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Proceeding of Postgraduate Research Colloquium (PGRC) 2023

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PGRC – 019

**Impact of social media Word of Mouth on Chinese
Consumers Intentions to Revisit Luxury Restaurants under the COVID-19**

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Extended Abstract:

Europe and the US have long been considered major luxury markets. However, since 2009, Asia, especially China, has emerged as a promising growth market for luxury goods (Gao et al., 2009; Langer, 2021). Rising living standards, coupled with booming tourism, are forcing hotels to innovate and increase customer satisfaction to expand their market share (Dabrowski et al., 2019; Rienda, Claver & Andreu, 2020; Romero & Tejada, 2019). The basic principles of business sustainability revolve around meeting the needs and desires of consumers (Makanyeza, Sivotwa, & Jaiyeoba, 2021). Effective market segmentation and understanding consumer needs are critical to driving repeat purchases. Despite the growing interest of Chinese consumers in luxury goods and services, research in this area has mainly focused on material goods rather than experiential luxury services (Peng & Chen, 2019).

Research purpose: In view of this, this study aims to explore the factors that influence the willingness of Chinese consumers to repurchase luxury hotels. By addressing the gap in Chinese consumers' understanding of experiential luxury consumption, this study aims to provide actionable insights for luxury hotels and restaurants in the region.

Rise of luxury hotel industry: The luxury hotel industry is booming, with high booking rates and significant economic contribution (Luna-Cortés et al., 2022). Although only a small number of travelers choose luxury hotels, they contribute greatly to tourism spending (Yang & Mattila, 2017; Chen & Peng, 2014). Paradoxically, research on luxury consumption in the hospitality industry lags behind broader research on luxury consumption (Yang & Mattila, 2017). Clearly, the hospitality domain lacks an effective framework to capture luxury value perceptions (Peng, Chen, and Hung, 2020; Yang and Mattila, 2016), thus requiring rigorous academic exploration.
Post-Pandemic Paradigm: The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered dramatic changes in consumer perceptions and behaviors in luxury hotels and luxury restaurants. Safety, hygiene, health protection and flexible booking policies are top of mind for consumers. The impact of the pandemic has highlighted the need for luxury hotels to adapt to these changing preferences. Research dedicated to understanding post-pandemic consumer perceptions is critical to developing effective marketing strategies and operational guidelines that resonate with the transformed consumer landscape.

Untapped territory: While studies exist on online hotel purchase intentions, they are mainly focused on online travel agencies (OTAs) and hotel apps (Abdullah et al., 2017; Murphy et al., 2016; Kucukusta et al., 2015 years; Wang et al., 2015). Current research mainly focuses on green hotel (e-WOM) and its marketing impact (Chan & Guillet, 2011; Leung et al., 2015; Choi et al., 2016). Despite the importance of social media in travel planning, especially in the Asian context (Dina & Sabou, 2012; Chung & Koo, 2015), research exploring its full potential as a marketing model is lacking. The rapid uptake of social media platforms like TikTok in hotel bookings offers an interesting avenue to explore. The cost-effectiveness and widespread user engagement of social media channels has changed the marketing landscape. However,

there is limited research on the impact of social media, especially TikTok, on Chinese consumers' hotel purchase intentions. This study aims to fill this gap by revealing the role of social media platforms in influencing consumers' hotel booking decisions

The COVID-19 pandemic has facilitated the integration of social media into everyday life. In the hospitality and tourism industry, the strategic use of social media is essential to building consumer trust and reputation. As the landscape shifts to adapt to the new normal, it becomes imperative to understand the interplay between social media, consumer choice of luxury restaurants, and the mediation of consumer sentiment. This research aims to shed light on these intricate relationships and provide insights to guide luxury restaurants in developing strategies for the evolving market.

The review of related literature highlights the scarcity of research on luxury service consumption, especially in the context of service industries like restaurants. Previous studies have focused on various aspects of luxury consumption, social media's impact on brand loyalty, and the role of eWOM in driving purchasing decisions. However, a comprehensive investigation of the influence of social media word of mouth on luxury dining choices under the new normal of the pandemic remains largely unexplored.

The study is grounded in the Mehrabian-Russell model, which focuses on the interplay between environmental stimuli, emotional responses, and consumer behavior. Chinese consumers' preference for experiential luxury products, like dining in luxury restaurants, has been on the rise.

The pandemic altered consumer behavior and raised concerns about health and safety in hospitality settings. As social media gained prominence in people's lives, its influence on consumer decisions became more pronounced. Against this backdrop, the research seeks to address several key questions: 1. What factors influence Chinese consumers' intentions to revisit luxury restaurants post-pandemic? 2. How does perceived value and emotion contribute to consumers' choice of luxury dining after the epidemic? 3. What are the differences in the impact of social media word of mouth on luxury dining choices before and after the pandemic? 4. Does social media word of mouth mediate the relationship between perceived luxury value/emotions and revisit intentions? Does perceived risk moderate this relationship after the pandemic? To answer these questions, the study utilizes quantitative methods, collecting data from Chinese tourists who have dined in luxury restaurants. A questionnaire is designed to capture demographic information and measure variables aligned with the extended Mehrabian-Russell model. The questionnaire employs a Likert 5-point scale to gauge respondents' agreement or disagreement. The collected data will be subjected to structural equation modeling (SEM) using Amos software. Exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis will be conducted to ensure data validity and reliability. The study extends previous research by integrating the impact of social media word of mouth into the Mehrabian-Russell model. By analyzing the data using SEM, the research aims to provide insights into consumers' intentions to revisit luxury restaurants post-pandemic and the role of social media in shaping these intentions

In conclusion, this research seeks to bridge the gap in understanding how social media word of mouth affects Chinese consumers' intentions to revisit luxury restaurants post-COVID-19. By integrating social media into the Mehrabian-Russell model, the study aims to provide valuable insights for the hospitality industry. As social media continues to shape consumer

decisions, the findings may guide practitioners and policymakers in effectively restoring business and customer trust in the aftermath of the pandemic.