



Examining consumers' intentions to dine at luxury restaurants while traveling

Annie Chen^{a,b}, Norman Peng^{b,*}

^a University of West London, UK

^b Westminster Business School University of Westminster, 35 Marylebone Road, London, UK



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ABSTRACT

This study incorporates a “food image” variable into a luxury value-attitude-behavior model. The aim is to examine Taiwanese tourists' attitudes toward luxury restaurants and purchase intentions, i.e., to dine at luxury restaurants while traveling for tourism purposes. A total of 361 participants were recruited to complete the questionnaires. The results indicated that the perceived functional value, perceived symbolic/expressive value, and perceived hedonic value may influence consumers' attitudes toward luxury restaurants, which, in turn, may affect their purchase intentions – to dine at luxury restaurants while participating in tourism activities. In addition, a destination's food image moderates the relationship between attitude and purchase intentions. The managerial implications of this research are discussed.

1. Introduction

Gastronomic tourists¹ form their attitudes toward tourism destinations partially based on their food and beverage consumption experiences (Chang et al., 2010; Lee and Hwang, 2011; Min and Lee, 2014). Parmar (2015) stated that 51% of US consumers have traveled to learn about unique dining experiences. The World Tourism Organization (2012) has indicated that gastronomic tourism has been an important segment within the tourism industry. Moreover, within the tourism industry, luxury tourism is a growing trend (Chipkin, 2016; Enskog, 2014). This includes dining at luxury restaurants² when trying and learning local cuisines (Enskog, 2014). Researchers have investigated gastronomic tourist and luxury restaurant consumption behavior; however, opportunities for further research exist (e.g., Alonso and Liu, 2012; Hillel et al., 2013; Kivela and Crofts, 2006; Lin, 2014; Sánchez-Cañizares and López-Guzmán, 2012).

First, the luxury consumption research has focused more on goods than services (Han et al., 2010a; Shukla and Purani, 2012; Wiedmann et al., 2009; Yang and Mattila, 2016). Because of the perishable and intangible nature of luxury services, existing theories and concepts on luxury consumption may need to be adjusted (Chen et al., 2015). For example, when investigating luxury accessories, Shukla and Purani

(2012) confirmed that symbolic value is an influential factor for consumers; however, Yang and Mattila (2016) reported that this factor had no significant impact on luxury restaurant consumers. Wu and Liang (2009) reported that experiential value is an important factor for diners' experiences; however, Shukla and Purani (2012) indicated that experiential/hedonic value had an insignificant influence on consumers of luxury accessories.

Second, findings regarding the influence of luxury value have been inconsistent when examining its relationship with luxury services (e.g., Shukla and Purani, 2012; Wu and Liang, 2009; Yang and Mattila, 2016). For example, Chen and Peng (2014) reported that symbolic value has a significant impact on luxury hotel consumers, whereas Yang and Mattila (2016) confirmed that it has an insignificant effect on luxury restaurant diners. Researchers have suggested that the perceived luxury value directly affects purchase intentions (Yang and Mattila, 2016), whereas other researchers have argued that consumers will form an overall evaluation, such as satisfaction and attitude, prior to forming a purchase intention or making a purchase (Tsai and Wang, 2017; Wu and Liang, 2009).

Third, given that these tourists have little or no opportunity to sample a restaurant service prior to consumption and the service quality is generally more variable than the product quality, dining at a

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: n.peng1@westminster.ac.uk (N. Peng).

¹ Gastronomic tourists are tourists who concerned with the consumption of food and drink, and the enjoyment of good food and drinks when participating in tourism activities (Hornig and Tsai, 2010). This present study concerns tourists' consumption of food and beverages in a more general sense. These tourists are different from culinary tourists. The latter tend to pay more attention to styles of food preparation and cooking alone (Hornig and Tsai, 2010).

² In this research, a luxury restaurant is defined as a full-service restaurant whose environment (e.g., services, décor, and atmospherics) and products (e.g., food and beverages) are carefully prepared and presented, unique, superior in quality, and conspicuous (Chen et al., 2015).

luxury restaurant when traveling involves additional uncertainty; therefore, their purchase decisions are arguably more reliant on pre-conceived perceptions or preexisting attitudes (Allen et al., 2002; Filieri et al., 2015; Mauri and Minazzi, 2013). However, the literature has rarely investigated whether consumer evaluations of luxury restaurants are sufficient to stimulate purchase intentions when traveling internationally or whether this relationship is moderated by factors such as preexisting image perceptions.

The purpose of this research is to explore the luxury restaurant consumption behavior of consumers when traveling. It aims to contribute to existing theory and narrow the gaps in the gastronomic tourism literature in three ways. First, this research provides a framework to examine tourists' intentions to dine at luxury restaurants when traveling by incorporating a "food image" variable into a value-attitude-behavior model. Second, the present study examines the influence of the perceived value of luxury restaurants on consumers' attitudes toward luxury restaurants and intentions to dine at luxury restaurants when traveling. Third, the study investigates whether food image moderates the relationship between attitude and purchase intentions. Finally, this research outlines a number of implications for the consideration of hospitality and luxury service marketing practitioners.

2. Literature review

2.1. Theory – consumption value, luxury value, and value-attitude-behavior model

The value-attitude-behavior model is rooted in the field of social psychology (Kang et al., 2015). Researchers have determined that value may serve as a predictor of individuals' attitudes toward a given behavior, which, in turn, may affect individuals' behavioral intentions (Allen et al., 2002; Kang et al., 2015). The value-attitude-behavior model has been applied to the field of consumption (e.g., Allen et al., 2002; McCarty and Shrum, 1994; Shim and Eastlick, 1998) and tourism studies (e.g., Kang et al., 2015; Lindberg and Johnson, 1997).

When examining consumption activities through the value-attitude-behavior model, researchers often consider the influences of consumption value. Consumption value has been the focus of marketers' attention since the late 1980s, and it has been deemed a key determinant of consumers' purchase decisions because it considers the benefits that consumers receive from a product and the sacrifices they make to obtain the product (Sánchez et al., 2006; Sheth et al., 1991; Sweeney and Soutar, 2001).

The concept of consumption value has been applied in the field of luxury product consumption research (Berthon et al., 2009; Sheth et al., 1991; Sweeney and Soutar, 2001). However, compared to non-luxury products, luxury products tend to have a premium quality, recognizable style, and high hedonic value, in addition to an increased cost (Berthon et al., 2009). Therefore, researchers who have investigated the consumption value of luxury products have suggested that the particular characteristics of these products must be considered and highlighted (Berthon et al., 2009; Han et al., 2010a; Vigneron and Johnson, 2004; Wiedmann et al., 2009). To take the value dimensions of luxury service into account, the studies by Chen and Peng (2014), Wu and Liang (2009), and Yang and Mattila (2016) are further reviewed as they focus on the perceived value of luxury services.

Wu and Liang (2009) examine how luxury restaurant diners' experiential value and satisfaction are affected by restaurants' service performance, dining environment, and interaction with other diners. Their results demonstrate that customers' perceived experiential value of luxury restaurants may affect their satisfaction. Furthermore, these authors reported that the service quality and environment of restaurants may directly affect diners' satisfaction, whereas interactions with other diners had an insignificant effect.

Chen and Peng (2014) focused on the context of luxury hotel consumption among 368 Chinese tourists to examine the influence of

symbolic value, functional value, and experiential value on lodgers' attitudes toward luxury hotels and their actual staying behavior while traveling. These authors confirmed that the perceived luxury value of luxury hotels may affect tourists' attitudes, which, in turn, may affect their staying behavior. Furthermore, the symbolic value and experiential value may directly influence tourists' staying behavior in contrast to the functional value.

Yang and Mattila (2016) suggested that consumers' luxury value has four dimensions: functional value, financial value, hedonic value, and symbolic/expressive value. These authors confirmed that functional value, financial value, and hedonic value may positively and directly affect consumers' luxury restaurant purchase intentions. Notably, they proposed that the symbolic/expressive value will not affect purchase intentions because luxury services are less tangible and visible than luxury goods, and their findings confirmed this hypothesis. They asserted that luxury services are less effective than luxury goods at expressing and relaying information regarding diners' wealth and status to other individuals (and the customers themselves) because the highly intangible nature of luxury services renders them less visible than luxury goods.

2.2. Destination food image

Researchers have explored the components and influences of destination brand image (e.g., Chen and Tsai, 2007; Folgado-Fernández et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2014), and studies have confirmed that food and beverages may contribute to tourists' perceptions of a destination (Alonso and Liu, 2012; Hillel et al., 2013; Kivela and Crotts, 2006; Lin, 2014; Sánchez-Cañizares and López-Guzmán, 2012). However, the question of whether tourists' image perceptions of a destination's food image, such as the quality, distinctiveness, and variety, may affect their luxury restaurant consumption behavior remains understudied.

Karim (2013) developed a food image scale when investigating tourists' perceptions, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions related to Malaysia's dining scene. In their research, food image is defined as a compilation of beliefs and impressions regarding Malaysian food. The food image scale comprises three sub-dimensions: "food distinctiveness and accessibility", "food diversity and enjoyment", and "food quality and presentation". Based on responses from 245 tourists, Chi et al. (2013) reported that food image has a direct influence on food satisfaction and culinary experience.

In general, consumer behavior related to overseas tourism participation behavior is considered to be a more planned activity than a spontaneous or reflexive action (Fodness and Murray, 1999; Han et al., 2010b; Lam and Hsu, 2006; Quintal et al., 2010; Sirakaya and Woodside, 2005). This may be particularly relevant to the consumption of luxury services while traveling for tourism purposes because it involves high levels of uncertainty as a result of the service-based products' nature (e.g., intangible and variable) and luxury products' characteristics (e.g., more expensive than non-luxury products), and tourists are in a generally less familiar environment. From a theoretical perspective, it is suggested that gastronomic tourists' intentions to dine at luxury restaurants when traveling for tourism purposes are conditioned by their perception of local food; moreover, Chi et al.'s scale is suitable for this research because it explores consumers' preexisting image perceptions toward a city's food scene and culinary culture from different angles.

3. Research framework and hypotheses

Based on a review of the relevant literature, this study adopts a value-attitude-behavior model as its overarching framework. Furthermore, the current study incorporates a "food image" variable into the proposed model to investigate the role of food image in moderating the relationship between attitude and purchase intentions. The following section provides details regarding this study's proposed

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