# Predictors and Consequences of Brand Preference in Luxury Restaurants

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**ABSTRACT:** This research proposes and empirically tests a model of the relationships among perceived food quality, perceived service quality, perceived environment quality, brand preference, trust, satisfaction and favorable recipient behavior within the context of luxury restaurant patronage. Hypotheses implied by the model are tested on a sample of 398 patrons of U.S. luxury restaurants. Findings revealed that perceived food quality, perceived service quality, and perceived environment quality positively effect on the brand preference, and the brand preference positively and directly influence on favorable recipient behaviors as well as trust and satisfaction. These findings are discussed in terms of both academic and practitioner implications.

**Keywords**: Luxury Restaurants, Brand Preference, Trust, Favorable Recipient Behaviors, Perceived Food Quality, Perceived Service Quality, Perceived Environment Quality

## INTRODUCTION & LITERATURE

The luxury restaurant segment is developed to provide customers with superior food, service, and atmospherics. A luxury restaurant identified as a restaurant operation which provides excellent food prepared by a well-trained chef including high service quality, attractive presentations, and excellent physical environment. In addition, average check per person of a luxury restaurant is usually more than US$25(Kang & Hyun, 2012). Consumers who dine out at luxury restaurants expect prestigious services are ready to pay premium prices for lavish amenities and unique dining experience (Kang & Hyun, 2012). However, compared other segments such as fast food and casual dining sectors the revisit rate in the luxury segment is significantly low because relatively high price is required to enjoy high-quality service (Kang & Hynn, 2012). Consequently, marketers of luxury restaurants make an effort to develop successful marketing to increase the rate of customer revisit and generate positive word-of-mouth.

Customers show their attachment to a brand by purchasing the same branded products or service. One of important characteristics increasing the strength of a brand is its preference for customers (Keller, 1993). Effective management of preferred brand from customers is important in luxury restaurants to differentiate on restaurant from its competitors and to provide positive pre-perception for target customers.

Brand preference can be conceptualized as "the extent to which the customer favors the designated service provided by other companies in his or her consideration set" (Hellier, Geursen,

Carr, & Rickard, 2003, p. 1765). Brand preference and brand loyalty can be used interchangeably in some contexts (Rundle-Thiele & Mackay, 2001). For this reason, brand preference needs to be considered depending on the marketing characteristics and the relationship with other related constructs such as trust, satisfaction, and customer loyalty.

Customers develop brand preference to minimize the complicated processes of decision-making since customers are exposed to many brands (Kardes, Kalyanaram, Chandrashekaran, & Domoff, 1993). In this sense, marketers develop brand strategy to help customers recognize their brands in higher ranks in the consideration set. Thus a customer's brand preference lead to increase positive perception for service provider, which results in consumer desire to build up relationship with service provider.

A meaningful investigation develops the relationship between perceived qualities in restaurants and their brand perception. Perceived food quality refers to tastiness of food, menu variety, and nutrition as major components (Kivela, Ilnbakaran, & Reece, 2000). In restaurant segment, perceived food quality is the most critical factor influencing customers' purchase decision and post-consumption evaluation. Perceived service quality include service employee's behaviors and affect customers' experiences with the organization (Wall & Berry, 2007). Additionally, perceived environment quality refer to physical environment functions as a crucial factor that provide excitement and positive image before customers experience main services (Wakefield & Blodgett, 1999). These perceived qualities are important predictors for the formation for brand perception that lead to customers' overall eva-

luation for their experience (Jin, Lee, & Huffman, 2012).

Relationship quality can be defined as a consumer's evaluation of the strength of his/her relationship with the service provider (Crosby, Evans, & Cowles, 1990). Relationship quality also explains the nature of relational exchange and trust and satisfaction are two major components as a higher-order construct (Crosby, Evans, & Cowles, 1990). Marketers measure relationship quality to examine the relationship between and trust and satisfaction because customers trust the service provider because they are satisfied with past performance (Wong & Sohal, 2002).

Trust can be defined as the customer's level of confidence in a service provider's integrity and reliability (Moorman, Zaltman, & Deshpande, 1992). Trust grants comfort to customers, which in turn, strengthens the efficiency and effectiveness of relationship exchanges (Anderson & Weitz, 1989). Satisfaction is based on expectancy-disconfirmation theory that positive disconfirmation apprise over service performance exceeds customers' expectation, whereas poor performance comes from negative disconfirmation (Oh & Park, 1997). These two components of relationship quality play an important role to develop marketing strategies for loyal customers.

Favorable reciprocal behavior refers to a vital tool in the interactive process of maintaining pro-social behavior (Hoppner & Griffith, 2011). A fundamental assumption of the concept is that relational benefit has a positive effect on a firm's performance. The motivation of favorable reciprocal behavior is to exchange cooperative actions in order to maintain a relationship (Dohmen, Falk, & Sunde, 2008). In this sense, favorable reciprocal behavior is vastly depends on how an action is interpreted to those who observe and perceive performance (Hoppner & Griffith, 2011). This means that the meaning attributed to the action is more important than observable action. Customers dine out at luxury restaurants not only to eat foods but also to enjoy total experiences. Thus, marketers need to make an effort to harmonize all components of the restaurant service to create favorable recipient behaviors through customers' consumption process.

Despite the increasing of importance of brand preference for the success of luxury restaurant industry, the topic has not been examined in depth. Although previous research considered perceived qualities and brand preference separately in a number of studies, combined examination with relationship quality and favorable recipient behavior has not conducted. Therefore, the primary objectives of this study are to: (1) propose a theoretical model that focuses on the relationships among perceived qualities, brand preference, and post-consumption behaviors; (2) empirically examine which perceived quality elicit positive brand preference, and (3) understand the relationship among brand preference, satisfaction, trust, and favorable reciprocal behaviors.

Based on those objectives, nine hypotheses were developed as following:

H1. Perceived food quality has a positive effect on brand preference.
H2. Perceived service quality has a positive effect on brand preference.
H3. Perceived environment quality has a positive effect on brand preference.
H4. Brand preference has a positive effect on trust.
H5. Brand preference has a positive effect on favorable response behavior.
H6. Brand preference has a positive effect on satisfaction.
H7. Satisfaction has a positive effect on trust.
H8. Trust has a positive effect on favorable recipient behaviors.
H9. Satisfaction has a positive effect on favorable recipient behaviors.

## METHOD

*Measurement Instrument*

A self-administered questionnaire was used for this study. The survey included questions regarding major constructs and demographic information. The survey items with the exception of demographic variables were framed in a 7-point Likert-type scale with 1 indicating 'strongly disagree' and a 7-for 'strongly agree'. The survey instrument was derived from the extensive literature review. Perceived food quality was measured using three items employed by Namkung and Jang (2007). Assessment of perceived service quality used three items based on Gremler and Gwinner (2000). Perceived environment quality was measured using three items from a study by Baker, Parasuraman, Grewal, and Voss (2002). To measure the brand preference, this study used three items based on the research of Kim, Ok, and Canter (2010). Trust was measured using three items from Morgan and Hunt (1994). Assessment of satisfaction used three items based on Carpenter (2008). To measure the favorable recipient beha-
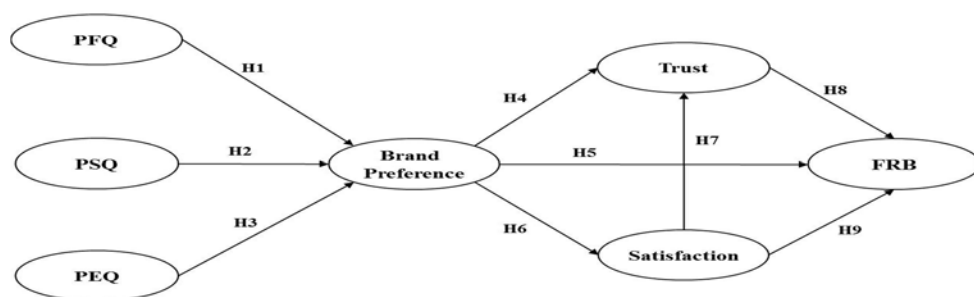


Fig. 1. Conceptual model.

Note: PFQ: perceived food quality, PSQ: perceived service quality, PEQ: perceived environment quality, FRB: favorable recipient behaviors.

viors, this study used three items based on the research of Kim and Lee (2012).

*Sample and Data Collection Procedure*

A self-report questionnaire was sent out to panel members through an on-line research company in the United States. Panel members were requested to provide the luxury restaurant name or brand that dined out most recently, and to respond all survey questions based on the chosen luxury restaurant brand. From the 5, 690 questionnaires distributed, 398 respondents were used for analysis after all checks for sample validity. The respondents were 50.8% male and 49.2% female. Regarding marital status, 50.8 % of respondents were single and 49.2 % were married. The data were 79.4% Caucasian, 7.8% Hispanic, and 7.5% Asian. 50% of the respondents had an annual household income over $100,000. Concerning education levels, 47.7% of the respondents had completed college degree, and 24.6% had graduate school education. The main reasons for dining out were social occasion (47.5%) and celebration (34.7%). Lastly, companions of dining are spouse (58.5%) and immediate family (14.8%).

Table 1. Confirmatory factor analysis for the measurement model

| Constructs and indicators | Standardized factor loadings | Composite reliability | AVE |
|---|---|---|---|
| Perceived food quality | | 0.85 | 0.65 |
| The restaurant offers new menu choices compared to other restaurants. | 0.77 | | |
| The restaurant provides creative food presentation. | 0.83 | | |
| The types of food in the restaurant offer unique taste compared to other restaurants. | 0.83 | | |
| Perceived service quality | | 0.89 | 0.73 |
| The restaurant provides prompt and quick service compared to other restaurants. | 0.76 | | |
| The restaurant has well-trained employees who could answer your questions well. | 0.90 | | |
| The restaurant has well-trained employees who were sensitive to your individual needs and wants. | 0.89 | | |
| Perceived environment quality | | 0.84 | 0.62 |
| The design of the restaurant is novel compared to other restaurants. | 0.81 | | |
| The table setting of the restaurant is pleasing compared to the settings of other restaurants. | 0.82 | | |
| The decorations of the restaurant are unique compared to the decoration of other restaurants. | 0.78 | | |
| The background music is pleasant compared to that of other restaurants. | 0.75 | | |
| Brand preference | | 0.92 | 0.80 |
| When I make a dining out decisions, I consider this restaurant a viable choice very often. | 0.91 | | |
| This restaurant meets my dining needs better than other comparable luxury restaurants. | 0.95 | | |
| I am interested in trying various menu items in this restaurant more than in other comparable luxury restaurants. | 0.82 | | |
| Trust | | 0.93 | 0.82 |
| I think this restaurant is reliable. | 0.91 | | |
| I have confidence in this restaurant. | 0.95 | | |
| I think this restaurant has high integrity. | 0.86 | | |
| Satisfaction | | 0.93 | 0.80 |
| I was happy with the dining experience at this restaurant. | 0.93 | | |
| I was pleased with the dining experience at this restaurant. | 0.88 | | |
| Overall I was satisfied with the dining experience at this restaurant. | 0.88 | | |
| Favorable recipient behaviors | | 0.86 | 0.68 |
| I have patronized the restaurant based on its extra effort to satisfy me. | 0.64 | | |
| I have given more business to the restaurant because I owed it to the restaurant. | 0.89 | | |
| I have provided opportunities for the restaurant to sell more F&B as a paycheck for its past efforts to satisfy me. | 0.91 | | |

## RESULTS

### Confirmatory Factor Analysis

A measurement model employing the maximum likelihood estimation method was performed. The results show a proper fit to the data ($\chi^2$=661.634; $df$=188; $p$<.001; Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)=0.080; Comparative Fit Index (CFI)=0.936; The Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)=0.922, and Normed Fit Index (NFI)=0.914). Composite reliability was the method for assessing the instrument's reliability, as shown in Table 1. Multiple measures achieved reliability for assessing each construct because all values of composite reliability estimates were over .70. The study verified convergent validity because all items had relatively high standardized factor loadings on their underlying constructs (values ranged from .64 to .95), and all were significant at an alpha level of .01. In addition, the average variance extracted (AVE) from all constructs exceeded the minimum standard of 0.50 threshold, indicating that constructs explain the majority of the variances (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair *et al.*, 1995). Discriminant validity was also assessed by comparing the AVEs with the squared correlations between constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table 2 displayed that AVE for each construct is greater than all the squared correlations except the relationship between perceived food quality and perceived environment quality. For the exception, discriminant validity between the constructs of each pair, combining two constructs into a single construct allowed performing a $\chi^2$ difference test on the two models: hypothesized measurement model and alternative model (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). The resulting $\chi^2$ difference is 128.218 ($df$=6), and the difference is significant at the 0.001 level. Thus, the discriminant validity was confirmed between all the pairs of the constructs.

### Structural Equation Modeling

Structural equation modeling was used to assess the overall fit of the proposed model and to test the hypotheses. The full structural model confirmed an adequate fit to the restaurant data ($\chi^2$=924.44; $df$=197; $p$<.001; RMSEA=0.096; CFI=0.902; TLI=0.886; NFI=0.880). Table 3 summarizes the path coefficients for all hypothesized paths in the model and Fig. 2 visualized the paths. All but two of the path coefficients in the model were positive and significant. Therefore, empirical supports accrue to all the hypotheses except for Hypotheses 8 and 9, which referred to the path from trust to favorable recipient behaviors and from satisfaction to favorable recipient behaviors.

The results confirm the proposed effects of perceived food quality on brand preference (Hypothesis 1: β=.22; $t$=2.23), as was the proposed effect of perceived service quality on brand preference (Hypothesis 2: β=.32; $t$=5.14). Additionally, the impact of perceived environment quality on brand preference was statistically significant (Hypothesis 2: β=.23; $t$=2.51). Findings indicated that brand preference affected trust (Hypothesis 4: β=.64; $t$=13.59), as was the proposed impact of brand preference on favorable recipient behaviors (Hypothesis 5: β=.37; $t$=5.12). While the impacts of brand preference on satisfaction (Hypothesis 6: β=.11; $t$=2.49) and trust on satisfaction (Hypothesis 7: β=.78; $t$=16.44) were significant, the impact of trust on favorable recipient behaviors (Hypothesis 8: β=.12; $t$=1.03) and satisfaction on favorable recipient behaviors. Fairness (Hypothesis 9: β=−.17; $t$=−1.53) were insignificant.

## CONCLUSION

This study explores the relationship among perceived food quality, perceived service quality, perceived environment quality,

Table 2. Comparison of AVE and squared correlations of paired constructs

| Constructs | PFQ | PSQ | PEQ | BF | Trust | Sat | FBR |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Perceived food quality (PFQ) | 0.65 | | | | | | |
| Perceived service quality (PSQ) | 0.45 | 0.73 | | | | | |
| Perceived environment quality (PEQ) | 0.65 | 0.36 | 0.62 | | | | |
| Brand preference (BF) | 0.35 | 0.34 | 0.33 | 0.80 | | | |
| Trust | 0.31 | 0.51 | 0.23 | 0.38 | 0.82 | | |
| Satisfaction (Sat) | 0.32 | 0.42 | 0.17 | 0.34 | 0.73 | 0.80 | |
| Favorable reciprocal behaviors (FBR) | 0.29 | 0.03 | 0.37 | 0.10 | 0.04 | 0.02 | 0.68 |

$\chi^2$=661.634, *d.f.*=188, NFI=0.914, TLI=0.922, CFI=0.936, REMSEA=0.080

Note. AVE is on the diagonal. Squared correlations of paired constructs are on the off-diagonal.

| | Original | Single construct | Δ *d.f.* | Δ$\chi^2$ | *p* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| PFQ - PEQ | 661.634 (188) | 789.852 (194) | 6 | 128.218 | *p*<0.001 |

Table 3. Structural parameter estimates

| Hypothesized path | Coefficient | t-value | Results |
|---|---|---|---|
| H1: Perceived food quality → Brand preference | 0.22 | 2.23* | Supported |
| H2: Perceived service quality → Brand preference | 0.32 | 5.14** | Supported |
| H3: Perceived environment quality → Brand preference | 0.23 | 2.51* | Supported |
| H4: Brand preference → Trust | 0.64 | 13.59** | Supported |
| H5: Brand preference → Favorable recipient behaviors | 0.37 | 5.12** | Supported |
| H6: Brand preference → Satisfaction | 0.11 | 2.49* | Supported |
| H7: Satisfaction → Trust | 0.78 | 16.44** | Supported |
| H8: Trust → Favorable recipient behaviors | 0.12 | 1.03 | Not Supported |
| H9: Satisfaction → Favorable recipient behaviors | -0.17 | -1.53 | Not Supported |

Note. * $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$.

$\chi^2$=924.444, $d.f.$=197, NFI (normed fit index)=0.880, TLI (Tucker-Lewis index)=0.886, CFI (comparative fit index)=0.902, REMSEA (root mean square error of approximation)=0.096.
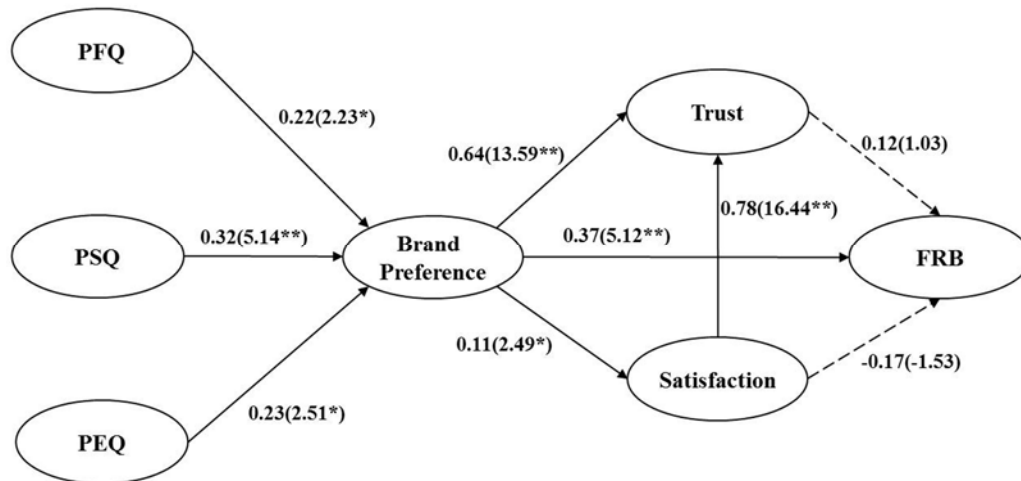


Fig. 2. Results of structural equation model.

brand preference, trust, satisfaction, and favorable recipient behaviors in the luxury restaurant segment. The results clearly display that brand preference has a significant effect on favorable recipient behaviors and concurrently, perceived food quality, perceived service quality, and perceived environment quality have critical impacts on brand preference. The findings suggest several theoretical and managerial implications. From a theoretical standpoint, this study plays an important role in extending understanding of brand preference as an important factor in securing loyal customers through a comprehensive conceptual model and empirical study.

While the importance of perceived qualities, brand preference and relationship quality (e.g., trust and satisfaction) has endured wide discussion in the hospitality literature, little research has been to unravel the relationship among these constructs. Based on previous research, this study uses three constructs (e.g., perceived food quality, perceived service quality, and perceived environment quality) as antecedents of brand preference to verify the relationship. Moreover, the exact relationship among brand

preference, relationship quality, and favorable recipient behaviors in a restaurant setting has not been clear. This study addresses this question. The findings show that the brand preference of a luxury restaurant is an indicator of positive post-consumption behaviors (e.g., favorable recipient behaviors).

This study also has practical implications for luxury restaurant marketers and managers. First, perceived service quality strongly influences brand preference among this population. Therefore, luxury restaurateurs should provide customers with quality service that is consistent with the expectation that customers have internalized through previous dining experiences at luxury restaurants. In order to make impressive service on customers of luxury restaurants, managers can work diligently to make employee physical attractiveness by identifying uniform designs that can be harmonized with their luxurious environment. For this purpose, managers may work with professional image consultants to adorn frontline employees from head to toe. Such differentiating efforts are likely to create the memorable experiences desired by patrons of upscale restaurants. In this light,

upper management may consider developing training program to help front servers intentionally show positive emotions during service encounters.

Second, perceived food quality and perceived environment quality has a significant independent role that influences formation of favorable recipient behaviors. Especially, both food quality and environment quality proved to be similar predictors of brand preference in term of strength of influence. Components of the environment (e.g., furnishings, atmosphere, and music) are likely to differentiate a specific restaurant from its competitors. In this sense, creating an attractive environment is crucial for luxury restaurants in order to appeal to target customers, thereby improving the chances of being recognized as a preference brand. For example, restaurateurs should arrange furniture that creates a desirable atmosphere for the luxury dining experience. Additionally, the findings of the present study show that a customer's food quality perception is the predictor that strengthens brand preference. Thus, restaurateurs should carefully consider the differentiated menu from other restaurant segments and competitors as a marketing tool to increase positive brand preference and to create customers' experiences.

Third, brand preference induces positive relationship quality and strengthens favorable recipient behaviors. These findings imply that brand preference is a crucial factor for stable revenue through revisit customers. Thus, restaurant marketers should invest in generating a brand preference among competitors to create an emotional attachment to target customer since this affective commitment results in customers' resistance to switching service providers. For example, restaurateurs could expose their brands through social media, viral marketing, and sponsorships with local companies.

Like other research, the current study has some limitation. First, this study used an online survey and participants responded the questions based on their previous dining experiences. The time-gap between completing survey and dining out at a restaurant could result in memory bias regarding to the experiences that should be addressed proper for exact analysis. In addition, this study only focused on luxury segments, and thus, if the data were collected from a different segment such as fast food and/or casual/family restaurant segments, the relationship among the constructs of this study might reveal different results because the formation of brand preference may differ depending on restaurant type. For this reason, examination of the role of brand preference in other restaurant segments will be interesting topics for future research.

Future studies may need to develop scales for brand preference through qualitative studies that includes both cognitive and emotional aspects for the formation of brand preference.

Last, this study used limited antecedents (e.g., food quality, service, and environment) effects on customers' perceptions of brand preference and subsequent behaviors such as trust, satisfaction and loyalty. However, the current study did not discuss various other constructs that affect customers' brand preference such as location and past experience. Therefore, a reasonable suggestion is that future studies examine the impact of both tangible and intangible factors and cognitive and emotional factors on the formation of brand preference. Future studies mi-

ght also investigate the role of brand preference as a moderator between predictors of behavioral intention (e.g., food quality, service, and environment) and actual behavioral intention in different restaurant markets.

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