

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; 2003b), 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 Deng and Li's (2014) image transfer model to explore a recently growing phenomenon and to provide practitioners with suggestions on how to use guest chefs effectively.

2. Research Frameworks

Figure 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 & 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 & Li, 2014). Scholars have suggested that perceived image is a crucial factor when examining an individual's future behavioral

intentions (Assaker, Vinzi, & O'Connor, 2011; Prayag & Ryan, 2012; Qu, Kim, & Im, 2011). In the hospitality literature, studies have found that a chef's image is important for an upscale restaurant's image (Lin & Lin, 2006; Pratten, 2003a; 2003b; 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, Huber, & Leeflang, 2007; Ugglå, 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 & Scott, 2011; Boo & Mattila, 2002; Lin, 2013). In the luxury restaurant context, diners have certain perceptions regarding luxury restaurants (Chen, Peng, & Hung, 2015; Wu & Liang, 2009). Chefs also have unique images and skill sets (Lin & Lin, 2006; Pratten, 2003a; 2003b). 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, 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 & Hill, 2006; Bigné-Alcañiz, Currás-Pérez, Ruiz-Mafé, & Sanz-Blas, 2012; Lafferty, 2012). 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.

*Figure 1

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 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 & Lin, 2006), the luxury restaurant's image (Ryu, Lee, & Kim, 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).

*Table 1

*Table 2

4. Data Analysis

SPSS AMOS 20 was used to analyze the data. Following Anderson and Gerbing's (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 & Wan, 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 coefficient revealed that the guest chef's image would not affect the luxury restaurant's image

($t=0.49$, $\beta=1.88$, $p>0.1$). Therefore, H3 is supported.

*Figure 2

5. Discussion

This research extends the existing literature by confirming that a guest chef's image can be transferred to his/her host and that a good restaurant-guest chef fit can improve a luxury restaurant's perceived image. More importantly, a good restaurant-guest chef fit has the potential to enhance the influence of a guest chef's image on his/her host's image. For luxury restaurant managers and owners, this study's findings provide additional insights into the use of guest chefs. To begin with, practitioners need to identify guest chefs with excellent technical skills, superb interpersonal skills, and high levels of creativity (Lin & Lin, 2006; Zopiatis, 2010). These dimensions form a chef's image. Reviewing potential guests' previous work and reputations in the industry can be a starting point.

Second, perhaps a much more difficult, but also more important, task for restaurant management involves identifying guest chefs who will fit well with the restaurants. Before inviting guest chefs, luxury restaurants should look for those whose images and skills are consistent and compatible with their own. For example, a luxury restaurant that is well known for its warm atmosphere may want to invite an outgoing and sociable chef. In addition, a chef's skills also need to be considered. A luxury restaurant that is famous for its steaks should consider inviting chef who is also renowned for delivering delicious steaks, though perhaps with a different preparation method. Restaurant management teams can investigate the fit issue by finding out their customers' perceptions and preferences as well as researching potential guest chefs' images.

6. Limitations, Future Studies, and Conclusion

In conclusion, this study examines the image transfer between guest chefs and luxury restaurants. Additionally, a new variable, the “restaurant-guest chef fit”, is incorporated into Deng and Li’s (2014) image transfer model. Although this study contributes to the research on a recently growing phenomenon, it can be further explored. First, the hospitality literature would benefit from an exploration of guest chefs’ influences on the staff rather than the customers. Scholars may want to investigate whether using guest chefs could have a more enduring impact on restaurants’ performances after their visits have ended. Second, other than financial reward and recognition, scholars can explore how guest can benefit from collaborating with luxury restaurants. Whether a luxury restaurant’s image can be transferred to its guest is a question worth further investigation.

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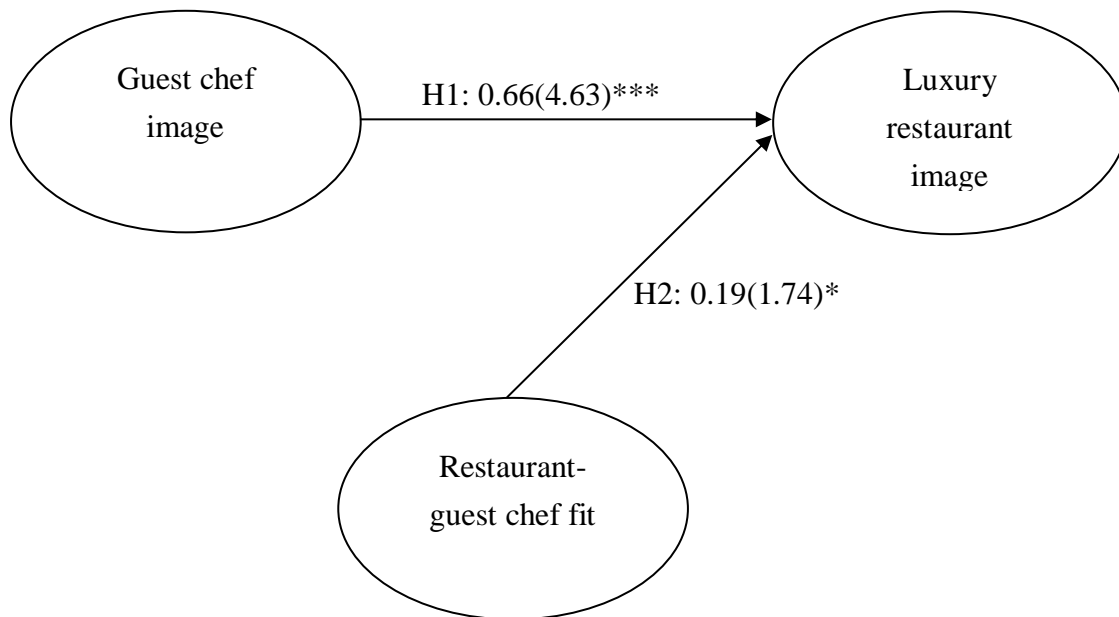
Table 1- Characteristics of the Participants (N=179)

| 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 |

Table 2. Descriptive Analysis of the Measures

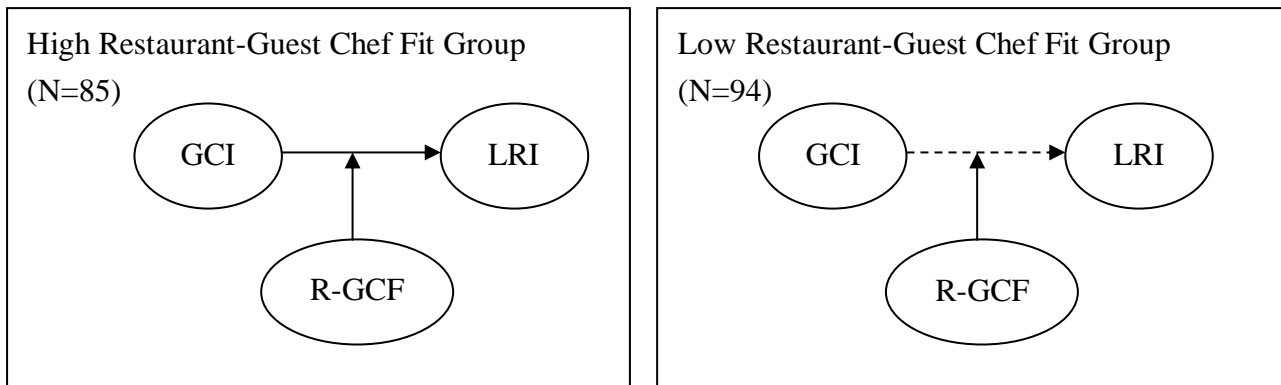
| Variable | Measurement items | Mean | SD | α | AVE | CR |
|---------------------------|--|------|------|----------|------|------|
| | | | | 0.80 | 0.55 | 0.79 |
| Luxury restaurant image | 1. The restaurant is sophisticated | 5.59 | 0.96 | | | |
| | 2. It has a luxurious atmosphere. | 5.66 | 0.99 | | | |
| | 3. The restaurant has authentic cuisine. | 5.42 | 1.03 | | | |
| | The chef... | | | 0.86 | 0.54 | 0.86 |
| | 1. makes delicious dishes. | 5.20 | 1.11 | | | |
| Chef image | 2. is professional at preparing the dishes. | 5.78 | 0.84 | | | |
| | 3. is innovative. | 5.29 | 1.02 | | | |
| | 4. has good aesthetics sense. | 5.11 | 1.08 | | | |
| | 5. explains his / her food preparation method and the uniqueness of each dish. | 5.26 | 1.12 | | | |
| | The image of guest chef and hosting restaurant ... | | | 0.81 | 0.60 | 0.82 |
| Restaurant-guest chef fit | 1. is consistent with one another. | 5.48 | 1.01 | | | |
| | 2. is complementary of one another. | 5.45 | 0.97 | | | |
| | 3. fits one another. | 5.65 | 0.93 | | | |

Figure 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 $p < 0.001$.

Figure 2. Restaurant-Guest Chef Fit's Moderating Effect (H3)



Number on path: standardized parameter estimation, Number in parentheses: T-Value.

Remark: *Significant at $p < 0.05$; **Significant at $p < 0.01$; ***Significant at $p < 0.001$.

Model fit: $\chi^2/df=1.902$, $p < 0.001$, RMSEA=0.071, CFI=0.90, NFI=0.89

CGI= Guest chef image; LRI= Luxury restaurant image; R-GCF= Restaurant-guest chef fit