

1 Title

2 Diners' responses to talent vs. effort of restaurant employees

3

4 Abstract

5           When presenting employees' laudable performance, shall restaurant managers emphasize  
6 effort or talent of their employees as the source of such performance? This study is proposed to  
7 answer this question. We suggest that diners' responses to employees' effort vs. talent hinge on  
8 diners' need to belong and restaurant type. Study 1 shows that diners' need to belong moderates  
9 their responses to effort- vs. talent-focused messages. Study 2 finds that restaurant type (casual  
10 vs. fine dining) moderates diners' responses to effort- vs. talent-focused messages. Diners'  
11 perceptions of fit with employees (Study 1) and persuasiveness of a message (Study 2) are  
12 mechanisms underlying the proposed moderating effects. Our findings help restaurant managers  
13 devise strategies to effectively communicate employee performance. Restaurant managers may  
14 benefit from tailoring their messages conveying employee performance on the basis of diners'  
15 need to belong and restaurant type.

16

17 Keywords

18 social identity, need to belong, perceived fit, message persuasiveness, restaurant marketing

## 19 1. Introduction

20 Talent is an inborn characteristic that a few individuals possess, whereas effort reflects  
21 commitment and perseverance that can be exerted by anyone (Emerson & Murphy, 2015; Leung,  
22 Kim, & Tse, 2020). When showcasing chefs' seasonal creations, restaurant managers can  
23 highlight chefs' relentless effort or natural talent as the primary source of such creations. A  
24 cursory study of restaurant magazines and websites indicates that talent and effort are commonly  
25 used in practice. On the one hand, renowned chefs often relate their success to their tireless effort  
26 (Hill, 2015). On the other hand, many popular magazines highlight the natural talent of  
27 successful chefs (Helterman, 2019). Given the two widely used options, restaurant managers  
28 may wonder which performance source (effort or talent) is more appealing to diners.

29 However, the extant literature provides limited insight into choosing the right  
30 performance source. Marketing messages showcasing employee performance are vital because  
31 consumers' perception of employee performance can shape their satisfaction with a company  
32 (Kusluvan et al., 2010). Emerging evidence suggests that marketing messages need to match  
33 consumers' psychological states and needs, such as construal level, to ensure the effectiveness of  
34 messages (e.g., Han, Duhachek, & Agrawal, 2014; 2016). Specifically, Han et al. (2016)  
35 demonstrated that marketing messages conveying problem vs. emotion-based coping should  
36 match consumers' construal level. In line with this body of literature, this paper suggests that the  
37 source of employee performance in marketing messages should be chosen in light of consumers'  
38 need to belong, the desire of being accepted by and belonging to a social group (Leary et al.,  
39 2013). Study 1 posits the moderating role of diners' need to belong in their responses to chefs'  
40 effort vs. talent highlighted in restaurant messages. Drawing on convergent findings that  
41 perceived fit/congruency results in favorable attitudes toward a company (Lee et al., 2012;

42 McCall & Voorhees, 2010; Stokburger-Sauer, 2011), we suggest that diners' perceptions of fit  
43 with an employee drive the proposed moderating effect. Attitude toward a company is the  
44 valence of consumers' overall evaluation of the company and it captures the effectiveness of  
45 marketing messages (Keller, 1993; Liu & Shrum, 2002).

46 Moreover, how diners respond to effort- vs. talent-focused marketing messages of casual  
47 and fine dining restaurants remains unknown. This knowledge gap is vexing because people tend  
48 to hold different expectations for casual and fine dining restaurants (Hwang & Ok, 2013; Liu,  
49 Wu, & Wang, 2020; Stierand & Dorfler, 2012). To address this void, Study 2 examines the  
50 moderating role of restaurant type in diners' responses to effort- vs. talent-focused messages.  
51 Drawing on previous research demonstrating the congruency effect in marketing  
52 communications (Line, Hanks, & Zhang, 2016; McGuire, 2013), we posit that the persuasiveness  
53 of a marketing message increases when diners' expectations for fine-dining vs. casual dining  
54 match the source of employee performance. In sum, we propose that a congruency between the  
55 source of employee performance and diners' need to belong (Study 1) and a congruency between  
56 the source of employee performance and restaurant type (Study 2) drive favorable attitudes of  
57 diners.

58 This study extends previous research by focusing on an under-examined type of  
59 marketing message, that is, the one that highlights employees. Previous research has dominantly  
60 explored marketing messages that showcase products (e.g., Jeong & Jang, 2016; Shao et al.,  
61 2020) or companies' initiatives to conserve the environment (e.g., Gao et al., 2020; Kim, Kim, &  
62 Kim, 2016; Xu & Jeong, 2019). By comparing diners' responses to employees' talent and effort  
63 in restaurant messages, this study advances our understanding of the effectiveness of restaurant  
64 marketing messages. For practitioners, this work offers guidance on how to communicate

65 employee performance effectively. Specifically, restaurateurs are advised to highlight their  
66 employees' talent (vs. effort) in marketing messages when diners' need to belong is low. When  
67 need to belong is high, restaurateurs have some leeway in highlighting either talent or effort.  
68 Additionally, fine dining restaurants may want to focus on the standalone source of talent,  
69 whereas casual dining restaurants may have latitude in showcasing either the talent or effort of  
70 employees.

## 71 2. Theoretical background for Study 1

### 72 2.1. Social identity theory

73 This study draws on the social identity perspective (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al.,  
74 1987; Turner & Reynolds, 2003) that individuals' cognition, emotion, and behavior are  
75 formulated in relation to their group membership in society. Social identity involves perception  
76 of self as part of a group (i.e., in-group) against other groups that one does not identify with (i.e.,  
77 out-group). This in-group vs. out-group categorization results from perceived similarity of an  
78 individual's characteristics with others' characteristics in a group. Social identity theory contends  
79 that people's desire for a unique personal identity and their desire for a social identity are at the  
80 opposite ends of continuum of human identity (Hornsey, 2008). In other words, when people's  
81 desire for establishing a group membership is salient, their desire for maintaining a unique  
82 personal identity is reduced.

83 Drawing on the social identity perspective, Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) postulate that  
84 consumer–company identification entails consumers' assessment of whether a company identity  
85 fulfills their self-defining needs in three domains: (1) self-continuity, (2) self-distinctiveness, and  
86 (3) self-enhancement. Self-continuity indicates consumers' motivations for maintaining the  
87 consistency of their identity across occasions and over time. When consumers perceive similarity  
88 between a company's and their own identity, they may find the company identity attractive. Self-  
89 distinctiveness reflects motivations for building a unique identity. When consumers perceive the  
90 company identity as distinct from that of other companies, they may favor the company identity.  
91 Self-enhancement is consumers' desire to boost their sense of self-worth. Such a desire can be  
92 fulfilled by identifying with companies with prestige. Company prestige arises when other

93 people, whose perceptions are valued by the focal consumer, highly regard the company  
94 (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003).

95         The company identity can be projected via various channels, including press releases,  
96 advertisements, official websites, and product offerings (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Messages  
97 disseminated through such channels can provide cues for group categorization. Social identity  
98 theory holds that accessible social cues trigger in-group vs. out-group categorization (Hornsey,  
99 2008). For example, consumers may use physical attractiveness of a frontline employee as a cue  
100 to associate their identity with the employee's (Luoh & Tsaur, 2009). The authors find that  
101 consumers who perceive themselves as attractive may find attractive employees as their in-  
102 group, and thus exhibit a favorable attitude. In this regard, we suggest that employees featured in  
103 a message can prompt consumers to categorize themselves into in-group or out-group of the  
104 employees. Specifically, we argue that talent and effort of employees can serve as a cue to form  
105 in-group vs. out-group perceptions.

106         The source of employees' competent performance can be natural talent, dedicated effort,  
107 or a combination of both (Leung et al., 2020). Talent is an innate characteristic that a few  
108 individuals possess, whereas effort reflects commitment and perseverance that can be exerted by  
109 anyone (Emerson & Murphy, 2015; Leung et al., 2020). Therefore, employees whose effort is  
110 highlighted may be perceived as an in-group, whereas employees whose talent is emphasized  
111 may be regarded as an aspirational out-group by the majority of consumers. An aspirational out-  
112 group, an out-group that individuals deem positive and desire to be a part of (Choi & Winterich,  
113 2013), can be spokespersons or protagonists in advertisements with desired characteristics that  
114 people generally lack (Dimofte, Goodstein, & Brumbaugh, 2015). Athletes in energy drink  
115 advertisements and actors whose projected social class is high in luxury brand advertisements are

116 examples (Dimofte et al., 2015). Relying on this stream of literature, this study suggests that  
117 restaurant employees whose talent is highlighted (e.g., chefs talented in creating menu items) are  
118 considered an aspirational out-group as diners typically do not possess such talent. By contrast,  
119 restaurant employees whose effort is emphasized are likely an in-group of diners as effort is not  
120 an exclusive characteristic. In what follows, we suggest that diners' need to belong moderates  
121 their responses to employees described as talented vs. hard-working. We chose to investigate  
122 need to belong as it is an important factor in deepening our understanding of identity of diners in  
123 relation to restaurant employees (e.g., Leary et al., 2013; Liu & Mattila, 2015).

## 124 2.2. Moderating effect of diners' need to belong

125         The need to belong is a fundamental desire of human beings. It denotes one's desire to be  
126 accepted by and to belong to a group (Leary et al., 2013). From the evolutionary perspective, the  
127 desire to maintain interpersonal relationships is indispensable for human survival and  
128 reproduction (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Previous research posits that the need to belong is an  
129 individual trait, and people exhibit varying levels of need to belong (Leary et al., 2013). Need to  
130 belong exerts a substantial influence on people's cognition, emotion, and behavior. For instance,  
131 people with high (vs. low) levels of need to belong are more likely to cooperate for group  
132 activities (DeCremer & Leonardelli, 2003) and respond to interpersonal cues (Pickett, Gardner,  
133 & Knowles, 2004).

134         Recent studies demonstrate that need to belong can be situationally activated (Loveland,  
135 Smeesters, & Mandel, 2010; Zhu & Argo, 2013). Loveland et al. (2010) reveal that consumers  
136 prefer to consume nostalgic products (i.e., products that were popular during one's childhood)  
137 when the need to belong is activated. The authors argue that the consumption of nostalgic  
138 products brings about feelings of connectedness between those who used these products and the

139 focal consumer. As a result, the consumption of nostalgic products satisfies need to belong. Zhu  
140 and Argo (2013) show that the geometric shape (circular vs. angular) of seating arrangements  
141 activates the need to belong. When the seating arrangement is circularly shaped, individuals  
142 perceive family-oriented (vs. self-oriented) messages as persuasive. Liu and Mattila (2015)  
143 examine the interactive effect of the presence (vs. absence) of authentic menus and types of other  
144 diners (Asian vs. Caucasian) on the focal diner's need to belong in the ethnic dining context. The  
145 authors show that a Caucasian diner's need to belong is heightened when the Chinese menu is  
146 not offered (vs. offered) and Asian diners surround the focal diner.

147         In this study, we examine the role of need to belong as an individual-level trait and  
148 propose that diners with low levels of need to belong exhibit greater levels of perceived fit  
149 between themselves and employees whose talent (vs. effort) is highlighted. Perceived fit denotes  
150 the degree of similarity and the relatedness of an object (e.g., product, brand, and company) to  
151 another (e.g., cultural context and product category). It has dominantly been discussed in the  
152 literature on consumer responses to brand extension (Keller, 2002; Meyvis & Janiszewski, 2004;  
153 Torelli & Ahluwalia, 2012). Recent studies apply perceived fit to the hospitality and tourism  
154 contexts, such as solo dining, luxury hotels, and holiday destinations (Manthiou et al., 2018;  
155 Shin, Hwang, & Mattila, 2018; Stokburger-Sauer, 2011). For instance, Shin et al. (2018) posit  
156 that solo diners may not feel that they "fit in" when their self-esteem is low (vs. high). This arises  
157 because customers low (vs. high) in self-esteem are susceptible to social cues, and dining alone  
158 can lead to feelings of social exclusion.

159         Moreover, perceived fit can be extended to person-to-group and interpersonal  
160 relationships (Hornsey, 2008; Walton & Cohen, 2007). Such perception of fit is based on  
161 interpersonal similarity, thereby inducing in-group perceptions. The present study investigates



162 consumer perceptions of fit with company employees. We posit that consumers with a low need  
163 to belong may exhibit higher levels of perceived fit (in-group perceptions) when employees'  
164 performance is due to their talent (vs. effort). Talent (vs. effort) is possessed by only a few  
165 people and thus perceived as unique (Emerson & Murphy, 2015). As noted earlier, such a unique  
166 nature of talent may lead consumers to perceive talented employees as an aspirational out-group.  
167 Consumers with a low need to belong are not as attentive to cues that make them feel connected  
168 to others (Loveland et al., 2010). As effort is possessed by everyone (Emerson & Murphy, 2015)  
169 and results in feelings of connectedness, consumers with a low need to belong may perceive  
170 lower levels of fit with employees who are portrayed as hard workers (vs. talented).

171 In line with this reasoning, recent evidence shows that gifted individuals are often viewed  
172 as nonsocial, and thus talent (vs. effort) results in feelings of social disconnectedness (Baudson  
173 & Preckel, 2013; Hong & Lin-Siegler, 2012; Klein & O'Brien 2017; Lin-Siegler et al., 2016).  
174 Such low levels of social connectedness of talented individuals align with consumers' low need  
175 to belong. Consumers with a low need to belong thus likely exhibit associative motives only  
176 toward talented employees, involving in-group perceptions. Conversely, those with a high need  
177 to belong are motivated to fulfill their desire to be accepted by a broad range of social groups  
178 (Kelly, 2001; Leary et al., 2013). Regardless of in-group (employees with effort) or aspirational  
179 out-group status of employees (employees with talent), consumers with a high need to belong  
180 may exhibit associative motives, thereby leading to high levels of perceived fit with employees.

### 181 2.3. Mediating effect of perceived fit on attitude toward company

182 Attitude toward a company is a consumer's overall evaluation of the company (Wilkie,  
183 1986). Attitude reflects the valence of such an evaluation (e.g., negative–positive, dislike–like)  
184 and influences purchase decisions (Keller, 1993). Consumers' favorable attitude toward the

185 company may arise when the company identity is consistent with consumers' self-defining needs  
186 (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Relying on this notion, we suggest that perceived fit between  
187 company employees and consumers mediates the moderating role of consumers' need to belong  
188 in the effect of source of employee performance on attitude toward a company.

189         Converging evidence demonstrates that perceived fit between the consumer and the  
190 company's offerings drives loyalty (Lee et al., 2012; McCall & Voorhees, 2010; Stokburger-  
191 Sauer, 2011). For instance, Lee et al. (2012) reveal that perceived fit between the company's  
192 corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities and the focal consumers' lifestyles positively  
193 influences their perceptions of the company's CSR activities. Such perceptions of the company's  
194 CSR activities are, in turn, positively associated with loyalty (Lee et al., 2012). Stokburger-Sauer  
195 (2011) demonstrates that perceived fit between the personality of consumers and that of a brand  
196 is positively associated with consumers' intention to revisit the brand. Accordingly, the current  
197 study predicts that diners' perceptions of fit with employees will enhance their attitude toward  
198 the company. The conceptual model is depicted in Figure 1. Taken together, this study proposes  
199 the following hypotheses:

200 Hypothesis 1 (H1). Diners' need to belong will moderate the effect of the source of employee  
201 performance on perceived fit with employees. Specifically,

202         Hypothesis 1a (H1a). Perceived fit will be higher for diners with a low need to belong  
203 when employees' talent (vs. effort) is emphasized.

204         Hypothesis 1b (H1b). Such a difference in perceived fit will not be observed among  
205 diners with a high need to belong.

206 Hypothesis 2 (H2). Perceived fit will mediate the moderating effect of diners' need to belong  
207 proposed in Hypothesis 1.

208 [Insert Figure 1 here]

### 209 3. Study 1

#### 210 3.1. Method

##### 211 3.1.1. Design and procedure

212 We adopted a two-factor, quasi-experimental design (source of employee performance:  
213 manipulated as a between-subject factor [effort vs. talent], need to belong: measured). The  
214 participants ( $n = 219$ ) were US consumers recruited from the crowd-sourced online consumer  
215 pool of Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Previous research reveals that data from MTurk are  
216 generally reliable and meet or exceed the psychometric standards determined by other samples  
217 (e.g., student sample) (Berinsky, Huber, & Lenz, 2012; Buhrmester, Talaifar, & Gosling, 2018;  
218 Paolacci, Chandler, & Ipeirotis, 2010). Each participant was paid US \$1 upon completion. To  
219 ensure data quality, participants were screened with the following criteria: (1) an approval rate  
220 equal to or higher than 98% and (2) 500 or more previous attempts in completing tasks on  
221 MTurk (e.g., Peer, Vosgerau, & Acquisti, 2014).<sup>1</sup> The participants were randomly assigned to  
222 one of the two conditions of performance source. They were told that they would participate in  
223 two unrelated surveys conducted by different researchers. In other words, we aimed to prevent

---

<sup>1</sup> In MTurk, "workers" are tasked to complete tasks created by "requesters" in exchange of monetary compensation. Tasks are varied from short surveys to writing tasks. Upon task completion, requesters can either "approve" or "reject" tasks based on the quality of task. If requesters embed questions or instructional manipulation to check attention (e.g., Oppenheimer, Meyvis, & Davidenko, 2009) in a task and workers fail to answer such questions correctly, requesters can reject their tasks. Only approval (vs. rejection) of a task can result in compensation credited to workers' Amazon account. With the approval rate as a proxy for quality of data, we screened out participants with an approval rate lower than 98%.

224 demand effects by minimizing the risk of respondents' hypothesis guessing (e.g., Trochim &  
225 Donnelly, 2008). At the end of survey, we instructed them to report any suspicion and to  
226 comment on the survey. No respondent raised a suspicion about connections between the two  
227 parts or guessed our hypotheses correctly.

228         The first part was disguised as a “personality test” wherein the need to belong was  
229 measured. The second part was presented as a “restaurant experience” whereby participants  
230 imagined going to a casual dining restaurant in town for dinner. While waiting to be seated, they  
231 found a scrap of a newspaper article featuring the restaurant's chefs pinned to the bulletin board  
232 (Appendix A). In the effort condition, the featured employees were described as hard-working  
233 individuals who have made relentless efforts in coming up with new menu items. Conversely, in  
234 the talent condition, the featured employees were depicted as naturally talented individuals with  
235 innate skills to come up with new menu items. After reading the scenario, the participants  
236 answered a battery of questions involving attitude toward the restaurant, perceived fit,  
237 manipulation check, and scenario realism. The survey ended with demographic questions and the  
238 frequency of dining out.

### 239 3.1.2. Measures

240         Attitude toward the restaurant was measured with four items from Freling and Forbes  
241 (2005) (unfavorable–favorable, bad–good, unlikeable–likeable, unpleasant–pleasant; seven-point  
242 bipolar scale;  $\alpha = 0.85$ ). Perceived fit was measured with three items from Torelli and Ahluwalia  
243 (2012) (e.g., “I and the featured employees are [1 = a bad fit – 7 = a good fit],”  $\alpha = 0.94$ ). The  
244 manipulations of performance source were assessed with three items from Leung et al. (2020)  
245 (e.g., “The featured employees in the article [1 = put a lot of effort into their work – 7 = were  
246 naturally talented at their work],”  $\alpha = 0.96$ ). Need to belong was measured with 10 items from

247 Leary et al. (2013) (e.g., “I try hard not to do things that will make other people avoid or reject  
248 me [1 = not at all – 5 = extremely],”  $\alpha = 0.87$ ). Scenario realism was captured with two items (“It  
249 was easy to project myself in the scenario” and “The scenario was realistic”;  $r = 0.74, p < 0.01$ ).  
250 The complete list of measures is presented in Appendix B.

## 251 3.2. Results

### 252 3.2.1. Demographics

253 Participants’ age ranged from 20 to 72 years old (Mean [ $M$ ] = 37, Standard Deviation  
254 [ $SD$ ] = 11.32). Among them, 57% were male, 25% were within the annual income bracket of  
255 \$20,000–\$39,999, 53% earned a college degree, and 24% dine out approximately once a month  
256 (Table 1).

257 [Insert Table 1 here]

### 258 3.2.2. Scenario realism and manipulation check

259 On average, the participants perceived our scenario as realistic ( $M = 6.09, SD = 1.04$ ). An  
260 independent-samples t-test revealed that the mean rating of scenario realism did not differ across  
261 effort and talent conditions ( $M_{\text{effort}} = 6.05, M_{\text{talent}} = 6.13, t(217) = 0.53, p > 0.1$ ). Another  
262 independent-samples t-test was performed to assess the effectiveness of manipulations of  
263 performance source. As a result, the participants attributed employees’ performance to talent in  
264 the talent (vs. effort) condition ( $M_{\text{effort}} = 3.13, M_{\text{talent}} = 4.77, t(217) = 6.05, p < 0.01$ ). As such,  
265 our manipulations were deemed effective.

### 266 3.2.3. Hypotheses testing

267 To test H1 and H2, a series of regression models were run via PROCESS (Model 7, IV:  
268 performance source, Moderator: need to belong, Mediator: perceived fit, and DV: attitude toward  
269 the company; Hayes, 2017). The main effect of performance source was significant  
270 (unstandardized coefficient ( $b$ ) = 3.01,  $SE$  = 0.70,  $t$  = 4.34,  $p$  < 0.01). The main effect of the need  
271 to belong was also significant ( $b$  = 0.35,  $SE$  = 0.13,  $t$  = 2.70,  $p$  < 0.01). However, such main  
272 effects were qualified by the two-way interaction ( $b$  = -0.53,  $SE$  = 0.20,  $t$  = -2.60,  $p$  < 0.01). To  
273 further understand this interaction, a floodlight analysis was conducted via the Johnson–Neyman  
274 technique (Spiller et al., 2013). Floodlight analysis enabled us to identify regions along the  
275 continuum of need to belong where differences in perceived fit between effort and talent  
276 conditions were significant and regions where such differences were insignificant. Participants  
277 whose need to belong score was 4.60 or lower (out of 5) indicated higher levels of perceived fit  
278 under the talent (vs. effort) condition ( $b_{\text{JN}}$  = 0.60,  $SE$  = 0.30,  $p$  = 0.05), congruent with H1a.  
279 Conversely, such differences in perceived fit were not observed among participants whose need  
280 to belong score was higher than 4.60 (see Figure 2), consistent with H1b. Thus, H1 was  
281 supported.

282 [Insert Figure 2 here]

283 Moreover, the moderated mediation index was significant (Effect = -0.20; Boot  $SE$  =  
284 0.08; 95% C.I. excluding 0 from -0.38 to -0.05). Thus, H2 was supported. The direct effect of  
285 performance source on attitude toward the company was significant (Effect = -1.40,  $SE$  = 0.15,  $t$   
286 = -9.19,  $p$  < 0.01; Table 2).

287 [Insert Table 2 here]

288 Findings from Study 1 demonstrate that diners' responses to effort vs. talent of restaurant  
289 employees depend on their need to belong. Specifically, when employees' talent (vs. effort) is  
290 salient, diners with low need to belong exhibit higher levels of fit with employees. Diners with  
291 high need to belong exhibit similarly high levels of fit with employees regardless of the source of  
292 employee performance. Although Study 1 nuances our understanding of diners' responses to  
293 effort vs. talent of employees, it does not paint the whole picture of diners' responses across  
294 different types of restaurants. We thus turn to discussing different expectations for casual vs. fine  
295 dining restaurants.

#### 296 4. Theoretical background for Study 2

##### 297 4.1. Consumer expectations for casual vs. fine dining restaurants

298 Converging evidence suggests that consumers hold different expectations for casual vs.  
299 fine dining restaurants (Hwang & Ok, 2013; Liu et al., 2020). For experiential (vs. material)  
300 purchases, such as restaurant dining, consumers are prone to use external cues to assess quality  
301 (Zeithaml et al., 2017). Price is a commonly used external cue to judge the quality of food and  
302 service particularly in fine dining restaurants (Ye et al., 2014). Moreover, consumers exhibit  
303 higher expectations for novel and unique experiences in fine dining (vs. casual dining)  
304 restaurants (Liu et al., 2020). Creative dishes and extraordinary services are governing norms in  
305 fine dining (vs. casual dining) restaurants. Previous research shows that employees' creativity  
306 and innovation in job performance and new product design are highly expected in high-end (vs.  
307 low-end) service sectors (Liu et al., 2020; Stierand & Dorfler, 2012; Yeh & Huan, 2017). In this  
308 regard, the Michelin's Guide considers culinary creativity a defining feature of high-end dining  
309 experiences (Stierand & Dorfler, 2012).

310 Drawing upon the aforementioned literature, this study proposes that consumers expect  
311 employees' unique characteristics in fine dining restaurants. Talent is more unique than effort, as  
312 it is possessed by only a few individuals (Emerson & Murphy, 2015; Leung et al., 2020).  
313 Previous research shows that people may exhibit a positive bias toward talent (Siegle et al.,  
314 2010; Tsay & Banaji, 2011). For instance, Tsay and Banaji (2011) reveal that people infer a  
315 higher likelihood of success for naturally talented musicians (vs. those who practice relentlessly).  
316 In the education setting, college students with honors tend to mention their academic  
317 performance in relation to their inborn intelligence (vs. effort) (Siegle et al., 2010). This study  
318 proposes that such a positive bias toward talent is manifested in fine dining restaurants as  
319 employees' talent (vs. effort) in a message is congruent with consumer expectations for  
320 uniqueness in fine dining experiences.

#### 321 4.2. Congruency and message persuasiveness

322 Such congruency, in turn, is likely to increase persuasiveness of a message. Emerging  
323 evidence demonstrates that consumers tend to perceive marketing messages as persuasive when  
324 message characteristics match their expectations or pre-existing perceptions (Kidwell, Farmer, &  
325 Hardesty, 2013; Line et al., 2016; McGuire, 2013). Specifically, McGuire (2013) contends that  
326 persuasiveness of a message results from an audience expectation-message source congruency.  
327 Line et al. (2016) show that persuasiveness of a sustainability message stems from a congruency  
328 between construal level of the message and consumers' existing perceptions of sustainability.  
329 Similarly, Kidwell et al. (2013) show that individuals find a recycling message persuasive when  
330 the appeal matches their political ideology. Drawing on this stream of literature, we suggest that  
331 a match between diners' expectations for uniqueness and talent (vs. effort) of restaurant  
332 employees leads diners to perceive a talent-focused (vs. effort-focused) message as more



333 persuasive and thus, exhibit a more favorable attitude toward a fine dining restaurant. This study  
334 further predicts that when both effort and talent are showcased in a message (vs. when only  
335 talent is highlighted), persuasiveness of the message may be undermined. As effort is possessed  
336 by all individuals (Emerson & Murphy, 2015; Leung et al., 2020), it dilutes the exclusive nature  
337 of talent. Therefore, persuasiveness of messages of fine dining restaurants is likely to be greater  
338 when employees' talent alone is emphasized than when effort is showcased alone or in a  
339 combination with talent.

340         Conversely, in casual dining restaurants, diners' expectations for novelty and uniqueness  
341 are not salient (Hwang & Ok, 2013; Liu et al., 2020). Talent, a unique aspect of restaurant  
342 employees, is not highly expected. As such, persuasiveness of a message may not differ across  
343 talent (vs. effort) conditions in casual dining restaurants. This study further proposes that  
344 persuasiveness of the message is enhanced when both talent and effort are highlighted in the  
345 message of casual dining restaurants. Considerable research suggests that diners' expectations  
346 for variety are salient in quick service and casual dining restaurants (Ha & Jang, 2013; Hwang &  
347 Ok, 2013; Liu et al., 2020; Park, 2004; Parsa & Njite, 2004; Ryu, Han, & Kim, 2008). Variety-  
348 seeking tendency indicates a propensity to seek diversity in purchase decisions and consumption  
349 experiences (Ha & Jang, 2013). Such a tendency manifests in variety in menu items (Hwang &  
350 Ok, 2013; Park, 2004; Ryu et al., 2008; Ryu & Han, 2010), variety in colors used to present  
351 prices of menu items (Parsa & Njite, 2004), variety-mix in ethnic fusion restaurants (Liu et al.,  
352 2020), and variety-seeking in company choice (e.g., "I would like to visit other restaurants for  
353 new food items"; Ha & Jang, 2013). As variety-seeking tendency applies to a range of brands,  
354 products, and services (Ha & Jang, 2013), it is reasonable to draw on this stream of literature to  
355 argue that consumers' expectations for variety are amenable to variety of sources of employees'

356 performance (i.e., effort combined with talent). Showcasing more than one source of employee  
357 performance aligns with diners' expectations for variety in casual dining segments.

358 Consequently, the congruency between diners' expectations for variety and dual sources of  
359 employee performance is likely to engender persuasiveness of the message and, in turn, foster a  
360 favorable attitude toward casual dining restaurants. Our conceptual model is depicted in Figure

361 1. Taken together, we put forth the following hypotheses:

362 Hypothesis 3 (H3). Restaurant type will moderate the effect of source of employee performance  
363 on message persuasiveness. Specifically,

364 Hypothesis 3a (H3a). For fine dining restaurants, message persuasiveness will be higher  
365 when talent of employees alone is showcased compared with effort alone or in a  
366 combination with talent.

367 Hypothesis 3b (H3b). For casual dining restaurants, such differences in message  
368 persuasiveness will not be observed.

369 Hypothesis 4 (H4). Message persuasiveness will mediate the moderating effect of restaurant type  
370 proposed in Hypothesis 3.

371

## 372 5. Study 2

### 373 5.1. Method

#### 374 5.1.1. Design and procedure

375 The purpose of Study 2 was to test H3 and H4. We used a 3 (sources of employee  
376 performance: effort vs. talent vs. both)  $\times$  2 (restaurant type: casual vs. fine dining) between-  
377 subjects experimental design. Participants were US consumers recruited from MTurk. They were  
378 randomly assigned to one of the six conditions. The compensation amount and the screening  
379 criteria were the same as Study 1.

380 Our participants were asked to imagine themselves in a hypothetical scenario wherein  
381 they were browsing online for information about a new restaurant in town called Bistecca.  
382 Depending on the restaurant type condition, Bistecca was described as a casual or fine dining  
383 restaurant. While browsing, participants found a local newspaper article featuring Bistecca's  
384 chefs. Depending on the performance source condition, the article emphasized chefs' effort,  
385 talent or both in creating new menus and creating pleasant dining experiences (Appendix A).  
386 After reading the scenario, participants indicated their attitude toward the restaurant and  
387 persuasiveness of the article. They also answered manipulation check, scenario realism, and  
388 demographic questions.

#### 389 5.1.2. Measures

390 Attitude toward the restaurant was measured with the four items as Study 1 ( $\alpha = 0.93$ ).  
391 Persuasiveness of the newspaper article was measured with four items from Popova, Neilands,  
392 and Ling (2014) (unconvincing–convincing, ineffective–effective, not believable–believable,  
393 unrealistic–realistic; seven-point bipolar scale;  $\alpha = 0.92$ ). Manipulations of performance source

394 were evaluated with the same items as Study 1 (1 = effort, 4 = both effort and talent, 7 = talent;  $\alpha$   
395 = 0.94). Scenario realism was measured with the two items as Study 1 ( $r = 0.70, p < 0.01$ ).

## 396 5.2. Results

### 397 5.2.1. Demographics

398 Our participants' age ranged from 19 to 73 years old ( $M = 38, SD = 10.95$ ). Sixty-percent  
399 were male, 24% were within the annual income bracket of \$40,000–\$59,999, 55% earned a  
400 college degree, and 25% dine out approximately a few times per month (Table 1).

### 401 5.2.2. Scenario realism and manipulation check

402 Our participants perceived our scenario as realistic ( $M = 6.01, SD = 1.00$ ). A two-way  
403 ANOVA showed that this mean rating did not differ across the six experimental conditions (all  
404  $ps > 0.1$ ). We ran another two-way ANOVA to assess the effectiveness of performance source  
405 manipulations. Only the main effect of performance source was significant ( $F(2, 330) = 22.94, p$   
406  $< 0.01$ ). The results from planned contrasts showed that participants in the talent condition  
407 perceived that the employees featured in the article are highly talented ( $M_{\text{talent}} = 5.07$ ), compared  
408 with both condition ( $M_{\text{both}} = 4.36$ ) and effort condition ( $M_{\text{effort}} = 3.37$ ; the three means were  
409 significantly different from one another,  $ps < 0.01$ ). The main effect of restaurant type ( $F(1,$   
410  $330) = 3.06, p > 0.05$ ) and the two-way interaction ( $F(2, 330) = 0.18, p > 0.1$ ) were insignificant.  
411 Hence, our manipulations were deemed effective.

### 412 5.2.3. Hypotheses testing

413 To test H3 and H4, we ran a series of regression models via PROCESS (Model 8; IV:  
414 performance source, Moderator: restaurant type, Mediator: persuasiveness of the article, DV:  
415 attitude; bias-corrected bootstraps = 10,000; Hayes, 2017; Table 3). Owing to the multi-

416 categorical nature of our IV, indicator coding (X1: both and effort conditions were coded as 0,  
417 whereas talent condition was coded as 1, X2: both and talent conditions were coded as 0,  
418 whereas effort condition was coded as 1) was used. The main effect of restaurant type ( $b =$   
419  $-0.64$ ,  $SE = 0.19$ ,  $t = -3.32$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) was significant. However, such a main effect was qualified  
420 by the significant two-way interaction ( $F(2, 330) = 3.11$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

421 [Insert Table 3 around here]

422 To decompose this interaction, we conducted an analysis of simple effects (Figure 3). For  
423 fine dining, persuasiveness of the article differed across three types of performance source ( $F(2,$   
424  $330) = 4.65$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Specifically, persuasiveness was highest in the talent condition ( $M =$   
425  $6.00$ ), followed by effort ( $M = 5.65$ ) and both conditions ( $M = 5.41$ ). Effort and both conditions  
426 did not differ in terms of persuasiveness ( $p > 0.05$ ), consistent with H3a. Conversely, for casual  
427 dining, persuasiveness of the article did not differ across three types of sources of employee  
428 performance ( $F(2, 330) = 0.26$ ,  $p > 0.1$ ;  $M_{\text{both}} = 6.05$ ,  $M_{\text{talent}} = 5.96$ ,  $M_{\text{effort}} = 5.91$ ), congruent  
429 with H3b. Thus, H3 was supported.

430 [Insert Figure 3 around here]

431 Furthermore, the mediating effect of persuasiveness of the article was significant when  
432 talent was highlighted in the fine dining condition (Effect = 0.37; Boot  $SE = 0.14$ ; 95% C.I.  
433 excluding zero from 0.11 to 0.65). Thus, H4 was supported. We also ran the PROCESS model  
434 above with some demographic variables as control variables (e.g., gender, age). Our results did  
435 not meaningfully alter with such control variables. Thus, H3 and H4 had robust support.

436

## 437 6. General discussion

438           This research examines how restaurateurs can effectively communicate employees'  
439 laudable performance. Two studies were conducted to test how diners respond to marketing  
440 messages emphasizing different sources of restaurant employee performance. Study 1 reveals  
441 that diners with low levels of need to belong perceive greater fit with restaurant employees  
442 whose talent (vs. effort) is highlighted and, thus, exhibit a more favorable attitude toward the  
443 restaurant. However, such a tendency is not observed among individuals with high levels of need  
444 to belong. These findings are consistent with those from previous research suggesting that talent  
445 tends to evoke feelings of social disconnectedness (Klein & O'Brien, 2017; Siegler et al., 2016),  
446 which are presumably of greater concern for those with a high (vs. low) need to belong.

447           This research further shows that perceived fit underlies the moderating effect of diners'  
448 need to belong in their responses to restaurant employees' talent vs. effort. This is congruent  
449 with previous findings wherein consumer perceptions of fit translate into positive consumer  
450 outcomes. For example, previous research indicates that perceived fit generates desired  
451 outcomes, such as customer satisfaction and loyalty (Kressmann et al., 2006; Shin et al., 2018;  
452 Sirgy et al., 2008).

453           Study 2 shows that diners perceive marketing messages that highlight employees' talent  
454 (vs. effort or talent combined with effort) as more persuasive and therefore exhibit a more  
455 favorable attitude toward the fine dining restaurant. However, such a tendency is not observed  
456 for casual dining restaurants. These findings align with previous findings that diners expect  
457 different attributes from fine dining and casual dining restaurants (Hwang & Ok, 2013). Fine  
458 dining restaurants are often expected to convey a sense of exclusiveness (Hanks, Line, & Kim,  
459 2017). Thus, customers of fine dining restaurants are likely to respond favorably to

460 characteristics owned by only a few individuals, including talent, because of a lay belief that  
461 innate talent is possessed by a select few (Emerson & Murphy, 2015). Conversely, such a  
462 preference for talent-based performance is unlikely in casual dining settings because of customer  
463 expectations for variety (Hwang & Ok, 2013; Liu et al., 2020). Our findings lend support to such  
464 restaurant-specific expectations by illuminating how diners respond to performance sources with  
465 varying degrees of associations with exclusiveness/variety in fine dining versus casual dining  
466 restaurants.

467         The mediation analysis reveals that perceived persuasiveness of marketing messages  
468 mediates the joint effect of source of employee performance and restaurant type on diners'  
469 attitude toward a restaurant. This finding is similar to previous research that perceived  
470 persuasiveness garners desired outcomes. For example, past studies document that message  
471 persuasiveness enhances consumers' behavioral intention (Lee & Pounders, 2019; Pounders,  
472 Lee, & Mackert, 2015). Our finding lends additional support to this line of research.

### 473 6.1. Theoretical implications

474         This study contributes to the hospitality literature by focusing on an understudied type of  
475 marketing message, that is, the one that showcases employees. Hospitality researchers largely  
476 examined marketing messages spotlighting products or companies. In terms of products,  
477 researchers explored how restaurants can successfully promote their offerings. For example, the  
478 effectiveness of marketing messages promoting nutritious menu items (Jeong & Jang, 2016) and  
479 ugly yet otherwise intact food (Shao et al., 2020) is explored. In terms of companies, researchers  
480 investigated how restaurant companies' good deed can be communicated successfully. For  
481 example, the effectiveness of messages conveying restaurant companies' cause-related marketing  
482 (Gao et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2016) and green practices (Xu & Jeong, 2019) is studied. However,

483 researchers have drawn little attention to marketing messages centering on employees. This gap  
484 is puzzling given the prevalence of messages showcasing employees' performance (e.g., the  
485 story of employee of the month on in-store bulletin board, website, or social media account). We  
486 fill this gap by illustrating how such messages should be crafted to beget diners' favorable  
487 attitude.

488         Not only the hospitality literature but also the mainstream business literature is at the  
489 paucity of understanding the effective communication of employee performance. As a notable  
490 exception, Leung et al. (2020) pioneer the work on this topic by investigating the effect of talent-  
491 based vs. effort-based messages on consumers' expectations for communal-exchange  
492 relationship norms and their helping behaviors that benefit the firm. The current research extends  
493 this line of work by illuminating the moderating role of a fundamental human motivation, the  
494 need to belong, in the effect of the source of employee performance on attitude toward company.  
495 By doing so, this study responds to Leung et al.'s (2020) call to examine individual  
496 characteristics that modulate the effect of talent-focused vs. effort-focused messages on  
497 consumer behavior.

498         This research advances the understanding of customizing marketing communication  
499 across restaurant types. Study 2 reveals that diners respond more favorably to a marketing  
500 message framed with employees' inborn talent (vs. dedicated effort or both) in the context of fine  
501 dining restaurant, whereas such a tendency no longer holds when the context is casual dining  
502 restaurant. Hospitality researchers rarely factored restaurant type into examining message  
503 effectiveness, but they compared how menu items, servicescape, and service quality influence  
504 diners' experiences in casual vs. fine dining restaurants (Hwang & Ok, 2013). The current work  
505 bridges this gap by comparing how diners respond to marketing messages conveying various



506 sources of employee performance and showing that message effectiveness is contingent on the  
507 restaurant type. Moreover, we find that highlighting both talent and effort is, at most, as effective  
508 as highlighting a single source of employee performance. Thus, our work adds to growing  
509 research showing that merely presenting more arguments may not beget persuasiveness of  
510 messages (Feiler, Tost, & Grant, 2012).

511         This research also advances the knowledge on perceptions of fit. Experiential purchases,  
512 such as dining at restaurants and staying at hotels, tend to be more closely connected to the self  
513 than material purchases (Carter & Gilovich, 2012). Thus, well-designed hospitality experiences  
514 can evoke a sense of fit. However, consumers' perceptions of fit with employees remain under-  
515 examined in the hospitality literature. Filling this void is vital because employees constitute an  
516 integral part of hospitality experiences. We bridge this gap by showing that marketing  
517 communications that match diners' need to belong can evoke a sense of fit with employees.

## 518 6.2. Practical implications

519         Our findings provide insight into how to optimize messages conveying employee  
520 performance (talent vs. effort). The findings from Study 1 suggest that diners with a low need to  
521 belong, but not those with a high need to belong, may respond more favorably to the talent-  
522 focused (vs. effort-focused) message. Individuals from independent (vs. interdependent) cultures  
523 often place less importance on social belonging (Gardner, Gabriel, & Lee, 1999; Loveland et al.,  
524 2010; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). On the one hand, restaurant managers primarily targeting  
525 mainstream customers in North America may reap the benefits from emphasizing the natural  
526 talent of their employee of the month (e.g., "natural-born barista") than the employee's dedicated  
527 effort (e.g., "barista with unremitting effort"). On the other hand, restaurant managers mostly

528 targeting mainstream customers in East Asia may be more flexible in communicating employee  
529 performance.

530           Independent vs. interdependent self-construal is not the one and only proxy for the need  
531 to belong. Previous research documents environmental cues that can situationally activate or  
532 deactivate the need to belong (Liu & Mattila, 2015; Zhu & Argo, 2013). Some cues are highly  
533 relevant to the restaurant context. Liu and Mattila (2015) show that a Caucasian customer  
534 surrounded by Asian customers in a Chinese restaurant may have a momentarily salient need to  
535 belong. Similarly, solo diners may experience loneliness and perceive social exclusion among  
536 group diners, which likely heighten need to belong (Her & Seo, 2018; Hwang, Shin, & Mattila,  
537 2018; Ratner & Hamilton, 2015). Such a tendency may be particularly pronounced during dinner  
538 (vs. lunch) time because people are more reluctant to dine out alone (Fitzsimons, 2020). Taken  
539 together, perceived dissimilarity between the focal customer and other customers may heighten  
540 the need to belong. Restaurateurs are advised to take this notion into account when gauging  
541 diners' need to belong.

542           This study further reveals that diners' perceived fit with employees is a psychological  
543 mechanism underpinning the joint effect of the source of employee performance and their need  
544 to belong. Thus, the communication of employee performance may lose some of its impact on  
545 consumer responses when perceptions of fit are diminished by external factors. Managers are  
546 advised to avoid dampening perceived fit and promote a sense of congruity. For example, posts  
547 on restaurants' social media and website should be carefully crafted to foster "this is my kind of  
548 restaurant" impression.

549           We also have suggestions based on the findings from Study 2. Common sense may  
550 dictate that the phrase "the more the merrier" applies to marketing communication. If so, a

551 restaurant manager may be tempted to emphasize both talent and effort of employees in  
552 marketing messages. Some fine dining restaurants indeed include both sources in their marketing  
553 messages. For example, The Peninsula Hong Kong, a luxury hotel, embeds talent and effort in  
554 the story of Chef Florian Trento posted on its website: “Chef Trento’s *hardworking nature* and  
555 *talent* would see him rise to become the Executive Chef at The Peninsula Hong Kong in 1991.”  
556 However, our findings contradict the effectiveness of such an intuitive practice by showing that  
557 emphasizing both sources of performance may be less effective than highlighting a single source,  
558 which is talent in the context of fine dining. Therefore, managers of fine dining restaurants may  
559 benefit from resisting the temptation of highlighting both. They may be well served by  
560 emphasizing employees’ talent only.

561         On the contrary, managers of casual dining restaurants may have more latitude in  
562 choosing the source of employee performance to communicate. We find that messages  
563 highlighting talent, effort, and both in the casual dining context may elicit similar levels of  
564 favorable attitude. Whether talent (e.g., “born for customer service”), effort (e.g., “making  
565 relentless effort to serve customers”), or both is highlighted, diners may exhibit invariantly  
566 favorable responses. Thus, managers of casual dining outlets, unlike those of fine dining outlets,  
567 may not be selective in choosing the source of employee performance to communicate.

### 568 6.3. Limitations and future research

569         This study has several limitations. First, a scenario-based experiment was used to ensure  
570 internal validity. Future investigations may consider using a field study to test whether our  
571 results extend to real-world situations. Second, although previous research suggests that data  
572 from MTurk are generally reliable (Berinsky et al., 2012; Buhrmester et al., 2018; Paolacci et al.,  
573 2010), our participants may not represent the US population because our sample (vs. the US

574 population) has a higher-than-average education level. Caution needs to be taken when applying  
575 our findings across job tasks. Some mechanical tasks, such as taking orders at drive-through  
576 outlets and delivering food, do not require as much talent as other tasks, such as creating new  
577 menu items. Therefore, our findings may not be highly relevant for restaurants whose employees  
578 primarily undertake mechanical tasks.

579         Moreover, we note that psychological factors other than the need to belong may moderate  
580 consumer responses to different sources of employee performance. For example, consumers high  
581 (vs. low) in narcissism may react more favorably to employees' talent because perceived  
582 uniqueness or exclusiveness of innate talent presumably matches their self-concept. Narcissists  
583 view themselves as a special being and are keen on presenting their unique self (Fastoso,  
584 Bartikowski, & Wang, 2018). Future studies may test the moderating effects of such variables.  
585 Another interesting research avenue is to understand consumer reactions to talent-based vs.  
586 effort-based messages in relation to service failures. Whether messages emphasizing employees'  
587 effort or talent lead consumers to be more forgiving of service failures is an open question. Our  
588 speculation is that consumers presumably derive more warmth from effort-based (vs. talent-  
589 based) messages (Baudson & Preckel, 2013) and, in turn, exhibit less negative responses to  
590 service failures (Bolton & Mattila, 2015).

## 591 7. References

592 Baudson, T. G., & Preckel, F. (2013). Teachers' implicit personality theories about the gifted: An  
593 experimental approach. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 28(1), 37-46.

594 Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: desire for interpersonal  
595 attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117(3), 497-  
596 529.

597 Berinsky, A. J., Huber, G. A., & Lenz, G. S. (2012). Evaluating online labor markets for  
598 experimental research: Amazon. com's Mechanical Turk. *Political Analysis*, 20(3), 351-  
599 368.

600 Bhattacharya, C. B., & Sen, S. (2003). Consumer–company identification: A framework for  
601 understanding consumers' relationships with companies. *Journal of Marketing*, 67(2), 76-  
602 88.

603 Bolton, L. E., & Mattila, A. S. (2015). How does corporate social responsibility affect consumer  
604 response to service failure in buyer–seller relationships?. *Journal of Retailing*, 91(1),  
605 140-153.

606 Buhrmester, M. D., Talaifar, S., & Gosling, S. D. (2018). An evaluation of Amazon's  
607 Mechanical Turk, its rapid rise, and its effective use. *Perspectives on Psychological  
608 Science*, 13(2), 149-154.

609 Carter, T. J., & Gilovich, T. (2012). I am what I do, not what I have: The differential centrality of  
610 experiential and material purchases to the self. *Journal of personality and social  
611 psychology*, 102(6), 1304.

- 612 Choi, W. J., & Winterich, K. P. (2013). Can brands move in from the outside? How moral  
613 identity enhances out-group brand attitudes. *Journal of Marketing*, 77(2), 96-111.
- 614 De Cremer, D., & Leonardelli, G. J. (2003). Cooperation in social dilemmas and the need to  
615 belong: The moderating effect of group size. *Group dynamics: Theory, Research, and*  
616 *Practice*, 7(2), 168-174.
- 617 Dimofte, C. V., Goodstein, R. C., & Brumbaugh, A. M. (2015). A social identity perspective on  
618 aspirational advertising: Implicit threats to collective self-esteem and strategies to  
619 overcome them. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 25(3), 416-430.
- 620 Emerson, K. T., & Murphy, M. C. (2015). A company I can trust? Organizational lay theories  
621 moderate stereotype threat for women. *Personality and Social Psychology*  
622 *Bulletin*, 41(2), 295-307.
- 623 Fastoso, F., Bartikowski, B., & Wang, S. (2018). The “little emperor” and the luxury brand: How  
624 overt and covert narcissism affect brand loyalty and proneness to buy counterfeits.  
625 *Psychology & Marketing*, 35(7), 522-532.
- 626 Feiler, D. C., Tost, L. P., & Grant, A. M. (2012). Mixed reasons, missed givings: The costs of  
627 blending egoistic and altruistic reasons in donation requests. *Journal of Experimental*  
628 *Social Psychology*, 48(6), 1322-1328.
- 629 Fitzsimons, J. (February 28, 2020). 20 tips for eating out alone – from a seasoned solo diner.  
630 Retrieved May 2, 2020 from <https://indianajo.com/tips-for-eating-out-alone.html>.
- 631 Freling, T. H., & Forbes, L. P. (2005). An empirical analysis of the brand personality  
632 effect. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 14(7), 404–413.

- 633 Gao, Y., Wu, L., Shin, J., & Mattila, A. S. (2020). Visual design, message content, and benefit  
634 type: the case of a cause-related marketing campaign. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism*  
635 *Research*, 1096348020911444.
- 636 Gardner, W. L., Gabriel, S., & Lee, A. Y. (1999). “I” value freedom, but “we” value  
637 relationships: Self-construal priming mirrors cultural differences in judgment.  
638 *Psychological Science*, 10(4), 321-326.
- 639 Ha, J., & Jang, S. S. (2013). Determinants of diners' variety seeking intentions. *Journal of*  
640 *Services Marketing*, 27(2), 155-165.
- 641 Han, D., Duhachek, A., & Agrawal, N. (2014). Emotions shape decisions through construal  
642 level: The case of guilt and shame. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 41(4), 1047-1064.
- 643 Han, D., Duhachek, A., & Agrawal, N. (2016). Coping and construal level matching drives  
644 health message effectiveness via response efficacy or self-efficacy enhancement. *Journal*  
645 *of Consumer Research*, 43(3), 429-447.
- 646 Hanks, L., Line, N., & Kim, W. G. W. (2017). The impact of the social servicescape, density,  
647 and restaurant type on perceptions of interpersonal service quality. *International Journal*  
648 *of Hospitality Management*, 61, 35-44.
- 649 Hayes, A. F. (2017). *Introduction to mediation, moderation, and conditional process analysis: a*  
650 *regression-based approach*. Guilford Publications.
- 651 Helterman, J. (2019, July 30). *A Massively Talented Chef Makes Providence's Pint-Sized Birch*  
652 *Restaurant a Chic Surprise*. Boston Magazine.  
653 <https://www.bostonmagazine.com/restaurants/2019/07/30/birch/>

- 654 Her, E., & Seo, S. (2018). Why not eat alone? The effect of other consumers on solo dining  
655 intentions and the mechanism. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 70, 16-  
656 24.
- 657 Hill, C. (2015, December 18). *20 Quotes From Successful Chefs: What They've Learned From a*  
658 *Career in the Kitchen*. Medium. [https://medium.com/@chefchris/20-quotes-from-](https://medium.com/@chefchris/20-quotes-from-successful-chefs-what-they-ve-learned-from-a-career-in-the-kitchen-bfe0c775d6f7)  
659 [successful-chefs-what-they-ve-learned-from-a-career-in-the-kitchen-bfe0c775d6f7](https://medium.com/@chefchris/20-quotes-from-successful-chefs-what-they-ve-learned-from-a-career-in-the-kitchen-bfe0c775d6f7)
- 660 Hong, H. Y., & Lin-Siegler, X. (2012). How learning about scientists' struggles influences  
661 students' interest and learning in physics. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 104(2),  
662 469-484.
- 663 Hornsey, M. J. (2008). Social identity theory and self-categorization theory: A historical  
664 review. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 2(1), 204-222.
- 665 Hwang, J., & Ok, C. (2013). The antecedents and consequence of consumer attitudes toward  
666 restaurant brands: A comparative study between casual and fine dining restaurants.  
667 *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 32, 121-131.
- 668 Hwang, Y., Shin, J., & Mattila, A. S. (2018). So private, yet so public: The impact of spatial  
669 distance, other diners, and power on solo dining experiences. *Journal of Business*  
670 *Research*, 92, 36-47.
- 671 Jeong, E., & Jang, S. S. (2016). Imagine yourself being healthy: The mental simulation effect of  
672 advertisements on healthy menu promotion. *International Journal of Hospitality*  
673 *Management*, 53, 81-93.



- 674 Keller, K. L. (1993). Conceptualizing, measuring, and managing customer-based brand  
675 equity. *Journal of Marketing*, 57(1), 1-22.
- 676 Keller, K. L. (2002). Strategic brand management: building, measuring, and managing brand  
677 equity. Prentice-Hall: Upper Saddle River, NJ.
- 678 Kim, S. B., Kim, K. J., & Kim, D. Y. (2016). Exploring the effective restaurant CRM ad.  
679 *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 28(11), 2473-2492.
- 680 Klein, N., & O'Brien, E. (2017). The power and limits of personal change: When a bad past does  
681 (and does not) inspire in the present. *Journal of Personality and Social*  
682 *Psychology*, 113(2), 210-229.
- 683 Kressmann, F., Sirgy, M. J., Herrmann, A., Huber, F., Huber, S., & Lee, D. J. (2006). Direct and  
684 indirect effects of self-image congruence on brand loyalty. *Journal of Business Research*,  
685 59(9), 955-964.
- 686 Kusluvan, S., Kusluvan, Z., Ilhan, I., & Buyruk, L. (2010). The human dimension: A review of  
687 human resources management issues in the tourism and hospitality industry. *Cornell*  
688 *Hospitality Quarterly*, 51(2), 171-214.
- 689 Leary, M. R., Kelly, K. M., Cottrell, C. A., & Schreindorfer, L. S. (2013). Construct validity of  
690 the need to belong scale: Mapping the nomological network. *Journal of Personality*  
691 *Assessment*, 95(6), 610-624.
- 692 Lee, E. M., Park, S. Y., Rapert, M. I., & Newman, C. L. (2012). Does perceived consumer fit  
693 matter in corporate social responsibility issues?. *Journal of Business Research*, 65(11),  
694 1558-1564.

- 695 Lee, S., & Pounders, K. R. (2019). Intrinsic versus extrinsic goals: The role of self-construal in  
696 understanding consumer response to goal framing in social marketing. *Journal of*  
697 *Business Research*, 94, 99-112.
- 698 Leung, F. F., Kim, S., & Tse, C. H. (2020). Highlighting effort versus talent in service employee  
699 performance: customer attributions and responses. *Journal of Marketing*, 84(3), 106-121.
- 700 Line, N. D., Hanks, L., & Zhang, L. (2016). Sustainability communication: The effect of  
701 message construals on consumers' attitudes towards green restaurants. *International*  
702 *Journal of Hospitality Management*, 57, 143-151.
- 703 Lin-Siegler, X., Ahn, J. N., Chen, J., Fang, F. F. A., & Luna-Lucero, M. (2016). Even Einstein  
704 struggled: Effects of learning about great scientists' struggles on high school students'  
705 motivation to learn science. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 108(3), 314-328.
- 706 Liu, S. Q., & Mattila, A. S. (2015). Ethnic dining: Need to belong, need to be unique, and menu  
707 offering. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 49, 1-7.
- 708 Liu, S. Q., Wu, L. L., & Wang, C. Y. (2020). A creative-mix or variety-mix fusion experience?  
709 Examining marketing strategies for ethnic fusion restaurants. *International Journal of*  
710 *Hospitality Management*, 89, DOI: 10.1016/j.ijhm.2020.102596.
- 711 Loveland, K. E., Smeesters, D., & Mandel, N. (2010). Still preoccupied with 1995: The need to  
712 belong and preference for nostalgic products. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 37(3), 393-  
713 408.
- 714 Luoh, H. F., & Tsaur, S. H. (2009). Physical attractiveness stereotypes and service quality in  
715 customer-server encounters. *The Service Industries Journal*, 29(8), 1093-1104.

- 716 Manthiou, A., Kang, J., Hyun, S. S., & Fu, X. X. (2018). The impact of brand authenticity on  
717 building brand love: An investigation of impression in memory and lifestyle-  
718 congruence. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 75, 38-47.
- 719 Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (1991). Culture and the self: Implications for cognition, emotion,  
720 and motivation. *Psychological Review*, 98(2), 224-253.
- 721 McCall, M., & Voorhees, C. (2010). The drivers of loyalty program success: An organizing  
722 framework and research agenda. *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly*, 51(1), 35-52.
- 723 McGuire, W. J. (2013). McGuire's classic input-output framework for constructing persuasive  
724 messages. In R. E. Rice & C. K. Atkin (Eds.), *Public Communication Campaigns* (pp.  
725 133-145). Sage Publications.
- 726 Meyvis, T., & Janiszewski, C. (2004). When are broader brands stronger brands? An  
727 accessibility perspective on the success of brand extensions. *Journal of Consumer*  
728 *Research*, 31(2), 346-357.
- 729 Oppenheimer, D. M., Meyvis, T., & Davidenko, N. (2009). Instructional manipulation checks:  
730 Detecting satisficing to increase statistical power. *Journal of Experimental Social*  
731 *Psychology*, 45(4), 867-872.
- 732 Paolacci, G., Chandler, J., & Ipeirotis, P. G. (2010). Running experiments on amazon mechanical  
733 turk. *Judgment and Decision Making*, 5(5), 411-419.
- 734 Park, C. (2004). Efficient or enjoyable? Consumer values of eating-out and fast food restaurant  
735 consumption in Korea. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 23(1), 87-94.

- 736 Parsa, H. G., & Njite, D. (2004). Psychobiology of price presentation: An experimental analysis  
737 of restaurant menus. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, 28(3), 263-280.
- 738 Peer, E., Vosgerau, J., & Acquisti, A. (2014). Reputation as a sufficient condition for data quality  
739 on Amazon Mechanical Turk. *Behavior Research Methods*, 46(4), 1023-1031.
- 740 Pickett, C. L., Gardner, W. L., & Knowles, M. (2004). Getting a cue: The need to belong and  
741 enhanced sensitivity to social cues. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 30(9),  
742 1095-1107.
- 743 Pounders, K. R., Lee, S., & Mackert, M. (2015). Matching temporal frame, self-view, and  
744 message frame valence: Improving persuasiveness in health communications. *Journal of*  
745 *Advertising*, 44(4), 388-402.
- 746 Popova, L., Neilands, T. B., & Ling, P. M. (2014). Testing messages to reduce smokers'  
747 openness to using novel smokeless tobacco products. *Tobacco Control*, 23(4), 313-321.
- 748 Ratner, R. K., & Hamilton, R. W. (2015). Inhibited from bowling alone. *Journal of Consumer*  
749 *Research*, 42(2), 266-283.
- 750 Ryu, K., & Han, H. (2010). Influence of the quality of food, service, and physical environment  
751 on customer satisfaction and behavioral intention in quick-casual restaurants: Moderating  
752 role of perceived price. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, 34(3), 310-329.
- 753 Ryu, K., Han, H., & Kim, T. H. (2008). The relationships among overall quick-casual restaurant  
754 image, perceived value, customer satisfaction, and behavioral intentions. *International*  
755 *Journal of Hospitality Management*, 27(3), 459-469.

- 756 Shao, X., Jeong, E., Jang, S. S., & Xu, Y. (2020). Mr. Potato Head fights food waste: The effect  
757 of anthropomorphism in promoting ugly food. *International Journal of Hospitality*  
758 *Management*, 89, 102521.
- 759 Shin, J., Hwang, Y., & Mattila, A. S. (2018). Dining alone? Solo consumers' self-esteem and  
760 incidental similarity. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 32(6), 767–776.
- 761 Siegle, D., Rubenstein, L. D. V., Pollard, E., & Romey, E. (2010). Exploring the relationship of  
762 college freshmen honors students' effort and ability attribution, interest, and implicit  
763 theory of intelligence with perceived ability. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 54(2), 92-101.
- 764 Sirgy, M. J., Lee, D. J., Johar, J. S., & Tidwell, J. (2008). Effect of self-congruity with  
765 sponsorship on brand loyalty. *Journal of Business Research*, 61(10), 1091-1097.
- 766 Spiller, S. A., Fitzsimons, G. J., Lynch Jr, J. G., & McClelland, G. H. (2013). Spotlights,  
767 floodlights, and the magic number zero: Simple effects tests in moderated  
768 regression. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 50(2), 277-288.
- 769 Stierand, M. B., & Dörfler, V. (2012). Reflecting on a phenomenological study of creativity and  
770 innovation in haute cuisine. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality*  
771 *Management*, 24(6), 946-957.
- 772 Stokburger-Sauer, N. E. (2011). The relevance of visitors' nation brand embeddedness and  
773 personality congruence for nation brand identification, visit intentions and  
774 advocacy. *Tourism Management*, 32(6), 1282-1289.
- 775 Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An intergrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin

- 776 & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (pp. 33–47).  
777 Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole.
- 778 Torelli, C. J., & Ahluwalia, R. (2012). Extending culturally symbolic brands: A blessing or a  
779 curse?. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 38(5), 933-947.
- 780 Trochim, W. M., & Donnelly, J. P. (2008). *The research methods knowledge base*. Cincinnati,  
781 OH: Atomic Dog Publishing.
- 782 Tsay, C. J., & Banaji, M. R. (2011). Naturals and strivers: Preferences and beliefs about sources  
783 of achievement. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 47(2), 460-465.
- 784 Turner, J. C., Hogg, M. A., Oakes, P. J., Reicher, S. D., & Wetherell, M. S. (1987).  
785 *Rediscovering the social group: a self-categorization theory*. New York: Blackwell.
- 786 Turner, J. C., & Reynolds, K. J. (2003). Why social dominance theory has been falsified. *British*  
787 *Journal of Social Psychology*, 42, 199–206.
- 788 Walton, G. M., & Cohen, G. L. (2007). A question of belonging: race, social fit, and  
789 achievement. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 92(1), 82-96.
- 790 Wilkie, W. L. (1986). *Consumer Behavior*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- 791 Xu, Y., & Jeong, E. (2019). The effect of message framings and green practices on customers'  
792 attitudes and behavior intentions toward green restaurants. *International Journal of*  
793 *Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 31(6), 2270-2296.
- 794 Ye, Q., Li, H., Wang, Z., Law, R., 2014. The influence of hotel price on perceived service  
795 quality and value in e-tourism: an empirical investigation based on online traveler  
796 reviews. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research*, 38(1), 23–39.

- 797 Yeh, S. S., & Huan, T. C. (2017). Assessing the impact of work environment factors on  
798 employee creative performance of fine-dining restaurants. *Tourism Management*, 58,  
799 119-131.
- 800 Zeithaml, V. A., Bitner, M. J., & Gremler, D. D. (2017). *Services marketing: integrating*  
801 *customer focus across the firm*. McGraw-Hill Education.
- 802 Zhu, R., & Argo, J. J. (2013). Exploring the impact of various shaped seating arrangements on  
803 persuasion. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 40(2), 336-349.

## 804 APPENDICES

## 805 Appendix A. Restaurant scenario

806

807 You and your friends visit a casual dining restaurant in town called J Kitchen for dinner.  
808 Once you enter the restaurant, you see some people in the waiting area. The hostess greets you  
809 and says you will need to wait for 15–20 minutes. You and your friends decide to wait. While  
810 waiting, a bulletin board on the wall captures your attention. Pinned to the board is a scrap of  
811 newspaper article featuring J Kitchen’s chefs.

812

813 [Effort attribution condition]

814 MEET J KITCHEN’S CHEFS!

815

816 Chris, Andy, and Jeff have joined J Kitchen since opening in 2014.

817

818 They work tirelessly to create quality food. They make relentless effort to come up with new  
819 menu items every season. Check out their new creation—Burrata & Shrimp Ravioli and Jupitar  
820 Salad.

821

822 Chris says, “our dedicated effort and commitment are ultimately for pleasant dining experiences.  
823 We want to see happy faces of our guests.”

824

825 [Talent attribution condition]

826 MEET J KITCHEN’S CHEFS!

827

828 Chris, Andy, and Jeff have joined J Kitchen since opening in 2014.

829

830 They are naturally skillful in creating quality food. Their innate talent is highlighted in new menu  
831 items every season. Check out their new creation — Burrata & Shrimp Ravioli and Jupitar Salad.

832

833 Chris says, “our sharp instinct and inherent skills are ultimately for pleasant dining experiences.  
834 We want to see happy faces of our guests.”

835

836

837



## 838 Appendix B. Survey measures

## 839 Perceived fit (Torelli and Ahluwalia, 2012)

840 I and the featured employees are a 1 = bad fit/7 = good fit.

841 My characteristics and the featured employees' characteristics are 1 = inconsistent/7 =  
842 consistent.

843 I and the featured employees are 1 = dissimilar/7 = similar.

844

## 845 Message persuasiveness (Popova et al., 2014)

846 How would you rate the newspaper article based on the following attributes?

847 1 = unconvincing–7 = convincing

848 1 = ineffective–7 = effective

849 1 = not believable–7 = believable

850 1 = unrealistic–7 = realistic

851

## 852 Items to check for manipulation of performance attributions (Leung et al., 2020)

853 The featured employees in the article...

854 1 = put a lot of effort into their work, 7 = were naturally talented at their work.

855 1 = worked very hard to deliver high-quality work, 7 = were talented at delivering high-  
856 quality work.857 1 = spent a lot of time mastering their professional skills, 7=had innate talent for  
858 mastering their professional skills.

859

## 860 Need to belong (Leary et al., 2013)

861 1 = not at all, 2 = slightly, 3 = moderately, 4 = very, 5 = extremely

862 If other people do not seem to accept me, I do not let it bother me. (R)

- 863 I try hard not to do things that will make other people avoid or reject me.
- 864 I seldom worry about whether other people care about me. (R)
- 865 I need to feel that there are people I can turn to in times of need.
- 866 I want other people to accept me.
- 867 I do not like being alone.
- 868 Being apart from my friends for long periods of time does not bother me. (R)
- 869 I have a strong “need to belong.”
- 870 It bothers me a great deal when I am not included in other people’s plans.
- 871 My feelings are easily hurt when I feel that others do not accept me.
- 872 (R) denotes reverse-coded items.
- 873
- 874 Scenario realism
- 875 1 = not at all, 7 = very much
- 876 What do you think about the restaurant scenario?
- 877 The scenario was realistic.
- 878 It was easy to project myself in the scenario.
- 879
- 880
- 881
- 882
- 883
- 884

## 885 TABLES

886 Table 1. Demographic profile of participants

Categories		Study 1 n (%)	Study 2 n (%)
Gender	Male	125 (57.0)	200 (59.5)
	Female	93 (42.5)	134 (39.9)
	Other	1 (0.5)	2 (0.6)
Income	Less than \$20,000	12 (5.5)	36 (10.7)
	\$20,000–\$39,999	54 (24.7)	69 (20.5)
	\$40,000–\$59,999	51 (23.3)	80 (23.8)
	\$60,000–\$79,999	46 (21.0)	68 (20.2)
	\$80,000–\$99,999	27 (12.3)	36 (10.7)
	\$100,000–\$119,999	7 (3.2)	17 (5.1)
	\$120,000 or above	22 (10.0)	30 (8.9)
Education	High school or equivalent	17 (7.8)	31 (9.2)
	Some college education	47 (21.5)	54 (16.1)
	College degree	116 (53.0)	186 (55.4)
	Graduate school/professional degree	39 (17.7)	64 (19.0)
	Other	0 (0)	1 (0.3)
Frequency of dining out	Rarely	30 (13.7)	44 (13.1)
	About once every three months	26 (11.9)	29 (8.6)
	About once a month	52 (23.7)	74 (22.0)
	A few times per month	50 (22.8)	85 (25.3)
	About once a week	39 (17.8)	61 (18.2)
	A few times per week	19 (8.7)	37 (11.0)
	Almost everyday	3 (1.4)	4 (1.2)
	Other	0 (0.0)	2 (0.6)
Total		219 (100.0)	336 (100.0)

887 Table 2. Results from Study 1

Antecedent	Consequent							
	M (perceived fit)			Y (attitude)				
	Coeff.	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	Coeff.	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>		
X (attributions)	<i>a</i>	3.01	0.70	< .01	<i>c</i>	-1.40	0.15	< .01
M (perceived fit)	-	-	-	-	<i>b</i>	0.39	0.05	< .01
W (need to belong)		0.35	0.13	< .01		-	-	-
X × W		-0.53	0.20	< .01		-	-	-
Constant	<i>i</i>	3.66	0.44	< .01	<i>i</i>	4.02	0.28	< .01
		$R^2 = .24$				$R^2 = .31$		
		$F(3, 215) = 22.21, p < .01$				$F(2, 216) = 47.61, p < .01$		

888 *Note.* X = independent variable; W = moderator; M = mediator; Y = dependent variable.

889

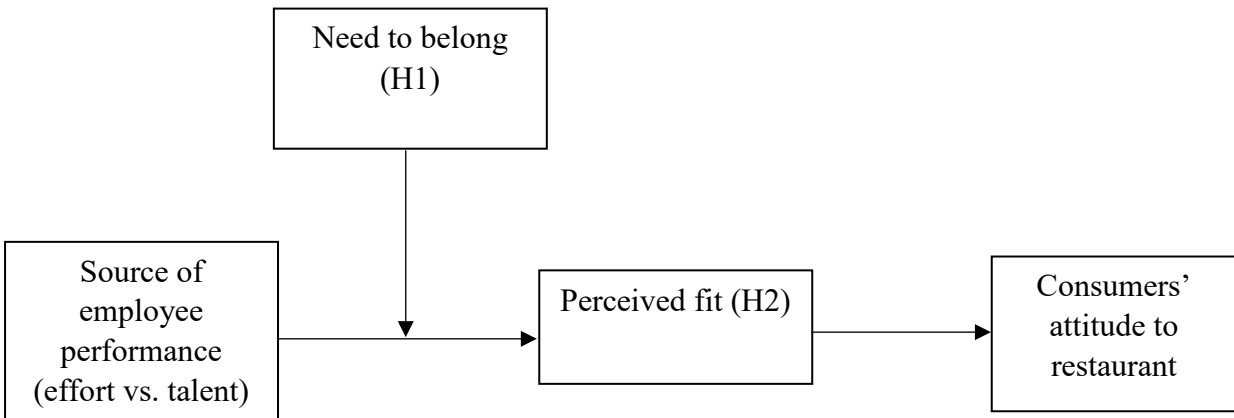
890 Table 3. Results from Study 2

Antecedent	Consequent					
	M (persuasiveness)			Y (attitude)		
	Coeff.	SE	<i>p</i>	Coeff.	SE	<i>p</i>
X1	-0.09	0.19	> 0.1	-0.07	0.12	> 0.1
X2	-0.14	0.19	> 0.1	0.09	0.12	> 0.1
M (persuasiveness)	-	-	-	0.63	0.03	< 0.01
W (restaurant type)	-0.64	0.19	< 0.01	0.03	0.12	> 0.1
X1 × W	0.68	0.28	< 0.05	0.13	0.17	> 0.1
X2 × W	0.37	0.27	> 0.1	-0.20	0.17	> 0.1
Constant	6.05	0.14	< 0.01	2.32	0.23	< 0.01
	$R^2 = 0.05$			$R^2 = 0.52$		
	$F(5, 330) = 3.33, p < 0.01$			$F(6, 329) = 59.75, p < 0.01$		

891

892

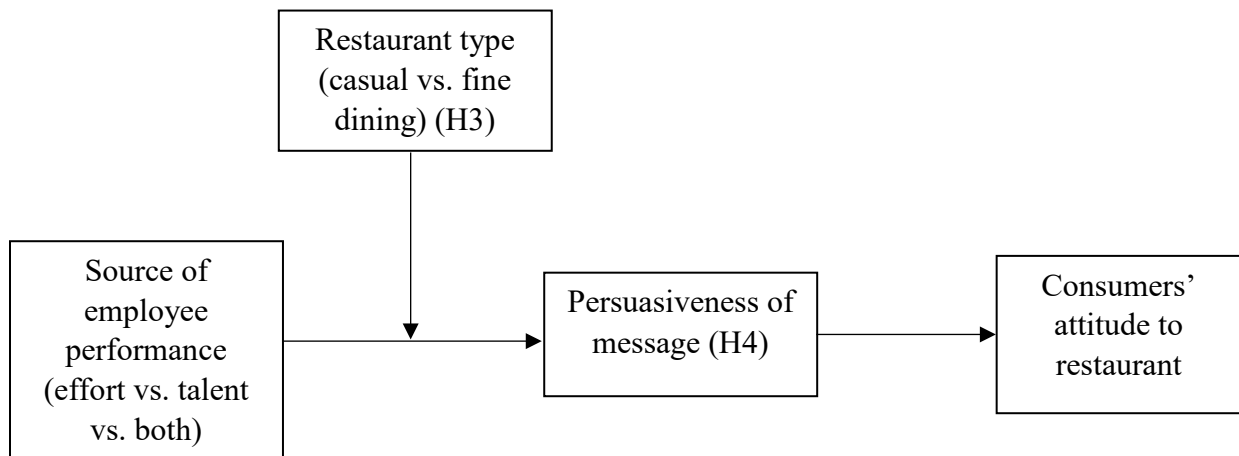
## 893 FIGURES



894

895 Figure 1a. Conceptual model for Study 1

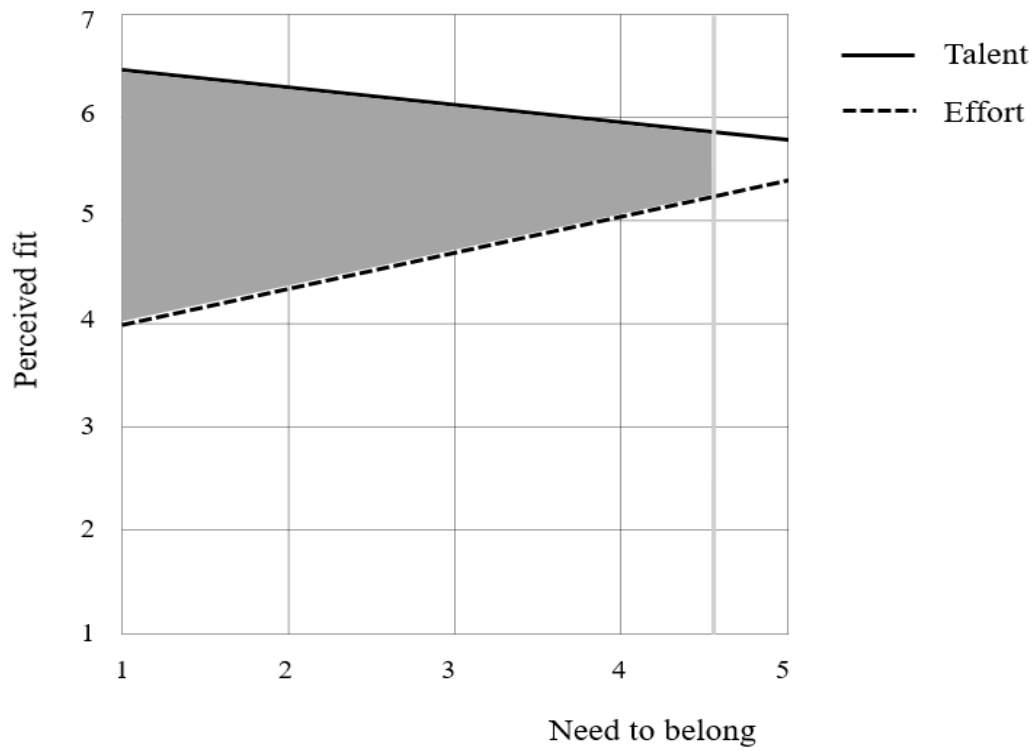
896



897

898 Figure 1b. Conceptual model for Study 2

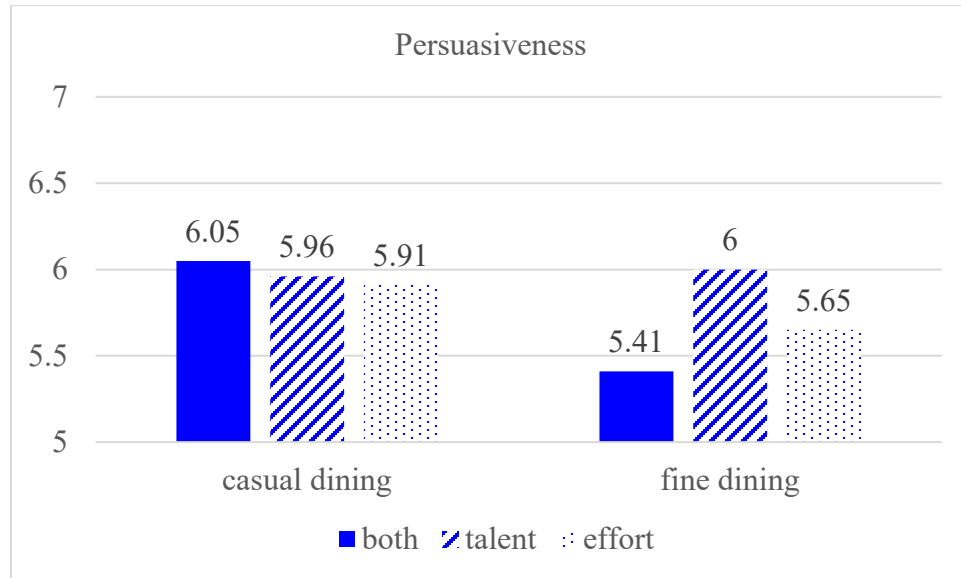
899



900

901 *Note.* The gray area indicates regions where differences in perceived fit between effort and talent  
 902 conditions are significant. The white area denotes regions where such differences are  
 903 insignificant.

904 Figure 2. Result from floodlight analysis



905

906 Figure 3. Result from simple effects