

Dining in the sharing economy: A comparison of private social dining and restaurants

Abstract

Purpose: In view of the intense competition between businesses in the sharing economy and the conventional hospitality industry, this study aimed to compare consumers' private social dining and restaurant dining experiences.

Design/methodology/approach: In-depth interviews with 29 private social diners were conducted to yield 10 dining experiential domains, which were then validated using online survey data from 840 diners across four sample groups—local (Hong Kong) private social diners, local (Hong Kong) restaurant diners, overseas private social diners, and overseas restaurant diners—to empirically examine a mechanism through which the dining experience influences diners' psychological and behavioral responses.

Findings: Significant differences emerged among the four sample groups in their evaluations of dining experiences. The mediating role of memorability appeared weaker in overseas settings than in local settings.

Originality/value: The study presents a novel angle on experiential consumption in the sharing economy to focus on food-sharing activities, which is thought to complement the currently skewed research focus in the sharing economy. A theoretically driven mechanism was also validated to explain the experiential differences between conventional restaurants and private social dining.

Practical implications: The findings suggest restaurateurs be creative and open-minded in designing dining experiences that go beyond food-related satisfaction. Destination marketers should also find the findings insightful because they can diversify their catering offerings by differentiating private social dining with conventional restaurants.

Keywords: private social dining, sharing economy, experience economy, dining experience, word-of-mouth, restaurant

1. Introduction

The sharing economy has emerged rapidly and has rewritten how hospitality service providers stage experiences since Airbnb launched in 2008. Airbnb has become increasingly attractive to the mainstream market over time, verifying Guttentag's (2015) contention that sharing-economy businesses can finally compete with conventional businesses. For example, Dogru et al. (2020) reported that a 1% increase in Airbnb listings leads to a 0.016% decrease in conventional hotel revenue per available room in the same geographical region. Whether this innovation disruption also exists in other hospitality sectors remains unknown; hospitality businesses should take the rapid growth of the sharing economy as an opportunity to differentiate their current offerings, especially learning from value-added experiences in the sharing economy (Altinay & Taheri, 2019).

Experience has been the heart of hospitality since Pine and Gilmore (1998; 1999) unveiled the new economic era of the experience economy. They suggested that this economy consists of four experiential domains (i.e., entertainment, education, escapism, and esthetics). This framework was widely adopted to conceptualize hospitality experiences until Walls et al. (2011) called for expansion, especially when the sharing economy rewrote the rules of experimental design (Heo, 2016). Whether the experience economy is applicable to the sharing economy remains doubtful (Mody et al., 2017), because the sharing economy boasts an appealing experiential value proposition (Oskam & Boswijk, 2016). While the success of hospitality businesses depends on their ability to stage enjoyable experiences on top of a high-quality service, investigations on hospitality experiences remain limited (Mody et al., 2021).

Filling this research gap is timely needed when online sharing platforms have cooperated with sole food and beverage providers to provide a new product termed ‘private social dining’ (Lin et al., 2021a). Its name implies the two main characteristics of private social dining. First, the word ‘private’ highlights the mystery of private social dining because most are privately operated by local residents who do not have an eligible business license (Lin et al., 2021b). Their marketing exposures had been largely limited until online sharing platforms emerged to enhance their accessibility. Second, the word ‘social’ stresses the close relationship between hosts and diners. While some high-ended restaurants may also build on the strategy of experiential consumption, it is unlikely for the restaurant operators or chefs to dine and socialize with the diners throughout their dining experience. Lawler (2014) believed that this new product is more than just a simple meal but a dining experience cocreated by hosts and diners. Diners experience an authentic home-cooked meal in a local’s home while socializing with the hosts to get a real picture of the society. In contrast, hosts establish close relationships with diners worldwide by sharing their cuisines and own stories.

These emerging forms of experiential dining consumption in the sharing economy not only require “new and subjective” research methods to “look for difference and uniqueness rather than similarity and patterns” (Williams, 2006, p, 493) but also challenges the food or service-oriented conceptualization of dining experience (Ha & Jang, 2010; Jeong & Jang, 2011). Hence, this mixed-method study attempted to satisfy three research objectives: (1) empirically expand Pine and Gilmore’s framework from the perspective of private social dining, (2) investigate how diners respond to dining experiences based on the stimuli-organism-response (SOR) model, and (3) explore how private social dining and restaurants differ in their dining experiences. First, the researchers adopted an inductive approach to achieve the first objective by exploring the dimensionality of the private social dining experience. Building on the top of the qualitative part, the researchers then used a quantitative design with an online survey to achieve the second and third objectives.

2. Literature review

2.1 The rise of the experience economy

The current economic stage has progressed from commodities to experiences because the latter enables providers to earn greater profits (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). The guest experience was initially framed as a subjective, immeasurable construct because it represents “a steady flow of fantasies, feelings, and fun” (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982, p. 132). Researchers later proposed this experience be considered a multidimensional variable to further validate assessments of the general consumer experience (Schreyer et al., 1984). As mentioned, Pine and Gilmore (1998; 1999) suggested that consumers’ experiences involve four experiential domains: entertainment, education, escapism, and esthetics. Oh et al. (2007) developed a scale for measuring the four experiential domains in hospitality contexts such as rural tourism sites (Kastenholz et al., 2018). However, the dining experience has been left behind because some scholars still focused on the service economy to conceptualize dining experience as a combination of food quality, service quality, and atmosphere (e.g., Ha & Jang, 2010; Jeong & Jang, 2011); more specifically, dining experiences have been largely relegated to one of the four experiential domains in lieu of being considered standalone activities.

Many food-service providers, therefore, doubt whether an experience can promote economic benefits and allow providers to build and sustain competitive advantages (Hussein, 2018). Several scholars have suggested that today’s customers are no longer simply seeking high quality (Kim et al., 2012) because dining motivations are more complicated than expected. Tikkanen (2007) adopted Maslow’s hierarchy of needs in food consumption activities to demonstrate how dining activities can satisfy people’s higher-level needs beyond those that are physiological. Similarly, de Albeniz (2018) claimed that dining activities do not represent what diners eat but rather how they *experience* eating.

2.2 *The rise of the sharing economy*

The sharing economy has rewritten the ways of how hospitality businesses delivery services because it enables consumers to share underutilized assets with one another. This transactional model challenges the traditional marketing theory that consumption destroys value because the co-created value contributes to an attractive consumption experience (Zhang et al., 2018). Traditional service design focuses on efficiency and cost-saving to build interests for the service providers themselves and customers. This approach ignores the interests of other stakeholders (e.g., suppliers, employees, and communities) who can interact with each other to make contributions if they are embedded in the whole service delivery process (Ramaswamy & Guillard, 2010). For example, private owners of accommodations had not been allowed to rent out their unoccupied flats in the lodging market until Airbnb created a centralized platform in 2008 to function as a new additional distribution channel for private owners. Belk (2014) suggested that sharing-economy businesses can create higher efficiencies than conventional businesses because resources in our society can be better utilized through sharing activities.

However, the sharing economy is not always positively discussed. Guttentag (2015) adopted disruptive innovation theory to suggest that sharing-economy businesses may upwardly encroach conventional markets over time. In other words, despite being inferior to conventional businesses in terms of several key performance attributes (e.g., safety), sharing economy businesses usually offer a distinct set of benefits (e.g., inexpensive and new experience) to satisfy niche markets (Lin et al., 2021b). Over time, sharing economy businesses improve their offerings and thereby attract more customers from the mainstream, threatening the operation of conventional businesses. Hence, it is unsurprising to see that many attempts have been made to examine how sharing economy businesses are influencing the conventional marketplace (Ranjbari et al., 2020), especially on the ways of designing and managing customer experience (Mody et al., 2019).

2.3 *Experience economy in the sharing economy*

The guest experience has become more complicated in the sharing economy because this economy highlights a unique experiential value proposition (Oskam & Boswijk, 2016). The sharing economy's rapid development can be attributed to its unique experiential value proposition that leverages facets beyond the initial four experiential domains proposed by Pine and Gilmore (1998; 1999). Walls et al. (2011) thus called for more sophisticated models of experiential consumption because many conventional businesses now face intensive competition with sharing-economy businesses that stress designing unique consumption experiences. Accordingly, Mody et al. (2017) expanded Pine and Gilmore's (1998; 1999) framework by adding four new experiential domains (i.e., serendipity, localness, *communitas*, and personalization) to help the hotel industry cope effectively with such intensive competition. The expansion of experiential offerings was also encouraged by Xie et al. (2018), who argued that the most appealing competitive advantage of accommodation-sharing services is their unique experience. However, the investigations of experiential consumption in the sharing economy are limited to accommodation-sharing services, leaving a large research gap in other forms of hospitality sharing activities (e.g., meal sharing) (Mody et al., 2021).

Belk (2010) highlighted that sharing food and beverage is not rare in human history, especially in a Chinese banquet when the hosts will welcome the guests by placing foods on their plates. Despite an emerging trend for private social dining to enter the global hospitality industry, the food and beverage sector has been overlooked in the literature studying the sharing economy (Lin et al., 2021a). This form of dining allows diners to enjoy a meal with locals in a local's private home (Lawler, 2014). Its unique experiential value proposition is evidenced by these companies' marketing campaigns, such as EatWith's slogan, "Book unforgettable culinary experiences." Investigating the dimensionality of private social dining experiences is timely because it complements currently skewed research focus on accommodation and transportation-sharing service and allows comparison between

dining experience in conventional restaurants and private social dining to achieve experiential diversification and differentiation in the food offering.

While Mody et al. (2017) discovered that the sharing economy outperformed conventional hospitality businesses on experiential staging in the accommodation sector, whether this pattern is true in private social dining remains unclear because its competitive relationship with conventional restaurants seems less lopsided (Lin et al., 2021b). In other words, diners are consistently satisfied with good dining experiences, but not all types of dining experiences are equally appealing (Getz et al., 2014). Hence, the study conceptualized the dining experience as a second-order construct to investigate how dining experiences are staged in private social dining and restaurants.

2.4 The stimuli-organism-response (SOR) model

The SOR model consists of three elements: stimulus, organism, and response. It is a theory from environmental psychology that describes an individual's behavioral responses to their environment (Turley & Milliman, 2000). Since Ritchie and Hudson (2009) praised this model for its ability to guide the understanding of hospitality and tourism experience, it has been widely used to explain the relationship between experiential consumption and individuals' behavioral responses in the hospitality context (e.g., Mody et al., 2017). In the restaurant study context, Meng and Choi (2018) suggested that diners tend to behave (i.e., response component) in a way to adapt the restaurant's servicescape (i.e., stimuli component) via cognitive and affective processes (i.e., organism component). Hence, this study took the SOR model as a theoretical foundation to investigate individual's responses (i.e., willingness to spread positive word-of-mouth and electronic word-of-mouth) to their dining experience that encompasses environmental input (Cao et al., 2019).

2.4.1 Stimuli: Dining experiential domains

Stimuli refer to environmental factors that influence an individual's (i.e., organism's) internal states. Marketing strategies in food offering have advanced from product-driven to customer-driven in the experience economy era (Mason & Paggiaro, 2012); therefore, how customers respond to dining experiences is of great interest to this industry. As experiences are formed through customers' participation in and engagement with their surroundings (Pine & Gilmore, 1998; 1999), many tourism research has incorporated the lens of experience into environmental stimuli that is not limited to aesthetics, atmosphere, and activities (Mody et al., 2021). In view of the experience-oriented marketing approach in the hospitality industry, dining experiential domains were conceptualized as stimuli in this study to investigate how private social dining and restaurants stage dining experience to induce diners' positive behavioral responses.

2.4.2 Organism: Arousal and memory

The second element of the model is the organism, suggesting that external stimulation influences people's behavioral responses through internal processes. People's connections with their external environment are mediated by individuals' emotional states (Lin & Kuo, 2016). Psychological arousal, representing emotional intensity, is a common indicator of an individual's emotional state triggering a sense of enthusiasm and energy during consumption experiences, with Martin (2010) describing it as an ultimate goal in a successful experience staging. It is a terminology stemmed from the arousal theory of environmental psychology in which scholars have tried to describe it as an individual's emotional responses towards their surroundings. The hospitality studies are no stranger to psychological arousal because it appears a useful variable to measure the degree to which a consumer feels positive arousal in a hospitality environmental setting, such as restaurants (Hyun & Kang, 2014). The researchers, therefore, recognize arousal as an organismic component and hypothesize that:

H1: Dining experiences positively influence arousal.

The researchers also acknowledge memorability as an organismic component. Memorable experiences are the core of the experience economy because “creating memorable experiences is the essence and the raison d'être of the hospitality study” (Pizam, 2010, p. 343). On top of Pine and Gilmore's (1998; 1999) model, Kim (2010) proposed a new variable called ‘memorable tourism experience’ to highlight the relationship between experiential consumption and memorability. It has inspired scholars to investigate effective ways of developing memorable experiences in different hospitality contexts (Tung & Ritchie, 2011). The memorable dining experience has widely been recognized as one of the ultimate goals for catering service providers because people are now looking for a distinctive and memorable dining experience instead of the mere acquisition of food consumption (Lin et al., 2021a). It is also reflected by Williams et al. (2019) concluded seven characteristics of a memorable dining experience. The researchers, therefore, hypothesize that:

H2: Dining experiences positively influence memorability.

Arousal, as the peak intensity of an individual's emotion, has been found to create a positive halo effect in attitude formation (Kastenholz et al., 2018). This effect was highlighted by Şahin and Güzel (2020) who proved the direct positive effect of emotional arousal on memorability when people are encountering a gastronomy-related destination experience. Hence, the researchers hypothesize that:

H3: Arousal positively influences memorability.

2.4.3 Responses: Word-of-mouth and electronic word-of-mouth

The last element in the SOR model is the response, referring to an individual's behavioral response towards an external stimulus and their internal state. Diners' willingness to spread positive word-of-mouth (WOM) and electronic WOM (eWOM) have been included in this component, given the study context. Customers tend to be more dependent on the interpersonal influence of WOM because dining services are intangible and inseparable. Similarly, Lin et al. (2021b) cited WOM as a dominant force in inspiring people's desires to participate in private social dining that contains an experiential value proposition (Parry et al., 2012). eWOM was found to have stronger influences on participation in the sharing economy because of its online nature (Mao & Lyu, 2017). It is also considered in this study to conceptualize the response component.

Relationships between the two organismic factors (i.e., arousal and memorability) and people's willingness to spread positive WOM have been well-documented because people only share memorable experiences with others (Williams et al., 2019). Huang et al. (2017) adopted the pleasure-arousal-dominance model and identified arousal as a significant predictor of people's willingness to spread WOM in virtual communities. Shafieizadeh et al. (2021) demonstrated that memorable dining experience even had a stronger positive effect on people's willingness to spread WOM than satisfaction. Given the importance of WOM and eWOM, the researchers propose a research model (Figure 1) by hypothesizing that:

H4a: Arousal positively influences diners' willingness to spread positive WOM.

H4b: Arousal positively influences diners' willingness to spread positive eWOM.

H5a: Memorability positively influences diners' willingness to spread positive WOM.

H5b: Memorability positively influences diners' willingness to spread positive eWOM.

***Insert Figure 1. Proposed research model

3. Method

3.1 Qualitative study for online survey design

The researchers delineated variations in the dimensionality of private social dining experiences through in-depth interviews. A snowball and convenience sampling technique was utilized to recruit people who had at least one private social dining experience. The research team shared interview recruitment messages through Facebook and WeChat to conduct in-depth interviews with 16 initial interviewees. Subsequently, all interviewees were encouraged to share the interview invitation at the end of the interview. This sampling technique helps gather information from niche market segments (Lin et al., 2021b). The final sample consisted of 29 interviewees from different countries such as China and The United States. 24 out of 29 interviewees were repeating private social diners who had rich private social dining experiences. The interviews averagely lasted 40 minutes.

In-depth interviews were conducted in person or on the phone by the first author over a 6-month period from August 2019 to February 2020. The interviews were operated in either Chinese or English, given that the first author is a native Chinese speaker with professional proficiency in English. Interview questions were developed on the basis of previous studies on restaurant selection (Chan & Lam, 2009; Kivela, 1997), the experience economy (Mody et al., 2017; Pine & Gilmore, 1998), and dining experiences (Ha & Jang, 2010; Jeong & Jang, 2011). The interviewer shared examples of private social dining listed on EatWith and PlateCulture to help them recall their private social dining experience at the start of the interview. Similar to Airbnb, they operate a platform for diners to search for private social dining activities using filters such as time, date, location, and type of cuisines. The interviewees were prompted to describe private social dining and compare it with restaurant dining services. Next, based on the interviewees' most memorable private social dining experiences, they were invited to discuss the overall experience (e.g., "Why did the activity memorable?"), the meaning of the dining activity (e.g., "What is the meaning of private social dining?"), and their feelings (e.g., "What were your feelings at that moment?"). Before the end of the interview, interviewees were encouraged to share other private social dining experiences (if applicable).

All interviews were audio-recorded with the interviewees' permission and transcribed verbatim before being entered into a six-step thematic analysis. The first and third authors were guided by the six steps to code the data and develop themes, whereas the second author verified the data analysis procedure. On top of the four experiential domains proposed by Pine and Gilmore (1998; 1999), it yielded six additional experiential domains to form a 10-dimension construct (Table 1). A context-specific instrument containing 41 items was proposed by adopting the measurements from existing literature.

***Insert Table 1. Ten experiential domains of private social dining

3.2 Quantitative study for model testing

3.2.1 Study context

The sampling frame for the cross-sectional online survey consisted of diners who had taken part in at least one dining experience in either a restaurant or a private social dining setting within the last 24 months. Participants were recruited and assigned to one of four groups based on two attributes: type of diner (local vs. overseas) and type of dining experience (private social dining vs. restaurant dining). Local and overseas perspectives were considered because Lin et al. (2020b) posited that overseas and local diners have distinct motivations for engaging in private social dining, which was also reflected by commentary from interviewees who had dined overseas.

Hong Kong was selected as the local study context for two reasons. First, the private kitchen sector, a predecessor of private social dining (Lin et al., 2021a), has been well-known in Hong Kong since 2003 when many workers lost their jobs and opened private kitchens during the outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome (Chui, 2010). Second, Hong Kong's sterling reputation as a "food paradise" has long been a staple of local tourism promotion; however, the role of private social dining in the local tourism industry remains underexplored. It can provide valuable insight into how private social dining can be developed as a local tourism product.

3.2.2 Data collection

Four screening questions were presented before the start of the survey to assign eligible respondents into one of the four target groups (Figure 2). Specifically, respondents' residential region was asked to determine whether they are considered as local (i.e., Hong Kong) or overseas diner. An additional question was asked for overseas diners to ensure that they travelled at least once in the last 24 months. Then, the survey displayed a definition of private social dining "centralized platforms [such as EatWith and PlateCulture] provide diners with an opportunity to enjoy a meal prepared by a resident in a private home... Host make money [and] establish connections with diners by sharing their stories and food; diners experience authentic cuisines and learn about the culture in a local's home." (Lin et al., 2021b, pp. 2-3) and asked if they have such kind of dining experience before. If yes, the local and overseas respondents were assigned to Group 1 and 3, respectively. If no, one more question was asked if they have conventional restaurant dining experience before assigning them into Group 2 and 4. Respondents were asked about their private social dining experience first because private social dining was less popular than restaurant dining. This approach ensured that Groups 1 and 3 constituted a representative sample.

***Insert Figure 2. Group assignment

Seven-point bipolar Likert scales were used to measure respondents' agreement level with 56 items in the online self-administered survey. The online survey consisted of 15 items adopted from the extant literature to measure arousal, memorability, and respondents' willingness to spread WOM and eWOM (Table 4). The online survey was designed in English and translated into Chinese by the first author. A back-translation process was implemented by the third author to check the items' validity. The online surveys were piloted with 22 Hong Kong residents and 10 overseas tourists. Minor modifications were made after the pilot test. For example, a question asking for respondents' dining frequencies was modified to specifically refer to their dining habits before the coronavirus pandemic because pilot participants expressed that the pandemic had drastically changed their dining habits. With the help of a professional survey company that is independent to this study, actual data collection took place over a one-week period via the Qualtrics online survey platform to attract 1,119 complete responses.

The final sample consisted of 840 valid responses after eliminating invalid responses per the following three criteria: (1) survey completed within less than 2 min, (2) survey scored with a standard deviation of less than 0.25, and (3) survey tripped by an attention-check question (Lin et al., 2020). Group sample sizes ranged from 184 to 234 (Table 2), well above the minimum sample size of 100 per group for conducting structural equation modeling (Hair et al., 2013). The sample was nearly equally distributed by gender (female: 56.2%; male: 43.8%), and respondents were 36.5 years old on average. Most held at least a bachelor's degree (74.8%) and dined out 3.86 times per week before the pandemic.

***Insert Table 2. Sample profile

3.2.3 Data analysis

A three-stage data analysis approach was adopted to analyze the valid data using IBM SPSS 25.0 and SmartPLS 3. First, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to validate the dimensions underlying diners' experiential involvement in private social dining and restaurants. The researchers followed Mody et al.'s (2017) approach to skip the exploratory phase because the measurements have been previously validated in other hospitality studies (refer to the last column of Table 1). Besides, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to investigate whether private social dining performs better than restaurants in terms of their experience staging. One-way ANOVA was deemed more appropriate than independent sample t-test because the study

consisted of four sample groups and post-hoc tests were then conducted to identify the significant differences between two specific sample groups.

Second, partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was used with a bootstrap resampling procedure to test all hypotheses depicted in Figure 1, addressing the study's second research objective. PLS-SEM was deemed appropriate for two reasons: (1) the research model was developed based on existing theories that have not yet been well-established; and (2) it allows for the convergence of smaller samples that support the use of multi-group analysis to compare group differences. Normal probability plots and scatterplots were generated to check linearity, normality, homoscedasticity, and multicollinearity before model assessment. Variance inflation factors ranged from 2.05 to 5.02, confirming the absence of multicollinearity. Standardized root means square residual (SRMR) values were considered to assess model fit in CFA and SEM. The last stage of data analysis relied on Fakhri et al.'s (2016) methodological approach to examine potential differences in the indicators' effects on dependent variables across the four diner groups by conducting multi-group *t*-tests and permutation tests thus addressing the study's third research objective.

4. Results

4.1. Confirmatory factor analysis on 10 experiential dining domains

CFA was conducted to validate the 10-dimension conceptualization of the dining experience (Table 3), addressing the first research objective. Four items (i.e., C1, EDU2, EDU3, and ENT3) were dropped to promote the reliability and validity of constructs by ensuring that significant standardized factor loadings were above 0.7, composite reliability (CR) values were above 0.7, and average variance extracted (AVE) values were above 0.5. All heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratios (0.266–0.934) were smaller than 1 to indicate good discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015). The SRMR values of less than 0.08 showed that the measurement models fit the data well for all groups (0.039–0.063).

To investigate the experiential performance of private social dining and restaurants, *ANOVA* was performed to compare the mean scores of valid items used to measure each construct across the four sample groups. Table 3 shows that local restaurant diners (i.e., Group 2) reported significantly lower mean scores on almost all experiential dimensions, except for *unrestrained* ($p > 0.05$), than local private social diners (i.e., Group 1). Although differences in the overseas samples (i.e., Groups 3 and 4) were not as apparent as in the local samples, overseas restaurant diners (i.e., Group 4) also reported lower mean scores on four experiential domains (i.e., relationship with strangers, education, personalization, and escapism).

***Insert Table 3. Performance on the 10 dining experiential domains

4.2. Model assessments

4.2.1. Measurement model assessment

Two items (i.e., FW2 and EW2) were dropped for the reliability and validity of constructs in the proposed model (Table 4). The CR and Cronbach's alpha values for all scales were above 0.70, indicating that the measures were reliable. All factor loadings significantly exceeded 0.60, and AVE values were above 0.50 to support convergent validity. Discriminant validity was further supported by all HTMT ratios being lower than the 0.9 thresholds. The models' homological validity was also supported to avoid model misspecification; all SRMR values were less than 0.08 (0.028–0.043) (Henseler et al., 2015).

***Insert Table 4. Reliability and convergent validity analyses

4.3.2. Structural model assessment and hypothesis testing

The overall SEM analysis results are shown in Figure 3 and Table 5 to address the study's second research objective. R^2 values show that the model explained 68.0% of the variance in arousal, 72.2% in memorability, 63.3% in WOM, and 48.2% in eWOM. Bootstrapping with 5,000 resampling iterations confirmed a significant positive effect of dining experience on arousal ($\beta=0.824$, $p<0.001$) and memorability ($\beta=0.385$, $p<0.001$), supporting H2 and H3. There was a significant positive effect of arousal on memorability ($\beta=0.504$, $p<0.001$), lending support to H4. Diners' willingness to spread WOM and eWOM were significantly predicted by arousal ($\beta_{\text{WOM}}=0.382$, $p<0.001$; $\beta_{\text{eWOM}}=0.318$, $p<0.001$) and memorability ($\beta_{\text{WOM}}=0.450$, $p<0.001$; $\beta_{\text{eWOM}}=0.408$, $p<0.001$), verifying H5 and H6.

***Insert Figure 3. Structural equation modeling

***Insert Table 5. Hypothesis testing

4.3. Multi-group analysis

The final analysis examined the model across four sample groups to explore whether private social dining and restaurant dining differed in their contributions to respondents' dining experiences and in their effects on diners' responses. Multi-group analysis indicated that the results differed across groups (Table 6), addressing the study's third research objective. H1 was supported because five experiential domains (i.e., relationship with strangers, relationship with companions, unrestrained, escapism, and entertainment) demonstrated significantly different weights relative to dining experience formation. Significant differences were also observed in the path coefficients between organism and response components in the SOR model.

***Insert Table 6. Result of multi-group analysis

5. Discussion

5.1. Conclusion

Along with the rapid development of platform-based technologies, the shift towards sharing consumption is no longer limited to the accommodation and transportation industries. Private social dining is progressing toward becoming a new catering service that offers a key proposition of unique dining experiences. The preceding analyses empirically validated a 10-dimension construct of the dining experience that is induced by the unique experiential value proposition in the sharing economy (Oskam & Boswijk, 2016).

Consistent with Mody et al.'s (2017) findings that accommodation-sharing services outperformed hotels in staging the guest experience, restaurants seemed to occupy an unfavorable position compared with private social dining. While insignificant differences six experiential domains suggested that restaurant is not at all inferior in the overseas market, overseas private social diners significantly outperformed restaurant dining in *relationship with strangers*, *education*, *personalization*, and *escapism* domains. It reaffirms that consumer experience in the sharing economy goes beyond Pine and Gilmore's (1998; 1999) framework to create an expansive experiential proposition. While it is not obvious as in the local market that restaurant dining experience were largely inferior to private social dining experience, private social dining continues to widen the gap in the overseas market in different experiential domains beyond Pine and Gilmore's (1998) model to surpass the competition with restaurants.

The mechanism in the SOR model through which dining experiences influence diners' arousal, memorability, WOM, and eWOM was also validated in this study. The composition of the dining experience varied significantly across the four sample groups. First, private social diners valued the unrestrained domain more than restaurant diners, corroborating Chan and Lam's (2009) finding that undisclosed, private, and comfortable/free dining areas were important attributes of private social dining. Contradictory to restaurant diners' expectations of professionalism, private social diners were uninterested in stringent dining parameters, such as dress code requirements, dining etiquette, and a crowded dining environment.

Second, private social diners valued relationship domains more than restaurant diners did. In addition to supporting Lin et al.'s (2021b) assertion that private social dining is a social activity through which people can cultivate relationships with others, the study findings imply that private social dining involves two forms of social interaction: relationships with strangers and with companions during a dining experience. Relationships with strangers were significantly more important in local private social dining, whereas relationships with companions were significantly more important overseas. These differences can be attributed to private social diners' perceived cultural distance from service personnel. The greater the cultural distance, the stronger the feelings of strangeness are. Hence, it may inhibit individuals from developing relationships with culturally distant peoples (Kastenholz, 2010). Fan et al. (2017) reported that socially-oriented contacts could enhance people's perceived cultural distance. Hence, private social diners may avoid socializing with strangers with whom they are unfamiliar in distant cultural destinations.

Third, local diners valued the entertainment domain more heavily in private social dining than in restaurant dining. This significant difference only manifested in the local context but offered meaningful insight. First, private social dining service providers can leverage the entertainment domain more in their dining experiences to satisfy diners' novelty needs (Lin et al., 2021b). Second, the entertainment domain is apparently not as appealing in overseas settings as in local settings. Oh et al. (2007) defined entertainment experiences in hospitality as customers' passive observation of activities or others' performances. Because diners often perceive less cultural distance during local private social dining, they presumably feel less pressured to interact with their surroundings and can react freely to what they have seen or heard.

The last difference in the composition of the dining experience concerns the escapism domain. Surprisingly, private social diners were less likely to value escapist experiences than restaurant diners when on vacation. However, this finding does not discount the importance of unrestrained experiences in private social dining because only overseas private social diners disregarded escapist experiences. Despite a prevailing belief that escapist experiences enable people to relax by moving outside their daily routines (Oh et al., 2007), distractions from everyday routines can also lead to perceived risks and uncertainty that create stress (Karl, 2018). Governmental authorities usually have responsibility to ensure safety for both personal apartments and cars, regardless of whether they have an eligible business license. Yet monitoring food hygiene or safety falls outside the purview of these authorities if a dining outlet is not a registered catering business. In light of these distinctions, overseas private social diners may be less likely to value stressful escapist experiences in unfamiliar places.

The multi-group analysis also uncovered significantly different relationships between diners' psychological (i.e., arousal and memorability) and behavioral outcomes (i.e., WOM and eWOM) across the four sample groups. Diners' willingness to spread WOM and eWOM was more likely to be predicted by memorability in local settings and by arousal in overseas settings. The mediating role of memorability was weaker in local settings. Although the direct effect of memorability on diners' recommendation intentions supports Cao et al.'s (2019) finding, its weaker effect in overseas settings highlights the role of food in travel: irrespective of whether a dining experience is positive or negative, sharing food-related elements in a destination with others generally represents a high point in diners' travel experiences (Wang et al., 2017).

5.2. Theoretical contributions

This study makes three main theoretical contributions. First, the advancement of Pine and Gilmore's (1998) four experiential domains is urgently needed (Walls et al., 2011)—particularly because the sharing economy presents a unique experiential value proposition (Oskam & Boswijk, 2016). While the guest experience in the sharing economy has received close attention from researchers, such interest remains largely limited to either accommodation- or transportation-sharing services. Investigations in food and beverage contexts can compensate for an otherwise asymmetric understanding of guests' experiences in the sharing economy. The 10-dimension construct of the dining experience is noteworthy to understand how private social dining designs and delivers an appealing dining experience given the strategic role of experiential domains in triggering desirable psychological responses, which can then enhance diners' willingness to spread WOM and eWOM.

This study's second theoretical contribution lies in comparing private social and restaurant dining experiences, which counters the competitive relationship between the sharing economy and conventional businesses in the food and beverage sector. Although restaurants were found to outperform private social dining on most experiential domains, private social dining services appeared to be as effective as restaurants in wielding dining experiences to spark diners' psychological responses (i.e., arousal and memorability). The insignificant differential impact of dining experiences on diners' psychological responses across private social dining (i.e., Groups 1 and 3) and restaurant dining (i.e., Groups 2 and 4) indirectly supports Getz et al.'s (2014) contention that while diners tend to be uniformly satisfied with pleasant dining experiences, not all types of dining experiences are equally attractive to all diners. Private social and restaurant diners indeed valued different experiential domains in this study; that is, private social dining represents a niche product that can enlarge the catering market rather than seize existing market share. For example, private social dining was found to offer patrons an unrestrained dining experience that may appeal to diners who would be initially reluctant to dine outside restaurants due to a stressful dining environment.

The study's final theoretical contribution involves its comparison between local and overseas diners. Disparate viewpoints are essential to consider because individuals' purposes for dining influence how diners value their dining experiences (Chan & Lam, 2009). Additionally, the target market for private social dining is much more diverse than that for tourist-oriented accommodation-sharing services or locally oriented transportation-sharing services. The current study's findings illuminate how diners value local and overseas dining experiences differently and demonstrate that various psychological states can trigger their behavioral responses, reaffirming the effect of perceived cultural distance on customers' psychological and behavioral responses in private social dining activities (So et al., 2019).

5.3. Practical contributions

The present study holds great practical value for private social dining operators, restaurateurs, and destination marketers. First, private social dining operators should not be discouraged by their underperformance on most experiential domains because these findings can assist them in distinguishing themselves from restaurants. Private social dining operators should consider an unrestrained dining experience as their differentiating feature. An unrestrained experience should be promoted from the initial interior design (e.g., lighting hue, background music, and furniture selection) to the hiring of service staff. Staff should also be aware of diners' characteristics and adjust their service styles accordingly. For example, servers should proactively approach local diners who value building relationships with strangers but should take a step back when meeting overseas diners who favor privacy and the chance to connect with their companions.

Second, while restaurants appeared to perform better on most experiential domains, restaurateurs should remember that private social dining is useful for translating diners' experiences into positive psychological responses. This study identified no significant difference in the effect of a person's dining experience on their

arousal and memorability between private social diners and restaurant diners. Restauranters are therefore encouraged to hone their performance in terms of personalization and education (i.e., the two domains in which private social dining appears to have fallen behind restaurant dining most markedly) by taking a proactive and expansive approach for dining experience design to elicit diners' psychological responses. These improvements will enable restaurants to further differentiate themselves and minimize possible upward encroachment from private social dining.

Last, the findings are informative for destination marketers. Private social dining is a niche tourism product that stands to widen the market as private social and restaurant diners seem to value different experiential domains. The controversy around whether sharing-economy businesses are encroaching upon the conventional marketplace has presented governments with a dilemma. Although more effort is needed to address this potentially contentious topic, the present study demonstrates that the possible threats that private social dining poses to the restaurant industry are limited in terms of the dining experience. Destination marketers can apply these findings to better understand how private social dining could diversify current dining-related offerings in destinations.

6. Limitations and future research

First, this study evaluated consumers' dining experience in the post-experience phase. Different from other studies whose samples were restricted to individuals with more recent experiences, the current sample included people who had engaged in a dining experience within the past 2 years. This methodological approach responds to the coronavirus pandemic and the social unrest in Hong Kong that has obstructed outside dining since early 2020. Second, the ten-dimensional conceptualization of the dining experience should be generalized with caution because the snowball sampling technique may result in a group of private social diners who are homogenous in terms of attitudes and values. Third, this study chose Hong Kong as a local study context. However, the construct of experience is subjective, and people's perception may vary across personal (e.g., ethical background, social status) and environmental factors (e.g., restaurant type, cuisine type). Future studies may take these variables into account before generalizing the study's findings into a broader context. Fourth, the 10 identified experiential domains were treated as second-order constructs of the dining experience to be incorporated into the SOR model. This study fails to reveal potentially distinct effects of each experiential domain on diners' psychological and behavioral responses. Subsequent work should aim to model all experiential domains as first-order constructs to illuminate clear relationships. Lastly, an importance-performance analysis is recommended to prioritize the importance of the 10 experiential domains across dining settings and to help practitioners determine which experiential domains are worth a deeper investment.

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