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How do Mainland Chinese travelers choose restaurants in Hong Kong? An exploratory study of individual visit scheme travelers and packaged travelers

Rob Law\textsuperscript{a,}\textsuperscript{*}, Tammy To\textsuperscript{a}, Carey Goh\textsuperscript{b}

\textsuperscript{a}School of Hotel and Tourism Management, Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hung Hom, Kowloon, Hong Kong
\textsuperscript{b}Department of Decision Sciences and Managerial Economics, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shatin, N.T., Hong Kong

Abstract

The introduction of the Individual Visit Scheme (IVS), which allows Mainland Chinese travelers (hereafter called Chinese travelers) to visit Hong Kong on an individual basis, has been beneficial to the fast recovery of the local economy in Hong Kong from severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS). The IVS travelers, together with the packaged travelers who visited Hong Kong by joining packaged tours, are presently forming the largest segment of inbound travelers to Hong Kong. Despite the significant economic contributions of Chinese travelers to Hong Kong in general, and to the foodservice sector in particular, there has been an absence of prior studies on IVS travelers’ behavior of selecting restaurants in the existing hospitality and tourism literature. This paper reports on an exploratory study that investigated the perceived importance of attributes that pertain to the selection of restaurants from the perspective of IVS and packaged travelers from Mainland China. Empirical findings of a questionnaire survey with 230 Chinese travelers, including 127 IVS travelers and 103 packaged travelers, showed that the respondents in general viewed the included attributes as relatively important. In addition, only two attributes exhibited significant differences between IVS and packaged travelers. Findings of this research would be useful for hospitality and tourism practitioners to better prepare for receiving the growing number of Chinese travelers.

Keywords: Chinese travelers; Individual visit scheme; Packaged tour; Restaurants selection; Hong Kong

1. Introduction

Ever since the introduction of the Individual Visit Scheme (IVS) in Mainland China, Hong Kong has been benefited from the increasing number of IVS travelers. The IVS, which was introduced in July 2003 immediately after severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and with the central government’s support of the economy in Hong Kong, allows travelers from selected cities in Mainland China to visit Hong Kong on an individual basis. However, IVS travelers can only stay in Hong Kong for not more than 7 days on each visit (China Legislative Information Network System, 2003). In May 2006, the extension of the scheme has brought the number of IVS cities in Mainland China to 44 (Lu, 2006). Such a policy considerably simplifies the process for Chinese travelers to visit Hong Kong. This, in turn, leads to the large increase in the number of IVS travelers. As reported by Tourism Commission (2004, 2007), as of March 2004, the number of IVS travelers who visited Hong Kong was 1.47 million, and as of December 2006 the number has increased more than 10-folds to 17.2 million. The arrivals of IVS travelers, together with the regular packaged travelers, have largely contributed to the rapid recovery of the local economy in Hong Kong. The expenses that these Chinese travelers have spent permeate to different business sectors, and specifically the foodservice sector, as dining is always one of the most popular activities for Chinese travelers (Cai et al., 2001; HKTB, 2005; Li and Carr, 2004; Wang and Qu, 2004). In Hong Kong, over 9000 restaurants offer a great variety of cuisine such as Dim Sum and food originating from different regions of China, as well as other eastern and western gastronomic delights at

\textsuperscript{*}Corresponding author. Tel.: +852 2766 6349; fax: +852 2362 9362. E-mail address: hmroblaw@polyu.edu.hk (R. Law).
world-class standard. Au and Law (2002) stated that Hong Kong has more restaurants per capita than anywhere else in the world, and that dining in the city would be an unforgettable experience for all visitors.

A current trend in international tourism is the increasing number of independent travelers (Chesshyre, 2002; Pryor, 2001; Scutte, 1997), particularly those from Mainland China (Marwaan, 2004). In the context of travelers from Mainland China, food is considered as far more important than anything else (Dunlop, 2005), and that the attributes of food and beverage include quality, portion size, presentation, taste, and variety of choices. In spite of the growing number of the outbound travelers from China, and the significant contribution of their arrivals to the tourism industry in general and the foodservice sector in particular, the existing hospitality and tourism literature virtually has no published article on IVS Chinese travelers’ behavior in selecting restaurants. To fill this void, this research makes an initial attempt to investigate the perceived importance of attributes pertaining to the selection of restaurants from the perspective of IVS and packaged Chinese travelers. Min (2004) stated the importance of performing studies on expectations and perceptions of Chinese travelers. More importantly, this research aims to find out whether IVS travelers and packaged travelers choose their restaurants differently during their trips, and therefore whether foodservice managers should act or react to these two groups of travelers’ behaviors differently. Research findings can contribute to better understand the consumer behaviors of Chinese travelers.

Having discussed the research motivation in this section, the remaining parts of this paper are organized as follows. Section 2 reviews the related literature related to the issue of restaurants selection behavior. The research design, methodology, and data collection are discussed in Section 3. Section 4 presents and analyzes research findings. Section 5 concludes this study, offers managerial implications, and provides directions for future research.

2. Literature review

As consumers are more exposed to tourism products and services, they have become more and more sophisticated and experienced in their restaurants selection process (Sun, 1995). Johns and Pine (2002) as well as Koo et al., (1999) stated that consumers assess a complex set of attributes during their selection of restaurants. Johns and Pine (2002), for instance, advocated that restaurants could increase their attractiveness by offering lower price and better food quality. In other words, price and quality can be the contributing factors to the business success of a restaurant. Pedraja and Yague (2002) claimed that when consumers search for restaurants, both active and passive external information search are involved. Active external search is affected by demographic background such as family income, whereas passive external search is affected by their level of prior knowledge, use of price-quality criteria, and level of perceived risks. Customers would search for information and then compare the options before making a decision for a restaurant choice.

Sun (1995) and Soriano (2002) reported that high quality food products, clean dining environment, excellent service, well-designed physical facilities, convenient location, a wide range of food and beverage choices, and good value for money are highly expected from experienced restaurant consumers. These experienced consumers often use a combination of these criteria to select specific restaurants. Hence, the necessity of understanding the decision-making process of consumers is important to restaurateurs (June and Smith, 1987). Koo et al. (1999) further stated that restaurants have to meet, and probably to exceed, the expectations of consumers by knowing their selection criteria. In addition, foodservice managers should be aware of consumers’ view on selection attributes (Sun, 1995).

In relation to the important attributes for a restaurant selection, the findings of prior studies have not been analogous to each other. For instance, in an earlier study, Turner and Collison (1988) broadly stated that the dominant factor for a quality meal experience is the food and beverage themselves. Findings in more recent studies are more specific. In particular, several studies concurred with the foremost importance of food and beverage quality during the restaurants selection process (Auty, 1992; Lewis, 1981; Lo and Lam, 2004; Sulek and Hensley, 2004). Meanwhile, Koo et al. (1999) suggested that the taste of food is the primary attribute of restaurants selection. In terms of market specific attributes for a restaurant selection, as previously stated, food is considered as the most important component by Chinese travelers, and particularly, food variety is found important to the Chinese travelers (Zhang and Lam, 1999).

In addition to food and beverage, service and price are considered by some researchers as the essential factors for choosing foodservice outlets. Domingo (2002) argued that customers are increasingly concerned with the ability of restaurants to consistently offer high quality service. Cranage (2004) further commented that restaurants have to ensure that quality service is one of the key elements for restaurants to remain competitive. As far as price is concerned, pricing strategy has always been a signal of product quality (Brooker et al., 1986). Carmine and Norkus (1990) concluded that the price elasticity for food and beverage is high, in general and in particular to Chinese travelers (Kau and Lim, 2005).

Furthermore, Clark and Wood (1998) as well as Kivela (1997) advocated the importance of atmosphere, comfortable environment, hygiene/cleanliness, location and decoration of restaurants. Bitner (1992) stated that restaurant’s environment is a form of nonverbal communication with customers. Foster (1997) and Soriano (2002) found that concern for hygienic and comfortable environment has been growing in the past two decades. Location of a restaurant has also been found to be vital.
Tzeng et al. (2002) claimed that location is an essential factor for a successful restaurant, and that the concepts of location and decoration are always implemented in the planning stage of a restaurant establishment (Yau and Lee, 1996).

Attractiveness appears to be another determining factor when customers select a restaurant. According to Auty (1992) and Kivela (1997), this factor includes brand image, new experience, word-of-mouth, and advertising. Similarly, Hong and Woo’s (2004) study found brand image could affect the performance of a hospitality business. Meanwhile, some studies (Bowie and Chang, 2005; Lin and Mattila, 2006; Yau and Lee, 1996) argued that restaurants should provide new experiences to customers by introducing special dishes in order to retain their attractiveness. The effectiveness of promotion through word-of-mouth as a third-party evaluation of products or services has been examined by Walker (1995). Hsu et al. (2006) as well as Heung (2002) even found word-of-mouth particularly effective and efficient for Chinese because through word-of-mouth, the message is forwarded convincingly. Also, Chen (1995) found Chinese perceived advertising positively, and hence the impact of advertisements on Chinese travelers would be high. Ferle and Lee (2002) advocated that as Hong Kong is targeting at the Mainland China market, it is necessary to understand how Chinese consumers view advertisements in the foodservice industry.

In short, although different studies have presented various factors on restaurants selection, these factors can generally be grouped into the dimensions of food and beverage, service, price, environment, and attraction. On the basis of this argument, the research question thus induced would be: To what extent do Chinese travelers perceive the attributes in these five dimensions? In addition, the induced sub-question is: Do IVS travelers and packaged travelers perceive these factors differently?

3. Methodology

This study is exploratory in nature, and it investigated the perception of Chinese travelers on their preferred attributes when selecting restaurants. Primary data were collected through a questionnaire which was developed on the basis of prior studies on restaurant selection criteria as discussed in Section 2. In addition to the qualifying question of whether the respondent is a Chinese traveler, the first part of the questionnaire requested respondents to indicate their trip profile, in particular on the type of visa they had for the trip, which was then used to determine if the traveler was an IVS or packaged traveler. The second part of the questionnaire comprised 18 attributes which were adapted from Auty (1992) and Heung (2002) and fell into five dimensions of food and beverage, service, price, environment, and attraction. As pointed out in Section 2, these dimensions were identified as the most essential factors on restaurants selection. A seven-point Likert scale was used for each of these attributes which ranged from 7 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree), and respondents were requested to rate the importance for each of these attributes.

The third part of the questionnaire asked for demographic information of the respondents, including gender, age group, education level, marital status, and family income. These are the most commonly used demographic variables in hospitality and tourism research (Chen and Gursoy, 2000; Dossa and Williams, 2001; Weber, 2005). Lew and McKercher (2002) further showed the appropriateness of using these variables in tourism research. There was also an open-ended question at the end of the questionnaire to allow the respondents to provide additional comments that are related to the five dimensions. The original questionnaire was developed in English, which was then translated to Chinese, and finally to English using a blind-translation–back-translation technique (Hsu et al., 2006). Such a method ensures the accuracy of a translation. Using a convenience sampling technique, the Chinese questionnaire was pilot-tested by 30 Chinese travelers (including 17 IVS and 13 packaged travelers) in early 2005 at the Avenue of Stars—one of Hong Kong’s most popular tourist spots. To ensure the content validity of the questionnaire, the travelers were requested to evaluate the appropriateness and comprehensiveness of all statements. No problem was found in the pilot test, and the large-scale survey was conducted in mid-2005 for 2 months at the Avenue of Stars due to its easy accessibility and the mass gathering of Chinese travelers. During that time, two interviewers were recruited to approach Chinese travelers for completing questionnaires during day time on weekdays. Among 239 completed questionnaires received, nine were discarded due to the numerous missing values, leaving 230 usable questionnaires for analysis.

4. Findings and discussion

4.1. Demographics

Table 1 shows the demographic profile of the 230 respondents, of which 127 were IVS travelers and the rest were packaged travelers. Among these travelers, 56% were male. Most of the IVS travelers were in the age groups of 16–35 years (70%), and the majority of packaged travelers were in the age groups of 26–45 years (67%). A chi-square test indicated a significant difference between the ages of IVS and packaged travelers. Apparently, IVS travelers were younger than their packaged counterparts. This difference is probably due to the fact that young travelers like to freely plan for their own trips instead of to join well-planned excursions led by tour guides. Excursions, however, provided more confidence and assurance, which are normally welcomed by more mature travelers. Dotson and Clark (2004) pointed out that the risk in decision-making for packaged tourists is always lower than individual travelers. In addition, packaged tourists had a lower demand for special or new experiences which differ...
from others. In contrast, young tourists might not like to be restricted by routine schedules.

Table 1 also reveals that about 46% of the IVS travelers and 38% of the packaged travelers were single and no significant difference was found on marital status between the two groups of travelers. However, significant differences were found between the two groups of travelers in education level and average family income. The percentage distributions of IVS and packaged travelers who had completed secondary school or bachelor degree were about the same, but there was a disproportionate discrepancy in the number of travelers with post-graduate degrees between these two groups. Apparently, IVS travelers were better educated than packaged travelers. Similarly, the percentages of IVS travelers and packaged travelers with a family income of RMB 1001–4000 (US $1 = RMB 7.8) were comparable but relatively there were significantly more IVS travelers with a family income of higher than RMB 4000. Such an observation implies that IVS travelers were from wealthier families. Since education level and income are positively correlated, the better-educated IVS travelers were more likely to spend more during their travel. Since packaged tours are generally of a lower quality in products and service (Dotson and Clark, 2004), they are less attractive to highly educated travelers. Despite the lower price, the packaged tours do not appear to be as appealing to the financially stronger travelers such as the IVS travelers.

4.2. Trip profile

The trip profile of the respondents is shown in Table 2. Among the respondents, about 60% of those who had visited Hong Kong for the first time were packaged travelers; whereas 80% of the repeat travelers were on IVS. The percentage distribution of the ‘First time visit’ showed a significant difference between the two groups of travelers. Travelers could join packaged tours when they were visiting an unfamiliar destination. However, with the well-developed transportation network as well as small and
compact geographical area of Hong Kong, once the travelers had visited the city, they would find it easy and convenient to explore on their own.

Length of stay is another factor that exhibited significant differences between IVS travelers and packaged travelers. Most respondents stayed in Hong Kong for 2–4 days, which matched the official record of average length of stay for all overnight visitors (HKTB, 2006). The percentages of Chinese travelers who stayed in Hong Kong for 2–4 days were about the same for the two groups but there were relatively more IVS travelers than packaged travelers for same day visit and for long-visit of at least 5 days. Apparently, IVS travelers were much more flexible in terms of the duration of stay.

Most of the respondents came to Hong Kong for travel or sightseeing but there was a significant difference for purpose of visit between these two groups of travelers. Specifically, more IVS travelers came to Hong Kong for visiting friends and relatives, and for business. Lastly, most respondents (68%) spent HK $100–300 on dining per head on each day albeit some respondents (18%) spent less than HK $100 per day on dining and 13% spent between HK $301 and HK $500 per day. Generally speaking, packaged travelers spent less on dining than their IVS counterparts as meals were often included in the package. Another reason for packaged tourists to spend less on food was probably due to their lower family income. Kivela (1997) stated that lower income groups were more concerned with the thriftiness of dining out. Still, no significant difference was found on dining expenses between the two groups of travelers.

4.3. Perceived importance on restaurant selection attributes

Before viewing the means of individual attributes, Cronbach’s alpha for attributes within each of the a priori dimension was calculated to assess internal consistency. All dimensions had alpha values of at least 0.81. Hence, they were considered satisfactory. Hatcher (1994) as well as Nunnally (1978) stated that the internal reliability can be ascertained if the alpha values are larger than 0.70.

Table 3 lists the perceived importance of the attributes on restaurant selection. As a whole, respondents viewed the attributes as rather important with servers’ attitude received the highest rating (mean = 6.57) and advertising received the lowest rating (mean = 4.21). This result is not unexpected, as Hong Kong had been a British colony for 150 years prior to 1997, and the city was largely influenced by Western culture. Such an influence directly applies to the service industry, which does not seem to have enough knowledge on the sub-cultural differences when serving the Chinese market. Koo et al. (1999) claimed local service providers had admitted that they were unable to understand the needs of Chinese travelers and it was not easy to gratify these travelers. While they were filling in the questionnaire, some respondents complained that the attitudes of restaurant servers were entirely unprofessional, showing no respect to Chinese travelers. This, inevitably,
would create a negative image about the foodservice industry in Hong Kong.

As far as food and beverage is concerned, respondents rated the attributes from neutral (portion with mean = 4.45) to important (quality with mean = 5.82). Results of independent samples t-test showed significant difference between IVS travelers and packaged travelers on quality and presentation. Specifically, IVS travelers viewed these two attributes significantly higher than packaged travelers. These significant differences could probably be related to the higher expectation for quality and presentation as a result of higher family income of IVS travelers. Such findings are in accordance with Kivela’s (1997) study which stated that higher income groups usually have a higher expectation on food product than low income groups. Packaged tourists normally visit Hong Kong for shopping and sightseeing, and meals were always included as part of the package. Hence, packaged travelers could view meals as a basic need rather than a luxurious enjoyment. As such, they had a relatively lower expectation on food quality and presentation.

The four service attributes were rated by the respondents from somewhat important for operating hours (mean = 4.76) and diversity (mean = 4.93) to important and very important for speed (mean = 6.20) and servers’ attitude (mean = 6.57). In addition to servers’ attitude, speed was also considered important as the respondents disliked waiting for a long time for their food. However, no significant difference was found between the IVS and packaged travelers. Moreover, the single attribute in the price dimension received an important rating (mean = 6.16), and there was no significant difference between the two groups of travelers. Comparing the price of food in Mainland China, the respondents found the price of dining in restaurants in Hong Kong was incomparably high. Some respondents even suggested that discounts should be offered to Chinese travelers.

As indicated in Table 3, the five attributes in the dimension of environment were rated from somewhat important for decoration (mean = 4.54) and location (mean = 4.69) to important for atmosphere (mean = 5.57), comfort (mean = 5.82), and hygiene/cleanliness (mean = 6.36). The study conducted by Pedraja and Yague (2001) and Hansen (2002) on restaurant patrons in Western countries showed that decoration of a restaurant could affect the preference of customers. However, empirical findings of this study did not show such an outcome. This is likely due to the cultural differences between Chinese and Westerners. The research findings on location, however, supports the claims made by Johns and Pine (2002) who

| Table 3 Perception of Chinese visitors on the importance of attributes on restaurants selection |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|                                | Total travelers (N = 230) | IVS travelers (n = 127) | Packaged travelers (n = 103) | Mean difference | t    | Significance |
|                                | Mean | S.D. | Mean | S.D. | Mean | S.D. | t    | Significance |
| Food and beverage              |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |              |
| F and B variety                | 5.00 | 1.460| 5.00 | 1.297| 5.00 | 1.645| 0.00 | 1.000         |
| F and B portions               | 4.45 | 1.329| 4.33 | 1.251| 4.61 | 1.409| −0.28| −1.627 0.105 |
| F and B quality                | 5.82 | 1.121| 5.97 | 1.046| 5.64 | 1.187| 0.33 | 2.224 0.027* |
| F and B presentation           | 5.03 | 1.394| 5.21 | 1.275| 4.81 | 1.502| 0.40 | 2.226 0.027* |
| Service                        |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |              |
| Service speed                  | 6.20 | 1.047| 6.10 | 0.954| 6.31 | 1.146| −0.21| −1.495 0.136 |
| Servers’ attitude              | 6.57 | 0.748| 6.57 | 0.662| 6.58 | 0.846| −0.01| −0.157 0.876 |
| Operating hour                 | 4.76 | 1.390| 4.84 | 1.353| 4.65 | 1.435| 0.19 | 1.034 0.302 |
| Diversity                      | 4.93 | 1.475| 5.00 | 1.491| 4.85 | 1.458| 0.15 | 0.744 0.485 |
| Price                          |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |              |
| Value for money                | 6.16 | 1.066| 6.06 | 1.111| 6.27 | 1.002| −0.21| −1.481 0.140 |
| Environment                    |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |              |
| Atmosphere                     | 5.57 | 1.141| 5.61 | 1.054| 5.52 | 1.243| 0.09 | 0.593 0.554 |
| Comfort                        | 5.82 | 1.040| 5.79 | 1.124| 5.86 | 0.929| −0.07| −0.555 0.579 |
| Hygiene/cleanliness            | 6.36 | 0.795| 6.35 | 0.822| 6.36 | 0.765| 0.01 | −0.046 0.963 |
| Location                       | 4.69 | 1.352| 4.73 | 1.382| 4.64 | 1.320| 0.09 | 0.497 0.620 |
| Decoration                     | 4.54 | 1.265| 4.64 | 1.142| 4.42 | 1.397| 0.22 | 1.344 0.180 |
| Attraction                     |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |              |
| Image                          | 5.41 | 1.156| 5.44 | 1.036| 5.38 | 1.292| 0.06 | 0.406 0.685 |
| New experience                 | 5.39 | 1.313| 5.48 | 1.207| 5.27 | 1.429| 0.21 | 1.199 0.232 |
| Word-of-mouth                  | 5.46 | 1.340| 5.54 | 1.283| 5.36 | 1.406| 0.18 | 1.036 0.301 |
| Advertising                    | 4.21 | 1.446| 4.30 | 1.340| 4.11 | 1.565| 0.19 | 1.014 0.311 |

Importance scale: 7 = very important, 6 = important, 5 = somewhat important, 4 = neither important nor unimportant, 3 = somewhat unimportant, 2 = unimportant, 1 = very unimportant.

*Significant at a 0.05 level.
stated that location was not so important for choice of making decisions on dining. The hygiene/cleanliness attribute was rated as the second most important factor that could affect Chinese travelers' choice of restaurants. This outcome is expected as the recent outbreak of SARS has raised the awareness of hygiene for global travelers, including the Chinese.

Lastly, the four attributes in the attraction dimension were rated as neutral for advertising (mean = 4.21) to somewhat important for image (mean = 5.41), new experience (mean = 5.39), and word-of-mouth (mean = 5.46). In contrast to Chen (1995), this study found that Chinese travelers generally pay little attention to advertisements.

4.4. Additional comments from respondents

As a whole, the respondents had a moderately positive view towards the restaurants in Hong Kong. Nonetheless, they provided some comments for improvements. For instance, the food variety was not wide enough compared to restaurants in Mainland China. Besides, the flavor of food was quite light, which was not suitable for many Chinese travelers who are used to food with stronger flavors. In relation to service, many respondents found it difficult to communicate with food servers. These respondents felt that the language proficiency of food servers was low, and at times these servers even could not understand simple Putonghua (Mandarin). Also, some respondents complained that the time needed for waiting was always unacceptably long, and that the information on food and beverage was not clear enough. What the Chinese travelers preferred was details of ingredients and cooking methods for the menu items.

The respondents also commented that the hygiene situation in Hong Kong's restaurants could be improved. For instance, some respondents commented that the floors in some restaurants were wet and that more washrooms should be provided. The table settings were sometimes oppressive, which could negatively affect customers' feeling. Another comment made by some respondents was the necessity for promotion of non-smoking restaurants.

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5. Conclusions

5.1. Summary and managerial implications

Many recent publications have indicated that China has become one of the world’s major generators of outbound travelers (Arlt, 2006; Marwaan, 2004; Ryan and Mo, 2001; Zhang and Heung, 2001). Yin (2005) claimed that a new wave of Chinese tourists will cause fundamental changes to the Italian tourism industry, and that China would become Italy's most important tourism partner. Adams and John (2005) made a similar claim for the British inbound travel industry. A similar effect also applied to Asian countries such as the Philippines (Alave, 2005) and Thailand (Marwaan, 2004). Kim et al. (2005) even predicted that China could have a greater influence on worldwide tourist destinations in the next decade than any other country in the world. More importantly, Qing (2005) found that Chinese travelers tend to spend more when they travel. In Hong Kong, US $4.7 billion or 53% of the total visitor spending was from Chinese travelers in 2005 (HKTB, 2006). In view of the huge economic contributions of Chinese travelers, many international destinations have been, and will be, targeting the China market.

In the context of Hong Kong’s foodservice industry, as Chinese travelers have dominated the inbound tourists market in Hong Kong and are gradually becoming the most important tourist generating market for many other destinations, understanding their restaurants selection criteria is crucial for industrial practitioners. Knowing the preference of Chinese travelers, foodservice operators can assess their current position and seek for opportunities to further improve their existing service and products. This exploratory study has made an initial attempt to achieve the goal of examining the perceptions of Chinese travelers on different attributes of restaurants selection and the differences in perceptions between IVS and packaged travelers.

To recap, China is fast becoming the world's largest outbound tourist generating country. This factor, together with Chinese travelers' rising disposable income and more leisure time, as well as the fact that Chinese travelers are among the world’s largest spenders on dining, have drawn worldwide attention for businesses to prepare for receiving these important leisure and business travelers in greater numbers. This study is therefore expected to benefit most, if not all, travel destinations in the world that have been, and will be, receiving Chinese travelers and better understanding the dining behaviors of these travelers.

As indicated in Section 4, empirical results showed that the respondents generally viewed the included attributes as rather important, and more importantly, only two attributes in the food and beverage dimension exhibited significant differences between IVS travelers and packaged travelers. Managers of the foodservice industry can thus reconsider how their limited resources can be utilized for marketing and product development. Drawing on the findings of this study and knowing the expectation of Chinese travelers (i.e. the answers to the research question), managers probably do not need to spend too much effort on segmenting IVS travelers and packaged travelers. Instead, they should make an ongoing attempt to improve the factors that were perceived as important by travelers. As an example, since word-of-mouth was found to be more important than advertising in attracting patrons, restaurateurs could probably give simple keepsakes with contact details and discount coupons to remind the tourists of their experience in the restaurant. These keepsakes are likely to be brought back to travelers’ home towns and the effect of such attraction would then be more noteworthy. Also, appropriate training should be provided to staff on quality
of service and communication skills. More representative menu items, preferably from different parts of the world, should also be provided to entice Chinese travelers, especially the health conscious travelers who requested more vegetable dishes.

5.2. Future research

This study is limited by its small sample size, absence of demographic information about the regions where the respondents came from, and the short time frame of data collection. These limitations render the study’s inability to make any generalized claims. Future research endeavors can repeat this study with a larger sample of Chinese travelers. It would be useful to do a segmentation of Chinese travelers from different regions of the country. It is expected that unequal findings would be generated for travelers from different parts of the most populous country in the world. Another future research possibility is to repeat the study in a longitudinal way to determine whether there are any changes of customers’ preference over time.

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