



The effects of *teppanyaki* restaurant stimuli on diners' emotions and loyalty



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ABSTRACT

This research examines the influence of restaurant stimuli (i.e., chefs, service staff, other customers, food quality, and atmospherics) on diners' emotions and loyalty to *teppanyaki* restaurants. In *teppanyaki* restaurants, chefs take orders from diners, prepare food in front of diners, and serve dishes to diners. Although the importance of chefs has been acknowledged by scholars, empirical research on the influence of chefs on diners has been scarce. To augment the literature on how chefs influence diners, this research incorporates "chef's image" into an extended Mehrabian-Russell model (M-R model) to conceptualize diner loyalty to *teppanyaki* restaurants. A total of 308 diners from Taiwan were recruited. After examining their completed questionnaires, this study found that chef's image, service quality, and food quality can affect the positive and negative emotions of diners. Moreover, other diners and restaurant atmospherics affect only the negative emotions of diners. Both positive and negative emotions can affect diner loyalty to *teppanyaki* restaurants. In addition, the managerial implications of this study are discussed.

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1. Introduction

The restaurant industry has grown significantly since the 1980s. From the 1980s to 2011, global restaurant industry sales increased more than tenfold from US \$42.8 billion to \$536.7 billion (all monetary units are in US dollars) (Chen et al., 2015). Studies in restaurant consumption have burgeoned in recent years partially as a result of this development. Within the research of the restaurant industry, some scholars have been interested in dining behavior at upscale restaurants because these experiences can be an art form that gratifies multiple human senses and because food is an important medium in understanding a culture or society (Chang et al., 2010; Lee and Hwang, 2011; Min and Lee, 2014). Although scholars have been examined some issues related to restaurant consumption behavior of diners, the role of chefs when promoting restaurants still requires further investigation (e.g., Chen et al., 2015; Jang and Namkung, 2009; Lee and Hwang, 2011; Peng and Chen, 2015; Wu and Liang, 2009).

For scholars who studied chefs' influence on restaurants, they suggested that chefs are crucial to restaurant performance (Kuroshima, 2010; Pratten, 2003a,b; Zopiatis, 2010), especially in

upscale restaurants (Byrne and Whitehead, 2003; Halonen-Knight and Hurmerinta, 2010; Harrington et al., 2011; Johnson et al., 2005) and restaurants in which the chef must directly interact with diners, such as *teppanyaki* restaurants (Fang et al., 2013; Kuroshima, 2010; Lin and Lin, 2006). For the aforementioned reasons, to remain competitive, restaurants must train their chefs and attract and retain chefs who are experienced, creative, and skillful (e.g., Batra, 2008; Chang et al., 2010; Law et al., 2008; Nam and Lee, 2011). Studies on chef's influence on restaurants have been conducted; however, the focus has been placed on their influence on other staff, suppliers, and managers. Chef's influence on diners has been overlooked (e.g., Byrne and Whitehead, 2003; Halonen-Knight and Hurmerinta, 2010; Harrington et al., 2011; Johnson et al., 2005).

To augment the literature on how chefs influence diners, this research examines how *teppanyaki* restaurant stimuli (e.g., chefs, service staff, other diners, food quality, and atmospherics) can influence customers' emotions and loyalty using an extended Mehrabian-Russell model (M-R model). According to Fang et al. (2013), *teppanyaki* restaurants provide a unique on-the-spot dining experience as diners sit around an iron plate while the chef prepares the dishes as the customers place their orders. Diners can watch as the chef prepares food and demonstrates his/her cooking skills; moreover, they can interact with the chef and even have a conversation. In these restaurants, chefs become an ambassador for this type of dining culture. Such restaurants are popular in Japan,

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Taiwan, France, and the US (Fang et al., 2013; Kuroshima, 2010; Lin and Lin, 2006).

Notably, *teppanyaki* restaurants are associated with Japanese culinary culture; however, Fang et al. (2013) and Lin and Lin (2006) noted that *teppanyaki* restaurants play a significant role in Taiwan's hospitality and tourism industries and appeal to both local diners and visitors from abroad. Although *teppanyaki*-style restaurant represents a major type of catering business in Taiwan, its market size can be difficult to measure (Fang et al., 2013). By considering information from Taiwan's Commerce Industrial Service Portal (2016) and Tripadvisor (2016), there are approximately 370 registered *teppanyaki* restaurants in Taiwan, but there are nearly 2000 restaurants have *teppanyaki* dishes as part of their menu. Some restaurants that offer *teppanyaki* dishes are not registered as *teppanyaki* restaurant because only some of the dishes are prepared in front of diners.

Investigating how *teppanyaki* chefs affect diners not only contributes to the literature on hospitality management and service marketing but it also has practical implications. Previous studies of restaurant service quality and performance have primarily focused on the service quality of service staff, such as waiters and waitresses (e.g., Jang and Namkung, 2009; Mohsin and Lockyer, 2010). In *teppanyaki* restaurants, chefs share some of the responsibilities of service staff by taking orders from diners and serving dishes to diners. Nevertheless, chefs differ from frontline service staff not only in their role but also in their food-related experience, creativity, and knowledge. The findings of this study can help *teppanyaki* restaurants and other restaurants in which chefs must directly serve diners to increase customer loyalty by assessing their chefs and service staff's roles and responsibilities.

This research has four objectives. First, this research explores how diners' emotions are influenced by chef's image. For this purpose, a "chef's image" factor is included in the modified M-R model. Second, this study tests the influence of other customers in the *teppanyaki* restaurant context by investigating the effect of an "interaction with other customers" variable. Third, the influences of *teppanyaki* restaurants' service quality, food quality, and atmospherics are examined; furthermore, positive emotions' and negative emotions' mediating effects will be explored. By exploring positive emotions' and negative emotions' mediating effects, this present study might further contribute to the literature on consumer emotions. Finally, this study advances a number of managerial implications for tourism and hospitality practitioners to consider.

2. Literature review

2.1. Mehrabian-Russell model

To further understand the influence of chefs on diners' emotions and behavior, this research aims to examine customers' emotions and loyalty through an extended M-R model. Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) study examines the influences of environmental stimuli on the emotions and responses of individuals. According to Mehrabian and Russell, stimuli can affect the emotions of individuals, which can in turn influence their responses. Scholars have used the M-R model and its modifications to examine consumers' shopping behavior (Kaltcheva and Weitz, 2006; Ong and Khong, 2011; Tai and Fung, 1997; Yuksel, 2007), and web surfers' online shopping behavior (Koo and Ju, 2010). The M-R model is suitable for examining how *teppanyaki* restaurants stimuli influence diners' emotions because these restaurants use their environment to promote diners' positive emotions and subsequent behaviors, such as repeat visits and recommendations (e.g., Chen et al., 2015; Jang and Namkung, 2009; Liu and Jang, 2009).

Among the studies on diners' behavior, the work conducted by Chen et al. (2015), Jang and Namkung (2009), and Liu and Jang (2009) is most relevant to the current research. Liu and Jang (2009) investigate the relationships among dining atmospherics, emotional responses, perceived value, and behavioral intention in the context of restaurants. They find that atmospherics influence diners' positive and negative emotions, which, in turn, affect their behavioral intentions. Liu and Jang's (2009) study is one of the first hospitality studies to include both positive and negative emotions in a modified M-R framework. Furthermore, it is one of the few studies to confirm that both positive and negative emotions affect individuals' behavioral intentions.

Because it uses an extended M-R model to examine the impact of luxury restaurant-specific stimuli (i.e., product quality, atmospherics, and service quality) on diners' emotions, Jang and Namkung's (2009) study has direct implications for the present study's framework. Their results show that service quality and atmospherics positively affect diners' positive emotions, whereas product quality is negatively correlated with diners' negative emotions. Moreover, their results show that only positive emotions can affect diners' subsequent behavioral intention. Furthermore, Jang and Namkung (2009) confirm that service quality and atmospherics can directly influence behavioral intentions, while product quality does not exert such an effect.

Chen et al. (2015) examine Taiwanese diners' luxury restaurant consumption behavior by incorporating customers' interactions with other customers into an extended M-R model. Their results show that luxury restaurants' stimuli can affect diners' emotions, which, in turn, can affect their loyalty. To be specific, restaurants' service quality and atmospherics are found to have a significant impact on diners' positive emotions, while food quality, service quality, and interactions with other customers can affect diners' negative emotions. Additionally, both positive and negative emotions can influence diners' loyalty. Interestingly, food and beverages, which are arguably a restaurant's core products, have no influence on diners' positive emotions.

Although scholars have applied the M-R model to restaurant-consumption context, areas for future research exist. First, the factors that affect diners' positive emotions and negative emotions can be further investigated. For instance, service quality had no impact on negative emotions in Jang and Namkung's (2009) study; however, it can affect diners' negative emotions significantly in Chen et al.'s (2015) research. Moreover, the influence of "interaction with other customers" can be further explored because it was a relatively new addition to the M-R model when applied to restaurant consumption scenarios.

Second, when investigating consumption experiences, Westbrook (1987) found that positive and negative affect can both influence consumers' satisfaction and their behavior. In other words, the joint occurrence of positive emotions and negative emotions, such as pleasant and unpleasant states, needs to be considered when examining consumer behavior. In the context of hospitality management research, Han and Back (2008) proposed and confirmed that positive emotions and negative emotions have a separate role in forming consumer loyalty when examined separately. In addition, given upscale restaurants often use multiple methods to gratify diners' senses (Chang et al., 2010; Lee and Hwang, 2011; Min and Lee, 2014), their effects on diners' emotions can be complex. For the purpose of obtaining a better understanding of restaurant-specific stimuli's influences on diners and scholars have suggested, this present research adapts the unipolar approach to examine emotions (i.e., the coexistence of positive and negative emotions).

By including positive emotions and negative emotions as two variables, this present study can contribute to the environmental psychology literature and hospitality management research

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