed when low consumer demand and heavy constraints as the goal of keeping revenues high and cost low are destroyed¹. As stated before, minorities immigrate to find their new success and new life, continuing what their traditions/families have been doing. This not only produces a challenge with sales revenues (difference in trends) but also sets them on a path of adversity and dereliction when combined with racism, cultural differences, and language barriers. Regardless of how hard one tries, there is always a significant impediment keeping one from taking the next step.

II. THE HISTORY OF ADVERSITY OF ASIAN AMERICANS

Asian Americans have long played an essential role in shaping the US identity. The essential Transcontinental Railroad was built by Asian Americans, who also fought in numerous wars and advocated for improvements to labor laws. They made these contributions despite continuing to experience violence and discrimination throughout American history. The article

Asian Americans Then and Now states, "The Chinese represented 20% of California's labor force by 1870, even though they constituted only .002% of the entire United States population." Despite this crucial role, Asian immigrants and citizens have experienced significant inequality and exclusion throughout the history of the United States. For Asian immigrants who fled their inhumane nation for America, the "American Dream" and the "Land of Freedom" were nothing more than myths they were seeking to escape. Furthermore, the Chinese Exclusion Act, which prohibited and restricted Chinese immigration to America based on race, was enacted by Congress in 1882. Due to this, fewer people immigrated, falling from 39,500 in 1882 to just 10 in 1887. After the Chinese Exclusion Act, many additional racist laws were passed. The Koreans who endured Japan's rule of Korea worked as farm laborers, railroad workers, and strikebreakers before being discriminated against again in America. Not only were they unwelcome to America, but their own country was also engaged in a life-and-death struggle for independence at home. Moreover, there would be another Indian Exclusion after that. Despite what some people may argue, racism is still very much present and pervasive².

III. THE BIGGEST HURDLES IMMIGRANT ENTREPRENEURS FACE

Coming back to the 21st century, and the entrepreneurs today, Dan Wu, the owner of Atomic Ramen, shares his experience of immigrating to the United States from China and facing several hurdles in opening and operating a small business in Lexington. Wu reflects on when he opened his restaurant in 2017. He states, "Sixty percent of restaurants do not make it past the first year, and over eighty percent shutter within five. Nevertheless, I was confident." Wu was determined to break down barriers despite the adversities ahead of him. He had investors and professionals to tap for advice and knew how marketing and social media affect his business³. He knew he was set, but this was until reality hit him. Wu was destined to become a business owner ever since his father quit a well-paying research job in the UK to open a Subway sandwich shop. Throughout high school, he would visit his father's shop learning and witnessing firsthand all the dos and don'ts, which helped him tremendously in the future creating his own business.

Other hardships immigrant restaurant owners face are language barriers, lack of access to traditional capital like bank loans, and private investors. The language barrier is one of the most significant factors immigrants must consider. Creating a massive pothole in social networking and media marketing can heavily impact the brand. Wu states, "They may not know better than to publish menus full of spelling and grammar mistakes." He portrays the reality of what it is like to be an immigrant owning a small business. The location of the minority restaurants is often not conducive to foot traffic, sometimes opened in isolated areas or in areas blocked by construction work because they can not afford better locations. Not only can they not hire services because of low income, but they need to purchase equipment for their business. Wu further his statement about the unfairness of immigrants asserting, "But these hurdles put immigrants, refugees, and other marginalized communities at a huge disadvantage in an already competitive marketplace³." Adjusting, most immigrant families start their businesses with all their capital, risking a lot for a slight chance of success.

Aside from the destructive effects of covid on the healthcare system, the economic repercussions have been disastrous for independently-owned enterprises. This "China Virus(Wu)" has directly influenced Wu, a Chinese American. The persistent blaming of the Chinese community for the virus in the United States has resulted in a loss of revenues for restaurants during the pandemic. According to Wu, these racist attitudes not only negatively affect the businesses that they directly attack, but the American economy as a whole. "...aside from the numerous data demonstrating immigrants' power, resilience, and outsized economic contributions. We lose the richness of American culture when we lose these enterprises."

Wu emphasizes that the problem is not that entrepreneurship alone is a difficult journey; the playing field itself is unfair and must be righted³. Immigrants and refugees have significantly more barriers to success when they lack familial wealth, cultural and language competence, and access to money.

IV. MOTHERING AMONG ASIAN IMMIGRANTS: WORKING CLASS

The transition process to life in the United States that Korean immigrant families undergo involves many shifts in familial roles, parenting styles, and priorities within the family. In the article "Reconstructing Mothering among Korean Immigrant Working-Class Women in the United States," Seongeun Kim illustrates the struggle and adversities Korean mothers face during their immigration process to a new world⁴. The primary research recorded 22 working Korean immigrant mothers with adolescent children in Philadelphia. The journal describes how the demarcation of public and private spheres was heavily deconstructed. Kim has found that women's nurturing roles and men's breadwinning roles are found in certain families. It was discovered that mothering behaviors are negotiated and reconstructed during the process of acculturation and that they are further adjusted depending on the period of stay in the United States.

One recent immigrant woman, Mun, recorded that she and her husband leave home around 3:00 or 4:00 am and face a trip until 11 pm every day. She and her husband had to work tirelessly to avoid bankruptcy. For about seven years, they followed this harsh routine. Mun worked two jobs as a janitor and babysitter to re-establish her family's economic security. Mun's family learned that running a small Korean restaurant entailed a high possibility of bankruptcy through harsh adversities and lessons, having to close a few of their own. America was not the "promised land" they had yearned for since the dawn of time, but rather a false and unprepared reality of their existence. All of their talents and achievements, native language, educational levels, social ability, and job skills earned at home had no meaning in America and instead worked against them. Korean mothers were obliged to work in blue-collar jobs requiring no specific skills or training to support and sustain their families, regardless of the professional qualifications they had gained and carried with them⁴.

They researched the lifestyles of recent immigrant women, mothering practices created with the current acculturation process, and social-economic displacement, including hurdles and difficulties during the investigation. Language, social networks, and family finance are the most common barriers for immigrant families. In the publication, Korean mothers are battling to complete their essential household tasks. Meal preparation, housework, organizing school supplies, and monitoring children's health and emotional well-being. The fact that mothers prohibit from being "mothers" to their children exemplifies the obstacles that every immigrant household encounters.

The interview of mothers caught the eyes of many individuals. The interviewer asked, "How do you want to raise your adolescent children⁴?" With genuine heart, the immigrant mother responded, "When I was in Korea, I did everything for my kids. However, since I came here, I have had to completely change my parenting style; I make my kids take care of themselves. I can do very little for my kids. My daughter prepares food for her little brother and helps out every Saturday at our shop. While she was in Korea, she was like a princess. She did not do anything that she does now before, but now she is different." While many people are convinced her daughter grew up swiftly and maturely, she is still a child. At a young age, no child should be apprehensive about serving and preparing meals for her siblings. It is completely unacceptable that a mother cannot do her ordinary duty of caring for and feeding her children due to economic problems⁴.

The study examines how Korean immigrant mothers nurture their children and how their parenting role shifted as they lived a working-class lifestyle in the United States. Going against the grain, the great challenge of moving abroad, and changing their traditional ways of life—not just as mothers, but as humans, as human beings. The study of diversity and its consequences for families began to take shape, highlighting the importance of employment and the challenges of living in America. Their acculturation process is also outlined by their employment experiences. To make the readers more aware of what it's like for mothers who are Asian immigrants to live in the United States⁴.

V. UNPLEASANT TIMING

When the pandemic took hold of the world in 2020, small Asian American businesses were hit the hardest. Because the virus originated from China, not only did Americans view anyone who seemed to be of Asian descent with fear, skepticism, and anger, but the president at the time, Donald Trump, further fueled the fire, referring to COVID-19 as "the China virus." As a result, Asian American business owner income/profit dropped by 26% during the months from February to April, according to a study by the National Bureau of Economic Research (Fernando). In the article "Racism Targets Asian Food, Business during COVID-19," Wu states, "To white Americans, these new immigrants were different in a threatening way, and there is fear of the 'other,' of difference." The fact that Asian Americans have to live and breathe through white supremacy to survive in this country is unjust. Keeping and being proud of their culinary heritage is now very difficult for all Asian Americans⁵.

Akin to this idea, there are two individuals who experienced a decline in sales in addition to racist calls live. One Chinese-American couple who own their Cantonese BBQ restaurant, RiceBox, in Downtown Los Angeles, shares their stories of adversity when attempting to survive with their small business. Leo and Lydia Lee opened their restaurant in September 2018, just a little over a year before the pandemic. Though most of their customers came from businesses nearby, the lunch crowds and sales revenues were highly decent. This initial success quickly dissipated at the height of the pandemic. They survived off of take-outs and delivery, which dropped sales by about 70%, but sales were not the main problem they faced. According to Leo, "We got many prank phone calls...People would ask, 'Do you serve bats? Do you serve Covid⁶.'"

In another instance, there was a customer who pushed past the blocked front door, where orders were being taken, coughed in the Lees' direction, and walked right back out. Lee went on to describe how terrifying the event was.

VI. 3.5 STAR RULE

Most users can find Yelp's star rating to be very accurate; this is proven false through the "3.5-star rule." Recently, on Sept 13, 2022, Freddie Wong posted a TikTok video that has been going viral on social media ever since. In the video, Wong went looking for the best "authentic" Chinese restaurant, utilizing reviews and ratings on Yelp. However, this backlashed, rather than the Chinese restaurant being a 5 out of 5 stars, he states, "The easiest way to find authentic Chinese food, assuming you are living in a major metropolitan area, is to go on Yelp and to look for restaurants with three-and-a-half stars... Exactly three and a half, not three, not four. Three-and-a-half stars is a sweet spot for authentic Chinese food." Wong visits and gives his opinion on a widely known "authentic" Chinese restaurant chain, Din Tai Fung. Fin Tai Dung has four stars, and Wong continues complaining about too many stars⁷. He implies that the rating is very high because of the service, not the food. Additionally, the video explains many restaurants that match his thesis, including a very authentic Chinese restaurant called Duck House, stating that their dumplings are much better.

The reason behind such a low rating in "authentic" restaurants is not because of the food but rather the service. The cultural differences influenced many small immigrated Asian restaurants in customer service, which led to customer dissatisfaction. This is how the modern world is stabilized and looked towards, the fine line between fantastic service and some room for unsatisfactory food. Confused, "A good Yelp review does not determine if a restaurant is good." Wong added that service in "authentic" restaurants is a huge reason why people get enraged and leave off negative reviews. The word "3.5-star rule" has had an overwhelming reaction from the audience, influencing others to try the method as well⁷. The nailing accuracy of Wong's opinion and database of great Chinese food is established through the TikTok video.

VII. MSG AND "CLEAN EATING"

MSG (Monosodium glutamate) was always known to be an abominable substance restaurant put in their dishes. This stereotype/controversy was all broken by Jenny Yang, a famous Asian American comedian, actor, and writer who eliminated the false accusations around MSG by creating her own clever and proficient campaign. Yang once says, "Food has been a lifelong passion of mine because it is so tied with my culture, it is so tied with identity... So when I became a comedian and built a following online, talking back to people who would malign ingredients or foods that represented my culture became one of my favorite things to talk about. [Goop] was calling MSG not clean eating when it was not proven with scientific evidence ... so this was a natural fit for me." Yang realized and saw the hate different cultures were perceiving Asian cultured ingredients, and her goal was to terminate the prejudice⁸.

Furthermore, the product of her campaign was not to redefine the "clean eating" example with MSG but to state that food arriving from different countries and cultures should not be discriminated against.

VIII. YELP'S MANIPULATIONS AND THREATS TOWARD SMALLER BUSINESSES

Consumer reviews are an essential element of making daily decisions. However, the reliability of the evaluations can influence, and deception can occur. With its 92 million daily users, Yelp has been in the spotlight as a convenient resource for consumers. Created as a user-friendly app, Yelp is cleverly programmed for users to discover store/business ratings and, most importantly, consumer reviews. The impact of modern technology used by Yelp through crowd-sourced local business reviews and social networking sites has shifted the entity of the marketing industry. The business can now facilitate, educate, and empower customer decisions due to its quick growth and excellent procedures. Nevertheless, recently, there have been numerous articles stating Yelp's abuse of smaller businesses and the manipulations of their algorithms. Not only generating hate towards Yelp but heavily influencing its reputation. This paper will reveal Yelp's threats to small businesses and their subterfuges to become a successful application for consumers

IX. YELP'S HISTORY

The beginning of Yelp was more than usual, the two former PayPal employees, Jeremy Stoppelman and Russel Simmions. Together they were able to swap friends for business partners. The company's name was Yelp, now worth over 2.7 billion dollars with approximately 250 million reviews. Stoppelman, trying to find a name for the brand, wished for something short, memorable, and similar to "help." This idea was an amusing but clever moment for them. In addition, Yelp needed an idea to differentiate people from other companies. In February 2005, Yelp launched a revamped version of its network that lets users share their opinions through reviews. This mechanism created a space for "Yelp users." Though many consumer review websites have been on the scene for decades, no other app like Yelp could receive the spotlight it has right now. Alone having over 92 million users every day, the company is still growing at a rapid speed. Not only is Yelp a third-

party online platform that allows any users to locate and review businesses, but stores can also receive feedback from stars, between 1-5 ratings, included with a user-written review. Depending on consumer reviews, the business's sales will vary, as small businesses need to be on top of the algorithm with a high star rating. Yelp's true colors show its strategies to manipulate and threaten smaller businesses, as anything is possible with Yelp's current power⁹.

X. THE PROBLEM WITH YELP'S ALGORITHM

Yelp effectively controls its algorithm through data collected from the user's reviews. With its star ratings and user-written reviews, the algorithm will classify the business as either recommended or non-recommended. Not only does this affect the ranking of restaurants shown on their feed, but it heavily includes consumer decisions and business revenues. One process that plays a crucial role in Yelp's data influence is the review filtering process.

Review filtering allows for detecting and removing spam or questionable content, ensuring that reviews are comments/written by actual users, not bots, businesses do not leave deliberate reviews of themselves, and lastly, making sure the reviews are left by customers and not hired by third parties¹⁰. Though some may say it is an efficient processing method, there are many downsides. The filtering algorithm tends to complicate credible reviews as non-recommended and vice versa. Misleading consumers into accidental decisions generates a painful experience in the app, discouraging new users from leaving reviews¹⁰.

Fake reviews are being manipulated all over Yelp, as they have done a great job of resolving the problem.

Users need to realize that non-recommended reviews are discredited towards the business's average rating. A Harvard Business Review study published in 2011 states, "Each star increase in average rating corresponds to the revenue increase between 5% and 9%." These statistics are ridiculous, considering almost 10% of sales can increase just from the number of stars in the business description. It is essential for business owners to do whatever they need to do to keep their star ratings high. The factors recognized as significant for filtering reviews are rationally compatible with Yelp's objectives to offer users quality, verifiable data. Yelp's job to constantly promote reliable recommending reviews is crucial to its algorithm and consumer satisfaction¹⁰. However, this fraud algorithm plays an essential part in manipulating small businesses through star ratings and user reviews.

Data Collection

In a research paper, *Yelp Review Manipulation and Social Effects*, Elaine Arbaugh from the California Institute of Technology has done many explorations of downtown Los Angeles restaurants and their review flaws. 578 restaurants in LA, including 71 that advertise, provided information for Arbaugh and her team's review database. 134,564 suggested reviews and 14,361 filtered reviews were included in the data overall. In addition to identifying a restaurant that launched as an advertiser after they began collecting data, their objectives included determining the difference between the reviews that restaurants that advertised and restaurants that did not promote obtained¹¹.

However, they could not confidently say whether it was because of societal changes or modifications to the restaurant itself, instead of making assumptions about what reviews each user viewed while writing a new review, the data throughout the time required to be collected to identify which reviews were the top ones. The team would base the user behavior compared with which reviews were the top ones. Attempting to separate exogenous effects from cascading effects, creating more specific data available over time¹¹.

XI. YELP'S INFLUENCE ON SMALL BUSINESSES

Yelp has been the primary online review network for major brands and standard and tiny local businesses. It possesses a significant influence considering 90% of respondents claimed. Yelp reviews influence their purchasing decisions. Yelp has changed the landscape for small businesses, changing how businesses promote and prioritize their Yelp profile. The most crucial part of becoming successful as a small business is having an excellent reputation and increasing revenue as fast as possible. With this said the concern of this specification is that restaurant ratings may display a restaurant's reputation, which is usually falsely accused. The mind-boggling 5-8% change in revenue based on each star rating change definitely catches the eye of small businesses¹².

Yelp's "influence" is where the inhumane fraud comes in. In the algorithm, there are many occasions where bot/non-reliable reviews are left. Compared to major brands with thousands of customer reviews, small businesses have to depend on their limited number of customers, leaving an excellent impression for them to leave a decent review. Meanwhile, local business competitors can rate low and leave negative reviews, heavily affecting the business. The rating has been a problem for many

small companies. Small businesses have started to notice that Yelp leads back to money and the vision of Yelp as a virtual marketing platform¹². The money and influence local businesses contribute to Yelp is another factor in their revenue. Yelp's influence can lead to success or depletion, especially for smaller companies.

XII. YELP'S ABUSE OF BUSINESSES

Sean Kernan and his partner participated in a trial project for Yelp's premium reviewer service about ten years ago. Every two weeks, they were dispatched to a set of locations where they would form impressions and write reviews. A few months after her "assignment", Kernan read a study in November that revealed more than a dozen occasions of Yelp reps pressuring to deceive businesses, constantly calling and contacting them, knowing well that the business owners had no idea what they were buying into¹³.

Melanie, an owner of a plant nursery, also experienced an instance of fraud from Yelp. Yelp personally approached her in March, claiming to be conducting a "give back" for small and local businesses during the pandemic. Melanie accepted the offer of a \$700 free advertising credit since it appealed to her and was advantageous. However, a week after accepting the deal, she received an unexplained \$52 charge. She protested angrily and demanded a refund, but Yelp said the credit was a component of the border purchase. A second charge of \$570 came soon after, adding fuel to the fire. Through all the arguments, Yelp refused to give her hard-earned money back¹³.

While Shafran, a construction business owner, was able to avoid direct financial fraud, he underwent ongoing issues with his reviews that affected his business long-term. One day, without cause, his 18 five-star Yelp reviews began suddenly disappearing. He stated in an interview, "It is very odd that out of 19 reviews posted, Yelp's filter has decided that the single negative review is the only one that is not spamming." Not only was his low number of reviews very important for his company's sales, but owning a small business, his entire livelihood depended on those Yelp reviews. The accusation of extortion might have seemed like a stretch, but the history of Yelp's shaky relationship with small businesses informs otherwise¹⁴.

XIII. CONCLUSION

One can see the reality of Asian immigrants' challenges and struggles in establishing their enterprises via personal experience from various situations and individualism. The tremendous impact Yelp has on small companies and its hidden method of manipulation can control the whole business industry continuously.

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