

POSTURING OR ENJOYING THE GASTRONOMIC EXPERIENCE? EFFECTS OF REPUTATION AND EXPERIENCE IN THE RECOMMENDATION OF UPSCALE RESTAURANTS

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1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the increase in the importance of gastronomy, fostered by the mass media and the generalized participation of the population in social networks, has allowed the expansion of a particular type of consumption, the high level gastronomy. These exclusive and elegant restaurants are designed to provide food, service and an environment of upper quality (Hyun and Kang 2014).

However, with the rise of social networks, assisted by technologies, new social practices have emerged related to the formation of personal identity online and how to show it to others. (Livingstone, 2008; Wakefield and Wakefield, 2016). In this stage many authors point out that the most important thing for many users is the image that is shared, the status, the notoriety and look for the approval of the other (Carsten et al. 2010); or in colloquial words what has come to call the “posturing” on line. In the context of our work, which is the consumption of the gastronomy of high level, it is difficult to discern if the consumer is really enjoying of his culinary and gastronomic experience or if it is the food itself that becomes part of the decoration of a style of life linked to status and social approval (Goolaup et al., 2017).

There are few studies that explain the motivations or attitudes related to the consumption of this type of gastronomy. Therefore, in this study we pretend to identify the motivations that promote the consumption of high-level restoration by determining the explanatory relationship between the enjoyment of the gastronomic experience itself and the reputation

or status that this experience provides in the recommendations or in the intention to come back. Therefore, the aim of this study is to know if the public that recommends and is regular to this type of establishments if there are really interested in gastronomy, and enjoys of the flavours, the new proposals, etc., or really they visit this type of restaurants to be able to explain it to their friends or share it on social networks.

To this end, an explanatory model based on the theory of the motivation of structural equations has been developed in which the elements that contribute to the intention of return and recommendation are represented: reputation, referred to the status or prestige that a person provides consumption of high-level gastronomy focused on the specific case of restaurants with Michelin stars and satisfaction understood as the enjoyment and fun related to the gastronomic experience.

Taking into account that the literature relates the gastronomic experience and reputation with the intention of recommendation, the following hypotheses have been developed:

- H1. The degree of perceived reputation to participate in the consumption of high level restaurants influences positively in the intentions to return and recommendation. (To more perceived reputation, higher the intentions to return and recommendation).
- H2. The degree of the perceived experience to participate in the consumption of high level restaurants influences positively in the intentions to return and recommendation. (To more perceived experience, higher the intentions to return and recommendation).

The aim of the proposed hypothetical model is to know what the effects of reputation and experience are in the intention to return and the recommendation of high-level gastronomy.

2. DATA

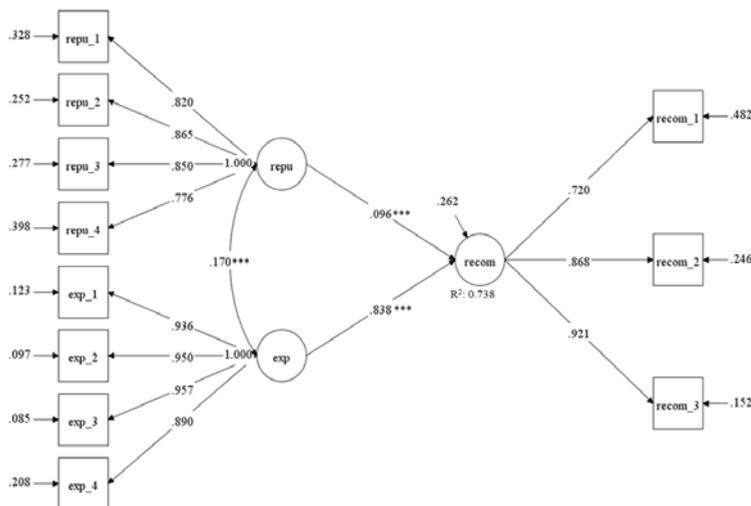
The population object of study was focused on individuals who had eaten at a Spanish Michelin star restaurant in the last two years. A total of 1500 surveys were collected, of which 432 were considered valid answers, which gives a sampling error of 4.8% (considering an infinite population), for a confidence level of 95% and $p = q = 50\%$. The sample was selected through Facebook groups on gastronomy and travel, and the Facebook of gastronomic bloggers of Spain of recognized prestige and with a large number of followers.

The sample is composed of 64% women and 36% men. By age, 21% of respondents are up to 34 years old, 68% are between 35 and 54 years old, and 11% are over 55 years old. In reference to the level of studies of the respondents, 86.5% have university studies and the rest (13.5%) have up to secondary education. In addition, 26.6% have a net monthly income of their home of up to € 2,000, 59% have an income of between € 2,001 and € 5,000 and 14.4% enter more than € 5,001.

3. EVALUATION OF THE THEORETICAL MODEL

The resulting model is statistically significant, with a Chi-square of 108,195 (41 degrees of freedom, $p < 0.000$). Other indicators of global adjustment of the model traditionally used are within the values recommended by the literature: RMSEA: 0.062, CFI: 0.969, TLI: 0.958, so the model fits satisfactorily (Hu and Bentler, 1999).

Figure 1
EVALUATION OF THE MEASUREMENT MODEL
AND THE THEORETICAL MODEL



Source: Authors (2017)
 *** p-value < 0,000

4. CONCLUSIONS

The results of the study show that both initial hypotheses are confirmed: by one hand, the degree of perceived reputation of participating in the consumption of high-level restaurants positively influences the intentions of return and recommendation. And by other hand, the degree of the perceived experience of participating in the consumption of high-level restaurants positively influences the intentions of return and recommendation.

Furthermore, it has been found that reputation and experience behave in a similar way, but there is a much stronger relationship between experience and recommendation than between reputation and recommendation. Then, we can answer the research question, the customer of the high-level restaurants are affected by the reputation in the experience and the recommendation of this type of restaurant, but they really enjoys the experience and recommends this type of restaurant, not so much for the prestige that provides them, because they really enjoyed the experience.

These results can be very useful for managers of restaurants, so much for the atmosphere and design of the restaurant, as for the preparation of the menu that compose the gastronomic offer, as well as the provision of the service. They can also be relevant for the planning of their communication campaigns and when managing planning their online presence on the website and in social media profiles. It would be in these resources where they have to emphasize the fact that to eat in this type of restaurants is a unique experience.

On the other hand, the promotion managers of destinations or tourist establishments could also be benefited in which the services of these restaurants can be offered as a complementary activity given that consumers consider it as important as any other.

5. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE LINE OF RESEARCH

Finally one of the main limitations is that research has focused on restaurants with Michelin stars, and therefore, is not applicable to all types of culinary establishments. Also, the survey refers to restaurants in a specific country, Spain, with which it would be interesting to extend the study to other geographical areas to analyse the influence of cultural variables.

In future lines of research, the analysis of the direct and indirect effects of the constructs analysed through rival models could be deepened. A second line of research would try to find out how variables related to the characteristics of consumers or restaurants affect the recommendation, experience and reputation. Finally, another future line of work would be to investigate if the motivation of the gastronomic experience is strong enough to condition the selection of the tourist destination.