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Examining Sustainable food practices in luxury gastronomic restaurants: A comparison between Michelin-starred restaurants and Luxury fine dining restaurants

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TTRA 2023 Extended Abstract (Conceptual Paper)

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Introduction

Although a substantial number of empirical research has been conducted on sustainability and ethical business perspectives in the hospitality industry (Li et al., 2017), limited researchers have investigated food ethics and the hospitality industry's eco-friendly business practices in restaurants (hereby luxury gastronomic restaurants). Luxury gastronomic restaurants are considered to be the top tier in the market from the perspectives of price, food and beverage quality, decoration, style, and influence (Hwang & Hyun, 2012-1). Luxury gastronomic restaurants are also known to be offering very innovative menus that push consumers beyond expectations and norms (Jin et al., 2016-5), and disregard the seasonality products (Batat & De Kerviler, 2019). Luxury gastronomic restaurants provide experiential and hedonic values to the customers for enhancing their emotions and increasing their feeling of joy, pleasure, and fun (Batat, 2019). Prior literature not only indicated that restaurants have a direct economic and environmental impact on food waste but also have an indirect impact on the image of restaurants in general (Namkang & Jang, 2017). Furthermore, previous research was mostly conducted from the consumers' perspective those arguing consumers' motivation for selecting sustainable restaurants (Clemes et al., 2013), concerns about food waste (Sirieix et al., 2017), and food-related health issues (Jin et al., 2017). Earlier works on sustainability research in the restaurant industry did not differentiate the restaurant segments, such as fine dining restaurants, fast food restaurants, casual dining restaurants, and luxury gastronomic restaurants (for example, Michelin-starred restaurants and luxury fine dining restaurants (Schjøll & Alfnes, 2017). Thus, it is necessary to explore whether luxury gastronomic restaurants can integrate sustainability practices into their luxury food experience. However, from a luxury gastronomic restaurant standpoint, the study that explores sustainability in restaurants has received extremely limited research attention across North America, especially from the Vancouver context. This research, therefore, will explore how chefs from luxury gastronomic restaurants (hereby Michelin-starred restaurants and luxury fine dining restaurants) integrate sustainability practices in their operations, which are an integral part of the luxury gastronomic food experience.

Literature Review

Sustainable luxury, marketing, and consumer behavior

The definition of sustainability is multidimensional that encompasses economic growth, social justice, and the protection of natural resources (Hennings et al., 2013). Other researchers define sustainability as the "Triple bottom line such as a planet, people, and profit" (Sheth et al., 2011). However, the sustainability topic, particularly the sustainable luxury concept has become very prominent among researchers and business practitioners in different fields. In the field of marketing and consumer behavior, sustainable luxury is an emerging area and remains limited and underdeveloped (Moraes et al., 2017). Researchers argued that sustainable luxury is fragmented into two compatibility perspectives: consumer and organization (Athwal et al.,

2019). From the consumer's context, sustainable luxury represents one's ability to consume luxury products and services without affecting the needs of future generations (Batat, 2019). Thus, one should develop sustainable behavior and focus on responsible buying, green consumption, and enhanced recycling activities (Batat, 2020). On the other hand, organizations should focus on environmental, social, economic, and moral dimensions to satisfy their responsible luxury consumers. In fact, much research revealed that a growing number of consumers particularly in developing countries are showing interest in purchasing luxury sustainable goods and services (D'Arpizio et al., 2017). However, in marketing literature, little research emphasizes the incompatibility between luxury and sustainability due to the perceptions and definitions of the two concepts. Whereas sustainability is mostly based on simplicity, moderation, and modesty, and luxury is based on using exotic and rare resources (Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2015).

Past research focused mainly on the relationship between luxury and sustainability to address the issues of three pillars: ecological/planet, social/people, and environment (Athwal et al., 2017). While other studies show that implementing sustainable luxury strategies has a greater impact on financial performance in the organization (Bendell & Thomas, 2013). Furthermore, sustainability in luxury is mostly associated with goods and fashion. Sustainability in luxury is still relatively under-explored in hospitality compared to consumers and marketing literature (Athwal et al., 2019, Batat, 2019, 2020). Additionally, Van der Veen (2003) argued that sustainability is a key factor in the decision-making process for the selection of luxury restaurants. This study, therefore, examines the three pillars to better understand the sustainable and ethical business practices in the luxury hospitality industry from the perspectives of Michelin-starred restaurant chefs and luxury fine dining restaurant chefs in Vancouver.

Sustainability and hospitality and industry

There is a growing number of studies that have examined sustainability in the hospitality sector (Rishi et al., 2015). However, there has been a limited set of studies focusing on the sustainability of food served in restaurants (Jacobs & Klosse, 2016). To this aspect, Myung et al. (2020) argued that sustainability is "understudied" in the restaurant context. Studies that have examined sustainability mainly focused on either food waste or food health issues (Sakaguchi et al., 2018; Yang et al., 2019). Existing literature also shows examined the food sustainability and waste associated with popular restaurants (Sirieix et al., 2017), family-owned restaurants (Jacobs & Klosse, 2016), and corporate social responsibility of fast-food chains (Kim et al., 2015). However, none of these studies has examined sustainability in luxury restaurants to understand how the chefs incorporate sustainable and ethical food practices in the luxury gastronomy industry.

Methodology

A qualitative approach will be used to investigate the research objective because its exploratory nature is given the limited previous research on the topic (Creswell & Cheryl, 2017). Qualitative methods are inherently useful in examining the daily lives where people live, work, and interact (Yin, 2011), and are therefore appropriate and a useful instrument for this study.

As a part of the exploratory nature of this study, individual semi-structured face-to-face interviews will be conducted to allow detailed information to be gathered, providing an opportunity for the interviewer to probe and expand the interviewee's responses (Weiss, 1994). The sample of luxury gastronomic restaurants will be acquired from telephone

directories and websites that maintain extensive food service business addresses. A purposive sampling and non-probability method will be used not only to gather information but also to complete the interviews as quickly and as cost-effectively as possible (Neuman & Robson, 2009), and “the results can almost be considered to constitute a population” (McBurney & White, 2004, p. 248).

Conclusions

Overall, the outcomes of this study will provide valuable knowledge and directions to develop clear and informed strategies for luxury gastronomic restaurants and thus offer their unique experiences while promoting sustainability.

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