



Research note

Examining guest chefs' influences on luxury restaurants' images

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1. Introduction

In recent years, some upscale restaurants have invited guest chefs to provide diners with cuisines that are out of the ordinary (e.g., new menus and/or dishes that use unique ingredients) for a limited period of time (e.g., Cheshes, 2015; Naylor, 2010). As suggested by Cheshes (2015), when executed successfully, this collaboration can bring new cuisines to diners without having them travel far, can allow chefs to learn from one another, and can help restaurants explore new opportunities without taking on too much risk.

Although the use of guest chefs by high-end restaurants is on the rise, scholars have not explored the impact of guest chefs and this phenomenon's implications to the hospitality literature. Kuroshima (2010), Pratten (2003a,b), and Zopiatis (2010) suggested that chefs are crucial to restaurant performance. The existing literature on restaurants has emphasized service quality and atmosphere; nevertheless, relevant studies on chefs have been scarce. To contribute to the hospitality literature, the current study incorporates "perceived restaurant-guest chef fit" into the image transfer model of Deng and Li (2014) to explore a recently growing phenomenon and to provide practitioners with suggestions on how to use guest chefs effectively.

2. Research frameworks

Fig. 1 shows the proposed framework for the current research. The first relationship to be examined is the influence of a guest chef's image on a luxury restaurant's image. The guest chef's image refers to customers' overall perceptions of the guest chef's interpersonal skills, technical skills, and creativity (Fang et al., 2013; Kuroshima, 2010; Lin and Lin, 2006; Zopiatis, 2010). The luxury restaurant's image can be defined as the diner's perceptions

of the luxury restaurant, as reflected by the associations held in his/her memory (Deng and Li, 2014). Scholars have suggested that perceived image is a crucial factor when examining an individual's future behavioral intentions (Assaker et al., 2011; Prayag and Ryan, 2012; Qu et al., 2011). In the hospitality literature, studies have found that a chef's image is important for an upscale restaurant's image (Lin and Lin, 2006; Pratten, 2003a,b; Zopiatis, 2010); a chef with a good image increases diners' confidence in their purchases and lowers their perceived risks (Lin, 2013; Tam, 2008). This study hypothesizes that guest chefs with good images contribute positively to luxury restaurants' images.

H1

A guest chef's image has a positive effect on a luxury restaurant's perceived image.

The second relationship examines the influence of the perceived restaurant-guest chef fit on a luxury restaurant's image. The restaurant-guest chef fit refers to whether diners perceive the guest chef's image as consistent and compatible with the hosting restaurant (Helmig et al., 2007; Uggla, 2004). In the brand alliance literature, scholars have found that a good fit between allied brands enriches the current associations in the minds of customers and improves their attitudes towards co-brands (Ashton and Scott, 2011; Boo and Mattila, 2002; Lin, 2013). In the luxury restaurant context, diners have certain perceptions regarding luxury restaurants (Chen et al., 2015; Wu and Liang, 2009). Chefs also have unique images and skill sets (Lin and Lin, 2006; Pratten, 2003a,b). The present research posits that a luxury restaurant's image will improve if diners perceive that there is a good fit between the guest chef and the luxury restaurant.

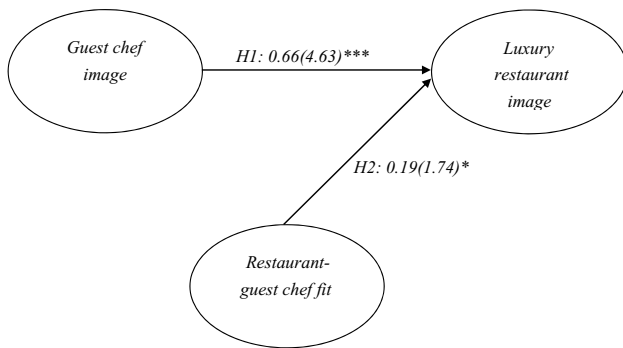
H2

A higher perceived fit between the restaurant and the guest chef has a positive effect on the luxury restaurant's perceived image.

The third relationship investigates the restaurant-guest chef fit's ability to moderate the influence of the guest chef image's on the luxury restaurant's image. In the brand sponsorship literature,

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Number on path: standardized parameter estimation, Number in parentheses: T-Value.
Remark: *Significant at $p < 0.05$; **Significant at $p < 0.01$; ***Significant at $p < 0.001$.

Fig. 1. Research Framework (Main; $N = 179$). Number on path: standardized parameter estimation, Number in parentheses: T-value. Remark: *significant at $p < 0.05$; **significant at $p < 0.01$; ***significant at $p < 0.001$.

scholars have reported that a good fit between two brands positively moderates the image transfer between the sponsor brand and the recipient brand (Becker-Olsen and Hill, 2006; Bigné-Alcañiz et al., 2012; Lafferty, 2007). Based on the existing findings in the brand sponsorship literature and in this research context, this study proposes that a good fit between the guest chef and the hosting restaurant can cause the guest chef's image to have greater positive effects on the luxury restaurant's image. By contrast, a poor fit between the two will cause the guest chef's image to have a weaker influence on the luxury restaurant's image.

H3

A guest chef's image has a stronger relationship with a luxury restaurant's image when diners perceive that there is a good fit between the restaurant and the guest chef versus when diners perceive that there is a poor fit between the restaurant and the guest chef.

3. Method

To examine the proposed framework, this study included full-service restaurants at Taiwanese five-star hotels that had invited guest chefs to visit at the time of this research. These hotel restaurants are subject to stringent inspections; therefore, the quality of the restaurants examined in this study is consistent (Chen et al., 2015). To qualify for the interview, potential participants (1) had to be older than 18, (2) had to have previously dined at the five-star

Table 1
Characteristics of the participants ($N = 179$).

Variable	Demographic traits	%
Gender	Male	47.5
	Female	52.5
Marital status	Married	55.9
	Unmarried	44.1
Age	18–30	11.1
	31–40	23.4
	41–50	31.8
	51–60	19
	61 and above	14.5

hotels' full-service restaurants, and (3) had to be aware of one of the collaboration programs included in this research.

After one month of data collection, 179 returned questionnaires were deemed effective, resulting in a valid return rate of 31.6%. The demographic breakdown of the sample set can be found in Table 1. The participants completed a survey that evaluated the guest chef's image (Lin and Lin, 2006), the luxury restaurant's image (Ryu et al., 2012), and the restaurant-guest chef fit (Lin, 2013); they were asked to rate their answers on a seven-point Likert-type scale (Table 2).

4. Data analysis

SPSS AMOS 20 was used to analyze the data. Following the Anderson and Gerbing (1988) two-step approach, a measurement model was first estimated using confirmatory factor analysis. The high factor loadings, composite reliability, and average variances extracted (AVEs) for each construct were used to confirm the reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of the instrument. Bootstrapping was used for robustness checks. After using structural equation modeling, the results showed a good fit between the data and the main model ($\chi^2 = 120.91$, $df = 41$, $p < 0.001$, $RMSEA = 0.08$, $CFI = 0.917$, $NFI = 0.88$). Based on the statistical results, H1 is supported ($t = 4.63$, $\beta = 0.66$, $p < 0.001$). The guest chef's image positively affects the luxury restaurant's image. H2 is also supported ($t = 1.74$, $\beta = 0.19$, $p < 0.05$). A good restaurant-guest chef fit positively influences the luxury restaurant's image.

To test the hypothesized moderating effects of the restaurant-guest chef fit, a multi-group invariance analysis was performed (Jurovski and Gursay, 2004), and the procedure recommended by Bell and Menguc (2002) was followed. These methods allowed participants to be divided into groups of high ($N = 85$) and low ($N = 94$) perceived restaurant-guest chef fit. The structural path coefficient indicated that a positive relationship existed between the guest chef's image and the luxury restaurant's image in the high restaurant-guest chef fit group ($t = 4.96$, $\beta = 1.20$, $p < 0.001$). In the low restaurant-guest chef fit group, the structural path

Table 2
Descriptive analysis of the measures.

Variable	Measurement items	Mean	SD	α	AVE	CR
Luxury restaurant image	The restaurant is sophisticated.	5.59	0.96	0.80	0.55	0.79
	It has a luxurious atmosphere.	5.66	0.99			
	The restaurant has authentic cuisine.	5.42	1.03			
Chef image	The chef. . .			0.86	0.54	0.86
	Makes delicious dishes.	5.20	1.11			
	Is professional at preparing the dishes.	5.78	0.84			
	Is innovative.	5.29	1.02			
	Has good esthetics sense.	5.11	1.08			
	Explains his/her food preparation method and the uniqueness of each dish.	5.26	1.12			
restaurant-guest chef fit	The image of guest chef and hosting restaurant. . .			0.81	0.60	0.82
	Is consistent with one another.	5.48	1.01			
	Is complementary of one another.	5.45	0.97			
	Fits one another.	5.65	0.93			

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