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Consumers' Luxury Restaurant Reservation Session Abandonment Behavior during the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Influence of Luxury Restaurant Attachment, Emotional Ambivalence, and Luxury Consumption Goals

Abstract

The purpose of this research is to examine how consumers' attachment to luxury restaurants and their emotional ambivalence contribute to their reservation session abandonment during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. In addition, the moderating effect of luxury consumption goals (e.g., self-presentation motives, status consumption, and need for uniqueness) is examined. A total of 408 participants completed questionnaires, and the results reveal that luxury restaurant attachment significantly influences consumers' emotional ambivalence, which in turn causes them to not complete their reservation sessions. Furthermore, the moderating effects of status consumption and need for uniqueness are supported.

Keywords: emotional ambivalence; luxury restaurant attachment; status consumption; need for uniqueness; self-presentation motives, abandonment

Introduction

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has had a significant effect on society and the global economy since it was first reported during winter 2019 (WHO, 2020a). One of the industries that has been seriously affected is the hospitality industry, such as restaurants (BBC, 2020a). In addition, experts suggest that the hospitality industry might be negatively affected for an extended period of time even after the virus is controlled (BBC, 2020a; 2020b). Because of the importance of this industry to society and the economy, for example, through job creation, some governments have decided to let their hospitality industries continue to conduct business or resume business even as the pandemic remains ongoing (BBC, 2020c; Smith-Spark, 2020). However, whether consumers will purchase hospitality products remains to be explored; after all, customers might be ambivalent when consuming these products and, for example, feel conflicted about dining in an enclosed environment with other customers and service staff (Chen, Peng, & Hung, 2015; Peng & Chen, 2019a). Studying consumers' luxury service product purchase behavior during and shortly after a period of high uncertainty can be beneficial for future research and has implications for the hospitality literature, practice, and policy (Bradshaw, Rodeheffer, & Hill, 2020; Nixon & Rieple, 2010).

From a practical perspective, the global personal luxury product market has made significant contributions to the global economy (Bain & Company, 2018). According to Bain & Company (2018), in 2018, the global personal luxury goods and services market was valued at US\$320.8 billion. Within the global personal luxury product market, luxury hospitality services have the third largest market share, behind personal luxury goods and luxury cars (Bain & Company, 2018). In addition, although there have been several global economic downturns since the 1980s, the global personal luxury goods and services market has been growing steadily and has been able to recover from the impact of such downturns quite quickly (Bain & Company, 2018; Hung et al., 2011; Reyneke, Sorokáčová, & Pitt, 2012). For example,

after the start of the global financial crisis, which began in 2007, the sales figure of this market returned to its precrisis position after two years (D'Arpizio, Levato, Kamel, & de Montgolfier, 2017). By further studying consumers of luxury service products, additional insights into the resilience of this market in the face of economic uncertainty, which is one of the possible outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic, might be gained (Craven, Liu, Wilson, & Mysore, 2020; D'Arpizio et al., 2017; Nunes, Drèze, & Han, 2011; Reyneke, Sorokáčová, & Pitt, 2012). Considering the importance of the hospitality industry to the economy and how it has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, this research's findings might allow practitioners and policymakers to formulate an effective strategy on how an important sector within this industry (i.e., luxury hospitality services) might be able to recover some of their businesses and customers when this pandemic is under control.

This research also intends to contribute to the luxury hospitality services literature because existing studies on products that offer an intangible emotional experience of high symbolic value have been scarce (Yang & Mattila, 2016; Yang & Mattila, 2017). To investigate how consumers' luxury hospitality product purchase behavior has been affected by this pandemic, this research focuses on luxury restaurants. A luxury restaurant is a full-service restaurant whose service, environment, and products (e.g., food and beverages) are carefully prepared and presented as unique, superior in quality, and conspicuous (Chen, Peng, & Hung, 2015; Peng, 2020). From a theoretical perspective, there are still opportunities for researching luxury restaurant consumers (Chang & Ko, 2017; Chen et al., 2015; Peng, 2020; Yang & Mattila, 2016).

First, studies that explored consumers' decisions to purchase products that can be risky and/or have a highly uncertain outcome can be further grounded into existing theory (Chang & Ko, 2017; Peng, 2020; Peng & Chen, 2019a). Protection motivation theory has recently been used to explain consumers' protective behaviors when they make risky decisions (Peng & Chen,

2019a; Peng, 2020); however, existing studies on this theory have not yet fully explored the antecedents that contribute to consumers' emotions and engagements in protective behaviors. In addition, this theory on its own cannot fully explain why some consumers still purchase certain products when the risk is high. In addition, there is a gap in the hospitality and tourism literature regarding consumers' decision to purchase products that can be risky and/or have a highly uncertain outcome (Akhtar, Sun, Akhtar, & Chen, 2019; Chang & Ko, 2017; Li, Wen, & Ying, 2018; Wong & Yeh, 2009).

In addition, the risks included in previous studies (e.g., restaurants changing their practices) were arguably not as severe as the risk of contracting a potentially deadly virus (Nunes et al., 2011; Peng, 2020; Reyneke et al., 2012). More importantly, existing luxury product consumption studies have suggested that consumers with certain consumption goals/traits will use the purchase of luxury products to signal their social status/self-image even during challenging times (Jang, Ko, Morris, & Chang, 2015; Jani & Han, 2015; Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012; Roux, Tafani, & Vigneron, 2017; Shin, , Eastman, & Mothersbaugh, 2017). Nonetheless, the question of which consumption goal-related factors can mitigate consumers' engagement in protective behavior when making a risky purchase remains to be explored.

Second, in research on consumers' luxury service product purchasing behavior, the role of signaling theory has been applied. Signaling theory presents the reasons some consumers purchase luxury products and/or premium green products, for example, to elevate/signal their social image (Berger, 2019; Nelissen & Meijers, 2011; Peng, 2020; Shin et al., 2017). Although researchers have applied signaling theory to explain consumers' luxury product and premium product consumption behavior, there are still opportunities for researching this type of consumption behavior and the effects of different consumption goals. Previous studies on luxury product consumption using signaling theory as their overarching theory tend to use more luxury goods (e.g., handbags and accessories) than luxury services (Shin et al., 2017).

Additionally, some of these studies were carried out in a tightly controlled laboratory setting with student participants. This method has its advantages, but it might limit the generalizability of their results (Berger, 2019). Research findings obtained from examining luxury good consumption behavior might not be fully transferable to luxury service product consumption behavior because of service products' intangible and perishable characteristics (Chen & Peng, 2018).

Third, existing research on consumers' attachment to brands/products places more emphasis on this factor's ability to contribute to consumers' purchase intentions than how it might lead consumers to give up (i.e., abandon) such intentions (e.g., Chen et al., 2015; Jang & Namkung, 2009; Yang & Mattila, 2016). When perceived consumption risk increases, some consumers might emotionally conflict about whether to dine at luxury restaurants. Researchers have suggested that consumer attachment might be a key factor; however, more studies can be carried out to examine the consequences of attachment (Schmalz & Orth, 2012). The luxury restaurant dining experience offers an opportunity to further examine attachment's consequences. It is a unique consumption experience that some consumers can become attached to. However, luxury hospitality service products are not an essential product that consumers need (Chang & Ko, 2017; Peng & Chen, 2019b). Additional research into this factor's effect on consumers can add new insight to the luxury hospitality service literature and studies on consumer attachment (Schmalz & Orth, 2012; Park, Eisingerrich, & Park, 2013; Peng & Chen, 2019b).

By taking into account the perspectives of signaling theory and protection motivation theory, the proposed framework of this study might provide some insights into consumers' luxury restaurant reservation behavior during the COVID-19 pandemic. This research has the following objectives. First, it aims to explore consumers' luxury service product consumption behavior during the COVID-19 pandemic by adopting signaling theory and protection

motivation theory. Second, a model for investigating consumers' luxury restaurant attachment, emotional ambivalence, and luxury restaurant reservation session abandonment is proposed and examined. Third, the ability of luxury consumption goals (i.e., status consumption, self-presentation motives, and need for uniqueness) to moderate the effect of emotional ambivalence on reservation session abandonment is tested. Finally, the practical implications of this study are discussed.

Literature Review

Protection motivation theory and signaling theory

Protection motivation theory and signaling theory are adopted to support the investigation of this study. Protection motivation theory studies a person's behavior when making decisions that have uncertain or risky outcomes, such as whether to dine at luxury restaurants that are changing their practices (Peng, 2020) or whether to visit tourism destinations with high crime rates (Wong & Yeh, 2009). When a decision outcome is perceived as highly uncertain or risky, this theory suggests that decision-makers are likely to engage in protective behavior (Roger, 1975), for example, by visiting another tourism destination or dining at a different restaurant, to protect themselves. Protection motivation theory has gradually been applied to tourism and hospitality studies (e.g., Peng, 2020; Wong & Yeh, 2009). It is appropriate for the present study because dining at restaurants, including luxury restaurants, during the COVID-19 pandemic can be a risky behavior for consumers even though this consumption behavior is not prohibited by the government.

To better understand consumers who purchase luxury products during or shortly after times of high uncertainty, this research also adopts signaling theory to complement protection motivation theory. Signaling theory has been used to explain communication between two parties. The sender chooses whether and how to communicate certain information through

different signals, and the receiver chooses how to interpret the signals (Connelly, Certo, Ireland, & Reutzel, 2010). For example, consumers sometimes purchase limited edition products to signal their need for uniqueness to their friends (Shin et al., 2017). Among consumer studies that adopt signaling theory, some researchers have noticed that consumers with certain traits and/or goals tend to go beyond the norm (e.g., display apparent and excessively wasteful behavior) to highlight certain desirable individual qualities (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012; Nelissen & Meijers, 2011; Roux et al., 2017; Shin et al., 2017). By adopting signaling theory, the present research might be able to provide additional insights into how consumers with certain consumption goals can mitigate their emotional ambivalence (e.g., the possibility of contracting a virus) toward dining at luxury restaurants during a pandemic.

Research framework and definitions

Based on the literature gaps identified, the main framework of the present study focuses on the relationships between consumers' luxury restaurant attachment, emotional ambivalence, and restaurant reservation behavior. In terms of reservation behavior, this research focuses on reservation session abandonment. This is because more consumers than ever before are using online platforms (e.g., OpenTable and the webpages of restaurants) to make reservations to advance digital technology (Huang, Liu, Kandapully, & Bujisic, 2020; OpenTable, 2020). In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has forced restaurants to change their operational methods. For example, during the pandemic, the percentage of restaurants accepting reservations has increased in many countries, including China, the UK, and the US (OpenTable, 2020; GOV. UK, 2020). Reservation session abandonment refers to consumers entering reservation details (e.g., date and party size) into the reservation webpage of a luxury restaurant or an online booking platform without completing the reservation process during that online session (Huang et al., 2018; Kurkar-Kinney & Close, 2010).

Researchers generally agree that consumer emotion is an antecedent to making or not making a purchase (Chen et al., 2015; Jang & Namkung, 2009). The field of psychology has performed an extensive amount of research on human emotions (Jang & Namkung, 2009). Marketing and consumer behavior researchers have applied this concept to the study of consumer psychology and consumer behavior because research has shown that consumers can be highly emotional in their decisions regarding whether to purchase tourism and hospitality-related products (Hudson, Roth, Madden, & Hudson, 2015; Prayag, Hosany, Muskat, & Chiapp, 2017). As part of the literature on emotions, this research investigates the role of emotional ambivalence. In this study, emotional ambivalence describes the occurrence of incompatible emotions (sometimes referred to as mixed emotions or conflicting emotions) when making a restaurant reservation (Huang, Korfiatis, & Chang, 2018; Schmalz & Orth, 2012). The investigation of the ambivalence aspect of emotion is appropriate in this research, as some consumers might experience this emotion when making a reservation because the spread of the COVID-19 virus might not be fully under control even though restaurants are open.

Regarding the antecedents of emotional ambivalence, this study examines the influence of luxury restaurant attachment, which is the strength of the connection between a consumer and a luxury restaurant (Peng & Chen, 2019b). The concept of attachment has been extensively explored by researchers studying interpersonal relationships, such as the connection between parents and children (Park et al., 2010). The concept has subsequently been applied to tourism and hospitality research (e.g., Peng, Chen, & Hung, 2016; Peng & Chen, 2019b). Peng and Chen (2019b) confirmed that some consumers have developed a strong attachment to luxury hotels. According to these researchers, the relationship between these consumers and their favorite luxury hotels is strong and lasting. Considering that some consumers are attached to luxury restaurants, examining the effect of this factor on the emotional ambivalence of

consumers might provide additional insights into consumers' decisions to abandon their reservation sessions.

To take into account the ability of consumers to mitigate the influence of their emotional ambivalence on reservation session abandonment, this research considers the moderating effect of status consumption, need for uniqueness, and self-presentation motives. Based on the findings of previous studies, these consumption goals have been highlighted as important for understanding the factors that drive consumers' luxury product purchasing behavior (e.g., Jang et al., 2015; Jani & Han, 2015; Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012; Roux et al., 2017; Shin et al., 2017) because luxury products have a strong ability to signal their users' status, uniqueness, and self-image to themselves and to others (Jang et al., 2015; Shin et al., 2017). These consumption goals are appropriate for this research because luxury hospitality products, such as hotels and restaurants, are often used by consumers as a way to show their status, present themselves to others, and fulfill their need for uniqueness (Chen & Peng, 2018; Yang & Mattila, 2016). In this research, status consumption refers to a motivational process by which consumers strive to improve their social standing through the conspicuous consumption of luxury restaurants that confer and symbolize status to both themselves and others (Pino, Amatulli, Peluso, Natarajan, & Guido, 2019). The need for uniqueness refers to an individual's tendency to distinguish him/herself from others through the luxury restaurants that he/she visits (Zhan & He, 2012). Self-presentation motives refer to the extent to which an individual wants to present his/her preferred image through his/her luxury restaurant consumption decision (Kim, Chan, & Kankanhalli, 2012).

Hypotheses

Based on the objectives of this study and the literature reviewed above, this research hypothesizes that consumers' luxury restaurant attachment will positively influence their

emotional ambivalence, which in turn will lead them to not complete their luxury restaurant reservation session (i.e., reservation session abandonment). In addition, it is proposed that status consumption, need for uniqueness, and self-presentation motives will moderate the effect of emotional ambivalence on abandonment (Figure 1).

*Figure 1 about here.

The first hypothesis to be examined concerns the influence of luxury restaurant attachment on the emotional ambivalence of consumers. Recent consumer research adopting attachment theory shows that attachment is not only a fundamental human need that can lead to a lasting emotional relationship with a company/brand but can also be a contributor to an individual's emotional conflict when consumers are concerned with that company's/brand's behavior (Schmalz & Orth, 2012). Furthermore, consumers who are highly attached to a company and/or brand tend to display stronger emotions (i.e., positive emotions and negative emotions) than consumers who are less attached to a company/brand (Peng & Chen, 2019b; Schmalz & Orth, 2012).

The concept of attachment is applicable to luxury hospitality products (Peng & Chen, 2019b). Peng and Chen (2019b) found that consumers will be attached to luxury hotels if these products can provide them with utilitarian and nonutilitarian value. Considering that some consumers will become attached to luxury hospitality products and attachment can lead to consumers having conflicting emotions, consumers who are attached to luxury restaurants might have mixed emotions in regard to making a reservation when the spread of COVID-19 is not yet under control (Briggs, 2020; Chen et al., 2015; Sirakaya & Woodside, 2005; WHO, 2020b; Wong & Yeh, 2009). This is because COVID-19 is contagious and luxury restaurants are nonessential products. The present study proposes that consumers who are attached to

luxury restaurants will be more ambivalent toward making a luxury restaurant reservation during the COVID-19 pandemic (H1):

H1: Luxury restaurant attachment has a positive effect on emotional ambivalence toward dining at luxury restaurants.

The second hypothesis of this research concerns the effect of emotional ambivalence on reservation session abandonment. Huang et al. (2018) examined consumers' mobile shopping cart abandonment decisions after observing that emotionally conflicted consumers will close the webpage or log off a mobile shopping application before paying for a product. They noticed that consumers experience positive emotions and negative emotions when shopping online; however, their negative emotion plays a dominant role before paying for products. When studying environmental psychology, Mehrabian and Russell (1974) proposed the stimuli-organism-response model (SOR model). The SOR model suggests that environmental stimuli can affect organisms, which, in turn, influence an individual's response. This framework has been applied to hospitality service consumption contexts, such as hotels and restaurants (e.g., Jang & Namkung, 2009; Peng & Chen, 2019b). The results generally support the proposition that the emotion consumers experience in these establishments can affect their subsequent behavior (e.g., revisit intentions).

Jang and Namkung (2009) and Chen et al. (2015) confirmed that the concept of mixed emotions is applicable in the luxury restaurant consumption context. Furthermore, negative emotions can affect consumers' luxury restaurant consumption intentions (Chen et al., 2015). When making a restaurant reservation, consumers might be ambivalent because dining out during a pandemic can be a risky and nonessential consumption behavior. Based on the works by the researchers mentioned above, this present study proposes that consumers' emotional

ambivalence will positively contribute to their reservation session abandonment behavior (H2):

H2: Emotional ambivalence has a positive effect on luxury restaurant reservation session abandonment.

The third hypothesis investigated in this research concerns the ability of status consumption to moderate the influence of emotional ambivalence on abandonment. Apart from their functional value, luxury products signal users' social status and wealth to others and to themselves (Chen & Peng, 2018; Yang & Mattila, 2016). For this reason, some researchers have investigated consumers' participation in status consumption, such as the consumption of organic food, green products, and luxury goods (Butcher, Phau, & Shimul, 2017; Fifita, Seo, Ko, Conroy, & Hong, 2020). Their findings generally show that status consumption is a key goal for buying luxury products (Roux et al., 2017).

Among the few studies that have tested status consumption's moderating effect on consumer emotions' influence on behavior, Eastman, Iyer, Liao-Troth, Williams, and Griffin's (2014) research is important. By adopting social comparison theory, Eastman et al. (2014) suggest that individuals compare their socioeconomic status to other people through the possessions that they owned (e.g., mobile phones). This is a method to signal themselves and/or to reduce uncertainty in a specific domain, such as wealth. Furthermore, these authors proposed that status consumption can moderate the relationship between consumer involvement, which includes emotion, and consumption behavior. Based on the rationale that luxury restaurants can be used as vehicles to signal and compare consumers' socioeconomic status with one another (Correia & Kozak, 2012; Phillips & Back, 2011), this research proposes that emotional ambivalence will have a smaller impact on reservation session abandonment for consumers

whose goal of dining at luxury restaurants is to signal status than for consumers who do not have this goal. The following hypothesis will be tested (H3):

H3: Emotional ambivalence has a stronger positive effect on reservation session abandonment for consumers with lower status consumption goals than for consumers with higher status consumption goals.

The fourth hypothesis investigated in this study concerns the ability of self-presentation motives to moderate the influence of emotional ambivalence on luxury restaurant reservation session abandonment. Existing studies that have explored the relationships between luxury product consumption behavior and consumers' self-presentation motives generally support the proposition that luxury products, such as accessories, are suitable vehicles for consumers to use to present their desired image to others and to themselves (e.g., Kauppinen-Räsänen, Björk, Lönnström, & Jauffret, 2018; Roux et al., 2017; Shin et al., 2017; Shukla, 2012; Truong & McColl, 2011). Furthermore, previous studies on arousal-shopping behavior have indicated that the influence of emotions on shopping behavior can be moderated by motivation (Vieira & Torres, 2014).

Consumers' motivation to present themselves to others and to themselves can be explained through signaling theory as well as through action-control theory. In their study, Vieira and Torres (2014) used action-control theory to support their investigation into motivation's ability to moderate emotion (i.e., arousal) and behavioral intentions. Based on this theory, Vieira and Torres confirmed that consumers' emotions (e.g., arousal) will have a greater impact on their shopping behavior when consumers have a hedonic motivational orientation, such as shopping for recreational purposes. Some consumers dine at luxury restaurants for

hedonic and leisure purposes (Yang & Mattila, 2016). In addition, luxury restaurants can constitute a suitable opportunity for consumers whose goal is to present themselves to others because it is a consumption experience where diners can be seen by other customers and staff (Chen et al., 2015; Peng et al., 2017). Based on the discussion above, this study proposes that consumers' conflicting emotions will have a stronger positive effect on their decision to abandon their restaurant reservation session for consumers who do not particularly like to be seen dining at luxury restaurants than for those who like to be seen dining at luxury restaurants (H4):

H4: Emotional ambivalence has a stronger positive effect on reservation session abandonment for consumers with lower self-presentation motives than for consumers with higher self-presentation motives.

The fifth hypothesis investigated in this research concerns the ability of consumers' need for uniqueness to moderate the effect of emotional ambivalence on luxury restaurant reservation session abandonment. Researchers have explored the impact of consumers' need for uniqueness on their decision-making process (Butcher et al., 2017; Shin et al., 2017; Wu, Lu, Wu, & Fu, 2012), finding that consumers' need for uniqueness can not only directly influence their decision-making process but also act as a moderator.

Commodity theory suggests that commodity will be more valued if they are perceived as scarce (Roy & Sharma, 2015). Moreover, signaling theory proposes that consumers will use limited-edition products to highlight their need for uniqueness. Researchers have studied advertisers' usage of scarcity appeal advertisements. The findings support the proposition that consumers' attitude, which consists of an emotion component, can affect their purchase

intention more significantly if consumers have a higher need for uniqueness (Roy & Sharma, 2015). For some consumers, their primary goal when consuming products is to fulfill their need for uniqueness (Wu et al, 2012). Luxury product providers, including luxury restaurants, will go great lengths to ensure that their products are more unique than nonluxury products, for example, by having a carefully designed dining environment (Butcher et al., 2017; Jang et al., 2015; Shin et al., 2017; Yang, Zhang, & Mattila, 2015).

Based on the studies and theories mentioned above, this research hypothesizes that emotional ambivalence will have a smaller effect on restaurant reservation session abandonment for individuals who have higher consumption goals related to the need for uniqueness than for those who have lower consumption goals related to the need for uniqueness. The following hypothesis will be examined (H5):

H5: Emotional ambivalence has a stronger positive effect on reservation session abandonment for consumers with a lower need for uniqueness than for consumers with a higher need for uniqueness.

Research Method

Sampling and data collection methods

To examine the proposed hypotheses, Taiwanese consumers were recruited. Taiwanese consumers are suitable for this research because they are enthusiastic about dining at luxury restaurants as a leisure activity and when traveling (Chen et al., 2015; Chen & Peng, 2018; Wu & Liang, 2009). Furthermore, they have opportunities to consider whether to dine at luxury restaurants during the COVID-19 pandemic because restaurants in Taiwan have remained open since the first COVID-19 patient was confirmed in late January 2020 and throughout the

pandemic, as declared by the WHO (Taiwan Centers for Disease Control, 2020; Taiwan Food and Drug Administration, 2020).

To collect the data, research assistants were hired. A purposive sampling technique was used to obtain the data. Consumers who were about to enter or leave a luxury restaurant, five-star hotels' full-service restaurants and Michelin-rated restaurants in Taiwan's four largest cities—Taipei City, New Taipei City, Taichung City, and Kaohsiung City—were approached by the research assistants (Peng, 2020). The purpose of the research was explained to the individuals who agreed to participate, and a set of screening questions was then asked. In addition, a description of luxury restaurants and examples of luxury restaurants were provided to those who agreed to participate (Chen & Peng, 2018).

To be eligible for participation in this study, participants needed 1) to be over 18 years of age, 2) to have dined at luxury restaurants for leisure purposes within the previous six months, and 3) to have abandoned a luxury restaurant reservation session within the previous six months. The survey was administered to individuals who passed the screening process. Once the survey was completed, the research assistants checked for missing data, debriefed the respondents, and thanked them for their assistance once the survey was returned. The research assistants followed the guidelines issued by the Taiwan Centers for Disease Control, such as social distancing with potential participants, throughout the data collection period.

During the four-week data collection period, 408 usable questionnaires were collected. The effective return rate was 75%. The demographic profile of the sample is presented in Table 1. This research addressed the issue of nonresponse bias by comparing early and late respondents (Armstrong & Overton, 1977). The findings revealed no significant differences in gender, age or the decision to not complete the luxury restaurant reservation process (i.e., abandonment). In other words, nonresponse bias does not appear to be an issue associated with the data.

*Table 1 about here

Survey design

The participants completed a two-section survey. In the first section, they were asked to provide their demographic information, such as their age, gender, and level of education. The second section included 28 statements about reservation session abandonment (Huang et al., 2018), self-presentation motives (Shin et al., 2017), need for uniqueness (Shin et al., 2017), status consumption (Shin et al., 2017), luxury restaurant attachment (Peng & Chen, 2019b), and emotional ambivalence (Huang et al., 2018). These items were generated from a review of the previous luxury product consumption literature and studies on hospitality services. The items for each variable are presented in Table 2.

*Table 2 about here

Data Analysis and Results

Model measurement

This study used IBM SPSS AMOS 25 to perform data analysis according to the two-step approach of Anderson and Gerbing (1988), including confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modeling. After items with low contributions were removed, the findings demonstrate that all factor loadings on the intended latent variable are significant and greater than 0.7 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The average variance extracted (AVE) values ranged from 0.62 to 0.80, and each was greater than 0.6, as shown in Table 3; therefore, convergent validity was confirmed. Moreover, Table 3 shows that each of the constructs has an AVE value greater than 0.5 and a composite reliability (CR) value greater than 0.7 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981);

therefore, the measurement model satisfies the test requirements for convergent validity. To test discriminant validity, this research compared the AVE for each individual construct with the shared variances between each individual construct and all other constructs. Discriminant validity is established because the AVE value for each construct is greater than the squared correlation between constructs, as presented in Table 3.

To ensure that common method bias was not a significant issue in this research, Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff (2003) suggested common latent factor (CLF) method was used. A latent variable was incorporated into the CFA model and then linked to all observed factors in the model. The standardized regression weights in the original model were then compared with those in the new model. The comparison showed that the results were similar between the two models, supporting the assumption that common method bias was not a significant issue in this research.

*Please insert Table 3 here.

Modeling comparisons

Model comparisons were conducted before examining the structural model. Three models (Model 1, Model 2, and Final Model) were independently tested and compared using structural equation modeling. First, the proposed model (final model) was compared with a revised model (Model 1) by adding a path from luxury restaurant attachment to emotional ambivalence based on the study's hypotheses. Second, the proposed model (final model) was compared with another revised model (Model 2), which examined luxury restaurant attachment's influence on restaurant reservation abandonment. Compared with Model 1 and Model 2, the final model showed better explanatory power (Table 4). The findings indicated that the proposed model (final model) had better explanatory power for restaurant reservation abandonment ($R^2= 0.73$) than Model 1 ($R^2= 0.66$) and Model 2 ($R^2= 0.27$). These results (shown in Table 4) indicate

that the proposed model contributes to the better prediction of consumers' decision to abandon their luxury restaurant reservation session.

*Table 4 about here.

Structural model

After the overall measurement model was found to be acceptable ($\chi^2/df=1.97$; RMSEA=0.054; CFI=0.985; GFI=0.957; NFI=0.969), the structural model was examined. The model fit was good ($\chi^2/df=2.11$; RMSEA=0.058; CFI=0.985; GFI=0.958; NFI=0.971). Because luxury restaurant attachment had a positive impact on emotional ambivalence, H1 was supported ($t=11.06$; $\beta=0.47$; $p<0.001$). As emotional ambivalence had a positive impact on luxury restaurant reservation session abandonment, H2 was also supported ($t=8.55$; $\beta=0.69$; $p<0.001$). Table 5 presents the results from hypothesis testing.

*Table 5 about here.

Moderating effects of status consumption (H3), self-presentation motives (H4), and need for uniqueness (H5)

A multigroup analysis was carried out to examine the moderating effect of status consumption (H3). The respondents were divided into two groups, i.e., a high status consumption group and a low status consumption group, using the means split before the analysis. The mean participant status consumption score was 4.79 on a seven-point Likert-type scale; therefore, those with mean scores greater than 4.79 were categorized in the high status consumption group (N=220), and those with mean scores below 4.79 were categorized in the low status consumption group (N=188).

To investigate the differential effect between the high status consumption group and the low status consumption group, the χ^2 difference between the constrained and unconstrained models was assessed according to the difference in the degrees of freedom (Anderson & Gerbing 1988). All path coefficients in each group were freely estimated in the unconstrained model; the path coefficients for the relationships between emotional ambivalence and abandonment were set equally across the two groups in the constrained model. The χ^2 difference ($\Delta\chi^2=27.785$, $\Delta df=9$) between the constrained and unconstrained models was significant ($p<0.01$). The findings showed that the high status consumption group and the low status consumption group were significantly different at the model level. To identify where significant differences appeared, the coefficients for the hypothesized path (i.e., the effect of emotional ambivalence and reservation session abandonment) were compared between the two groups. The statistical tests showed that there was a moderating role of status consumption in the hypothesized path, as the difference in the coefficients between the constrained and unconstrained models was significant ($\Delta\chi^2=3.846$, $\Delta df=1$, $p<0.01$). Based on the above analysis, H3 was supported (Table 6).

*Table 6 about here.

The same procedure was performed to test the moderating effect of self-presentation motives (H4). The mean participant self-presentation motive score was 4.45 on a seven-point Likert-type scale; therefore, those with mean scores greater than 4.45 were categorized in the high self-presentation motives group (N=207), and those with mean scores below 4.45 were categorized in the low self-presentation motives group (N=201). The χ^2 difference ($\Delta\chi^2=27.23$, $\Delta df=9$) between the constrained and unconstrained models was significant ($p<0.01$). The findings showed that the high self-presentation motives group and the low self-presentation

motives group were significantly different at the model level. However, the statistical tests showed that there was no moderating role of self-presentation motives in the hypothesized path (i.e., the effect of emotional ambivalence and reservation session abandonment), as the difference in the coefficients between the constrained and unconstrained models was not significant ($\Delta\chi^2=1.86$, $\Delta df=1$, $p>0.05$). Based on the above analysis, H4 was not supported (Table 7).

*Table 7 about here.

To test the moderating effect of need for uniqueness (H5), the same procedure was performed. The mean participant need for uniqueness score was 4.78 on a seven-point Likert-type scale; therefore, those with mean scores greater than 4.78 were categorized in the high need for uniqueness group (N=220), and those with mean scores below 4.78 were categorized in the low need for uniqueness group (N=188). The χ^2 difference ($\Delta\chi^2=26.73$, $\Delta df=9$) between the constrained and unconstrained models was significant ($p<0.001$). The findings showed that the high need for uniqueness group and the low need for uniqueness group were significantly different at the model level. Moreover, the statistical tests showed that there was a moderating role of need for uniqueness in the hypothesized path (i.e., the effect of emotional ambivalence and reservation session abandonment), as the difference in the coefficients between the constrained and unconstrained models was significant ($\Delta\chi^2=2.76$, $\Delta df=1$, $p<0.05$). Based on the above analysis, H5 was supported (Table 8).

*Table 8 about here.

Discussion and Implications

This research's results provide some explanations for consumers' luxury product buying behavior during uncertain and/or risky times. This section further elaborates upon how this research bridges the following gaps in the literature: 1) Consumers' decision to purchase luxury products with uncertain outcomes can be further explored and explained by using existing theory. 2) Research findings obtained from examining good luxury consumption behavior might not be fully transferable to product luxury service consumption behavior. However, existing studies on products that offer an intangible emotional experience of high symbolic value have been scarce. 3) Few studies have explored how consumers' attachment to brands/products might lead consumers to have mixed emotions and ultimately give up (i.e., abandon) their consumption intentions. The implications of this research for theory and how the findings compare with those of similar studies are discussed.

Discussion

The results of this research make three contributions to the literature on luxury product consumption and research on restaurant marketing. First, studies on consumers' luxury product buying behavior during times of uncertainty have been scarce. Among the few studies that examined this topic, researchers mainly focus on how consumers use these products to signify certain characteristics or how consumers protect themselves (e.g., Bradshaw & Rodeheffer, 2020; Peng, 2020). Furthermore, existing studies on luxury product consumption tend to emphasize luxury goods more than luxury services (Chen & Peng, 2018).

The present study integrated protection motivation theory and signaling theory to better understand luxury service product consumers' behavior. Luxury restaurant consumers will engage in protective behavior by not completing their reservation when they are emotionally conflicted about dining at luxury restaurants when the risks involved are high. On the other

hand, some consumers' desire to signal certain desirable qualities, such as status and wealth, to themselves and/or to others will be able to mitigate these risks, such as the increased chance of contracting COVID-19, by completing their restaurant reservation session (Nelissen & Meijers, 2011).

The findings of this research provide a more comprehensive view of this consumption phenomenon. On the one hand, consumers will engage in protection behavior when consumption risk (i.e., catching the COVID-19 virus) is high. On the other hand, some consumers will purchase luxury products because of these products' ability to signify certain value and characteristics to others. By adopting these two theories, this research might provide additional explanations regarding the performance of the global personal luxury product market during times of high uncertainty, such as economic downturns and pandemics.

Second, the proposed framework of this research is generally consistent with the findings indicating that an individual's emotion can affect his/her behavior (Jang & Namkung, 2009; Vieira & Torres, 2014). It also provides support to the SOR model that organisms (e.g., emotions) can affect individuals' responses (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). In particular, the present study confirms that consumers who are emotionally ambivalent toward dining at luxury restaurants during a pandemic are more likely to close online reservation webpages before completing the reservation form. This behavior is similar to that of the consumers in the study by Huang et al. (2017), who showed that consumers would abandon their shopping cart if they experienced mixed emotions while browsing, most likely because negative emotion plays a dominant role when individuals experience mixed/conflicted emotions (Huang et al., 2017).

Another potentially interesting result is the effect of luxury restaurant attachment on emotional ambivalence. Peng and Chen (2019b) revealed that consumers will develop a strong and lasting bond with luxury service providers. Previous studies have mainly tested the positive

influence of attachment on consumers, such as positive emotions and behavioral intentions (e.g., Bahri-Ammari, Niekerk, Khelil, & Chtioui, 2016; Kaufmann, Petrovici, Filho, & Ayres, 2016), but few studies have investigated the relationship between attachment and nonpositive emotions, such as emotional ambivalence (Schmalz & Orth, 2012). This present research is one of the few studies to confirm that consumers' attachment to luxury service products can cause them to be conflicted about consuming this product when the risk is high (e.g., catching the COVID-19 virus). This study's finding is largely consistent with previous studies' results (e.g., Schmalz & Orth, 2012; Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich, & Iacobucci, 2013). It makes an incremental contribution to research on attachment by confirming that consumers who have strong emotional ambivalence toward making a luxury restaurant reservation during a pandemic are often consumers who are strongly attached to these establishments. This is because luxury restaurant dining is a unique consumption experience that has not been fully explored (Chang & Ko, 2017; Peng & Chen, 2019b).

Third, perhaps the most interesting findings of this research concern the moderating effects of status consumption, self-presentation motives, and need for uniqueness. The present research contributes to the luxury restaurant literature by confirming the status consumption ability and need for uniqueness to moderate the effect of emotional ambivalence on luxury restaurant reservation abandonment. Consumers' mixed emotions in regard to making a restaurant reservation during the COVID-19 pandemic will have less influence on their reservation session abandonment behavior if their consumption goal is to signal their status through their restaurant choices. In the existing hospitality marketing literature, researchers have noted that luxury restaurants have the ability to signal consumers' status, such as wealth and conspicuousness (Yang & Mattila, 2016). The confirmation of status consumption's moderate effect supports the social comparison theory that some consumers will compare their socioeconomical status to other people through their consumption behavior, such as

conspicuous consumption (Eastman et al., 2014). It could be these consumers' way to signal to themselves and to others that they are not significantly affected by the uncertain situation that they are in.

If consumers' consumption goal is to distinguish themselves from others through their restaurant choices, their mixed emotions in regard to making a restaurant reservation during the COVID-19 pandemic will have less influence on their reservation session abandonment behavior. Studies have shown that consumers' need for uniqueness plays an important role in their evaluations of different restaurants (Peng, 2020). Furthermore, the significance of the need for uniqueness' moderating effect supports signaling theory but also aligns with commodity theory. Commodity theory suggests that consumers place more value on items that they perceive as scarce (Roy & Sharma). Dining at luxury restaurants during a pandemic could be interpreted by some consumers as a method to demonstrate their uniqueness to others and to themselves.

As another interesting aspect of the study results, even though the need for uniqueness has a significant moderating effect on the influence of emotional ambivalence on reservation session abandonment, this relationship remains significant for those with both a high and a low need for uniqueness. This result may imply a strong connection between emotional ambivalence and luxury restaurant reservation session abandonment during the pandemic.

One potential explanation for the inability of self-presentation motives to moderate the effect of emotional ambivalence on reservation session abandonment might be that some luxury restaurant dining experiences are intangible. Previous studies have indicated that the ability of luxury service products to signal self-image to others might not be comparable to that of luxury goods because of this characteristic (Chen & Peng, 2018; Yang & Mattila, 2016). In other words, an individual who wants to present his/her preferred image through his/her luxury

product consumption decisions might consume luxury goods rather than luxury services (Kim et al., 2012). This result is also different from action-control theory's suggestion that motivation can moderate the relationship between emotions and behavioral intentions (Vieira & Torres (2014). One possible explanation is that the self-presentation motive is one of the dimensions of the motivation construct; therefore, it alone is not sufficient to moderate the effect of emotional ambivalence on restaurant reservation abandonment. To further examine the explanations proposed in this research, additional research is necessary, as no previous tourism and hospitality studies have tested this hypothesis.

Implications

The restaurant industry and the personal luxury product market in general have made significant contributions to the global economy; furthermore, consumers value the benefits of these consumption experiences (Bain & Company, 2018; Chen & Peng, 2018). For luxury restaurants, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a severe influence on their performance even if they have been able to remain fully open for business during the pandemic (BBC, 2020a; 2020b). In addition to offering theoretical contributions, this research has several implications for practitioners to consider.

This research recognizes that there might be little that practitioners can do until the virus is under control (e.g., a vaccine becomes widely available). On the other hand, as pandemic-related guidelines have been eased in some regions and multiple vaccine trials have shown positive signs (Gallagher, 2020), luxury hospitality services might be able to recover some of their business and customers. During this phase of recovery, it is important for practitioners to try their best to decrease the potential mixed feelings about reserving a table and dining at restaurants that consumers might feel. On the websites where consumers make reservations,

practitioners can clearly present the steps that they have taken to ensure that their restaurant is a safe dining environment, such as performing regular sanitization and maintaining a safe distance from diners. It will also be useful to let potential customers know which time the restaurant is busy and which time is not by having a traffic light-like system on the reservation page. Additionally, targeting existing customers who are attached to luxury restaurants is probably more efficient than trying to attract new customers. Restaurants can reach out and invite existing customers (e.g., email) to revisit. Information regarding the health and safety steps taken can be included with restaurants' promotional offers. Compared to other restaurants, luxury restaurants might have a slight advantage because consumers generally believe that these establishments are subject to stringent inspection (Chen et al., 2015).

In terms of assisting consumers in mitigating the influence of emotional ambivalence on their reservation behavior, practitioners can focus on the ability of restaurants to confer and symbolize the status of customers to the customers themselves and to others. Of the three consumption goals examined, emotional ambivalence does not significantly influence reservation session abandonment for consumers for whom the goal of using luxury restaurants is to highlight their status. Researchers have suggested that practitioners can use different methods, such as rare and healthy ingredients, expensive décor, attentive staff, and a premium pricing strategy, to highlight their customers' status (Chen et al., 2015; Jang & Namkung, 2009; Yang & Mattila, 2016). In the context of this research, luxury restaurant practitioners will need to translate these luxury characteristics into their online presence, such as social network sites and websites. For example, practitioners might want to consider using virtual reality technology to create a virtual restaurant tour to showcase their luxury dining environment to website visitors and social media site followers. Moreover, practitioners can develop mobile applications to allow customers to order food and drinks online. It is not only an opportunity to showcase restaurants' high-quality food and drinks to potential customers but can also

reduce customer-to-customer and customer-to-service staff interaction if that is what some customers prefer.

Finally, policymakers might need to consider taking a more active role in helping consumers be confident about making restaurant reservations and dining at restaurants during this challenging time. In some cities, such as Taichung and Taiwan, hoteliers can apply to be included in a list of assured accommodations after passing additional COVID-19-related health inspections and agreeing to update their practices (e.g., checking lodgers' temperature when checking in), as set out by the local tourism bureau (Taichung Travel Net, 2020). The restaurant industry, including luxury restaurants, can collaborate with local governments and online reservation platforms (e.g., OpenTable) to develop similar schemes and use them in their communication materials. Furthermore, governments can consider supporting restaurants in making necessary changes, such as installing protective screens and purchasing additional sanitizers, through direct subsidies and/or low-interest loans from relevant financial service providers.

Limitations, Future Studies, and Conclusions

The present study contributes to the luxury restaurant consumption literature and provides implications for restaurateurs on marketing their establishments under the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the study makes contributions to the literature, it has several limitations. First, consumers who have the tendency to spontaneously dine at luxury restaurants might be underrepresented, as this research focuses on reservation intention abandonment. Future research can compare luxury restaurant consumers who tend to plan their visits with those who decide to visit without much planning. In addition, it would be interesting to explore consumers who completed their reservation but failed to show up (e.g., reservation

abandonment). Second, there are different types of dining customs. Consumers might have more opportunities to share food with their companions at one type of luxury restaurant than at another type of luxury restaurant. This aspect can cause consumers to have different levels of emotional conflict when making a reservation decision; however, this research did not take this factor into account. Future studies might want to consider the effects of different dining customs on consumers' emotions and behaviors. Third, consumers' decision to abandon their restaurant reservation session might be influenced by emotional ambivalence as well as cognitive conflicts. This research framework only focused on consumers' emotions. Future research could propose and test an alternative model to explain consumers' decisions to abandon their restaurant reservations by examining the effect of cognitive conflict.

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Table 1- Characteristics of the Participants (N=408)

Variables	Demographic traits	%
Gender	Male	47.8
	Female	52.2
Respondent's age	Between 18-30 years old	7.4
	Between 31-40 years old	34
	Between 41-50 years old	27.7
	Between 51-60 years old	25.5
	61 and above	5.4
Education	High school degree	10.8
	College degree	43.1
	University	29.7
	Postgraduate degree or above	16.4

Table 2. Measurement Items

Variable/Adopted from	Measurement items	FL ³
Reservation session abandonment (RSA) / Huang et al. (2018)	RSA1: How often do you plan to book a reservation at luxury restaurant online, but do not book it during the same session / call due to COVID-19-related concerns? ¹	0.90
	RSA2: How often do you close the webpage (e.g., restaurant's reservation page) before you make a reservation with luxury restaurant due to COVID-19-related concerns?	0.70
	RSA3: How often do you abandon your decision to reserve a table with luxury restaurant due to COVID-19-related concerns?	0.71
	<i>RSA4: When booking with luxury restaurant online, how often do you leave during the reservation process without booking it due to COVID-19-related concerns?²</i>	
Emotional ambivalence (EA) / Huang et al. (2018)	EA1: I have strong mixed emotions both for and against making a reservation with luxury restaurant.	0.70
	EA2: I feel conflict when thinking about making a reservation with luxury restaurant.	0.81
	<i>EA3: I feel indecisive about making a reservation with luxury restaurant.</i>	
	EA4: I feel ambivalent about making a reservation with luxury restaurant.	0.92
	<i>EA5: I can't make up my mind one way or another about the best course of action for me to take regarding making a reservation with luxury restaurant.</i>	
Self-presentation motives (SM) / Shin et al. (2017)	SM1: Luxury restaurants are a symbol of social status.	0.90
	SM2: Luxury restaurants help me fit into important social situations.	0.91
	SM3: I like to be seen dining at luxury restaurants.	0.73
	SM4: I enjoy it when people know I am dining at luxury restaurants.	0.77
Status consumption (SC) / Shin et al. (2017)	SC1: I would visit a luxury restaurant just because it has status.	0.85
	SC2: I am interested in visiting new luxury restaurants with status.	0.91
	SC3: I would pay more to dine at a luxury restaurant if it had status.	0.86
Need for uniqueness (NU) / Shin et al. (2017)	NU1: When a luxury restaurant I visited before becomes popular among the general population, I revisit it less often.	0.91

	NU2: I often try to avoid luxury restaurants that I know are visited by the general population.	0.86
	NU3: As a rule, I dislike luxury restaurants that are customarily visited by everyone.	0.89
	NU4: The more commonplace a luxury restaurant is among the general population, the less interested I am in visiting it.	0.70
	LRA1: I love luxury restaurant.	0.92
	LRA2: I am passionate about luxury restaurant.	0.90
	LRA3: Luxury restaurant reminds me of people that I love and beautiful experiences.	0.89
	<i>LRA4: If I were describing myself, luxury restaurant would likely be something that I would mention.</i>	
	<i>LRA5: If someone ridiculed luxury restaurant, I would feel irritated.</i>	
	<i>LRA6: If someone praise luxury restaurant, I would feel somewhat praised myself.</i>	
	LRA7: People who know me might sometimes think about me with luxury restaurant when they think of me.	0.88
	LRA8: I would feel sorry if luxury restaurant ceases to exist.	0.86

Luxury restaurant attachment (LRA) /
Peng and Chen (2019)

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1. A series of seven semantic differential scales were used.
 2. Questions in italic were eliminated due to low factor loading.
 3. Standardized factor loading

Table 3- Correlations and Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	SD	CrA	CR	AVE	LRA	EA	RSA	SC	SM	NU
LRA	4.04	1.41	0.95	0.95	0.80	0.89					
EA	4.86	1.28	0.85	0.85	0.66	0.64	0.81				
RSA	4.61	1.26	0.82	0.82	0.62	0.25	0.42	0.81			
SC	4.79	1.25	0.91	0.91	0.76	0.45	0.65	0.34	0.87		
SM	4.45	1.28	0.87	0.90	0.69	0.63	0.70	0.45	0.68	0.83	
NU	4.78	1.17	0.91	0.95	0.79	0.69	0.65	0.44	0.62	0.69	0.89

Bold numbers on the diagonal elements are square root of each construct's AVE value
 CrA= Cronbach's Alphas; CR= Composite reliability; AVE= Average variance extracted
 -LRA= Luxury restaurant attachment; EA= Emotional ambivalence; RSA= Reservation session abandonment; SC= Status consumption; SM= Self-presentation motive; NU= Need for uniqueness

Table 4- Model Comparison

	Model 1	Model 2	Final model
RRA's R^2	0.66	0.27	0.73

-RSA= Reservation session abandonment

Table 5- Hypotheses tests (H1-H2)

Path	Standard estimate (β)	t-value	Results
H1: LRA \rightarrow EA	0.47	11.06***	Support
H2: EA \rightarrow RSA	0.69	8.55***	Support

-LRA= Luxury restaurant attachment; EA= Emotional ambivalence; RSA= Reservation session abandonment

-*** $p < .001$.

Table 6. Status consumption's moderating effect (H3)

Path estimated	Low status consumption group $\beta(t)$	High status consumption group $\beta(t)$	t-value ($\Delta\chi^2, \Delta df=1$)	Moderating effect
H4: Emotional ambivalence → Reservation session abandonment	0.50(6.84)***	0.08(1.90)	4.85***	Supported

*** $p < .001$.

Table 7. Self-presentation motive's moderating effect (H4)

Path estimated	Low self-presentation motive group $\beta(t)$	High self-presentation motive group $\beta(t)$	t-value ($\Delta\chi^2, \Delta df=1$)	Moderating effect
H5: Emotional ambivalence → Reservation session abandonment	0.43(5.86)***	0.33(5.37)***	1.86	Not supported

*** $p < .001$.

Table 8. Need for uniqueness's moderating effect (H5)

Path estimated	Low need for uniqueness group $\beta(t)$	High need for uniqueness group $\beta(t)$	t-value ($\Delta\chi^2, \Delta df=1$)	Moderating effect
H6: Emotional ambivalence → Reservation session abandonment	0.25(5.95)***	0.39(6.60)***	2.76*	Supported

* $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

Figure 1. Research framework

