The roles of nostalgia-evoking stimuli at nostalgia-themed restaurants in explaining benefits, consumption value and behavioral intention

Abstract

This study focuses on nostalgia-evoking stimuli at nostalgia restaurants and their influence on consequent evaluation and behavioral intention. Through in-depth interviews and a survey, the present study identified the factor structure of nostalgia stimuli that includes four dimensions and 18 items. Then, the conceptual model was embedded with nostalgia stimuli, benefits, consumption value and behavioral intention. Among the important results, the hypothesized relationships between nostalgia stimuli and epistemic, emotional and nostalgia-seeking benefits were partly supported. The benefits sought from dining in a nostalgic restaurant positively lead to consumption value, which further has a positive effect on behavioral intention. These findings have theoretical and practical implications for capitalizing on nostalgia management in the hospitality industry.

Keywords: Nostalgia-evoking stimuli; Restaurant; Epistemic benefits; Emotional benefits; Consumption value; Behavioral intention

1. Introduction

Many restaurants in downtown offer spaces for business, purposeful meetings, family gatherings, or meetings with friends to accommodate today's fast-paced lifestyle and people's hectic working schedules. However, some people like to patronize certain restaurants that evoke reminiscent themes by featuring "good old days" films, music, historical events, and famous persons (Kim et al., 2019; Lakshmi and Vineeth, 2019). Nostalgia has the power to facilitate social connectedness and self-reflection in looking back to the past (Kim et al., 2019; Wildschut et al., 2010). Thus, the nostalgic environments of such restaurants provide customers with diverse benefits. Nostalgia-evoking restaurants provide nostalgia stimuli to provide customers with relief from stress through crafted environments designed to be soft and traditional (Hwang and Hyun, 2013).

From a functional perspective, nostalgic and sentimental establishments offer customers the opportunity to engage in spiritual dialogue with tradition, history, or ethnic belongingness

(Begüm, 2016; Wardono et al., 2012). Restaurant food menus with items that are authentic or region-representing or that were popular in the "good old days" bring customers back to their childhood when they were poor but happy (Bardhi et al., 2010; Batcho, 2013). By ruminating on their cherished past, they rediscover their own strength and are refreshed and ready to face their future (Hepper et al., 2012; Wu et al., 2019). The communal design of such establishments offers customers the opportunity to share their past memories, recognize their social identity and experience a sense of belonging to a social group (Bennett, 2018).

As described above, the benefits customers obtain from nostalgia stimuli may further affect their perceptions of consumption value and impact future behavioral intention. As nostalgic sentiment-evoking restaurants differ from other types of themed restaurants, they provide new opportunities to those establishments in terms of marketing and customer maintenance (Amalia, 2014). Thus, restaurant management can benefit from obtaining a better understanding of customers' perceptions of nostalgia stimuli and their consequences.

Several previous studies have highlighted the significance of nostalgia stimuli in restaurant management (Begüm, 2016; Chen et al., 2014; Hwang and Hyun, 2013; Jantasri and Srivardhana, 2019; Lakshmi and Vineeth, 2019; Renko and Bucar, 2014). However, limited effort has been made to conceptualize the linkage of nostalgia stimuli-benefit-value-intention and to test a structural model for this construct in the restaurant business research. Based on the aforementioned discussion, two research objectives were put forward for the present study. The first objective was to identify the dimensional structure of nostalgia stimuli and the benefits sought from experiencing a nostalgia-specific restaurant. The second was to investigate the relationships among nostalgia stimuli, benefits, consumption value and behavioral intention using structural equation modeling (SEM). Through the identification of nostalgia stimuli and their service outcomes, this study improves upon the extant understanding of hospitality services utilizing nostalgia and has implications for nostalgia management in the restaurant industry.

2. Literature review and hypotheses
2.1 Nostalgia-evoking stimuli and epistemic benefit

Nostalgia-evoking stimuli in nostalgia-themed restaurants convey history, symbolic meanings, culture, customs, locality, or social or political systems by presenting key elements. They demonstrate a social ethos relished at a certain time rather than that otherwise found in

contemporary food establishments. The first and foremost nostalgia-triggering stimulus is inherent in cuisine and includes elements such as recipes, cooking methods, names, origins, ingredients, or nostalgia-associating stories (Hwang and Hyun, 2013; Choe and Kim, 2019; Mkono, 2012). The second stimulus is pertinent to elements including elements such as interior design, decoration, atmosphere, furniture, tableware, exterior design, music, and displayed items, which can also associate customers with objects, persons and events in the past (Brumann, 2009; Renko and Bucar, 2014). Restaurant staff who stimulate nostalgia through their uniforms, dialects, service style, and performance function in helping customers recall "the old days" (Christou et al., 2018). Finally, restaurant customers who long to share similar sentiments or social ethos with others over a meal can also may function as stimuli for their fellow patrons' recollection (Hwang and Hyun, 2013; Kim, Kim and Petrick 2019).

According to the means-end chain theory, recollection-causing stimuli give rise to benefits and consumption value generated by a desire to quench one's curiosity about a novel environment (Brunsø et al., 2004; Zhou et al., 2012). Through the nostalgia-based experience of reminiscent food and environmental cues, customers can increase their understanding of the "good old days" or authentic cuisines and inspire their curiosity about food culture and society (Bardhi et al., 2010; Wijaya et al., 2013).

Nostalgia stimuli can affect all five human senses, which can facilitate the absorption of epistemic benefits. Reminiscing about a joyful or unhappy childhood over a meal can enhance one's learning about a particular food-making culture or method as well as the social motifs of an earlier time (Fairley, 2003; Long, 2004; Teyet al., 2018). For younger generations, nostalgia-evoking stimuli can help them discover something new and different from modern food production or delivery styles through mechanized or automated methods (Kniazeva and Venkatesh, 2007; Lakshmi and Vineeth, 2019). Based on the aforementioned discussion, hypothesis 1 is put forward as follows.

H1: Nostalgia-evoking stimuli will positively influence epistemic benefit.

2.2 Nostalgia-evoking stimuli and emotional benefit

Nostalgia is regarded as a yearning for the past at individual, social, or more extended levels (Reisenwitz et al., 2004). Elements that trigger nostalgia can activate diners' senses and facilitate

a cross-time dialogue with the past (Christopher, 2011; Sierra and McQuitty, 2007). Moreover, it can produce an amalgam of emotional experiences such as warmth, joy, gratitude and sadness (Hwang and Hyun, 2013). In the context of nostalgia-evoking restaurant services, customers encounter nostalgia stimuli, which induce a psychological interaction and response (Ritivoi, 2002) and further lead to the relaxation of various emotions (Chen et al., 2014).

As nostalgia involves recurring mental impressions of the past, nostalgia-evoking stimuli may empower patrons with spiritual empathy and reinforce their preferences and sense of existence (Zhou et al., 2012). This mechanism facilitates feelings of familiarity and comfort that remind them of home (Bardhi et al., 2010). Such emotional attachment to nostalgic ambience enables a shift in customers' psychological balance that is conducive to self-esteem (Sedikides et al., 2008), thereby maintaining their self-identity (Meretse et al., 2016). Further, it can help customers obtain a sense of belonging (Sierra and McQuitty, 2007; Tuan, 2001), strengthen their social relationships, and cause them to be more optimistic about the future by recalling the past (Hepper et al., 2012). Therefore, we propose the following research hypothesis.

H2: Nostalgia-evoking stimuli will positively influence emotional benefit.

2.3 Nostalgia-evoking stimuli and nostalgia-seeking benefit

Nostalgia triggers occur when people recall a bygone time and long for a bittersweet time in the past (Zinchenko, 2011). Responding to this nostalgia-seeking need, nostalgia-themed restaurants create stimuli to summon customers' "good old days" memories (Lakshmi and Vineeth, 2019). These stimuli enable customers to readily connect their ideal states in another time and place with "traditional values" through which they obtain inner peace, dignity and self-esteem (Barrena and Sánchez, 2012) and regain their sense of social belonging (Smith and Colgate, 2007).

Some customers can alleviate loneliness through nostalgia stimuli, which can extend their social connections at an establishment (Wildschut et al., 2010; Zhou et al., 2008). Nostalgia-triggering symbols offer diners spiritual comfort and protection, which is favorable for mental and physical health maintenance (Batcho, 2013; Lee et al., 2004). Therefore, nostalgia-evoking stimuli satisfy diners' need for nostalgia and enable them to attain ideal states and performance. Based on the above discussion, the following research hypothesis is proposed.

H3: Nostalgia-evoking stimuli will positively influence nostalgia-seeking benefit.

2.4. Benefits and consumption value

The benefits gained from dining in a nostalgic restaurant further enhance the customers' perceived value of the dining services provided. Those who gain epistemic benefits may seek food consumption value (Barrena and Sánchez, 2012; Choe and Kim, 2019). For example, when diners learn about traditional recipes, cuisine culture, or cuisine stories at a nostalgia-themed restaurant, they may obtain an understanding of community or society and sense a connection between the past and the present. In addition, the curiosity and psychological discovery derived from nostalgia accelerate an individual's quality of life and increase one's sense of self (Barrena and Sánchez, 2012; Sierra and McQuitty, 2007; Williams and Soutar, 2009).

Nostalgia-evoking stimuli such as "once-popular" decoration and furniture function as conveyances of a "good mood" or provide customer's with an exciting experience (Chen et al., 2014; Lai, 2015; Choe and Kim, 2018). The emotional gains obtained during the consumption of traditional or "good old days" food can fortify companionship with other diners who have the same need and dissipate loneliness. In particular, senior diners can experience rejuvenation by recollecting the "good old days".

The benefits obtained from dining in a nostalgic restaurant can help invigorate diners' everyday lives and augment the value of belongingness through dining with friends and family (Goolaup and Mossberg, 2017; Ha, 2013). The sentimental fulfilment attained through dining in such an establishment further alleviates customers' stress and frustration in daily life (Kniazeva and Venkatesh, 2007; Lai, 2015). Therefore, the benefits obtained from dining in a nostalgic restaurant help create a memorable experience and further promote physical health and mental well-being (Goolaup and Mossberg, 2017; Levitt et al., 2019). These statements persuasively lead to the proposition of the following hypotheses.

H4: Epistemic benefit (H4-1), emotional benefit (H4-2), and nostalgia-seeking benefit (H4-3) will positively influence food consumption value.

2.5 Food consumption value and behavioral intention

As tasting authentic or novel cuisine within a reminiscing space allows certain individuals to relish life, diners perceive consumption value, which induces the retention of a good memory and increases diners' quality of experience (Madaleno et al., 2019). An unforgettable and memorable nostalgic experience can lead to future intention to revisit (Meretse et al., 2016; Hwang and Hyun, 2013) and increase recommendations to others (Adongo et al., 2015; Tsai, 2016). Therefore, the food consumption value obtained from nostalgia-evoking stimuli acts as an antecedent in explaining behavioral intention (Amalia, 2014; Choe and Kim, 2018). Based on the discussion above, hypothesis 5 is proposed. All hypotheses pertaining to structural relationships are shown in Figure 1.

H5: Food consumption value will positively affect behavioral intention.

[Figure 1 HERE]

3. Methods

3.1. Measurement

The measurement items were developed through an extensive literature review, an expert panel review and a pilot test. Initially, a thorough literature review of nostalgia stimuli was conducted. A pool of items to measure nostalgia stimuli were derived and modified to fit the context of nostalgia stimuli in restaurants (Chen et al., 2014; Hwang and Hyun, 2013; Jantasri and Srivardhana, 2019; Lakshmi and Vineeth, 2019 Renko and Bucar, 2014). The items to represent the benefits from consuming food at a nostalgia restaurant were extracted from previous studies (Chen et al., 2014; Choe and Kim, 2018, 2019; Kim et al., 2012; Lai, 2015; Wijaya et al., 2013). Those regarding food consumption value were derived from past studies (Callarisa et al., 2006; Choe and Kim, 2019; Lai, 2015; Sánchez-Fernández and Iniesta-Bonillo, 2007; Tsai, 2016).

To better adapt the nostalgia stimuli items and to understand the benefits of the experience of dining in nostalgic restaurants, in-depth interviews were also conducted in nine restaurants in Naijing, China. According to the previous research (Havlena and Holak, 1991; Holak and Havlena, 1998), nostalgia triggers can differ among objects, historic stories, persons and events. Open-ended questions related to the three aspects of nostalgia triggers were asked such as "What elements in a restaurant can trigger feelings of nostalgia for you?" Several

prompts were given to encourage the interviewees to elaborate, e.g., social aspects, sensory inputs and events. To understand the benefits sought from eating at a nostalgia-evoking restaurant, the question "What kind of benefits do you obtain from dining in a nostalgia-themed restaurant?" was also asked. In total, 18 Chinese adults who had experience dining in nostalgia-evoking restaurants within the past year were interviewed. Based on the interview results, the wordings of the measurement items from the previous literature were slightly modified while a few new items were also generated.

As for the other measurement items, the items to specify the value obtained by tasting food at a nostalgic restaurant and the items to measure behavioral intention were adopted from previous studies (Choe and Kim, 2019). To better adapt these items to the nostalgia-evoking restaurant dining experience, their wording was slightly modified and revised. The revised pool of items was then submitted for further review to a panel of seven academic professionals on cuisine and restaurant management. After a revision was made based on the feedback from the expert panel, a draft questionnaire was completed. All items were measured using a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 7 ("strongly agree").

Before conducting the main survey, a pretest to verify the face validity of the items was implemented in a sample of 50 middle-aged and senior citizens who had previous dining experience in nostalgia-evoking restaurants. The respondents recommended including the definition of a nostalgic food restaurant at the beginning of the questionnaire and using a 5-point Likert type scale to determine the preference for nostalgia and the likelihood of eating in a nostalgic restaurant. They also recommended changes in the frequency of visiting a nostalgic restaurant from the last six months to the last three months. It was also recommended that one question be added requesting the length of residing in the present city. Accordingly, these suggestions were reflected in a revised version of the questionnaire. Subsequently, a pilot study was conducted using a sample of 89 respondents who were required while they waited in a queue outside a nostalgia-themed restaurant.

Regarding the items to indicate behavioral intentions, some of the interviewees recommended that the behavioral intention to visit a restaurant again be changed from one month to three months as one month was considered to be a short period in which to revisit. It was also recommended that the terms "service quality" and "food quality" be removed from a list of items representing satisfaction with a restaurant. These comments were accepted in the development of

the final version of the questionnaire. The original questionnaire was developed in English and translated into Chinese by professional translators. After compiling a draft, the translators had the questionnaire back-translated into English by two researchers who were fluent in both languages. After they implemented the back-translation and compared the two language versions and those of the two researchers, a final version was completed.

3.2. Data collection

The survey was administered on both weekends and weekdays to include various responses among different diners. In total, 15 undergraduate students were employed as interviewers after they received interview training that included an explanation of how to contact potential respondents, the research objectives, the definition of a nostalgic restaurant and an explanation of the need for the respondent to comment on his or her feelings at the end of the questionnaire. After completing the questionnaires, the participants were given a small gift as a token of gratitude. To confirm the quality of each questionnaire, the interviewers were required to provide interview records, which were verified by the authors verified The interviewers received monetary compensation based on the number of eligible questionnaires they obtained.

As middle aged and older respondents are more likely to have nostalgia emotions, one screening question was whether the respondents were aged 45 or older. Therefore, only nostalgic restaurant patrons who were aged 45 or older were invited to answer the questionnaire. The data were collected in authentic and traditional food restaurants located in Nanjing and Wuxi in Jiangsu Province, Yinchuan in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region and Baotou in Inner Mongolia from March to July 2019. A total of 471 questionnaires were collected. However, 21 questionnaires containing many missing values were removed from the dataset. Therefore, 450 questionnaires were included in the data analysis. Of these questionnaires, the regional distribution of the respondents was as follows: Nanjing (30.48%), Wuxi (10.10%), Yinchuan (40.36%), Baotou (11.21%), and Hanzhou and Wuhan (7.85%).

4. Results

4.1. Demographics and travel-related profiles

The respondents were approximately equally distributed in terms of gender while approximately 88% of them were married. The mean age of the sample was 51.53 years, and the age range was

45 to 60. In terms of education level, 28.60% of the respondents held a secondary school diploma, 20.04% a high school diploma, 16.67% a vocational degree, and 27.48% a bachelor's degree. Regarding annual household income (RMB), the highest percentage (46.03%) was noted as between 80,001 and 300,000 RMB, followed by a category of 30,001-80,000 RMB (32.24%). The respondents' occupations mainly included retired (28.8%), company employee (15.7%), educator (14.2%), and freelancer (11.9%).

Regarding their dining experience, nearly one-third of the respondents had visited nostalgic restaurants twice in the previous two months while 20.68% of them reported to have visited three or more nostalgic restaurants. Concerning duration residing in current city of residence, 65.60% of respondents had lived for 20 years or longer, with a mean value of 31.81 years. Regarding their dining preference, 70.76% of the respondents agreed that dining in a nostalgic restaurant is a meaningful experience. Approximately 73% of the respondents demonstrated a preference for eating at a nostalgic restaurant while 78.13% of them showed a preference for nostalgia stimuli at the restaurant.

4.2. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and reliability test

The original dataset was randomly split into two subsets for cross-validation of the measurement. EFA was performed on the sample subset (n=231) while confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was carried out on the other subset (n=219). In the EFA, principal axis factoring as an extraction method was used for each of the constructs.

To identify the underlying domains of the nostalgia stimuli attributes in a nostalgia-themed restaurant, an EFA with principal axis factor extraction and varimax rotation methods was conducted using 26 items. Three items, namely, "traditional calligraphy evokes a nostalgic mood", "the exterior of the building evokes a nostalgic mood" and "the images of the food on the menu evoke a nostalgic mood", were deleted because they showed communalities below the 0.50 criterion, which indicates at least a moderate level of relation to the set of factors (Pituch and Stevens, 2016). Therefore, the EFA was rerun using 23 items. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy (0.87) and Bartlett's test of sphericity ($\chi^2 = 2148.861$, $p=.000$) proved the factorability of the nostalgia stimuli attribute construct (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2001). The factor analysis of the items revealed four underlying domains with eigenvalues greater than 1.0. Now that the communalities for all items exceeded .50, whereas all factor loadings surpassed

.50, they were regarded as satisfactory with a .45 criterion (Comrey and Lee, 1992). After 5 items were deleted due to low factor loading (<.40) (Hair et al., 2014), the results of rerunning EFA using the remaining 18 items generated a four-factor model in which the factors were named staff, design and atmosphere, tableware and furniture, and food. The Cronbach's alpha reliability scores for each domain were greater than Nunnally's (1978) 0.7 criterion, thereby demonstrating the internal consistency of the items in each domain. The grand mean values for the above domains were 3.67, 5.21, 4.66 and 4.85, respectively.

EFA was also conducted for benefits, food consumption value, and behavioral intention. The EFA for benefits produced a three-factor model with items whose eigenvalues were greater than 1.0. The item "tasting food at this nostalgic food restaurant enables me to learn what this cuisine tastes like" was ruled out as its communality was .42, which was lower than the .45 criterion (Comrey and Lee, 1992). The communalities of the remaining items ranged from .49 to .72, indicating that each item was strongly correlated to the set of factors (Pituch and Stevens, 2016, p. 384). One item, "tasting food at this nostalgic food restaurant facilitates the creation of good memories," was deleted due to the location of a cross-loading (Hair et al., 2014, p.117). The factor loadings of the remaining items ranged from .61 to .84, thereby satisfying the .45 criterion (Comrey and Lee, 1992). The three domains explained 45.87%, 14.13%, and 6.39% of each variance. The Cronbach's alpha values for these three domains were .90, .86 and .87, respectively.

The factor analyses for food consumption value in the nostalgic restaurant and behavioral intention produced single-factor solutions that explained 53.74% and 58.04% of the variance, respectively. All communalities and factor loadings on these two constructs were satisfactory. In addition, the Cronbach's alpha values for the two constructs were .85 and .61, thereby indicating the acceptable internal consistency of the items in each construct (see Table 1).

[TABLE 1]

4.3. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)

Before evaluating the structural model, CFA was performed on the other subsample (n=219) to guarantee that the proposed measurement model specified the expected relationships between the observed variables and the latent constructs. As shown in Table 2, the measurement model

comprised nine constructs with 38 items. In the measurement model, all factor loadings were salient and above the cut-off point of 0.6. First, the standardized factor loadings of the manifest variables on their respective latent variables ranged from .61 to .92, exceeding the .50 criterion (Hair et al., 2010). Second, the CFA results indicated that an adequate level of fit to the data was identified (χ^2/df = 2.34, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .0.08, comparative fit index (CFI) = .87, incremental fit index (IFI) = .87, Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) = .86, goodness of fit index (GFI) = .75). Third, the composite construct reliability (CCR) values were greater than .70 and thus indicated a sufficient level of internal consistency (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988).

The average variance extracted (AVE) was calculated to assess construct validity. AVE values ranging from .46 to .84 confirmed acceptable convergent validity (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988). Discriminant validity was ascertained by comparing the scores of the squared correlation of the paired constructs with the AVE values of each construct. Most of the AVE values were greater than the squared correlations between constructs (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Considering the exploratory nature of the study, and the strict sampling measures taken, the measurement/structural model was regarded as acceptable. Subsequently, all 38 items in the measurement model revealed significant *t*-values for the latent construct, indicating that the measurement scales for each construct support high levels of convergence and construct validity. The results are presented in Table 3.

[TABLES 2 AND 3]

4.4. Structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis

SEM analysis was conducted to assess the adequacy of the proposed theoretical framework and to test the hypothesized relationships. The hypothesized model included three domains of local food attributes, two domains of benefits, one food consumption value domain, and one behavioral intention domain. The findings showed an overall acceptable model fit (χ^2 = 1,809.74, df = 6, *p* < .001, χ^2/df =2.84, RMSEA = .06, CFI = .88, IFI = .89, TLI = .87, GFI =.83). As shown in Figure 2, the theoretical model revealed a high level of predictive power to explain each dependent variable because the R^2 values for predicting epistemic benefit, emotional

benefit, nostalgia-seeking benefit, food consumption value, and behavioral intention using multiple independent variables were .56, .69, .73, .96 and .62, respectively.

As presented in Table 4, the results of the SEM analysis show that 11 of the 16 hypotheses were statistically supported at the .05 level. It was found that epistemic benefits are the consequences of two factors of nostalgia stimuli, specifically, design and atmosphere (β = .57, t = 6.43, p < .001) and staff (β = .17, t = 2.507, p < .001). Similarly, nostalgia-seeking benefits were significantly explained by the three factors design and atmosphere (β = .69, t = 7.51, p < .001), food (β = .24, t = 3.37, p < .001), and staff (β = .36, t = 5.40, p < .001). Emotional benefits were explained by the two factors environment (β = .80, t = 7.56, p < .001) and staff (β = .31, t = 4.29, p < .001). It should be noted that the relationship between tableware and furniture and all the three types of benefits was not significant at the .05 level.

A significant path relationship was also observed between epistemic benefit and food consumption value (β = .24, t = 5.38, p < .001), emotional benefit and food consumption value (β = .49, t = 7.60, p < .001), and nostalgia-seeking benefit and food consumption value (β = .41, t = 6.62, t = 6.43, p < .001). Food consumption value significantly influenced behavioral intention (β = .79, t = 11.89, p < .001) level. All these results, including those of the hypotheses test, are presented in Table 4 and Figure 2.

[TABLE 4 AND FIGURE 2]

5. Discussions and implications

The findings provide important points for discussion. First, the results of running exploratory factor analysis generated four nostalgia stimuli domains: staff, design and atmosphere, tableware and furniture, and food. The factor model was confirmed by a CFA with satisfactory validity and internal consistency. The dimensional framework of nostalgia restaurant triggers is analogous to those of other studies that have commonly identified the dimensionality including of staff, food, and environment domains (Brumann, 2009; Hwang and Hyun, 2013; Renko and Bucar, 2014; Begüm, 2016). However, this study added more items to specify staff's dress/uniform, language style, artistic/singing performance and manner of food-serving, which were found based on in-depth interviews. Furthermore, this study identified "tableware and furniture" as a new domain of the authentic nostalgia restaurant. This finding provides practical

implications, and many marketers and scholars could benefit from the consequences of bringing this outcome to light.

Second, three benefit-sought domains were ascertained after implementing two factor analyses. While the extraction of epistemic benefit and emotional benefit was consistent with the findings of previous studies (e.g., Chen et al., 2014; Lai, 2015; Choe and Kim, 2018), nostalgia-seeking benefit was newly supplemented in the context of experiencing nostalgic food. This newly created benefit is fit for the means-end chain theory. A nostalgia restaurant provides a nostalgic atmosphere, and conveys customers relief of from stress through crafted environments designed to be soft and traditional (Hwang and Hyun, 2013). Additionally, customers can increase their understanding of the "good old days" or obtain a feeling of familiarity and comfort like they do at home, and these psychological benefits derived from nostalgia could alleviate customers' stress and frustration in their daily lives (Kniazeva and Venkatesh, 2007; Lai, 2005).

Third, it was found that the design and atmosphere of nostalgia restaurants vary significantly, which affects all three benefit domains (.58, .80, .69, $p<0.001$). This result corresponds to the notion that nostalgic environmental decoration has been deemed as the most important determinant in explaining the overall restaurant dining experience (Jantasri and Srivardhana, 2019). More specifically, nostalgia-evoking stimuli such as internal design, symbolic decoration, and other displayed items produce a strong visual impact on the eyes that associate customers with objects, persons and events of the past (Brumann, 2009; Renko and Bucar, 2014). This facilitates customers' feelings of familiarity and comfort like they are at home, maintaining customers' self-identity and further sense of belonging (Bardhi et al., 2012; Meretse et al., 2016; Sierra and McQuitty, 2007; Tuan, 2001). This emotional resonance and connectivity enable customers to obtain inner peace, dignity, spiritual comfort and a sense of protection (Batcho, 2013; Lee et al., 2004). The finding implies that a traditional and authentic environment is critical in promoting customers' feelings of nostalgia. Therefore, managers must focus more on the specialized environments of nostalgia-themed restaurants. For example, a nostalgic atmosphere could be decorated by old-fashioned objects (e.g., screens and cupboards with illustrations of characters that originated from China's classic literature, stickers, and photos to decorate walls), which can enhance a restaurant's layout and at the same time stimulate customers' nostalgic emotions. Objects employed to decorate such spaces can include quotes from Chinese presidents, authentic movie posters, photos of former celebrities and advertising

pictures with beautiful models selling facial creams or cigarettes. Music and lighting are also important means of creating a nostalgic atmosphere. Providing diners with warm-toned lights will cause customers to feel immersed and as if they have returned to the "good old days". Spaces that include classical or reminiscent music of a particular time will further induce customers to psychologically connect with the past.

Fourth, the results of examining the role of staff-related nostalgia stimuli in conveying benefits indicated that the impact of staff significantly induces customers' epistemic benefit, emotional benefit, as well as nostalgia-seeking benefit. The positive relationship between staff and epistemic benefit means that staff could successfully enhance customers' epistemic understanding by consuming nostalgic dining experiences. This study expanded the existing literature by identifying the role of staff in inducing customer' epistemic consumption benefit (e.g., Chen et al., 2014; Christou et al., 2018). Meanwhile, the significant role of staff is also highlighted in creating emotional and nostalgia-seeking benefits. This finding supplemented the previous studies (Chen et al., 2014; Hwang and Hyun, 2013), which have found that the impact of staff as nostalgic stimuli of guests' pleasurable responses is significantly positive in terms of revealing benefits that have been ignored to some extent. Compared with a luxury restaurant study setting where the dining environment is generally pleasant and servants are well trained and skillful, this study investigated ordinary popular nostalgic restaurants where customers are crowded and employees are busy maintaining basic services. Thus, the performance of service staff in stimulating nostalgia was supported across a wide range of contexts. This finding indicates that staff can stimulate nostalgia through their uniform/dress, language style, artistic performance and manner of food serving, and their behaviors can also cause customers recall the old days (Christou et al., 2018). This point stresses the importance of training staff in terms of knowledge and service skills. This is an extremely important point when restaurant chains aim to enhance their layout and expand their ability in the current globalized society, which makes it difficult for restaurants to maintain the quality of staff and to match staff performance to the restaurant's service requirements (Zeng et al., 2012). Unqualified and inappropriate language and service behavior among employees are likely to lead to guests' dissatisfaction.

To better stimulate consumers' emotion and nostalgia, corresponding strategies can be considered to obtain service improvement. With regard to job arrangement, restaurant managers should try their best to suit local conditions and give play to employees' own advantages.

Improvements should be made in clothing and language (e.g., slogan) to improve the special features of service. These are the basic details that will cause customers' emotional dissatisfaction once there is a failure in reaching them. In terms of the service behaviors of front-line employees, it is crucial for them to speak to customers in a suitable language at the right time to increase their dining pleasure and stimulate their nostalgia. For example, when serving food and wine, they can describe the scene where the ingredients were picked or the history of the wine and the winery. In addition, as it is the critical role of restaurants, it is necessary for the chef to have the opportunity to explain to customer the process of ingredient selection and food preparation, which can increase the interaction between the chef and customers. For instance, cooking performances or having the chef deliver meals can help consumers learn about the chef's professional knowledge and experience in cooking, thus increasing their dining benefits.

Fifth, interestingly, no significant relationships were found of tableware and furniture to all three benefit domains. This means that even though a total of four items including silverware, chinaware or furniture stimulate nostalgia (higher than mean=4.54), they do not lead to the perception of benefits. The reasons for supporting this relationship are as follows. First, although diners attach great importance to furniture and tableware and other detailed items, those objects are not sophisticated enough in the restaurants surveyed, and they fail to successfully convey history, culture or other meaningful benefits to customers. Second, diners might be so familiar with a particular type of tableware or furniture that they cannot discover anything new in them. According to the means-end chain theory, this stimuli did not arouse any novel emotion or psychological benefit (Brunso et al., 2004; Zhou et al., 2012). The previous food tourism studies have found that tasting exotic food at a foreign tourism places brings out diverse benefits (Choe and Kim, 2019; Wijaya et al., 2013). However, it is understandable that familiar tableware or the display of furniture in a restaurant does not provoke a novel experience even if they are old fashioned or antique. Therefore, nostalgia-themed restaurants should develop differentiatedchinaware, silverware, and furniture that can arouse customers' nostalgic feelings. As another example, such restaurants must contain condiments and seasonings in "good old days" ware and learn about representative food culture characteristics to create unique dining furniture. For example, the use of traditional cups such as the painted porcelain cylinders that were popular in early China will make an impression on customers. Meanwhile, the menu is an important tool by which to convey the restaurant's theme to customers. It can serve as channel of

illustration. Managers can focus on the menu design so that consumers can appreciate the historical origin and regional flavor of the dishes. Such appreciation will help to further stimulate their cognitive, emotional and nostalgia-seeking benefits. A dining experience that is pleasant because of these types of benefits will encourage customers to share their dining experience in a nostalgic restaurant with others and even recommend the restaurant to their social circles.

Sixth, a significantly positive relationship between food and nostalgia-seeking benefits was found, although significant relationships of food to epistemic benefits were not identified at the .05 level. The significant relationship between food and nostalgia-seeking benefits further shows that food is still the most important part of the overall restaurant dining experience (Hensley, 2004). This result is consistent with those of the past literature (Choe and Kim, 2019; Hwang and Hyun, 2013; Mkono, 2012; Youn and Kim, 2017) that customers were reminded of their food-related memories stimulated by food production methods, food ingredients, seasonings and sauces. Through the nostalgia-led experience of reminiscent food clues, customers can increase an understanding of "the good old days" and remind them of their past experiences (Bardhi et al., 2010; Wijaya e al., 2013). Reminiscing about a joyful or unjoyful childhood over food can facilitate learning about prior food-making cultures or social norms (Fairley, 2003; Long, 2004; Teyet al., 2018). These stimuli enable customers to readily connect their ideal states in another time and place with "traditional values" through which they may obtain inner peace and a sense of social belonging (Smith and Colgate, 2007). By enabling customers to attain ideal states and performance, food stimuli satisfy diners' need to seek nostalgia.

Regarding to the insignificant relationship of food to emotional benefits in this study, this finding is contrary to those of the previous studies that have found that, in nostalgia-evoking restaurants, the encountered stimuli can induce psychological interaction and response and further lead to the relaxation of various emotions (Ritivoi, 2002; Chen et al., 2014). Thus, even for popular nostalgia-evoking restaurants, their service quality still needs to be improved. For example, the food nostalgia should be supplemented with other performance (e.g., presentations of the food making process or talks about early food making). By creating nostalgic servicescapes, customers' psychological responses will be evoked, and various emotions pertaining to familiarity, self-identity and social relationships will arise (Bardh et al., 2010; Hepper et al., 2012). Managers could creatively combine local flavors with traditional ingredients to create bespoke menu items and innovative dishes. Exceeding the meaning of

simply food of the past, such restaurants must stimulate memorable experiences such as presenting traditional or secret approaches in cooking, food processing, or seasonings. Story-telling about how to pick the ingredients or processing can also provide consumers with valuable experiences while they wait for their meal. The presentation of cooking in front of diners can stimulate many emotional and epistemic benefits.

Seventh, all three benefits from tasting food at a nostalgic restaurant significantly influence consumption value. This result is consistent with those of many of the previous studies that have found that both emotional and epistemic benefits were significant contributors in explaining consumption value (Choe and Kim, 2019; Ha and Jang, 2010). It indicates that when they are exposed to nostalgia-evoking stimuli at a nostalgia-themed restaurant, customers experience the benefits of having a better understanding of local community, and society and feel connected with traditional culture and their present lives. This psychological curiosity including the desire to discover something new about food culture and history accelerates personal happiness, satisfaction and enjoyment. This strong relationship of emotional benefit to value is consistent with the results of the previous studies that the psychological discovery derived from nostalgia accelerates quality of life and extends the self (Barrena and Sanchez, 2012; Sierra and McQuitty, 2007; Williams and Soutar, 2009).

The achieved emotional gains help fortify companionship with other diners, and senior diners in particular may experience feelings of rejuvenation by recollecting the "good old days". Therefore, such customers will likely revisit a nostalgic restaurant or recommend it to others in the future. This study also found that nostalgia-seeking benefits have influential and strong effects on consumption value (.41, p<0.001). This means that customers can obtain sentiment fulfilment when eating with friends and family in a nostalgic restaurant. Such occasions can be a good opportunity for diners to meet friends and family who also enjoy "the good old days". Through such gatherings in a nostalgic restaurant, diners can enhance the value of belongingness, and the experience can alleviate customers' stress and frustration in their everyday lives (Kniazeva and Venlatesh, 2007; Lai, 2015). The benefits associated with dining in a nostalgia restaurant can help to remind customers of their past unforgettable experiences and further create new memorable experiences (Goolaup and Mossberg, 2017; Levitt et al., 2019). Diners mainly come to restaurants for meals and enjoyment. It is therefore important to fully stimulate consumers' emotional pleasure. Since the benefits of consuming food can stimulate

perceived consumption value, among which emotional pleasure strongly induces the perceived value, attention should be paid to the elements of the restaurant that can stimulate the emotional resonance and benefits of diners and bring out positive feelings and expectations towards the restaurant.

Eighth, food consumption value showed a significant and strong effect on behavioral intention. This confirms that eating traditional food in a nostalgic restaurant helps people to relish their lives and obtain consumption benefits. These benefits induce consumption value as it allows them to hold onto "the good old days" and furthers future intentions to revisit (Meretse et al., 2016; Hwang and Hyun, 2013). This finding shows that the food consumption value obtained from nostalgia-evoking stimuli acts as the predictor in explaining behavioral intention in the context of nostalgic restaurants.

6. Theoretical implications

It is meaningful to explore the dimensionality of nostalgia-evoking stimuli at a nostalgic restaurant, the benefits sought, the consumption value, and behavioral intention. In particular, it is contributory to conceptualize the dimensional structure of nostalgic stimuli and validate it based on empirical testing. This study attempted to link these constructs into an integrated structural model. The newly developed NS-B-V-I model facilitates the extant understanding of the role of nostalgia-evoking triggers in explaining their consequences. As the function of nostalgia-evoking stimuli in predicting diners' psychological mechanisms has been under investigated, the results of this study herald the development of new theory and concepts.

The customer assesses nostalgic stimuli that are coherently linked to benefits, which in turn can result in a high level of consumption value and behavioral intention. This model offers a lucid explanation of the role of nostalgia triggers at nostalgia-themed restaurants in enhancing restaurant attractiveness and influencing diners' choice and satisfaction. Accordingly, this model can help expound upon the experiential quality sought by diners from their nostalgic food experiences. The findings of this research can be utilized to reinstate diverse strategies for the enhancement of satisfaction, the retention of loyalty, the development of establishment interior and/or exterior, new menu development, and promotional tactics.

7. Limitations and suggestions for future research

This study has some limitations. First, the study aimed to test the effects of nostalgia

restaurant stimuli on subsequent attitudinal and behavioral outcomes. Future research must identify the characteristics of nostalgia restaurant patrons and further segment them according to nostalgia-evoking stimuli or the benefits obtained. Second, customers' perceptions of nostalgia-evoking stimuli can vary according to age or generation. For example, seniors who lived in poverty-stricken eras during the Cultural Revolution or the World Wars can react to nostalgia differently compared to middle-aged customers who grew up relatively wealthy. Therefore, future research must identify whether the findings vary according to different generations. Third, as nostalgia is a personal emotion that expresses longing or yearning for the past (Holbrook, 1993), it would be interesting to explore differences in experiences in nostalgic restaurants according to personality or personal traits.

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