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Incorporating Vanity into a Luxury Value-Attitude-Behavior Model- Evidence from Luxury Restaurant Consumers

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Existing theories of the effect of luxury value on consumers may require adjustment when applied to service-based products. To contribute to the literature, this study incorporates a “vanity” variable into a luxury value-attitude-behavior model. A total of 150 participants from Taiwan completed questionnaires. All hypotheses are supported.

INTRODUCTION

As luxury products have become more accessible to middle class consumers since the mid-2000s, some consumers are interested in purchasing luxury services, such as luxury restaurants and hotels (Chen & Peng, 2014; Chen *et al.*, 2015). Although identifying the factors that contribute to consumers’ intentions to purchase luxury products is of interest to researchers, previous luxury consumption research has focused more on goods than on services (e.g., Chen and Peng, 2014; Yang and Mattila, 2016).

Existing theories on luxury consumption may need to be adjusted when applied to service-based products because of their perishable and intangible qualities. In particular, the effect of luxury service’s perceived symbolic value has on consumers have been inconsistent (Chen and Peng, 2014; Yang and Mattila, 2016). The objectives of this study are as follows. First, the study intends conceptualize consumers’ consumption of luxury restaurant by examining the influences of perceived luxury value. Second, this study plans to examine vanity’s moderating effect on the relationship between perceived symbolic value and attitude.

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

To contribute to the literature, this study adapts the value-attitude-behavior model as its research framework. When compared to non-luxury products, luxury products tend to have premium quality, recognizable style, strong reputation, and high hedonic value, in addition to being more expensive; therefore, Yang and Mattila (2016) recommends researchers to focus on functional value, financial value, hedonic value, and symbolic / expressive value when examining the consumers’ of luxury services.

First, this study hypothesizes perceived luxury value (i.e. functional value, financial value, and hedonic value) can affect consumers’ attitude toward luxury restaurants (H1a, H1b, and H1c, respectively). Additionally, it hypothesizes that symbolic / expressive value has an insignificant impact on consumers’ attitude (H1d). When consumers are seeking symbolic / expressive value, Yang and Mattila (2016) argued that luxury goods are more suitable than luxury services because tangible goods are more visible. Second, it proposes that attitude can affect consumers future behavioral intentions (H2).

Third, this study hypothesizes that symbolic value’s influence is negatively moderated by vanity (H3). For researchers who studied luxury good consumption behavior, vanity has a prominent role (e.g., Berthon *et al.*, 2009; Hung *et al.*, 2011). Vanity is defined as having an

excessive concern and inflated view of one's physical appearance and / or personal achievements (Netemeyer *et al.*, 1995). Because the very intangible nature of luxury services renders them less visible than luxury goods, symbolic / expressive value's influence on attitude toward luxury restaurant will be insignificant for consumers who are prone to vanity. However, for consumers who are less vain, this relationship will be significant.

METHOD

To examine the proposed framework, this study focused on British consumers who have dine at luxury restaurants. Trained interviewers were used to collect data in London. A description of luxury restaurants adapted from Wu and Liang (2009) and Yang and Mattila (2016) (e.g., a restaurant that serves high quality local food and beverages at a premium price, that has a luxurious dining environment, and / or that has a celebrity chef) and examples of luxury restaurants (e.g., 3-star Michelin restaurants and restaurants with celebrity chefs) were presented to the participants at the beginning of the interview to ensure that participants understood the context of this research. A total of 150 usable surveys were obtained after five weeks of data collection.

The participants completed a survey that consisted of two sections. In the first section, participant demographics such as gender and age were tracked. The second section consisted of 28 statements about tourists' behavioral intentions (Jang and Namkung, 2009), attitude (Carlson *et al.*, 2015), functional value (Yang and Mattila, 2016), financial value (Yang and Mattila, 2016), hedonic value (Yang and Mattila, 2016), symbolic / expressive value (Yang and Mattila, 2016), and vanity (Hung *et al.*, 2011).

DATA ANALYSIS

IBM SPSS AMOS 22 was used to analyze the data. Based on the CFA results, this research analyzed convergent validity, discriminant validity, and composite reliability of all the multi-item scales, following the guidelines from previous literature (Data available upon request). The results gathered using structural equation modeling show a good fit ($\chi^2=1333.586$; $df=539$; $\chi^2/df=2.474$; RMSEA=0.064; CFI=0.921; NFI=0.904). The results from hypotheses testing show H1a, H1b, and H1c were supported ($\beta=0.13$, $t=3.38$; $p<0.05$; $\beta=0.09$, $t=2.64$; $p<0.01$; $\beta=0.77$, $t=15.57$; $p<0.01$); H1d was not supported as expected ($\beta=-0.18$, $t=-2.27$; $p>0.05$). H2 was supported ($\beta=0.18$, $t=4.54$; $p<0.001$). H3 was supported (low vanity group: $\beta=0.14$, $t=3.82$, $p<0.001$; high vanity group: $\beta=0.11$, $t=1.45$, $p>0.05$).

DISCUSSIONS

Two issues warrant further discussion. First, the luxury restaurant's perceived functional value, financial value, and hedonic value all positively influenced diners' attitude. These results align with the previous luxury products (services and goods) research. Second, this study found perceived symbolic / expressive value cannot affect consumers of luxury services. In other words, luxury services are not suitable to demonstrate users' wealth and status.

However, the relationship between symbolic / expressive value and consumers' attitude toward luxury restaurants is conditioned by vanity. For consumers who are prone to vanity, luxury restaurants are not suitable mean to demonstrate wealth and status. On the other hand, this relationship becomes significant for consumers who do not have an excessive concern

and inflated view of their physical appearance and / or personal achievements. One explanation is that consumers who are less vain are also more sensitive toward luxury services' symbolic / expressive value. In other words, luxury services still have symbolic / expressive value, but it is less noticeable if consumers are prone to vanity.

LIMITATIONS, FUTURE STUDIES, AND CONCLUSIONS

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, this study did not consider the influence of companion. This factor might also influence symbolic / expressive value's effect. Future studies should compare symbolic / expressive value's effect when consumers dine alone and when they dine with companions. Second, this study's did not explore the reasons behind vanity's moderating effect. Researchers could further investigate the relationship between vanity, luxury products' symbolic / expressive value, and consumers' attitude toward luxury products.

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