Yes, Chef! Experimenting Congruence Between the Chef of Cuisine and Informational Clues

ABSTRACT: Literature on congruence has neglected studies in gastronomy regarding the congruence between the chef of cuisine and the cuisine in which they act. This study analyzed the congruence effect, the type of cuisine and the informational clue. Two experiments were executed, and were found that the congruence between a Japanese chef of cuisine and Japanese cuisine results in higher approval rates regarding the intention of buying sushi and the attitude of the consumer when compared to a Brazilian chef. In the second experiment, when an informational clue was added to the restaurant advertisement (a Michelin star), the chefs received equal evaluations, and it was observed that congruence interacted with informational clue. It should be highlighted that the evaluation of the Japanese chef's cuisine did not depend on the informational clue, while the Brazilian chef received a higher evaluation when the Michelin star was on the restaurant advertisement.

KEYWORDS: congruence, chef, cuisine, informational clue, Michelin

SI CHEF! EXPERIMENTANDO CONGRUENCIA CON EL CHEF DE COCINA Y LA PISTA INFORMACIONAL

RESUMEN: Literatura sobre congruencia no ha tenido en cuenta estudios en gastronomía respecto de la congruencia entre el Chef de cocina y la cocina en que actúa.Se analizó el efecto de la congruencia del Chef de cocina con el tipo de cocina y la pista informacional. Se realizaron dos experimentos, donde se constató que la congruencia entre el Chef japonés y la cocina japonesa produce una evaluación superior y significativa sobre la intención de compra y la actitud del consumidor, en comparación con el Chef brasileño. En el segundo experimento, al añadir una pista informacional en el anuncio del restaurante (estrella Michelin), los Chefs obtuvieron evaluaciones semejantes, observándose que la congruencia interactuó con la pista informacional. Se resalta que el Chef japonés es independiente de la pista informacional para la evaluación de su cocina, mientras que el Chef brasileño recibió una evaluación superior cuando contó con la estrella Michelin.

PALABRAS CLAVE: congruencia, chef, cocina, pista informacional, Michelin

INTRODUCTION

The habit of visiting or routinely frequenting restaurants is motivated by different reasons, such as meeting friends, going out to dinner with the family (Rydell et al., 2008), business meetings or, yet, the desire to experiment another culture's cuisine and its meanings (Ray & Srinivas, 2012)

The motives for searching for foreign cuisines are also present in the academic literature. Some studies talk about ethnic restaurants and consumer experience (Jang & Ha, 2015; Simon Tsai Chen-Tsang & Lu, 2012), others about identification with the culture of the country of origin (Almerico, 2014), and others about how it is a ritual for changing the routine (Marshall, 2005).

In Brazil, a type of cuisine that has increased in consumption over the last few years is the Asian cuisine. This market had a growth of 30% over the last decade, with an increase of 17% from 2014 to 2015 (Asian Food Show, 2016). In the case of Japanese cuisine, its dissemination in Brazil is due mainly to the fact that Brazil is the country which harbors more Japanese families and their descendants, with around 1.5 million people (Food Magazine, 2017). From an economic point of view, this market is very important for the creation of job opportunities and economic development.

From a theoretical point of view, this study contributed for better comprehending the theory of congruence and informational clues (Olson & Jacoby, 1972) for consumer evaluation. The congruence theory states that individuals, through a cognitive process, try to identify patterns or similarities between elements to perform their evaluations (Eckstein, 1997). It is worth mentioning that clues are signs that the consumer can use to make their judgement (Olson & Jacoby, 1972). One gap identified in the literature about this subject is if a low congruence, that is, little similarity between the chef de cuisine and the cuisine they work with would be evaluated differently when the chef is from one country and the cuisine in which they work is from another one. The chef de cuisine is the leader in the kitchen, they are at the top of the hierarchy, and some of their functions are preparing the menu, conducting the team with strictness and focus on the quality of the meals (Pratten, 2003).

Some studies about congruence investigated the congruence between the self of the consumer and the choice of touristic spots (Ahn, Ekinci, & Li, 2013), between the personality of the consumer and loyalty to a brand (Moisescu, 2009), between self-image and perceived quality (Kwak & Kang, 2009), and between an athlete's profile and product sponsoring (Lee & Koo, 2015). These studies revealed that, when congruence between the elements was identified, the consumer evaluation had a tendency to be higher (Story, 2005), and when there were few similarities the evaluation of the consumer had a tendency to be lower (Aureliano-Silva, Lopes, De Lamônica Freire, & da Silva, 2015; Lee & Thorson, 2008).

This article analyzes the effect of the ethnic congruence between the chef de cuisine and the cuisine with which they work, and also how the presence of na informational clue in a restaurant's commercial advertisement can alter the evaluation of the consumers when the chef de cuisine does not have the same origin as the cuisine. For example, a Brazilian chef de cuisine that works in a Japanese restaurant. The following research question will direct this study: **What is the effect of different levels of ethnic congruence of the chef de cuisine, and of an informational clue in the evaluation of the cuisine in which they operate?** The main goal, therefore, is to analyze the effect of different levels of congruence on consumer behavior in the segment of Japanese restaurants.

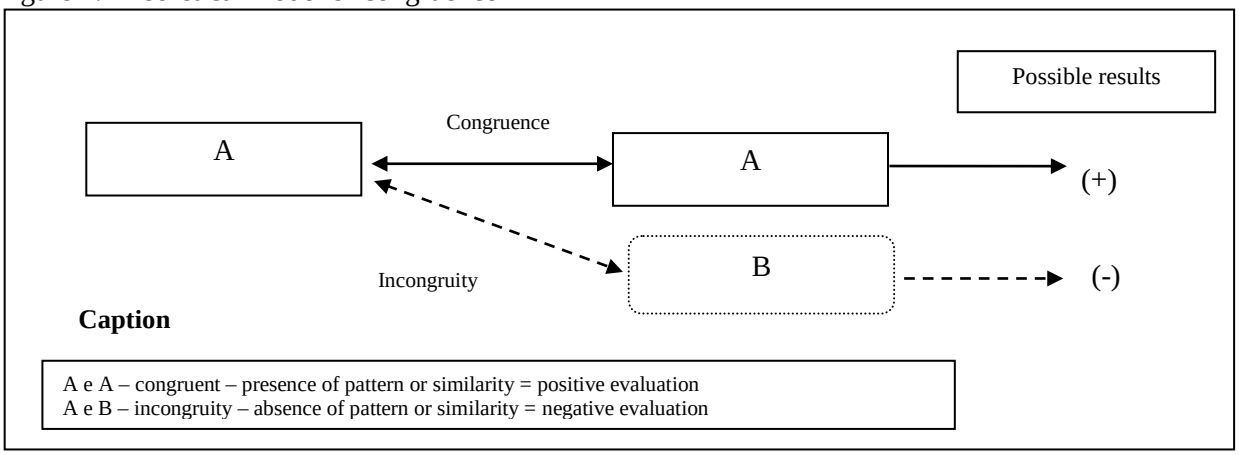
This study intends to contribute to the understanding of the effects of congruence and incongruity, when there is an informational clue, on consumer cognition, and to stimulate restaurant managers to analyze their advertisement strategies.

The article presents the theoretical approach used, the methodological procedures applied to the research, the analysis and discussion of the results and the final considerations.

2. Congruence and Consumer Evaluations

The phenomenon of congruence has been defined in different fields of the human and social sciences as the perception of a pattern or similarity between objects or elements when compared to each other (Eckstein, 1997). The theory of congruence has also been researched in the field of marketing. Some examples are consumer-celebrity congruence (Choi & Rifon, 2012), congruence between self-image and product image (Heath & Scott, 1998), congruence of self-image as a moderator of consumer loyalty and welfare (Grzeskowiak & Sirgy, 2008), congruence of the brand image and consumer self (Dolich, 1969), congruence between seller and type of product (Kamins & Gupta, 1994), and also the perception of congruence between individual and engaged marketing (Kuo & Rice, 2015). In general, what was researched in these studies was to investigate whether the perception of a pattern or similarity between the way consumers sees themselves, and other elements (celebrities, brands and products) influences their evaluation. Most of these studies found that when perceiving congruence between two entities (similarity or pattern between elements compared) there would be a better cognition (understanding of the phenomenon) on the part of the individual, and, consequently, a more positive evaluation when compared to a lack of congruence between the objects being compared. The theoretical model represents the logic of the congruence theory, according to Figure 1.

Figure 1. Theoretical model of congruence



Source: created by the authors (2017)

In fact, most of these studies (Kuo & Rice, 2015; Kwak & Kang, 2009; Matanda & Ndubisi, 2013; Moisescu, 2009) found positive effects of congruence on consumer evaluations and support the following hypothesis:

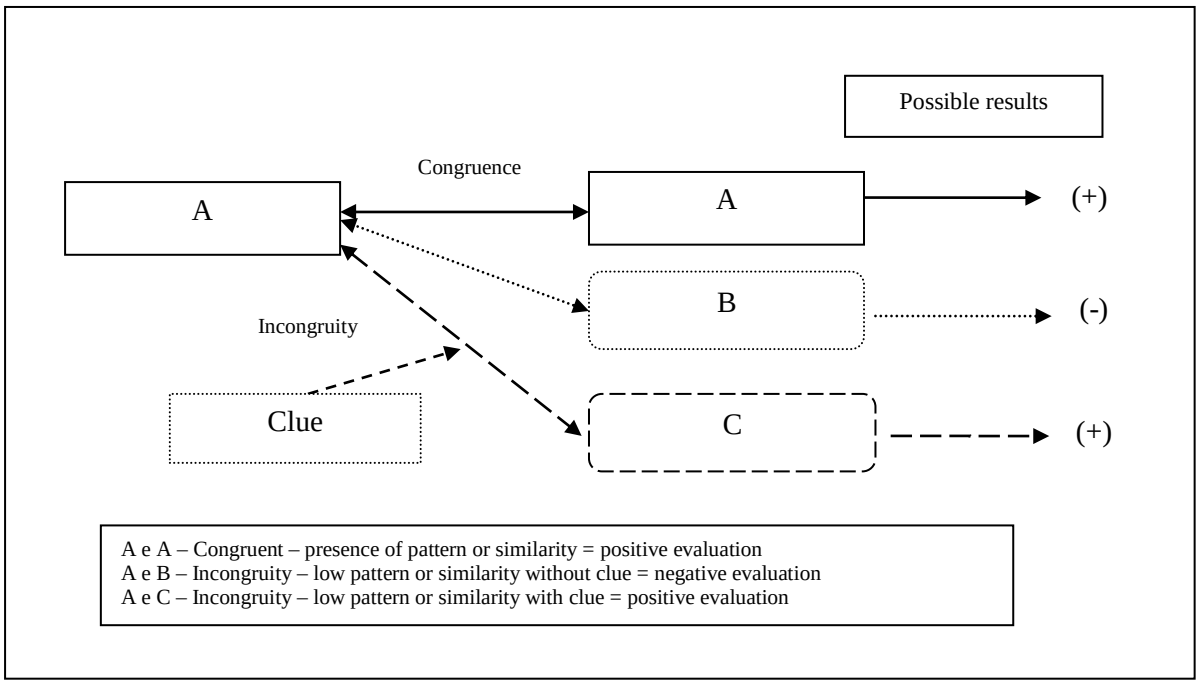
H[1] - The consumer will give a more positive evaluation of the sushi when there is high ethnic congruence of the chef with the cuisine (versus low congruence).

2.1 Clues in Service Environments

Studies of the area of service show that consumers use clues in the service environment as signals to evaluate their performance (Berry, Wall, & Carbone, 2006a, 2006b). Given the importance of clues for improving consumer perception (Berry et al., 2006a, 2006b), restaurant managers must pay special attention to them so as to positively influence consumers (Chua, Jin, & Goh, 2014). According to Berry, Wall & Carbone (2006), there are three key categories of clues in service environments: functional, mechanical, and human. The functional clues refer more specifically to the processes for the provision of the service, in the case of a restaurant, from the client's request to delivering of the correct meal to the client's table at the right time. The second category, named mechanical clues, refers to tangible clues, for example, equipment, colors in the environment or even lighting. Finally, the human clues, related to the interaction between employees and clients, which should exceed the client's expectations (Berry et al., 2006a).

A study carried out by Chua et al., (2014) about the restaurant segment showed that functional clues influence human clues, and are important factors in the customer perception of value. It also identified that functional and human clues should be considered when planning a restaurant environments (Chua et al., 2014) to improve the consumer experience. The need for clues in restaurant environments is possibly due to the intangibility (Vargo & Lusch, 2004) of the food service process. What these studies show is that the presence of clues in service environments positively influences customer evaluations in the most varied contexts (White, 2014). It is worth remembering that clues are signals that consumers can use to infer their judgment (Olson & Jacoby, 1972), and may be used in different contexts (White, 2014). In this study, a Michelin star (Snyder & Cotter, 1998) will be used as a clue in the restaurant advertisement. Given the fact that consumers use clues to infer a judgment about something (Chua et al., 2014; Garg, 2014; White, 2014), it is believed that using them may alter consumer's evaluations and also improve them, especially in cases where there is a low congruence between the elements being compared. Differently from the theoretical model of congruence, in the theoretical model of incongruity and informational clues, additional information between elements A and C can change the consumer's evaluation; see Figure 2.

Figure 2. Theoretical model of incongruity and informational clues



Based on studies presented about clues (Berry, Wall, & Carbone, 2006; Chua et al., 2014; White, 2014) and in the deduction expressed in the theoretical model of incongruity and informational clues, we proposed the following hypotheses:

H^2 - the evaluation of the sushi made by the Japanese chef (high congruence with Japanese cuisine) is independent from the informational clue;

H^3 - the evaluation of the sushi made by the Brazilian chef (low congruence with Japanese cuisine) will be better when the advertisement of the restaurant has an informational clue;

H^4 - the evaluation of the sushi made by the Brazilian chef (low congruence with Japanese cuisine) will be better with the informational clue, however, it will still be inferior than the evaluation given to the sushi made by the Japanese chef, when they also have an informational clue in the restaurant advertisement; and, finally,

H^5 - the evaluation of the sushi made by the Brazilian chef (low congruence with Japanese cuisine) will be inferior to the one given to the Japanese chef, when there is no informational clue in the restaurant's advertisement.

Following, the article will present the method, the research design and the general data analysis plan.

3.0 Method

The following items describe how the stimuli used in the experiments were designed, the research instrument design and the data analysis technique.

3.1 Elaboration of the stimuli used in the Experiments

For the elaboration of the stimuli, images of chefs were found in the internet, and later edited for creating the commercial advertisement of the restaurant. Subsequently, the stimuli were submitted to the evaluation of a group of consumers to analyze the ethnic congruence between the chefs (Japanese or Brazilian) and the type of cuisine with which they work. Two different groups, each composed of 10 individuals, evaluated the ethnic congruence of the chefs and Japanese cuisine through a 7-point Likert scale. The chef has the profile to work with Japanese cuisine - 1 totally disagree and 7 totally agree. Two advertisements were created, one with the Japanese chef and the other with the Brazilian chef, presenting a sushi plate. On average, the Japanese chef was perceived as having a more congruent ethnic profile to prepare the sushi when compared to the Brazilian chef ($Mean_{Japanese}$= 6.32; sd= 1.18; ($Mean_{Brazilian}$= 4.28; sd= 1.39 (19)=3.214; $p<0.01$.

3.2 General design of the data collection instrument

Electronic questionnaires adapted to each experiment were used to analyze the effect of the ethnic congruence of the chefs on the evaluation of the cuisine with which they work. In all cases, the first part of the research instrument featured the commercial advertisement of a restaurant that offered sushi rolls and their respective chefs. Soon after the advertisement of

the restaurant, it was questioned whether the respondent liked Japanese food, and, specifically, sushi. When the respondent said no, the survey was terminated. Following were the alternatives that assessed the intention to buy and the attitude of the consumer to the sushi plate. Then, the manipulation of the ethnic congruence of the chefs with Japanese cuisine was verified, and, finally, the categorical data of the respondents.

In experiment 2, the same structure of the research instrument used in experiment 1 was maintained, altering the commercial advertisement of the restaurant, in which a Michelin star was added as an informational clue. We chose to use the Michelin star, as it is a very important classification for restaurants and much desired by chefs (Snyder & Cotter, 1998).

In addition to the verifications of the congruency between the cuisine and the chefs, a closed question was added with yes or no alternatives to see if the respondent knew what the Michelin star meant for restaurants, or something close to the definition of "award given to a restaurant Excellence in service" (Snyder & Cotter, 1998). If the answer was no, the search was terminated. Figures 3 and 4 were used in experiment 1, and again in experiment 2, adding to this second experiment Figures 5 and 6, with the Michelin star in the advertisement.

Figure 3. Brazilian Chef



Source: created by the authors (2017)

Figure 4. Japanese Chef



Source: created by the authors (2017)

Figure 5. Brazilian chef – Michelin



Source: created by the authors (2017)

Figure 6. Japanese chef - Michelin



Source: created by the authors (2017)

3.3 General data analysis plan

For the data analysis, descriptive statistics and analysis of variance using SPSS software version 19.0.0 were used. For testing the hypothesis, a level of significance of 5% was accepted, that is, $p < 0.05$, since this level is considered acceptable for applied social sciences (Hair et al., 2005).

3.4 Application of experiments 1 and 2

The experiments were applied online and at random, and each respondent received only one link to access one of the restaurant advertisements developed for the experiments. A minimum of 20 respondents per group was considered for analysis of variance (Hair et al., 2005).

4.0 Experiment 1

Experimental design 2 x 1 (single factor) - (Chefs: Japanese versus Brazilian). Objective: to analyze the effect of the chef de cuisine ethnic congruence (high vs. low) on Japanese cuisine (sushi).

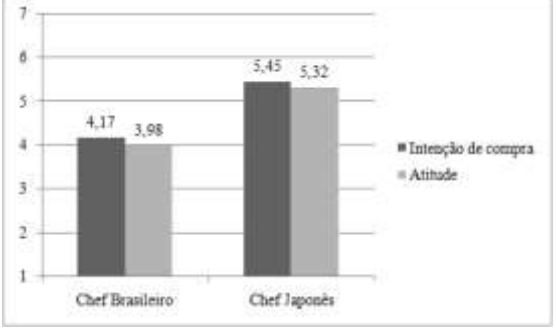
4.1 Results of Experiment 1

The sample of this experiment was composed of 60 respondents, and 31 (52%) evaluated the Brazilian chef's advertisement and 29 (48%) evaluated the advertisement with the Japanese chef. The gender composition of the sample was 26 (43%) men and 34 (57%) women. The average age of respondents was 28 years old. In order to evaluate the intention to buy the sushi, 4 alternatives were used (Cronbach's alpha = 0.84), and for the attitude 4 alternatives (Cronbach's alpha = 0.88) adapted from (Spears & Singh, 2004).

The verification of the manipulation of the ethnic congruence of the chefs occurred as expected ($Chef_{Japanese}$=5.11; sd=1.33 $Chef_{Brazilian}$=3.47; sd=1.37; (57)=4.817; $p<0.001$), that is, the Japanese chef was evaluated with a higher level of ethnic congruence with the Japanese cuisine compared to the Brazilian chef.

The different levels of ethnic congruence of the chefs (high vs. low) also influenced the evaluations. The respondents' evaluation of the sushi made by the Japanese chef was significantly higher compared to the evaluation of the same meal made by the Brazilian chef, ($A=_{ChefJapanese}$=5.32; sd= 1.21; $A=_{ChefBrazilian}$=3.98; sd=1.24; F(1.58)=17.288; $p<0.01$) for the attitude and ($A=_{ChefJaponês}$=5.54; sd= 1.38; $A=_{ChefBrazilian}$=4.17; sd=1.23; F(1.58)=14.402; $p<0.01$) for the intention to buy. The results are presented on Figure 7.

Figure 7. Evaluations - (Brazilian Chef vs. Japanese Chef)



4.1.2 Discussion of the results of experiment 1

Through this experiment, it was possible to analyze the effect of the ethnic congruence of the Chefs (Brazilian versus Japanese) in the evaluation of the cuisine in which they work, in this case, Japanese cuisine.

The purpose of this experiment was to operationalize the theory of congruence, which states that in situations where individuals perceive coherence or similarities between certain elements, their judgment tends to be more positive (Choi & Rifon, 2012; Dolich, 1969; Heath & Scott, 1998). With this experiment, it is evident that the phenomenon of congruence is recurrent and timeless in the evaluations of consumers in different contexts of evaluation of products and services.

After this first experiment, we proceed with experiment 2, in order to analyze the effects of the chef's ethnic congruence and informational clues in the consumer evaluation.

4.2 Experiment 2

Experimental design 2 x 2 (Chefs: $\text{Japanese}_{\text{highcongruence}}$ versus $\text{Brazilian}_{\text{lowcongruence}}$) versus (Clue: With versus Without). Objective: to analyze the effect of the ethnic congruence of the chefs (high versus low) on the type of cuisine (Japanese), including informational clues in the restaurant's advertisement (Michelin star).

4.2.1 Results of experiment 2

The sample of this experiment was composed by 111 evaluators, 31 of which evaluated the Brazilian chef without a Michelin star and 27 with a Michelin star, with a total of 58 respondents in this condition. The other part of the sample evaluated the Japanese chef without the clue in the advertisement (30), and the other 23 with the Michelin star. The gender composition of the sample consisted of 35 (38%) and 76 (62%) women with average age of 26 years. In order to evaluate the intention to buy the sushi, 4 alternatives were given (Cronbach's alpha = 0.88), and for attitude, 4 alternatives were given also (Cronbach's alpha = 0.91), adapted from (Spears & Singh, 2004).

Firstly, the verification of the manipulation of the ethnic congruence of the chefs with the Japanese cuisine ($\text{Chef}_{\text{Japanese}} = 5.81$, $\text{Chef}_{\text{Brazilian}} = 3.84$, $(58) = 8.427$, $p < 0.01$) was carried out. To check the manipulation of the clue on the advertisement (Michelin star), the respondents had to report if they saw any rating information in the restaurant advertisement, and what that rating meant. Sixteen respondents were excluded from the sample because they did not know the meaning of this classification.

The experiment did not identify a main effect of the chef's congruence on the attitude $F(1.110)=1.572=p=n.s$ and intention to buy $F=(1.110)=1.683=p=n.s$. When the advertisement had the clue (Michelin star), a main effect was identified for attitude $F(1.110)=3.470=p<0.05$, but no main effect for intention to buy of the sushi $F(1.110)=3.472=p>0.10$.

The experiment identified a interaction effect between the chef's congruence with the type of food (Japanese cuisine) and the informational clue (Michelin star) for attitude $F(1.110)=6.295)=p<0.01$ and intention to buy the sushi $F(1.110)=3.849)=p<0.05$.

The consumer's attitude towards the sushi plate presented by the Japanese chef was not significantly different, with or without the Michelin star, ($A_{\text{WithoutMichelin}}=5.11$; $sd=1.41$; $A_{\text{WithMichelin}}=4.94$; $sd= 1.30$; $F=0.204$; $p=n.s$), and the same occurred for intention to buy ($A_{\text{WithoutMichelin}}=5.30$; $sd=1.47$; $A_{\text{WithMichelin}}=5.18$; $sd= 1.39$; $F=0.204$; $p=n.s$).

For the Brazilian chef, the informational clue (Michelin) resulted in a significant difference in attitude ($A_{WithoutMichelin}$=4.12; sd=1.63; $A_{WithMichelin}$=5.28; dp= 1.07; F=9.840; p<0.05), and intention to buy ($A_{WithoutMichelin}$=4.44; sd=1.63; $A_{WithMichelin}$=5.36; sd= 1.07; F=6.770; p<0.05).

It was also verified that the evaluation of the consumer's attitude towards the Japanese chef's sushi, compared to the evaluation of the sushi made by the Brazilian chef, was superior and significant even when the informational clue (Michelin star) was not present ($A_{JapaneseChef}$=5.11; sd=1.42; $A_{BrazilianChef}$=4.12; sd= 1.63; F(1.59)=6.465; p<0.05), and the same occurred with the intention to buy ($A_{JapaneseChef}$ =5.30; sd=1.47; $A_{BrazilianChef}$ =4.44; sd= 1.54; F(1.59)=5.014; p<0.05).

When both chefs had the informational clue (Michelin star) in the restaurant's advertisement, both were evaluated in the same way ($A_{JapaneseChef}$=4.94; sd=1.29; $A_{BrazilianChef}$=5.28; sd= 1.07; F(1.48)=0.979; p=n.s) for attitude and ($A_{JapaneseChef}$=5.18; sd=1.39; $A_{BrazilianChef}$=5.36; sd= 1.05; F(1.48)=0.257; p=n.s) for the intention to buy. The results are presented on Figures 8 and 9.

Figure 8. Attitude

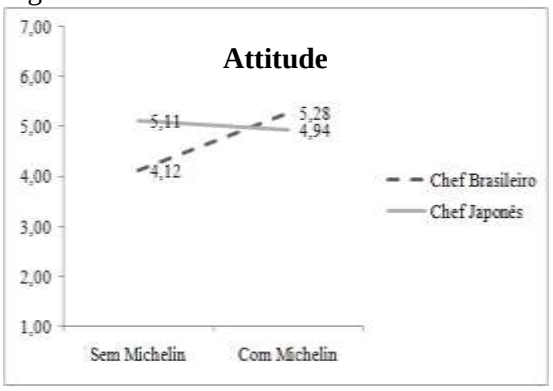
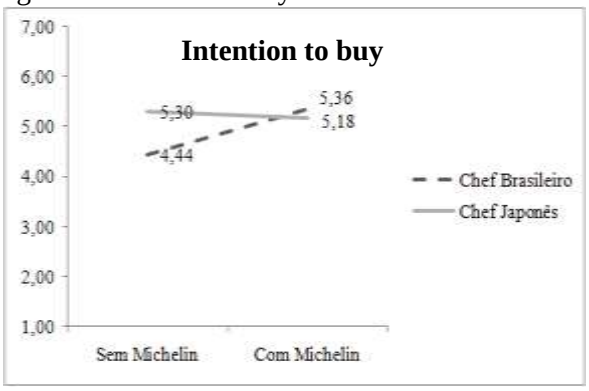


Figure 9. Intention to buy



4.2.3 Discussion of experiment 2

According to studies on the effects of congruence (Choi & Rifon, 2012; Dolich, 1969; Grzeskowiak & Sirgy, 2008; Kwak & Kang, 2009) consumers tend to make a more positive assessment between elements when they find a pattern or similarity (Moisescu, 2009; Pradhan, Duraipandian, & Sethi, 2014).

This study confirmed that the Japanese chef was perceived as more congruent with the sushi presented in the advertisement of the restaurant, which resulted in a more positive assessment by the consumers both for attitude and intention to buy, regardless of the Michelin rating of the restaurant. So, **H_2** was confirmed in that the evaluation of the sushi plate made by the Japanese chef (high congruence with the type of cuisine), would be independent from the information about the Michelin rating.

Conversely, when consumers want to evaluate products or other elements that present differences, they have a tendency to look for information, here called clues (signs) to make their assessment (Olson, 1978). An informational clue was used: a Michelin star, shown in the restaurant advertisement, to help the consumer to evaluate the sushi. The results supported **H_3**, in which the evaluation of the sushi made by the Brazilian chef (low congruence with the type of cuisine) would be better when the restaurant advertisement showed the Michelin rating (versus without rating) taking the focus away from the need of congruence between the

Brazilian chef and the type of cuisine. This cognitive phenomenon can be explained by the process of using clues (Olson, 1978; White, 2014), in which, with the use of clues, functional, mechanical, human (Berry et al., 2006) and also informational (Olson, 1978), like the one used in experiment 2, it is possible to receive better consumer evaluations about products and services offered by restaurants with meals from different cultures, prepared by chefs who do not belong to the gastronomic culture of that country.

It is worth noting that the evaluation of the sushi made by the Japanese chef was the same with or without the Michelin rating. Thus, the influence of congruence (Kuo & Rice, 2015; Zhang & Bloemer, 2008) between the elements Japanese chef and type of cuisine (Japanese cuisine) becomes evident. The **H_4**, in which the evaluation of the sushi made by the Brazilian chef (low congruence with the type of cuisine) would be better when the Michelin rating was shown, was also proven; however, it was still worse than the evaluation given to the sushi made by the Japanese chef when the Michelin rating was also shown. Lastly, **H_5** was also accepted, in which the evaluation of the sushi made by the Brazilian chef would be worse than the one given to the Japanese chef when the Michelin rating was not shown. Figure 10 summarizes the hypotheses of this study.

Figure 10 – Tested hypotheses

Hypotheses	**Status of the hypotheses**
H^1 - The consumer will give a more positive evaluation of the sushi when there is high ethnic congruence of the chef with the cuisine (versus low congruence).	**Supported**
H^2 - the evaluation of the sushi made by the Japanese chef (high congruence with Japanese cuisine) is independent from the informational clue.	**Supported**
H^3 - the evaluation of the sushi made by the Brazilian chef (low congruence with Japanese cuisine) will be better when the advertisement of the restaurant has an informational clue.	**Supported**
H^4 - the evaluation of the sushi made by the Brazilian chef (low congruence with Japanese cuisine) will be better with the informational clue, however, it will still be inferior than the evaluation given to the sushi made by the Japanese chef, when they also have an informational clue in the restaurant advertisement.	**Supported**
H^5 - the evaluation of the sushi made by the Brazilian chef (low congruence with Japanese cuisine) will be inferior to the one given to the Japanese chef, when there is no informational clue in the restaurant's advertisement.	**Supported**

5.0 General discussion

The literature on congruence has neglected studies in the field of gastronomy regarding the congruence between the chef de cuisine and the cuisine in which they act.

In order to better understand this phenomenon, the goal of this study was to analyze the effect of the ethnic congruence of the chefs de cuisine with the type of cuisine with which they work, including an informational clue in the advertisement of their restaurants. Congruence is a cognitive phenomenon in which the individual, when comparing elements, tries to identify patterns or similarities (Eckstein, 1997). Informational clues are signs the consumer can use to make their assessment (J. Olson & Jacoby, 1972).

After a research of studies about the subjects congruence (Grzeskowiak & Sirgy, 2008), chef de cuisine and type of cuisine (Pratten, 2003), informational clue (Berry et al., 2006a) and restaurant management (Chua, Jin, & Goh, 2014), we identified an absence of studies about the phenomenon of congruence on the evaluations of consumers of ethnic restaurants, considering the congruence between the chef and the type of cuisine.

The literature on congruence states that most of the time, when the individual perceives a correspondence between elements, their evaluation tends to be more positive (Dolich, 1969; Heath & Scott, 1998). This phenomenon can be observed in experiment 1, confirming its recurrent and timeless characteristic.

An informational clue was added to the second experiment to investigate its effects along with the ethnic congruence of the chef de cuisine in the evaluations by the consumers. In fact, the informational clue contributed tu reduce the need for congruence between the chef and the type of cuisine. In the area of services, Berry, Wall, & Carbone (2006a, 2006b) had already identified the influence of clues on consumer evaluations. With experiment 2, it was possible to identify that, in the presence of an informational clue and incongruence between two elements – in this case, the Brazilian chef and the Japanese cuisine – the consumer tends to lean on the informational clue to make their assessment. One of the alternatives for a theoretical explanation for this phenomenon is the heuristic processes that consumers use for making their decisions (Prabhaker & Sauer, 1994).

Experiments 1 e 2 evidenced that congruence is important in the absence of clues. However, when the chef does not belong to the culture from which the cuisine they work with derives, the use of clues is fundamental to facilitate the heuristic process of the consumer and the evaluation.

The first experiment proved the theory that consumers would give a more positive evaluation when they perceived a high ethnic congruence of the chef de cuisine (versus low congruence) with the type of cuisine.

Despite the fact that the theory of congruence has been tested in previous studies (Ahn et al., 2013; Choi & Rifon, 2012; Dolich, 1969; Grzeskowiak & Sirgy, 2008; Heath & Scott, 1998; Kamins & Gupta, 1994; Kwak & Kang, 2009; Pradhan et al., 2014), none of them had considered the congruence of chefs de cuisine with the type of cuisine they work with, and informational clue for cognitive support and aid to the evaluation.

Most studies used for developing this article investigated the congruence between celebrities and brands (Pradhan et al., 2014), choice of the group and congruence of brand choices (Witt & Bruce, 1972), and congruence between self-image and perceived quality (Kwak & Kang, 2009). Thus, the results of this research now join the theoretical corpus about congruence, and also further the comprehension about consumer cognition in the evaluation of ethnic restaurants when eating out.

5.1 Theoretical and practical information

This study contributes to the understanding of the phenomenon of congruence and informational clues about consumer behavior, and also presents a second theoretical model named Informational clue and Incongruity, which partly explains the cognitive process of the consumer when faced with elements that do not have a pattern or similarity between them.

The main contribution of this study for managers is to show that in situations where there is incongruence of the chefs with the cuisine in which they operate, restaurant managers should use informational clues in restaurant advertisements to positively influence consumer evaluations. Another point that should be highlighted is that when the image of the chef is

congruent with the cuisine they work with, this should be considered in advertisements. If the chef does not belong to the culinary culture with which they work, exhibiting awards or certifications can leverage sales and improve the image of the restaurant.

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