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Florence Jeannot, Maud Dampérat, Marielle Salvador, Mariem El Euch  
Maalej, Eline Jongmans

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**Toward a luxury restaurant renewal:****Antecedents and consequences of digitalized gastronomy experiences****Authors:****Florence Jeannot (corresponding author)**

INSEEC Grande Ecole, OMNES Education, CERAG, Lyon, France

Postal address: 25 rue de l'Université, 69007 Lyon, France

Email: [fjeannot@inseec.com](mailto:fjeannot@inseec.com)

Phone: +33-478298028

**Maud Dampérat**

Univ. Lyon 2, UR COACTIS, MSH, Lyon, France

Postal address: 14-16 avenue Berthelot, 69007 Lyon, France

Email: [maud.damperat@univ-lyon2.fr](mailto:maud.damperat@univ-lyon2.fr)

**Marielle Salvador**

Institut Paul Bocuse, Ecully, France

Postal address: 1 chemin de Calabert, 69130 Ecully, France

Email: [marielle.salvador@institutpaulbocuse.com](mailto:marielle.salvador@institutpaulbocuse.com)

**Mariem El Euch Maalej**

Paris School of Business, Paris, France

Postal address: 59 rue Nationale, 75013 Paris, France

Email: [m.eleuch@psbedu.paris](mailto:m.eleuch@psbedu.paris)

**Eline Jongmans**

Univ. Grenoble Alpes, Grenoble INP, CERAG, Grenoble, France

Postal address: 150 rue de la Chimie, 38040 Saint-Martin-d'Hères, France

E-mail: [eline.jongmans@univ-grenoble-alpes.fr](mailto:eline.jongmans@univ-grenoble-alpes.fr)

## **Toward a luxury restaurant renewal:**

### **Antecedents and consequences of digitalized gastronomy experiences**

#### **Abstract**

Like many other activities, luxury gastronomy has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. To maintain a certain level of turnover, luxury restaurants had to innovate by *digitalizing* their offer, that is, delivering a customer journey that encompasses digital and physical consumer experiences. Based on the two approaches to customer experience (dimension- and stage-oriented), the aim of this research is to propose and test a model of the digitalized gastronomy experience that includes its antecedents and consequences. A qualitative study (Study 1), involving 15 restaurant chefs and experts, defines the digitalized gastronomy experience and identifies the dimensions and customer journey stages associated with that experience. A quantitative study (Study 2) of 217 French consumers of luxury gastronomy validates the proposed conceptualization, its antecedents (website elements and psychological variables), and its consequences (purchase intentions). We also confirm the role of involvement in gastronomy as a contingent variable.

**Keywords:** Luxury restaurants, Gastronomy, Digitalized experience, Online customer experience

## 1. Introduction

On September 10, 2020, the French newspaper *Le Monde* ran the headline “Lyon, a world capital of gastronomy in a full change of regime,” presenting the challenging situation that French gastronomy, and specifically, its luxury side, currently faces. Like many activities all over the world, luxury gastronomy has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, to maintain a certain level of turnover during lockdowns, luxury restaurants had to innovate by developing takeout and/or home delivery services, which (until then) had mainly been the prerogative of fast-food restaurants (Herbert et al., 2018). Guy Savoy, Alain Ducasse, and Anne Sophie Pic are Michelin-starred chefs who have started to *digitalize*<sup>1</sup> their offering—that is, provide experiences that bring assets of the digital world into the physical world (e.g., offering advice to customers about how to warm dishes delivered at home via a QR code included on food containers). Designing digitalized experiences remains particularly challenging for luxury gastronomy—which is known to be cautious about the use of digital technologies (Holmqvist et al., 2020b), partly due to the weight of heritage (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009)—but may also provide luxury restaurants the opportunity to reinvent themselves and sustain their activities in an uncertain socioeconomic context. From academic and managerial perspectives, the digitalized gastronomy experience, as well as its antecedents and consequences, remain to be better understood.

The literature on luxury gastronomy focuses on the physical elements of the experience (Batat, 2020; Clauzel et al., 2019; Daries et al., 2018; Frochot & Batat, 2013; Hetzel, 2004), highlighting the notion of the haute cuisine spectacle and the importance of family history or the lineage that enriches this “extraordinary” experience (Hetzel, 2004; Dion & Arnould, 2016), and emphasizing the role of involvement in gastronomy in providing memorable luxury gastronomy experiences (Kiatkawsin & Han, 2019). Luxury gastronomy is

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<sup>1</sup> According to the IT Gartner Glossary, digitalization is “the use of digital technologies to change a business model and provide new revenue and value-producing opportunities” (<https://www.gartner.com/en/information-technology/glossary/digitalization>, accessed February 1, 2022).

part of the luxury services sector in which customers derive their pleasure, not from the ownership of high-quality luxury products, but rather from receiving hedonic customer experiences that vary on a continuum from “everyday luxury” to “elite luxury” (Wirtz et al., 2020, p. 681). The gastronomy experience has been disrupted by the rise of digital technologies (Les Echos, 2020). Interest in the digitalization of the luxury field is relatively recent in marketing, but it has provided useful insights, for example, into how luxury service providers can benefit from digital practices to enhance their brand image (Holmqvist et al., 2020b), transform consumption on visual social media (Leban et al., 2020), or provide engaging brand or customer service encounters (Chung et al., 2020). The question of how digitalization can bring value to the luxury gastronomy experience remains largely unexplored.

The concept of experience is increasingly recognized as significant in marketing (Becker & Jaakkola, 2019; Waqas et al., 2021), especially for luxury services (Wirtz et al., 2020) and luxury gastronomy (Batat, 2020; Batat et al., 2019). Customer experience is described as a mental state and has been pursued via two different approaches (Hoyer et al., 2020): one identifies the set of sensations, described as dimensions, that emerge from a consumer’s interactions with a company or brand; and the other delineates the experience touch points, described as stages, that occur throughout the customer journey. These two complementary approaches capture specific aspects of customer experience, but they refer to different streams of research—see Waqas et al. (2021) for a review of the dimension-oriented approach, and Hamilton et al. (2020) for a synthesis of the stage-oriented approach—which have mainly been studied separately in the literature. Hoyer et al. (2020) began to integrate those two approaches into a new conceptualization of the influence of digital technologies on the customer experience, and encouraged additional research in this area.

Based on the two approaches to customer experience (dimension- and stage-oriented), the aim of this research is to propose and test a model of the digitalized gastronomy

experience that includes its antecedents and consequences. Specifically, we investigate the role of two types of antecedents—firm-controlled variables (i.e., website’s visual and verbal elements) and psychological variables (i.e., mental imagery and digital self-efficacy)—and two consequences (i.e., the intentions to purchase a digitalized gastronomy experience and a physical gastronomy experience). We also examine the moderating role of involvement in gastronomy in the relationship between the intention to purchase a digitalized gastronomy experience and the intention to purchase a physical gastronomy experience. To address those aspects, we first conducted a qualitative study by interviewing 15 restaurant chefs and experts. Then, we designed and conducted a quantitative study with 217 French consumers of luxury gastronomy. Study 1 defines the digitalized gastronomy experience and identifies the dimensions and stages of the customer journey associated with that experience. Study 2 empirically tests a model of the digitalized gastronomy experience, including its antecedents and consequences, and the moderating effect.

Overall, this research makes three key contributions. First, it enriches the literature on luxury services—which requires further conceptualization due to the lack of consideration of their specific characteristics (Wirtz et al., 2020)—by defining digitalized gastronomy experiences. Specifically, we extend the well-established dimension-oriented approach of customer experience, as recommended by Hoyer et al. (2020), by considering the different stages of the customer journey for a digitalized luxury gastronomy offering. Second, we contribute to the literature on customer experience by developing a model that posits firm-controlled variables (i.e., website’s visual and verbal elements) and psychological variables (i.e., mental imagery and digital self-efficacy) as antecedents of the digitalized gastronomy experience. Waqas et al. (2021) identified a gap in the literature regarding the role of antecedents for the co-creation of new experiences (in this case, the digitalization of luxury gastronomy). Third, this research expands the body of research on customer involvement as a contingent variable. More specifically, involvement in gastronomy provides information on

the conditions under which the intention to purchase a digitalized gastronomy experience influences the intention to purchase a physical gastronomy experience.

## **2. Digitalized gastronomy experience in luxury restaurants**

### 2.1. Luxury gastronomy and luxury restaurants

Luxury gastronomy is a type of luxury service defined as an “extraordinary hedonic experienc[e] that [is] exclusive whereby exclusivity can be monetary, social, and hedonic in nature” (Wirtz et al., 2020, p. 682). Wirtz et al. (2020) give the example of a three-star Michelin dining experience as an illustration of luxury services. For the case of luxury services, experiences are central to the luxury value provision, as is co-creation between consumers and service providers (Conejo et al., 2020). In our study, the service provider is a luxury restaurant, defined as “a restaurant operation that promises excellent food prepared by a highly paid chef, menu options that may include expensive and/or imported items and exquisite drinks, high quality of service attributes [...], distinctive presentations, and a superior physical environment” (Hwang & Hyun, 2013, p. 254). Specifically, the term “luxury restaurants” includes *gourmet restaurants* (which are managed by chefs with the aim of providing exceptional experiences), *starred restaurants* (which each year receive a ranking according to criteria of excellence in the field of gastronomy), and *bistronomic restaurants* (which offer a reinterpretation of the great classics of gastronomy with less common products at lower costs).

Empirical studies conducted on luxury restaurants have primarily focused on characterizing the physical gastronomy experience and identifying its components. Generally, the dining experience at a luxury restaurant is described as a spectacle (Hetzl, 2004) or an object of art (Batat et al., 2019). These descriptions lead to a holistic consideration of the gastronomy experience, meaning that it is normally deemed a whole experience and not reduced to the degustation of a single plate, even if well presented. Customers of luxury restaurants look beyond taste and indulge in the entire dining experience (Yang & Mattila,



2016). It is well-established that service quality and other aspects of luxury restaurant operations affect a customer's willingness to pay a premium price (Han & Jeong, 2013). Another significant stream of research in the luxury gastronomy literature highlights the role of chefs as emblematic characters of luxury restaurants (Zopiatis, 2010). For example, Fournier and Eckhardt (2019) considered the chef of a luxury restaurant a (human) brand that can transmit to the restaurant a higher level of authenticity, uniqueness, and cultural significance than any non-human brand. Recently, researchers in the luxury gastronomy field have begun to analyze certain factors that may prompt consumers to dine at a luxury restaurant. For example, Chen and Peng (2018) showed that perceived values positively influence consumers' attitudes toward luxury restaurants, which in turn positively affect their intentions to dine there while participating in tourism activities. These studies considered luxury restaurants to be physical places where gastronomy experiences take shape. We propose a broader view of luxury restaurants that also integrates digital elements.

## 2.2. Customer experience in the digital era

The experiential approach to consumption originated with Holbrook and Hirschman (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Pine and Gilmore (1999) were the first to introduce the term customer experience, which they described as a unique and memorable offering that is distinct from products and services. Many theoretical frameworks and definitions of customer experience exist, which has led to some theoretical fragmentation and confusion (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Becker and Jaakkola (2020, p. 638) provided an integrated view that the customer experience includes "spontaneous and unintentional customer responses and reactions to supply-related stimuli throughout the customer journey," which can be both "ordinary" and "extraordinary," depending on the intensity of clients' responses to stimuli.

The customer experience has been conceptualized through two different perspectives (Hoyer, 2020). The first focuses on its dimensions as perceived by customers

(e.g., Bleier et al., 2019; Brakus et al., 2009; Schmitt, 1999). Dimensions are the manifestation of the set of sensations that form the customer experience, and they vary depending on the context in which the experience takes place (see Waqas et al., 2021 for a review). Bleier et al. (2019) distinguished between four dimensions of the customer experience: *informativeness*, which refers to the functional information acquired by consumers throughout the experience and involves a mental process for understanding that information; *entertainment*, which deals with the immediate pleasure that comes from enjoying the experience; *social presence*, which refers to the warmth and sociability felt during the experience; and *sensory appeal*, which relates to the appeal of the stimuli involved in the experience, reflected primarily through the assessment of the aesthetic quality of those stimuli. The second perspective focuses on the stages that make up the experience throughout the customer journey (e.g., Hamilton et al., 2020; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Voorhees et al., 2017). Analyzing the customer journey in any given industry involves identifying the key elements at each stage of the purchase process in that industry (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). This is essential because customer experience is context specific (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020; Klaus, 2013). As the customer journey in luxury gastronomy has recently been disrupted—partly due to the coronavirus pandemic and the rise of new digital technologies—the elements associated with each of its stages need to be further investigated.

### **3. Study 1: Toward a conceptualization of the digitalized gastronomy experience**

Study 1 aimed to understand how restaurant chefs and experts anticipated the digitalized gastronomy experience that luxury restaurants could design for customers. As the customer journey is orchestrated by the company (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020; Pine & Gilmore, 1999), interviewing restaurant chefs and experts was necessary to create and design a new digitalized gastronomy experience. First, referring to Bleier et al. (2019), we explored the dimensions of the digitalized gastronomy experience, as perceived by the restaurant chefs and experts. Second, we examined the specific elements associated with each stage of the

customer journey of the digitalized gastronomy offering. This study provides valuable insights into the definition of the digitalized gastronomy experience.

### 3.1. Methodology

A qualitative study was carried out using a semi-structured interview guide. The data were collected by three undergraduate students under the careful supervision of the third author. Fifteen interviews with restaurant chefs and experts (Table 1) were conducted face-to-face, by telephone, or by videoconference during May and June 2020 to discuss the phenomenon of the digitalization of gastronomy experiences. We sought experts' perceptions of this change in the profession, the constraints and opportunities the transformation entails, and how they integrated these changes in their new business model. For the data analysis, we focused both on exploring the dimensions of the digitalized gastronomy experience and on identifying the stages of the customer journey—passing through the purchase and consumption process, as recommended by Lemon & Verhoef (2016)—for digitalized gastronomy offerings. From this perspective, we used sentence element or paragraph as the coding unit according to the criterion homogeneity of meaning (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The progressive thematic analysis of the interviews resulted in a coding grid (with semantic saturation that synthesized the themes).

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

### 3.2. Results

The disruption imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic led to the digitalization of gastronomy experiences—somewhat reluctantly, as is common in the luxury sector (Holmqvist et al., 2020b)—and revealed the various challenges that professionals had to anticipate for both the consumer journey stages and the dimensions of the digitalized gastronomy experience.

### 3.2.1. Exploring the dimensions of the digitalized gastronomy experience

The chefs and experts shared their perceptions of the four dimensions of the digitalized gastronomy experience. Regarding *informativeness*, respondents anticipated that customers of digitalized gastronomy experiences would be deprived of the service encounter with frontline staff (Chandon et al., 2021) and information exchanges. For example, a customer in a restaurant could query the sommelier about the origin of the wine. Respondents stated that “*clients tend to want to understand the products and ingredients that go into a dish*” (J.-C. Cahagnet). Some respondents pointed out the gap in terms of experience between the sommelier’s explanations at restaurants and the information provided by a digital platform: “*I would lose the experience [...] it’s like when you drink a wine in a restaurant with a sommelier who advises you, who explains the wine to you, and, in comparison, you drink a wine at home where you pick up your phone to scan it via Vivino to read wine tips*” (J. Guèze).

The *entertainment* dimension was deemed very important by respondents, because the experience is memorable only if it is lived *in situ*; immersion is necessary to trigger emotions. Furthermore, the amount of time dedicated by a customer to this experience is the basic component of the entertainment that such an experience entails. When we are physically present at a restaurant, we want to spend more time there, as we share moments of conviviality: “*The meal that I’ll have at Bras is not just a starter, a main course, and a dessert; it’s an extraordinary three-hour experience that I’ll think about for six months before and think about four or five years after... that no delivery can bring to me*” (C.C. Marotel). The physical gastronomy experience (i.e., taken at restaurant) takes time, whereas a digitalized gastronomy experience (i.e., delivered at home) does not. In the former, the customer chooses how much time to dedicate to living the experience; sometimes, the visit is planned months before it actually occurs and this planning is an integral part of the physical gastronomy experience, conceptualized as a moment of spectacle. Conversely, the temporality

of the digitalized gastronomy experience might reduce it to the mere act of eating, which alters the whole experience (Woermann & Rokka, 2015).

In digitalized gastronomy experiences, *social presence* is expressed through indirect interactions with the restaurant via an ordering interface provided by a technological entity (i.e., the delivery platforms and/or the restaurant's website). As stated by J. Guèze: "*Eating fine food to go doesn't make much sense to me because it's really a whole that builds the experience. With platforms (UberEats, Deliveroo), we don't know our customers directly. And we like to know them; we also adapt to what they like.*" Moreover, digitalization anonymizes the customer, whereas the gastronomists' artisanal visions place social interactions at the heart of the service encounter. Again, the chef's lack of control over the social interactions inherent in the dining experience brings frustration. Professionals feel helpless: "*We like to know people; we adapt to what they like. And going through a platform goes against that because we are less in direct contact with the customers. This is not our approach, in any case*" (J. Guèze). Since then, specialized platforms have appeared (e.g., Tiptoque), and others have started offering drive-through services.

However, even if the online environment limits the *sensory appeal* and the sensations experienced, these aspects can be evoked through imagery (photos or videos): "*Today, when we go to a restaurant, we have already read the menu, we have already seen all the dishes on Instagram. It loses a bit of its magic: we've taken away all the surprise that a dish can offer visually*" (P. Favre d'Anne). Although this chef is describing a physical experience, the words could also apply to a digitalized experience, as evidenced by the number of chefs who have started communicating on social networks, allowing Internet users to enter their universe. It is imperative that when the customer chooses a dish, the photos on the website reflect the reality of the food: "*You cannot find the same service with small herbs, small flowers, or small finishes*" (J.-C. Cahagnet). Therefore, most chefs have adapted their offer to online sales by

favoring a more bistronomic cuisine, lowering expectations and limiting the risk of customer dissatisfaction.

Although restaurant chefs and experts focused more on the physical elements of the gastronomy experience to which they were accustomed, consistent with previous research (e.g., Bleier et al., 2019), they described sensations—that is, informativeness, entertainment, social presence, and sensory appeal—that consumers should feel while anticipating a digitalized gastronomy experience. The general impression that emerges from the interviews is the fear of an impoverishment of the overall gastronomy experience. Restaurant chefs and experts position the new digitalized gastronomy experience as inferior, in terms of quality and price, to the current physical gastronomy experience. As further discussed in the general discussion (see Section 6), this perspective reflects some findings in the literature on downward brand extension, which refers to the development of a new brand at a lower price point and quality than the existing brand (Keller & Aaker, 1992; Keller & Lehman, 2006). Appendix A provides sample quotes relating to the four dimensions of the digitalized gastronomy experience.

### 3.2.2. *Designing the stages of the consumer journey*

Both the data analysis and the literature on gastronomy in *physical* luxury restaurants—notably by Batat et al. (2019)—led us to identify the stepwise sequencing of the digitalized gastronomy experience. Chefs and experts expressed *online ordering* as the first stage, but they did not have a comprehensive view of the specific digital systems (e.g., websites, social networks, and applications) that they would rely on to support the at-home delivery of their gastronomy offering. In the digitalized experience, the location of ordering is no longer the restaurant—a multisensory venue designed to provide the best possible ordering experience—but, rather, a place chosen by the customer that chefs cannot see and over which they exert no control. Some respondents opined that luxury gastronomy cannot be delivered; it “*cannot be transposed into nomadization*” (C. Marotel), as such food is not street food that

can be eaten anywhere and at any time. These opinions contrast with recent news reports about two three-star chefs (Chef Piège and Chef Pic) who have started to digitalize their gastronomy offering, especially for end-of-year celebrations. Another aspect of digitalization discussed by the chefs and experts concerns the price of the gastronomy offering. The specific question of finding the right price from a psychological point of view arose in interviews. In particular, respondents highlighted that the prices on a delivery menu should not be the same as those on a restaurant menu: *“The prime rib consumed in restaurants costs €35, while it costs €22 or €25 for takeout. It needs to be explained to the customer why they are paying €15 more when they eat it in a restaurant”* (P. Favre d’Anne). Because of the digital transformation, payment is made when the food is ordered online, implying a reflection on pricing strategy and its legitimization. Overall, as online ordering is crucial to the success of the subsequent stages, it requires special attention from professionals.

The second stage of the customer journey, *click and collect*, in particular was discussed by the chefs and experts. The main concern of respondents was the quality of the service provision, first when dressing the dish for delivery and then when the customer receives it from the delivery person. The constraints imposed by delivery narrow the spectrum of gastronomy offerings and make the service suitable only for restaurants with up to one Michelin star. Beyond this level, it seems impossible to maintain the mandated level of quality in delivery. All the respondents spoke of the difficulty of delivering meals under these circumstances, as these meals have been envisioned for restaurant service. The delivery and implied constraints require the recipe to be adapted to ensure a satisfactory result. F. Prochasson stated that *“[w]e are using a bit of a regional cuisine, since it is more suitable for transportation. But you will prepare the same cuisine differently in a gastro. The cooking, the juices will be served immediately.”* Another key issue is the choice and environmental friendliness of packaging. How does one combine a high-end image with such concerns? How is it possible to fulfill all the wide-ranging commitments with respect to seasonality,

awareness of food waste, and so on? Some chefs offer porcelain crockery, which “*they can collect from the customer’s home and return to the restaurant premises*” (J. Guèze), while others are thinking about crockery deposit systems to avoid the use of plastic packaging and cardboard boxes. This thought process coincides with the high-end image that they want to convey, and using innovative packaging is a step in that direction. “*We are using packaging with a strong CSR [corporate social responsibility] connotation—recyclable, and, above all, very design-centric, with an origami inspiration. It can be transported easily, and it’s very clean. It is in line with the positioning and vision of the restaurant*” (F. Gagnaire). In addition, with home delivery, the delivery person does not know the norms of haute cuisine, the chef’s philosophy, or the restaurant’s brand image in general, especially if the chef appoints an external service provider. The delivery causes chefs to lose control over how they want dishes to be presented, both verbally and nonverbally. These skills are instilled in restaurant frontline staff but are not passed on to the service providers, who now play a major role: “*It’s a bit as if a waiter brings you a gourmet plate in a t-shirt and jeans; it kinda kills the dream*” (J. Guèze). If the click and collect stage is of undoubted importance to the quality of the gastronomic offer, the implementation method remains unclear.

The third stage of the customer journey is about the *unboxing* experience. The packaging conveys the image of the chef and the restaurant and, therefore, must be chosen with care, especially as that packaging will replace, to a certain extent, the art of the table. The care taken over the container should be the same for the digitalized and physical experiences. The packaging is part of the codes of luxury and must be preserved despite the use of click and collect. Cahagnet explained: “*The origami is nice and its coating can handle the sauce. For this weekend, I made a dish with an American sauce and you can put it in these cardboard boxes. You have to get it a little bit anyway, but people will be able to eat in the origami. The possibilities come with techniques and time.*” This statement is in line with the results of previous research (Moreau, 2020), according to which a clever door-to-door



branding strategy can help build brand equity advantageously even if the unboxing experience occurs after the consumer has made the purchase. Unboxing, therefore, becomes akin to special attention given to the customer rather than a thoughtful marketing strategy. Moreover, the author specified that customers are ready to share the joy of opening the box on social networks, echoing the sharing by some dine-in customers who photograph their dishes and share them on social media. Although the chefs and experts underlined the difficulty of preserving the codes of luxury with a meal delivered at home, they perceived the potential “wow effect” of the unboxing.

The fourth and fifth stages, *heating* and *tasting*, were referenced to a lesser extent than other stages of the experience. The luxury gastronomy experience provided in a restaurant entails following dressing and minute preparation techniques that are essential to guarantee a particular quality level and are an integral part of the experience offered. The heart of the gastronomy experience is, above all, the dish. C. Marotel explained: “*The plate arrives with precise timing. If you let a few seconds pass, the experience is no longer the same, from an organoleptic point of view. We can see that eating a pizza in a pizzeria, even 50 meters from home, and eating the pizza after it’s been carried 50 meters in a cardboard box is not the same experience.*” The chefs expressed their fears that the customer could receive the dish in a visual state very unlike that of a restaurant dressing: “*It will jump all over the place during delivery*” (J.-C. Cahagnet). Doubts were expressed about the taste of the dish itself, which could be distorted by the smells of other dishes. Likewise, respect for the cold chain and, more generally, the issue of food safety, for which the duration of transport is a variable to be considered, were mentioned as negative elements of the consumer journey.

To conclude, the emerging stages of the customer journey are: (1) online ordering; (2) click and collect; (3) unboxing; (4) heating experience; and (5) tasting experience. Chefs and experts highlighted that different stages of the digitalized gastronomy experience, all of which offer rich emotions and sensations, are disrupted by the digital transformation. In the physical

context, the experience begins with the discovery of the menu, which invites discussion and social interaction, is followed by the wait between dishes, the manner of tasting in the order chosen by the chef, who introduces the customer to their world, and ends with coffee, desserts, and payment of the bill. In contrast, with a digitalized gastronomy experience, the payment stage takes place before the dish is tasted, which suggests a greater risk of disappointment for the customer who orders online. Thus, chefs fear a loss of control over the customer's digitalized gastronomy experience. As a conclusion, although this study revealed the difficulties in adapting gastronomy offerings to the digital domain, it also highlighted the upheavals in the digitalized gastronomy experience. Appendix B presents some sample quotes relating to each stage of the customer journey.

### *3.2.3. Defining the digitalized gastronomy experience*

To provide an integrative conceptual framework, we incorporated insights from the chefs and experts into the dimension- and stage-oriented approaches of customer experience. This led us to define consumers' digitalized gastronomy experience as their expected set of sensations, described as dimensions, likely to emerge from physical and digital interactions with a luxury restaurant throughout each stage of the customer journey. The *dimension-oriented approach* is reflected, in this study, in a set of four types of sensations—described as the dimensions of informativeness, entertainment, social presence, and sensory appeal—that consumers should feel while experiencing a digitalized gastronomy offering. The *stage-oriented approach* is shaped by the following five successive stages of the customer journey: online ordering (e.g., navigation and payment on the restaurant website), click and collect (e.g., the use of delivery platform), unboxing (e.g., opening the packaging and sharing the spectacular experience on social media), heating experience (e.g., preparing and eating the meal following chefs' recommendations, delivered virtually), and tasting experience (e.g., savoring the experience at home and posting photos on Instagram while dining).

## 4. Developing a model of the digitalized gastronomy experience

### 4.1. Determinants of the digitalized gastronomy experience

Following Islam and Rahman (2016), Waqas et al. (2021) distinguished three types of factors that affect customer experience—firm-controlled, psychological, and context-based variables—that “can lead to positive or negative customer experiences” (p. 22). These factors are considered as “antecedents” of the customer experience (Waqas et al., 2021, p. 22). *Firm-controlled factors* refer to variables that can be modified by the firm (e.g., marketing mix and service personnel). *Psychological factors* represent the type of mental states that can positively or negatively influence customer experiences (e.g., arousal, challenge, or trust). *Context-based factors* refer to variables that result from external macro forces (e.g., political, economic, or technological) and are therefore not influenced by the firm or the customer. In this research, we focus on four variables from the first two categories that are particularly important from a marketing standpoint: website’s visual and verbal elements as firm-controlled variables, and mental imagery and digital efficacy as psychological variables.

Website elements include “verbal and/or visual stimuli that provide the building materials for any given page” (Bleier et al., 2019, p. 102). In general, studies in web marketing emphasize the importance of two categories of stimuli—verbal and visual—that determine the layout of e-commerce websites (Cai & Xu, 2011; Demangeot & Broderick, 2010). A website’s visual elements are the sensory and structural features, for example, photo size and product videos, through which consumers form a global attitude toward the appearance of commercial sites (Mishra et al., 2015). Some studies show that attractive visual elements positively influence users’ judgments about digital offerings (e.g., Coursaris & Van Osch, 2016; Jiang et al., 2016), especially in gastronomy (Atwal et al., 2019). We propose that the digitalized gastronomy experience is based on the evaluation of the visual elements of the website, as that is the first contact—or touch point, using Lemon and Verhoef’s (2016) meaning—that the consumer has with a digitalized gastronomy offer.

**H1:** *A website's visual elements positively influence the evaluation of the digitalized gastronomy experience.*

A website's verbal elements refer to words and all forms of text that are included within the web interface, for example, the linguistic style and product features (Bleier et al., 2019). Semantics is an essential part of luxury gastronomy (Batat et al., 2019), as the words used to describe gourmet dishes contribute to triggering mental constructions of the tasting experience. Referring to Bleier et al.'s (2019) model of online customer experiences, we suggest that the evaluation of the verbal information displayed on the interface enables customers to anticipate the digitalized gastronomy experience they will have with an at-home luxury restaurant.

**H2:** *A website's verbal elements positively influence the digitalized gastronomy experience.*

Mental imagery has been shown to play an important role in luxury services, especially in luxury hospitality (Mou et al., 2019). It has been investigated extensively within the field of psychology and marketing (Heller et al., 2019) and is defined as "the mental invention or recreation of an experience that in at least some respects resembles the experience of actually perceiving an object or an event, either in conjunction with, or, in the absence of, direct sensory stimulation" (Finke, 1989, p. 2). The concept of mental imagery refers to a process "by which sensory information is represented in working memory" (MacInnis & Price, 1987, p. 473). It helps explain functional and hedonic consumption experiences (Rodríguez-Ardura & Martínez-López, 2014). By supplementing information with mental images of the product or its environment, clients construct visual maps of potential consumption experiences (Hassabis et al., 2007). Mental imagery has many dimensions, such as vividness or clarity (Bone & Ellen, 1992), valence (MacInnis & Price, 1987), or ease of imagining (Anderson, 1983; Bone & Ellen, 1992). We focus on the ease of imagining, an important dimension of imagery processing (Anderson, 1983), defined as the extent to which an individual is readily able to imagine a scenario (Ellen & Bone, 1991). Ease

of imaging positively influences consumer attitudes toward advertisements (Bone & Ellen, 1992) and preference for luxury brands (Mandel et al., 2006). This positive influence can be explained by the fact that the ease with which consumers mentally imagine a scenario works as a heuristic in forming their judgments (Menon & Raghurir, 2003).

***H3:** Mental imagery positively influences the evaluation of the digitalized gastronomy experience.*

Digital self-efficacy is rooted in Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory and is understood within the broader context of self-efficacy, defined as an individual's belief in their ability to produce a particular outcome. It is also closely related to computer self-efficacy, which represents an individual's perception of their ability to use computers to perform a task (Compeau & Higging, 1995). Digital self-efficacy has emerged as a consequence of computer ubiquity and the digitalization of the customer journey, as well as the usage difficulties both can imply (Borg & Smith, 2018). We define digital self-efficacy as an individual's belief in their ability to use digital services successfully. The more consumers are confident in their digital skills, the less likely they are to feel anxious about using information technology (Bellini et al., 2016), and the more likely they are to be proficient in doing so (Agarwal et al., 2000; Rohatgi et al., 2016). Accordingly, digital self-efficacy has been shown to positively influence experiences with information systems (Davis et al., 1989) and websites (Joyce & Kirakowski, 2014). We expect such a positive influence to happen with digitalized gastronomy experiences.

***H4:** Digital self-efficacy positively influences the evaluation of the digitalized gastronomy experience.*

#### 4.2. Consequences of the digitalized gastronomy experience

One of the main interests in understanding customer experience is that it will translate into improving company or brand performance (e.g., loyalty behavior) and monitoring customer reactions (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Several conceptual articles on customer

experience consider the behavioral dimension to be an outcome rather than a component of the experience (e.g., Agarwal, 2019; Becker and Jaakkola, 2020; Waqas et al., 2021). For instance, Agarwal (2019) examined how experiences play a role in shaping consumers' online shopping behaviors and emphasized the need for empirical study of that relationship. Roggeveen et al. (2020) also proposed that customer experience—both in-store and out-of-store—influence shopping behavior. From an empirical standpoint, the positive influence of customer experience on purchase intention has also been demonstrated, especially in the online environment (Bilgihan et al., 2014; Bleier et al., 2019; Morgan-Thomas & Veloutsou, 2013; Rose et al., 2011; Van Noort et al., 2012). For luxury brands, shopping experience has been proposed as a determinant of customer satisfaction (Kauppinen-Räisänen et al., 2020), which should lead to purchase intention. These findings have led us to expect a positive influence of the evaluation of the digitalized gastronomy experience on two types of behavioral intentions: the intention to purchase a digitalized gastronomy experience and the intention to purchase a physical gastronomy experience.

***H5:** The evaluation of the digitalized gastronomy experience positively influences the intention to purchase a digitalized gastronomy experience.*

***H6:** The evaluation of the digitalized gastronomy experience positively influences the intention to purchase a physical gastronomy experience.*

#### 4.3. Moderation by consumers' involvement in gastronomy

According to Rothschild (1984, p. 216), involvement is defined as “an unobservable state of motivation, stimulation or interest.” Involvement also plays a critical role in understanding consumers' reactions to luxury services (Holmqvist et al., 2020a) and luxury restaurants (Kiatkawsin & Han, 2019). Its role is particularly important in shaping consumer decision-making (Chakravarti & Janiszewski, 2003; Laurent & Kapferer, 1985) because “the level of involvement determines the depth, complexity, and extensiveness of cognitive and behavioral processes during the consumer choice process” (Bian & Moutinho, 2011, p. 195).

In marketing literature, the moderating effects of involvement are well documented (e.g., Bei & Widdows, 1999; Geuens et al., 2011; Simões & Agante, 2014). In our study, the rationale for the moderating effect on consumers' involvement in gastronomy can be explained by two complementary findings relating to information processing and knowledge. More specifically, prior research suggests that when involvement is high, the consumer decision-making process is extended (with more effort made to process information and gain knowledge). When involvement is low, the consumer decision-making process is shortened because the consumer exerts less effort to process information (e.g., Bian & Moutinho, 2011). As Zaichkowsky (1985) indicates, "involvement may motivate one to gather information and in time become increasingly knowledgeable about the product" (p. 297). In line with that finding, Park and Moon (2003) showed a strong and positive correlation for hedonic products or services between consumer involvement and their perceived knowledge. In other words, the more consumers are involved in hedonic products, such as gastronomy, the more they perceive themselves to be knowledgeable about those products. In addition, people who are highly knowledgeable in a specific domain tend to rely more on their internal knowledge to make decisions than on external cues, and the opposite is true for people with low levels of knowledge, who rely more on external cues than their internal knowledge (Kim et al., 2009).

Consequently, we expect that people who are highly involved in gastronomy—that is, those who exert more effort to process information and perceive themselves to be highly knowledgeable—will form their intention to purchase a physical gastronomy experience based on their internal knowledge rather than on an external cue (in this case, the exposure to a digitalized gastronomy offering). In contrast, people who have low involvement in gastronomy—that is, those who exert less effort to process information and perceive themselves to have low levels of knowledge—will use the digitalized gastronomy offering as an external cue to form their intention to purchase a physical gastronomy experience.

*H7: Involvement in gastronomy moderates the influence of the intention to purchase a digitalized gastronomy experience and the intention to purchase a physical gastronomy experience, such that there is a positive influence for low levels of involvement in gastronomy but no influence for high levels of involvement in gastronomy.*

#### 4.4. Mediation by the digitalized gastronomy experience

As a mental state, customer experience occupies a pivotal position in models of both offline behavior (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020; Roggeveen, 2020; Waqas et al., 2021) and online behavior (Bleier et al., 2019; Martin et al., 2015; Novak et al., 2000; Rose et al., 2012). In their systematic review, Becker and Jaakkola (2020) conceptualized customer experience as a central construct between offering-related stimuli and evaluative outcomes. Roggeveen (2020) proposed a similar framework in a retailing context, positioning customer experience between customer journey factors and shopping behavior. However, only a few studies have empirically tested the mediating role of customer experience. Based on an extension of the stimulus-organism-response model (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974), Rose et al. (2012) and Martin et al. (2015) showed that two experiential dimensions (cognitive and affective) mediate the relationship between various antecedent variables and online repurchase intention. Bleier et al. (2019) showed the mediation of each of the four dimensions of customer experience considered in our research (informativeness, entertainment, social presence, and sensory appeal) between web page design elements and customer purchase. Those studies shared a common focus on the dimension-oriented approach of the customer experience and tested the mediated role of each dimension separately. To build upon and extend those studies, we propose to adopt an integrated approach to customer experience. Specifically, we suggest that the evaluation of the digitalized gastronomy experience mediates the relationship between its antecedents (website elements and psychological variables) and the intentions to purchase a digitalized experience and a physical experience.



**H8:** *The evaluation of the digitalized gastronomy experience has a mediating role between its antecedents (i.e., website elements and psychological variables) and its consequences (i.e., the intention to purchase a digitalized gastronomy experience and the intention to purchase a physical gastronomy experience).*

## **5. Study 2: Testing the digitalized gastronomy experience model**

Based on the literature and our qualitative study, we developed an integrative framework of customer experience that combines both the experience dimensions as perceived by customers and the experience stages that make up the overall experience throughout the customer journey. The aim of the second quantitative study was the empirical testing of the proposed digitalized gastronomy experience model and its related hypotheses (Figure 1).

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

### 5.1. Sample, protocol, and stimulus

#### 5.1.1. Sample

Data were collected in December 2020. Respondents were consumers who had experienced a luxury restaurant at least once during the previous two years<sup>2</sup> and answered an online questionnaire using a Qualtrics panel. A total of 217 French consumers from the city of Lyon or its suburbs were interviewed, and the sample comprised 43.3% male and 56.7% female respondents aged 20 to 82 years (mean = 52.2; SD = 14.0). Of the respondents, 60.8% were married, 22.1% were single, 9.2% were separated or divorced, 2.8% were widowers, and 5.1% were in “other” domestic situations. A filter question excluded any respondents who had not been to a luxury restaurant in the previous two years. Responses showed that 45.2% of the

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<sup>2</sup> We also asked, “In general, over 1 year, how often do you go to a gastronomic restaurant?” 10.1% answered “never,” 33.6% answered “once per year,” 43.3% answered “twice per year,” 12.4% answered “once per month,” and 0.5% answered “once a week.” Note that 79.3% answered “twice a year or more” to the same question regarding bistronomic restaurants.

respondents had a household income (after taxes) greater than €3,800 per month.<sup>3</sup> Our sample included low to high income categories, which is consistent with the democratization of luxury gastronomy due in part to digitalization, as indicated in an article entitled “These gourmet chefs embark on the delivery of dishes at low prices,” published in *Le Parisien* in April 2021.<sup>4</sup> For example, the take away offer *Ducasse Chez Moi* by Michelin-starred chef Alain Ducasse includes main dishes like “Chestnut confit, puréed potatoes, red wine jus” at €19 per person.<sup>5</sup> This democratization of luxury gastronomy is reflected in the idea that “the privileged feeling of buying luxury is no longer reserved for the privileged” (Kapferer & Laurent, 2016, p. 338). Moreover, luxury is a subjective concept (Kapferer & Laurent, 2016) and luxury services are not exclusively based on the monetary dimension, but also include the social and hedonic dimensions (Wirtz et al., 2020).

### 5.1.2. Protocol

Empirically, customer experience has been studied in three ways in the marketing literature. The dominant approach is the retrospective investigation of customer experiences (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020) several weeks or months after interactions with brands or companies (e.g., Martin et al., 2015). In that approach, the experience can be qualified as memory-based. Another approach is to study the experience during the exposure to a brand or company stimulus (e.g., Herhausen et al., 2020). In such cases, the experience is real-time-based. Finally, the customer experience can be studied prospectively by exposing consumers to stimuli (in this case, still images of a fictitious website) that help them to imagine their future experience<sup>6</sup> with products or services (e.g., Bufquin et al., 2020). Such experience is

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<sup>3</sup> Regarding respondents' income: 1.8% earn less than €760, 8.3% from €760 to €1,520, 13.4% from €1,520 to €2,300, 17.5% from €2,300 to €3,050, 13.8% from €3,050 to €3,800, 16.6% from €3,800 to €4,500, 8.8% from €4,500 to €5,340, and 19.8% more than €5,340.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.leparisien.fr/val-de-marne-94/joinville-le-pont-ces-chefs-gastronomiques-se-lancent-dans-la-livraison-de-plats-a-petits-prix-30-04-2021-2L5N7XNKG5GWXKNIN676BNXQ4Q.php> (accessed on February 1, 2022)

<sup>5</sup> <https://tinyurl.com/mwvm4j85> (accessed on February 1, 2022)

<sup>6</sup> Respondents were exposed to a stimulus about a *specific* digitalized gastronomy offer, but were asked about their intentions to purchase *any* digitalized gastronomy offers in the future.

anticipation-based. As the phenomenon of digitalization in luxury gastronomy is still new, we used the third approach in our research protocol.

The online survey was organized as follows. The participants were first instructed to imagine a scenario in which they would try a new gastronomy offering. Because the phenomenon of digitalization of gastronomy experiences was new at the time of the data collection and to avoid any bias linked to brand awareness, we used a fictitious luxury restaurant name, L’Absolu de Lyon (named after the French city that is famous for its gastronomy), in the following imaginative instruction:

*Let’s imagine. You are planning to organize a meal for four people at your place on a Saturday evening. By searching on the Internet, you come across the new gastronomy offer proposed by the restaurant L’Absolu de Lyon. This new service consists of reserving a gourmet meal online, then picking it up at the restaurant (click & collect) or having it delivered directly to your home (in Lyon and surrounding towns).*

Next, the participants were invited to consult eight web pages (see Section 5.1.3. for more details) representing the new gastronomy offer by L’Absolu de Lyon. The participants were instructed that these web pages were intended to help them anticipate the proposed experience:

*The details of this restaurant’s offer are presented below in the images of L’Absolu de Lyon website. This is to help you to anticipate the at-home gastronomy proposed by the restaurant. Take the time you need to observe the eight images that will be presented to you.*

Finally, after consulting the web pages, the participants answered questions to evaluate their purchase intentions (i.e., digitalized and physical), their digitalized gastronomy experience (i.e., customer journeys and experience dimensions), website elements (i.e., visual and verbal), psychological variables (i.e., mental imagery and digital self-efficacy), and

involvement in gastronomy, as well as three covariates (i.e., online ordering habits, income, and social desirability). To ensure that the participants actually read the web pages, we included an instructional check (Oppenheimer et al., 2009) in which we asked them to recall the name of the restaurant.

### *5.1.3. Stimulus*

We created a prototype website for the fictitious luxury restaurant, L’Absolu de Lyon. The prototype displayed the fictitious luxury restaurant’s website structured as a set of eight still images of web pages (see Appendix C). These images were developed for scientific research purposes. To ensure realism, we included photos of real gastronomy dishes provided by chefs from the renowned French Institut Paul Bocuse. Two experts (a researcher and a chef) of the Institut Paul Bocuse assessed and edited the stimuli. The respondents’ perceived realism in the webpages was measured as higher than the mid-point scale of 4, where the scale ranged from 1, “not realistic,” to 7, “very realistic”:  $t(213) = 21.182, p < 0.001, M = 5.57; SD = 1.08$ .

The eight still images of web pages were aimed to help respondents anticipate their digitalized gastronomy experience. (1) A welcome page informed the respondents about the new gastronomy offer by L’Absolu de Lyon. This page included a picture representing a live video from the restaurant’s kitchens. (2) A second page provided information about the menu, prices, and the customer journey stages of the digitalized gastronomy offer, from ordering to tasting, proposed by L’Absolu de Lyon. (3) A third page presented the two first course options. (4) A fourth page presented two options for the main fish dish. (5) A fifth page displayed two options for the main meat dish. (6) A sixth presentation page showed the dessert options. (7) A seventh page provided information on ordering and delivery, as well as a picture representing a video with heating tips. (8) An eighth page invited customers to contact the restaurant and share the experience on social networks.

## 5.2. Measurement scales

Regarding the determinants of the digitalized gastronomy experience, *visual website elements (VISU)* were measured using a 7-point three-item Likert scale adapted from Ben-Bassat et al. (2006). *Verbal website elements (VERB)* were measured using a 7-point two-item Likert scale adapted from Bleier et al. (2019). *Mental imagery (IMAG)* was measured using an adapted version of Abaidi et al.'s (2020) 7-point three-item scale. *Digital self-efficacy (DEFF)* was measured using a 100-point one-item scale adapted from He and Lee (2009).

The evaluation of the digitalized gastronomy experience was conceptualized using a MIMIC model that included reflective and formative measures. For the reflective measurement, the evaluation of the digitalized gastronomy experience was measured using a second-order reflective construct with four dimensions: (1) *informativeness (INFO)*, (2) *entertainment (ENT)*, (3) *social presence (SOC)*, and (4) *sensory appeal (SENS)*. These dimensions were measured with three-, two-, two-, and three-item 7-point Likert scales, respectively, adapted from Bleier et al. (2019). For the formative measurement, the evaluation of the digitalized gastronomy experience was measured using a 7-point five-item Likert scale that represented the five key steps of the customer journey: *online ordering (CJ1)*, *click and collect (CJ2)*, *unboxing (CJ3)*, *heating (CJ4)*, and *tasting (CJ5)* experiences.

Regarding the consequences of the digitalized gastronomy experience, *intention to purchase a digitalized gastronomy experience (DIGI)* and *intention to purchase a physical gastronomy experience (PHYS)* were measured using a 7-point three-item scale adapted from Ajzen (1991).

Concerning the moderator and control variables, *involvement in gastronomy (INV)* was measured using a 7-point three-item semantic differential scale from Zaichkowsky (1985). *Ordering online habits (OOH)* were measured on a 7-point one-item scale adapted from Bristol and Mangleburg (2005). *Social desirability (SOD)* was an index based on a 7-point five-item scale from Abaidi et al. (2020). *Income (INC)* was measured using a nominal

8-point scale regarding monthly income in euros. The wording of all items is presented in Appendix D.

### 5.3. Measurement evaluation

To test the measurement model, we performed confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). We evaluated the model's goodness-of-fit by following Hu and Bentler's (1998) recommendations against the GFI and the AGFI and in favor of the SRMR, supplemented by one of the following indices: RMSEA, CFI, and TLI. CFA was performed to test the measurement model (see Appendix D) and confirm the suitability of each scale. The descriptive statistics and correlation matrix for each latent variable are provided in Appendix E. The results were satisfactory according to the usual standards ( $\chi^2 / 279 = 1.620$ ; RMSEA = 0.054; TLI = 0.968; CFI = 0.975; SRMR = 0.028). The measurement model was confirmed to be robust, as the Bollen-Stine bootstrap test showed that the model was correct ( $p = 0.114$ ).

Reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity (Table 2) were evaluated using CFA as recommended by Steenkamp and van Trijp (1991). Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to assess reliability, which was found to be satisfactory because the coefficient values of each construct exceeded Nunnally's (1978) recommendation of 0.70. To evaluate convergent validity, the average extracted variance (AVE) was computed (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Each construct provided satisfactory results ( $AVE > 0.50$ ). Discriminant validity was examined using Fornell and Larcker's (1981) procedure, according to which the squared correlation between pairs of constructs must be inferior to the AVE value of each construct. Discriminant validity was established for all pairs of constructs. Consequently, we used these constructs to test the hypotheses.

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

To evaluate common method bias, we conducted two tests: first, Harman's single-factor test was performed using exploratory factor analysis (EFA); and second, the latent common methods factor was performed using CFA (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The set of

variables for measuring multi-item scales was included in the analyses. The EFA results for the 10 constructs showed that there were 10 different factors with factorial weights between 0.95 and 0.66 within a factor. In addition, the total variance explained was 91.8% for 10 factors versus 46.4% for one factor. This lack of effect was confirmed by the CFA results, highlighting an AVE for the common factor method equal to 3.65%, which was low compared to the average of the variance due to the method bias effect in social sciences (Cote & Buckley, 1987).

#### 5.4. Results

The hypotheses were tested using structural equation modeling with SPSS-AMOS 27 software and the maximum likelihood method. We examined the proposed model, which included all the hypothesized structural paths (see Figure 1). The results for the proposed model are shown in Table 3. The goodness-of-fit measures satisfied Hu and Bentler's (1998) requirements ( $\chi^2 / 524 = 1.72$ ; RMSEA = .058; TLI = .940; CFI = .952; SRMR = .050). The proposed model was confirmed, as were most of the hypotheses. *Visual website elements* had a statistically significant and positive influence on *digitalized gastronomy experience* (H1:  $\beta = 0.31$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ); and *verbal website elements* had a statistically significant and positive influence on *digitalized gastronomy experience* (H2:  $\beta = 0.24$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). Thus, H1 and H2 were supported. *Mental imagery* had a statistically significant and positive influence on *digitalized gastronomy experience* (H3:  $\beta = 0.29$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). Contrary to our predictions, however, *digital self-efficacy* did not have a statistically significant effect on *digitalized gastronomy experience* (H4:  $\beta = -0.01$ ;  $p = 0.772$ ). Thus, H3 was supported, but H4 was not. As expected, *digitalized gastronomy experience* was influenced statistically significantly and positively by *heating experience* ( $\beta = 0.16$ ;  $p = 0.004$ ) and *tasting experience* ( $\beta = 0.18$ ;  $p = 0.001$ ). Contrary to our expectations, *digitalized gastronomy experience* was influenced statistically significantly but negatively by *online ordering* ( $\beta = -0.11$ ;  $p = 0.047$ ) and did not have a statistically significant influence on *click and collect* ( $\beta = 0.05$ ;  $p = 0.447$ ) or *unboxing*

( $\beta = 0.07$ ;  $p = 0.235$ ). *Digitalized gastronomy experience* had a statistically significant and positive influence on *intention to purchase a digitalized gastronomy experience* (H5:  $\gamma = 0.71$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ) but not on *intention to purchase a physical gastronomy experience* (H6:  $\gamma = 0.08$ ;  $p = 0.435$ ). Thus, H5 was supported, but H6 was not supported.

We also tested the moderating effect of *involvement in gastronomy* on the relationship between *intention to purchase a digitalized gastronomy experience* and *intention to purchase a physical gastronomy experience* (H7). We found a statistically significant negative effect of the interaction term (*intention to purchase a digitalized gastronomy experience*  $\times$  *involvement in gastronomy*; H7:  $\beta = -0.14$ ;  $p = 0.038$ ). Thus, H7 was supported.

#### INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

To test H7, we used the floodlight approach (Spiller et al., 2013) and the Process macro for SPSS (model 1). We first created an index (i.e., calculated the average of the items) for *involvement in gastronomy* (INV), *intention to purchase a digitalized gastronomy experience* (DIGI), and *intention to purchase a physical gastronomy experience* (PHYS). Figure 2 depicts the regression model that was obtained ( $PHYS = 3.6143 + .0511 \times DIGI + .3056 \times INV + (-.0946) \times DIGI \times INV$ ). Note all the other variables from the model are included as covariates in model 1, and all the independent variables were previously mean-centered. To interpret the interaction term, we used the floodlight technique based on the Johnson and Newman approach, which gives the conditional effect of digitalized intention for each value of *involvement in gastronomy* (Figure 2) and whose main advantage is that it can identify the values of the moderator for which the relationship is statistically significant and the values for which it is not (Spiller et al., 2013). In this particular case, the significance of the slope of *intention to purchase a digitalized gastronomy experience* against *intention to purchase a physical gastronomy experience* was examined at several points (from 1 to 7) of *involvement in gastronomy*. For values of involvement higher than 3.646, the simple slope of *intention to purchase a digitalized gastronomy experience* was not statistically significant. In



contrast, it was statistically significant for values ranging from 1.000 to 3.646 for *involvement in gastronomy*. These results allow us to detail the moderating role of *involvement in gastronomy*, as the positive effect of *intention to purchase a digitalized gastronomy experience* on *intention to purchase a physical gastronomy experience* occurred only for individuals with low involvement, but not for those with high involvement ( $M_{\text{Involvement}} = 5.41$ ;  $SD = 1.20$ ).

INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

Regarding the mediation test via the digitalized gastronomy experience, we followed the recommendations of Zhao et al. (2010) and Preacher and Hayes (2004). Therefore, we favored the bootstrap test of indirect effects using structural equation modeling. To validate the indirect effects, the estimated parameters must be significant within a 95% confidence interval, which excludes the value zero. The results indicated that four indirect effects—via digitalized gastronomy experience as a mediator—were validated (see Table 4). (1) The indirect effect of the *visual website elements* on *intention to purchase a digitalized gastronomy experience* was statistically significant and positive ( $b = 0.21 \in [0.12; 0.32]$ ;  $p = 0.004$ ). (2) The indirect effect of the *verbal website elements* on *intention to purchase a digitalized gastronomy experience* was statistically significant and positive ( $b = 0.17 \in [0.09; 0.27]$ ;  $p = 0.005$ ). (3) The indirect effect of *verbal website elements* on *intention to purchase a physical gastronomy experience* was statistically significant and positive ( $b = 0.03 \in [0.01; 0.11]$ ;  $p = 0.035$ ). (4) The indirect effect of *mental imagery* on *intention to purchase a digitalized gastronomy experience* was statistically significant and positive ( $b = 0.22 \in [0.08; 0.32]$ ;  $p = 0.032$ ). Thus, H8 was partially supported.

INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

### 5.5 Competitive model testing

In agreement with the person–situation interaction approach (Buss, 1977; Rauthmann, 2017), we specified and tested a competitive model that considered the psychological

variables (i.e., mental imagery and digital self-efficacy) as moderators in the relationship between the firm-controlled variables (i.e., website's visual and verbal elements) and the digitalized gastronomy experience. Table 3 presents the results of the competitive model. Results show that the psychological variables have no significant moderating effects on either the relationship between website's visual elements and digitalized gastronomy experience, or on the relationship between website's verbal elements and digitalized gastronomy experience. To compare the *person–situation interaction* approach (Buss, 1977) with the *person as determinant* approach of the customer experience (Waqas et al., 2021, see Section 4.1.), we compute the  $\text{Khi}^2$  difference between the proposed model and the competitive model. The results (see Table 5) show that the proposed model is significantly better ( $\text{Khi}^2/\text{df}$  difference = 170/88;  $p$ -value = 0.000) than the competitive model. The proposed model based on the person as determinant approach appears to better fit the data, showing that both mental imagery and digital self-efficacy act as determinants, rather than moderators, of the digitalized gastronomy experience.

INSERT TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE

## 6. Discussion

### 6.1. Theoretical contributions

This research shows the relevance of the integrative conceptualization of the digitalized gastronomy experience. That relevance goes beyond the predominant dimension-oriented approach (Waqas et al., 2021) by combining it with the stage-oriented approach (Hamilton et al., 2020; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016), as recommended by Hoyer et al. (2020). The empirical results verify the proposed conceptualization of the digitalized gastronomy experience, its determinants (i.e., website elements and psychological variables), and its consequences (i.e., intention to purchase a digitalized gastronomy experience and intention to purchase a physical gastronomy experience), as most of the hypotheses were supported. The

research showed the challenges and complexity of digitalization for “extraordinary” physical experiences (Arnould & Price, 1993, p. 28), such as those in luxury gastronomy.

One of the theoretical interests of this research was to enrich the literature on luxury services by providing a definition of digitalized gastronomy experience. This conceptualization simultaneously includes the dimensions of a consumer’s digitalized gastronomy experience—via the measurement of four reflective dimensions (i.e., informativeness, entertainment, social presence, and sensory appeal)—and the successive steps of the consumer journey—via the measurement of five formative items (i.e., online ordering, click and collect, unboxing, heating, and tasting experiences). This addresses the lack of consideration of the specific characteristics of luxury services (Wirtz et al., 2020) and extends the seminal dimension-oriented approach of customer experience (Waqas et al., 2021) by including the customer journey stages for a digitalized gastronomy offering. It also enriches the literature on digitalization of offerings in the luxury field (Holmqvist et al., 2020b) insofar as this paper provides a unified vision of the digitalized experience, including physical and digital elements.

The results show that the digitalized gastronomy experience is positively influenced by heating and tasting experiences, but it is negatively influenced by online ordering. This means that online ordering is anticipated to be an unpleasant activity that damages the experience, while heating and tasting foster the digitalized gastronomy experience. We might expect that online ordering positively contributes to the experience with ordinary products or services by making the experience simpler and easier. However, when it comes to luxury gastronomy offerings, online ordering negatively contributes to gastronomy experience. That result reflects concerns—expressed by restaurant chefs and experts in Study 1—regarding the impoverishment of gastronomy experiences due to online ordering, and it indicates that online ordering requires greater attention to attempt to modify consumers’ negative anticipations. A

similar phenomenon, called the “democratization of luxury” (Cristini et al., 2017, p.101), has already been observed in the fashion industry. Magnoni and Roux (2012) indicated that such downward brand extension strategies can be risky due to the risk of diluting the parent brand and cannibalizing the traditional offer. Neither the click and collect nor the unboxing experiences influenced the digitalized gastronomy experience. Consumers’ experiential expectations related to these two steps were probably low, as they were not sourcing the digitalized gastronomy experience. Although gastronomy experts go to great lengths to make unboxing extraordinary, consumers do not pay particular attention to this aspect when they anticipate digitalized gastronomy experiences.

Regarding the determinants of the digitalized gastronomy experience, the results confirmed the positive influence of the website’s visual and verbal elements on the digitalized gastronomy experience, as it occurs in fully digital environments (Bleier et al., 2019). The website’s visual elements appeared to have a stronger effect than the website’s verbal elements on the digitalized gastronomy experience. Despite the low interest expressed by some gastronomy experts, it is necessary to pay particular attention to the images and textual content offered on a website. The results also indicate that the digitalized gastronomy experience is influenced by consumers’ mental imagery, which is consistent with previous research that showed the importance of mental imagery in food consumption (Septianto et al., 2019). Surprisingly, digital self-efficacy had no statistically significant influence on the digitalized gastronomy experience. We attribute this result to the ease of the task, as using digital services successfully is now well mastered by most consumers.

Regarding the consequences, the digitalized gastronomy experience has a direct and positive effect on the intention to purchase a digitalized gastronomy experience, but only an indirect and positive effect on the intention to purchase a physical gastronomy experience. This is an important finding for restaurants, as it shows that the website will lead consumers to buy not only a digitalized gastronomy experience, but also a physical gastronomy

experience. Involvement in gastronomy moderates the impact of the intention to purchase a digitalized gastronomy experience on the intention to purchase a physical gastronomy experience; that is, the less involved in gastronomy customers are, the more their intention to purchase a digitalized experience will influence their intention to purchase a physical experience. This result is important, because it offers new potential target customers through digitalized offers, as those who are less involved in gastronomy will be more inclined to physically go to a restaurant if they first intended to try the digitalized offer. However, that positive impact did not appear for customers with high involvement; probably because they process the information more extensively (and have good knowledge about gastronomy) and thus perceive that a luxury restaurant's physical offering (i.e., taken at restaurant) and digitalized offering (i.e., delivered at home) to be two different (or separate) experiences. Another interesting takeaway is that the key target customers (those who are more involved) have, per se, the highest intentions to purchase digitalized and physical experiences. Altogether, these results indicate the potential of the digitalized gastronomy offer.

## 6.2. Managerial contributions

The managerial interest of this study is significant for professionals and echoes the recent news of Michelin-starred chefs who offered starred dishes during the Christmas and New Year holidays via home delivery.<sup>7</sup> The results indicate that the intention to purchase digitalized gastronomy experiences can lead to the intention to purchase physical gastronomy experiences, but only for consumers who have low involvement in gastronomy. This is an important contribution for professionals who have been forced to remain closed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The results indicate that the digitalization of gastronomy experiences allows access to a clientele who, until now, did not go to luxury restaurants. Thus, what is still perceived by some professionals as a constraint is an opportunity to

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<sup>7</sup> As an example, a report entitled "Trend: your New Year's Eve meal delivered to your home" was broadcast in France on television news on December 31, 2021. Available at: <https://www.lci.fr/conso/video-tendance-votre-repas-du-reveillon-livre-a-domicile-2205918.html> (accessed on January 20, 2022)

broaden their customer base. One explanation for this result may be that those customers who are less used to luxury restaurants are less intimidated in front of a screen than in the splendor of the restaurant. This first digitalized experience thus attenuates this obstacle. The step taken via digital technology allows unaccustomed customers to familiarize themselves with certain codes of gastronomy and encourages them later on to make a positive decision to have an experience in a restaurant. Another explanation may be the price paid. A Michelin-starred meal ordered online remains less expensive than in a restaurant. Therefore, the perception of financial risk is lower for this new customer.

This research proposes a renewal of the gastronomy experience in tune with the times. Although in recent years chefs have understood the value of communicating on social networks to attract customers and create links to build customer loyalty, the delivery service appears, on the professional side, as an additional way to diversify the client base. On the customer side, this service, ultimately, seems to respond to a demand that was latent. Delivery meets the post-modern individual's desire for immediacy and simplicity. Although the gastronomy experience in a restaurant must remain an exceptional moment, the experience that occurs via a delivery service remains imperfect from the experts' point of view. In particular, restaurant chefs must acknowledge that browsing an online ordering site should be an enjoyable experience for the customer and not focus all their efforts on the unboxing experience, to which the customer does not always seem very sensitive. Gastronomy professionals must realize that it is not only about offering a delivery service, but also about redesigning a fully integrated digitalized gastronomy experience for the delight of customers. It would also be advisable to accompany the development of this digitalized offer with experiences that are better adapted to luxury gastronomy and its constraints (Forbes, 2020). Marketing specialists' expertise in "designing digitalized experiences" might be useful. As an

example, the Uquonic chefs<sup>8</sup> platform provides digital tools (e.g., tips on dressing and heating the dish via a QR code and a video) to assist Michelin-starred chefs in commercializing their digitalized gastronomy experiences abroad.

This research also showed the importance of the visual and verbal elements of a website. These elements directly improve the digitalized gastronomy experience, and indirectly increase intention to purchase both digitalized and physical gastronomy experiences. Therefore, it is ultimately a matter of gastronomy professionals highlighting their dishes as works of art and promoting their culinary specificities via verbal elements, as some are doing on social networks, to provide the customer with a rich digitalized gastronomy experience.

To help people anticipate their digitalized gastronomy experience, especially those with low levels of mental imagery, we suggest including videos at each step of the consumer journey. These videos definitively support customer anticipation. We encourage luxury restaurants to choose the appropriate visual content (images and videos) and not leave that element to web designers, as they might not be aware of the extraordinary experience expected by consumers. This content must also be used to bring customers into the restaurant. Highlighting the dining room—as well as the restaurant's external environment or the richness of the exchanges with the staff in the dining room—must be considered so that the customer can appreciate the experience that is offered when visiting a luxury restaurant and understand how it justifies the high price of the menu.

### 6.3. Limitations and future research

This study has several limitations that might be used as avenues for future research. First, respondents had to visualize the website of a fictitious luxury restaurant, using realistic screenshots and real photographs of dishes. Using hypothetical stimuli (rather than real ones) allows the control of confounding effects related to previous experiences (Sen &

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<sup>8</sup> [www.uqonicchefs.com](http://www.uqonicchefs.com)

Bhattacharya, 2001). Future research should test the proposed model using real websites. Using a real website would enable us to consider other luxury variables, such as the chef's personality and fame, which are very important to relationships with customers and their loyalty to a restaurant (Zopiatis, 2010). We could also investigate the role of additional personal variables, such as need for uniqueness, which reflects the prestige and exclusivity of the luxury offer and is a signal of social status (Stathopoulou & Balabanis, 2019).

Based on construal level theory (Trope & Liberman, 2003), the use of a real website would also deepen the understanding of the influence of online ordering on the digitalized gastronomy experience. In particular, it would be useful to compare the role of website quality indicators (e.g., usability, aesthetics, fun, and social status) before and after using a luxury restaurant's website. The use of digital technologies (e.g., a website) generally positions consumers within a short-term perspective and prompts them to adopt a more concrete mindset (Thompson et al., 2005). Thus, we might expect the impact of concrete (vs abstract) web design elements—such as usability—on consumer evaluations and intentions to be higher after use (vs before use). The use of an actual website should also reinforce the moderating role of involvement in gastronomy, as the experience would be more vivid.

Second, as digitalized luxury gastronomy is emerging, and its development is mainly related to the real-life pandemic context, we focused, in this research, on the digitalized gastronomy experience. However, it would be interesting for future research to test the robustness of these results with actual digitalized experiences using a field study, data from a panel involving actual online ordering, or even adopt a longitudinal design to detect causal effects of the actual digitalized experience evaluation on purchasing behaviors (instead of self-reported measurement of behavioral intentions). The research could evaluate more precisely the risk of offering cannibalization and measure the related financial loss in revenue terms.



Third, it would be relevant to investigate the extent to which the findings of this study can be generalized to digitalized experiences in other luxury sectors. As an example, *prêt à porter des couturiers* seems to have neither diluted haute couture house brands nor affected the perception of their luxury products. Our results also highlight customers' anticipation of a positive heating and tasting experience for a digitalized gastronomy offering. Thus, the market seems ready for new digitalized gastronomy experiences, but restaurants need to manage consumer expectations so as not to disappoint the early experiencers. Despite the risk of cannibalization prevalent in luxury goods and services, such forms of digitalized experiences represent a growth potential that merits careful examination.

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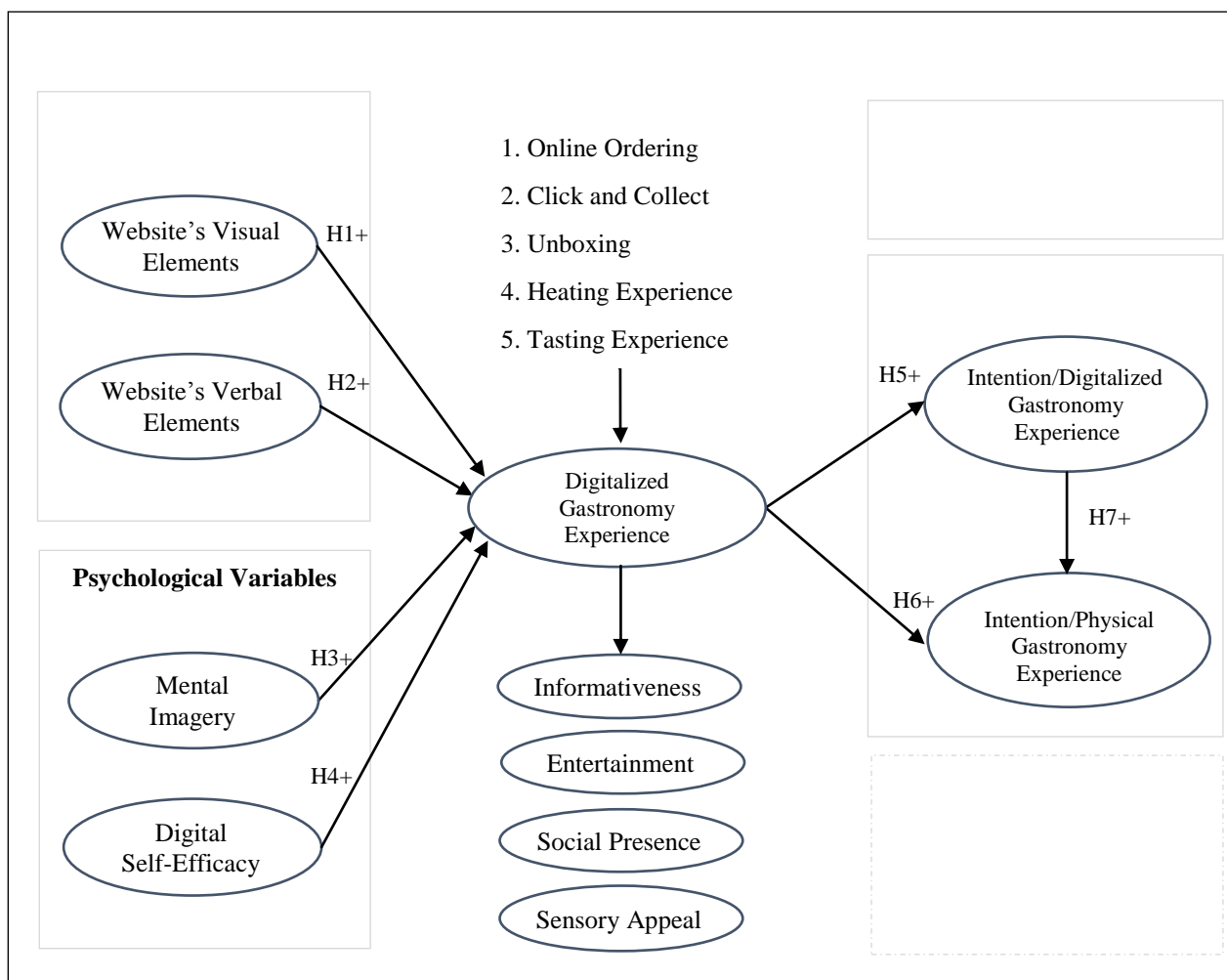
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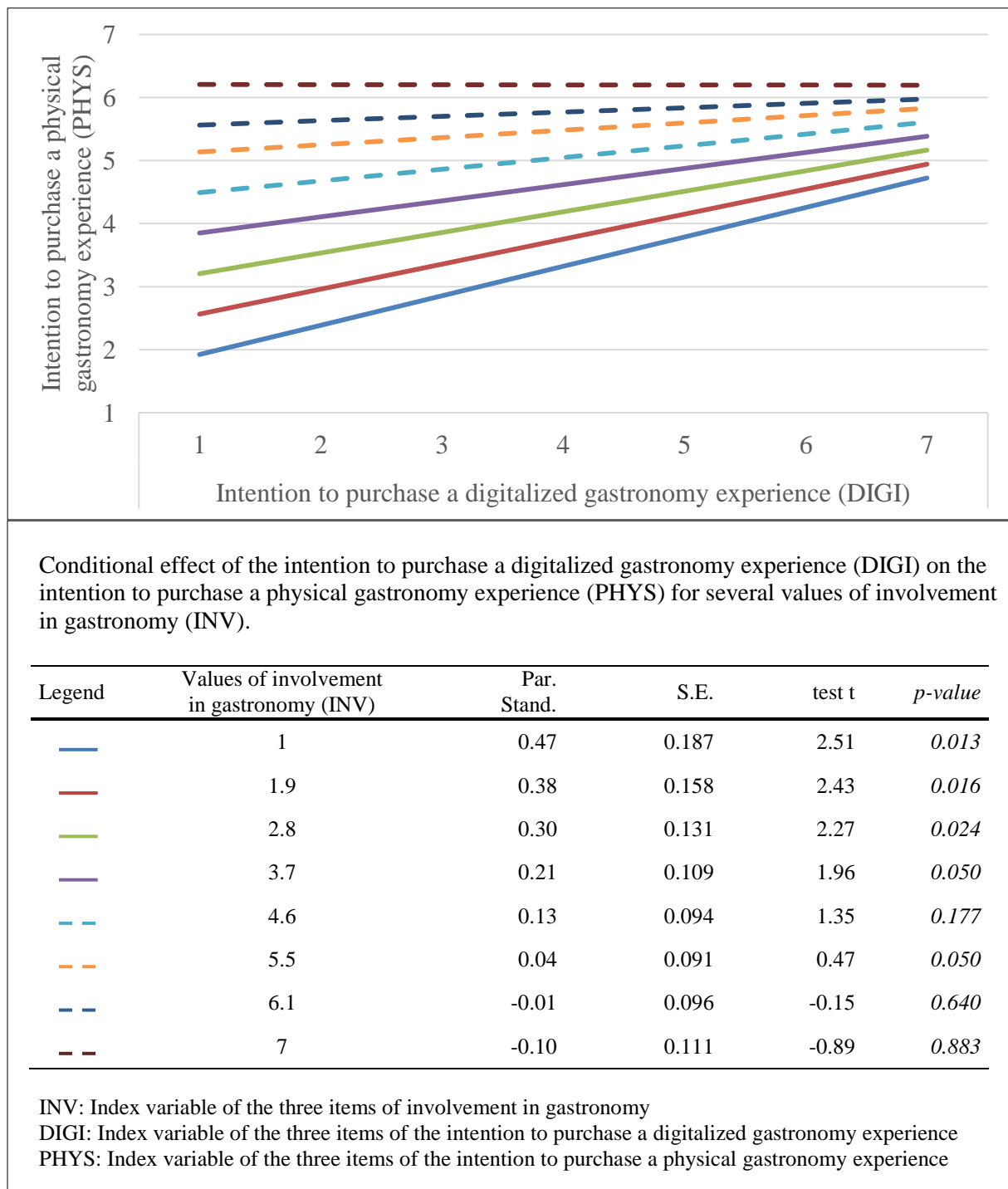
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**Figure 1.** A model of the digitalized gastronomy experience



**Figure 2.** Moderating role of involvement in gastronomy

**Table 1.** Sample composition (Study 1).

Name	Role/Restaurant
Jennifer Cohen Solal	Founder/L'Ultime—Le Meilleur Gâteau du Monde
Laura Mantia	Line Chef/Ritz (1 star Michelin)
Julien Guèze	Pastry Chef/Maison Pierre Gagnaire
Christophe Marotel	Sustainable Restoration Director/Chez Balluchon Group
François Daubinet	Pastry Chef/La Maison de l'Excellence Savencia
Nicolas Boussin	Pastry Chef/Maison Fauchon
Fabrice Prochasson	Creation and Innovation Director/Groupe Aryta
François Gagnaire	Chef/Restaurant Anicia (previously 1 star Michelin)
Pascal Favre d'Anne	Chef/Le Favre d'Anne (1 star Michelin)
Stephane Debracque	Laboratory Director/Maxim's Catering
Julien Diaz	Chef/Saisons de Marseille (1 star Michelin)
Jean-Claude Cahagnet	Chef/Auberge des Saints Pères (1 star Michelin)
Anonymous 1	Chef/Lyon (2 stars Michelin)
Anonymous 2	Chef/Lyon (2 stars Michelin)
Anonymous 3	Owner and Chef/Lyon

**Table 2.** Reliability and convergent and discriminant validity.

Constructs	Squared correlations										
	AVE	VISU	VERB	IMAG	INFO	ENT	SOC	SENS	DIGI	PHYS	INV
VISU	0.85 <sup>a</sup>	<i>0.94<sup>b</sup></i>									
VERB	0.87	0.49 <sup>c</sup>	<i>0.93</i>								
IMAG	0.87	0.27	0.25	<i>0.95</i>							
INFO	0.83	0.33	0.38	0.19	<i>0.93</i>						
ENT	0.85	0.31	0.27	0.29	0.26	<i>0.92</i>					
SOC	0.86	0.36	0.33	0.33	0.18	0.52	<i>0.93</i>				
SENS	0.87	0.54	0.44	0.46	0.29	0.50	0.47	<i>0.95</i>			
DIGI	0.92	0.21	0.17	0.47	0.21	0.44	0.40	0.43	<i>0.97</i>		
PHYS	0.92	0.17	0.18	0.07	0.06	0.08	0.02	0.05	0.09	<i>0.97</i>	
INV	0.75	0.04	0.03	0.12	0.08	0.10	0.04	0.15	0.15	0.17	<i>0.90</i>

<sup>a</sup>The average variance extracted (AVE) for the construct is shown in the second column.

<sup>b</sup>The alpha coefficients are shown along the diagonal in italics.

<sup>c</sup>The squared correlations are shown in the lower triangle.



**Table 3.** Results for the test of the proposed model and the competitive model.

			Proposed model				Competitive model			
			Par. stand.	S.E.	test t	p-value	Par. stand.	S.E.	test t	p-value
<i>Website elements and digitalized gastronomy experience</i>										
H1	Website's visual elements	→ Digitalized gastronomy experience	0.31	0.040	4.691	0.000	0.27	0.043	3,819	0.000
H2	Website's verbal elements	→ Digitalized gastronomy experience	0.24	0.044	3.857	0.000	0.28	0.053	3,774	0.000
<i>Psychological variables and digitalized gastronomy experience</i>										
H3	Mental imagery	→ Digitalized gastronomy experience	0.29	0.033	4.720	0.000	0.29	0.033	4.553	0.000
H4	Digital self-efficacy	→ Digitalized gastronomy experience	-0.01	0.001	-0.290	0.772	-0.02	0.001	-0.430	0.667
	Mental imagery × Website's visual elements	→ Digitalized gastronomy experience	-	-	-	-	-0.05	0.02	-0,785	0.432
	Digital self-efficacy × Website's visual elements	→ Digitalized gastronomy experience	-	-	-	-	0.05	0.001	0,987	0.324
	Mental imagery × Website's verbal elements	→ Digitalized gastronomy experience	-	-	-	-	0.06	0.023	1,089	0.276
	Digital self-efficacy × Website's verbal elements	→ Digitalized gastronomy experience	-	-	-	-	-0.03	0.001	-0,600	0.548
<i>Digitalized gastronomy experience</i>										
	Online ordering	→ Digitalized gastronomy experience	-0.11	0.037	-1.984	0.047	-0.10	0.036	-1,829	0.067
	Click and collect	→ Digitalized gastronomy experience	0.05	0.040	0.761	0.447	0.05	0.04	0,799	0.424
	Unboxing	→ Digitalized gastronomy experience	0.07	0.041	1.188	0.235	0.08	0.041	1,266	0.206
	Heating experience	→ Digitalized gastronomy experience	0.16	0.034	2.862	0.004	0.15	0.034	2,705	0.007
	Tasting experience	→ Digitalized gastronomy experience	0.18	0.040	3.200	0.001	0.18	0.04	3,196	0.001
<i>Digitalized gastronomy experience and intention to purchase</i>										
H5	Digitalized gastronomy experience	→ Intention / digitalized gastronomy experience	0.71	0.212	8.706	0.000	0.71	0.213	8.676	0.000
H6	Digitalized gastronomy experience	→ Intention / physical gastronomy experience	0.08	0.225	0.781	0.435	0.08	0.225	0.722	0.470
<i>Involvement in gastronomy as moderator</i>										
H7	Involvement in gastronomy × Intention / digitalized gastronomy experience	→ Intention / physical gastronomy experience	-0.14	0.035	-2.078	0.038	-0.14	0.035	-2.073	0.038
	Intention / digitalized gastronomy experience	→ Intention / physical gastronomy experience	0.08	0.083	0.760	0.447	0.08	0.083	0.809	0.418
	Involvement in gastronomy	→ Intention / physical gastronomy experience	0.30	0.107	3.872	0.000	0.30	0.107	3.868	0.000
<i>Covariants</i>										
	Ordering online habits	→ Intention / digitalized gastronomy experience	0.11	0.061	2.328	0.020	-0.14	0.035	-2.073	0.038
	Social desirability	→ Digitalized gastronomy experience	0.01	0.032	0.127	0.899	0.08	0.083	0.809	0.418
	Social desirability	→ Intention / digitalized gastronomy experience	0.12	0.109	2.407	0.016	0.30	0.107	3.868	0.000
	Social desirability	→ Intention / physical gastronomy experience	0.04	0.115	0.618	0.537	-0.14	0.035	-2.073	0.038
	Income	→ Intention / digitalized gastronomy experience	0.01	0.021	0.255	0.799	0.08	0.083	0.809	0.418
	Income	→ Intention / physical gastronomy experience	0.07	0.023	1.145	0.252	0.30	0.107	3.868	0.000
<i>Goodness-of-fit Measures</i>										
	Chi <sup>2</sup> / df		899.6 / 524 (1.717)				1069.6 / 612 (1.748)			
	RMSEA		0.058				0.059			
	TLI		0.940				0.926			
	CFI		0.952				0.945			
	SRMR		0.050				0.048			

**Table 4.** Indirect effects via digitalized gastronomy experience.

		Par. stand.	Lower bounds	Upper bounds	<i>p</i> - value
Website's visual elements	Intention / digitalized gastronomy experience	0.21	0.14	0.34	<i>0.003</i>
	Intention / physical gastronomy experience	0.04	0.00	0.09	<i>0.054</i>
Website's verbal elements	Intention / digitalized gastronomy experience	0.17	0.09	0.27	<i>0.005</i>
	Intention / physical gastronomy experience	0.03	0.01	0.11	<i>0.035</i>
Mental imagery	Intention / digitalized gastronomy experience	0.22	0.08	0.32	<i>0.032</i>
	Intention / physical gastronomy experience	0.04	0.00	0.10	<i>0.081</i>
Digital self-efficacy	Intention / digitalized gastronomy experience	-0.01	-0.07	0.05	<i>0.756</i>
	Intention / physical gastronomy experience	-0.00	-0.02	0.01	<i>0.673</i>

**Table 5.** Comparison of the results between the proposed model and the competitive model.

	Khi <sup>2</sup>	df	RMSEA	TLI	CFI	SRMR
Proposed model	899.6	524	0.058	0.940	0.952	0.050
Competitive model	1069.6	612	0.059	0.926	0.945	0.048
Difference	<i>170</i>	<i>88</i>				
<i>p</i> -value of the <i>difference</i>		<i>0.000</i>				

## Appendix A

Table A.1. Sample quotes relating to the dimensions of the digitalized gastronomy experience.

Dimensions	Number of statements	Example verbatim statements
Informativeness	4	<p>“Clients tend to want to understand the products and ingredients that go into a dish.” (J.-C. Cahagnet)</p> <p>“We have to go into it. Then you have to use it intelligently, to show your house, your know-how, your DNA, your spirit, what you want to bring into what you do, so that people discover you, want to come to you, and come back.” (F. Prochasson)</p>
Entertainment	6	<p>“Staging for the client, cutting in the room. You come to eat at the gastro restaurant because you want to discover it all.” (L. Mantia)</p> <p>“The discovery of the menu, always a moment of excitement too: what do we like, what do we not like, do we take a menu, we look at each other, what do we do? Do we take a fish, do we share?” (J. Guèze)</p>
Social presence	6	<p>“With platforms (UberEats, Deliveroo), we don’t know our customers directly. And we like to know them; we also adapt to what they like.” (J. Guèze)</p> <p>“I would lose experience by removing the human relationship from the restaurant.” (J. Guèze)</p> <p>“Customer contact is very important. Our customers are not anonymous and we are not anonymous to them. We need these customers and they need to have contact with us. Customers will always need to have us on the phone to understand the composition and alchemy of a dish.” (J.-C. Cahagnet).</p>
Sensory appeal	5	<p>“The starred restaurants scare a lot of people. It’s not in their culture. They imagine that they’re not going to find their happiness in the meals because the names are complicated, the tastes are different.” (J.-C. Cahagnet)</p> <p>“Today, when we go to a restaurant, we have already read the menu, we have already seen all the dishes on Instagram. It loses a bit of its magic: we’ve taken away all the surprise that a dish can offer visually.” (P. Favre d’Anne)</p>



## Appendix B

Table B.1. Sample quotes relating to the customer journey stages of a digitalized gastronomy experience.

Customer journey stages	Number of statements	Example verbatim statements
Online ordering	9	<p>“The consumer who orders a takeaway or delivery dish from a top chef, a starred chef, thinks it will be great because the offer has been well marketed. Except that when the dish arrives and they see it, they are very disappointed. They were expecting the gourmet plate they saw on the website.” (S. Debracque)</p> <p>“No website can give me that.” (C. Marotel)</p>
Click & collect	6	<p>“We are using a bit of a regional cuisine, since it is more suitable for transportation.” (F. Prochasson)</p> <p>“I don’t think we can deliver gourmet products if the service doesn’t follow. It’s a bit as if a waiter brings you a gourmet plate in a t-shirt and jeans; it kinda kills the dream.” (J. Guèze)</p>
Unboxing	6	<p>“The origami is nice and its coating can handle the sauce. For this weekend, I made a dish with an American sauce and you can put it in these cardboard boxes. You have to gel it a little bit anyway, but people will be able to eat in the origami. The possibilities come with techniques and time.” (J.-C. Cahagnet)</p>
Heating	4	<p>“If a customer orders Ritz at home. Will the customer eat things the right way? In the right way? Hot enough? When it should be very hot, or will they eat it cold when it should be very hot too?” (L. Mantia)</p> <p>“For example, a gratin dauphinois that is easy to reheat, that is good, that is not necessarily difficult to make. To play it safe in fact.” (J. Guèze)</p>
Tasting	5	<p>“The plate arrives in a precise timing. If you let a few seconds pass, the experience is no longer the same from an organoleptic point of view. We can see that eating a pizza in a pizzeria, even 50 meters from home, and after spending 50 meters in the cardboard box is not the same experience.” (C. Marotel)</p> <p>“What people come to look for in the three stars, it is a surprise, the quality of what they eat, but also to be surprised by things that they would not have had the idea to make or associations that they would not have imagined.” (J. Guèze)</p>

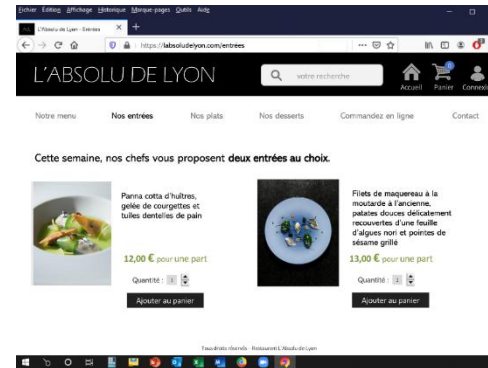
## Appendix C

Table C.1. Website screenshots of a fictitious luxury restaurant<sup>a</sup> (Study 2).

Web page	Key elements	Online stimulus
Welcome page and invitation to follow	<p>Online video about the offering from the chef's kitchen regarding the digitalized gastronomy experience</p> <p>Invitation to follow the restaurant on social networks</p>	
Menu and process	<p>Online tips and tutorial from the chef about the food reheating process to improve the digitalized gastronomy experience</p> <p>Presentation of the key steps, from ordering online to home tasting</p>	

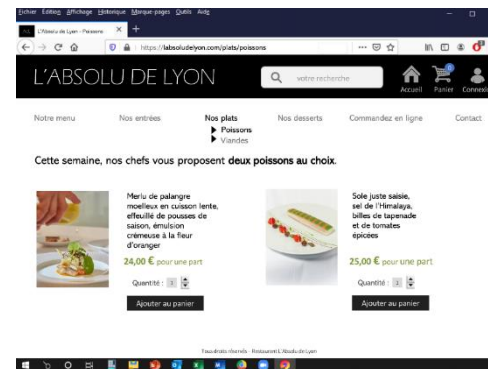
Presentation of the first courses

Order online (add the selected option to the cart)



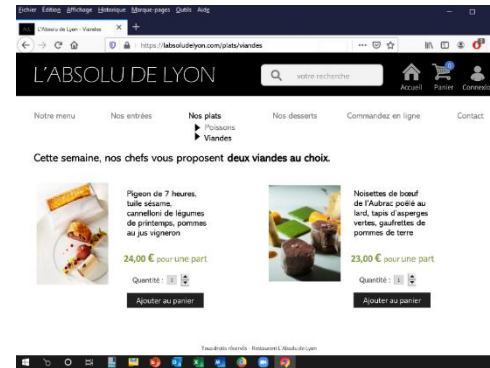
Presentation of the main fish courses

Order online (add the selected option to the cart)



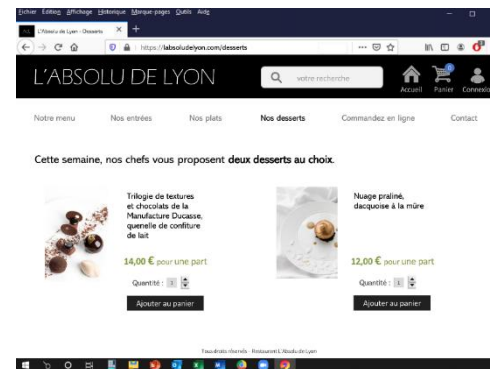
Presentation of the  
main meat courses

Order online (add the  
selected option to the cart)



Presentation of the  
desserts

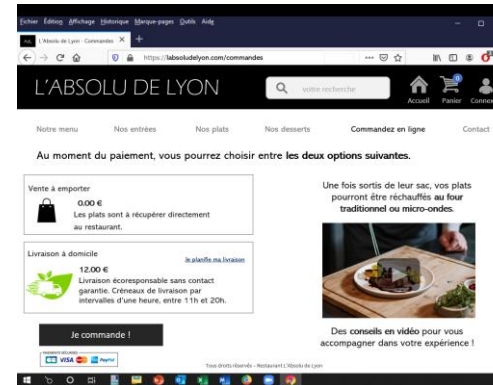
Order online (add the  
selected option to the cart)





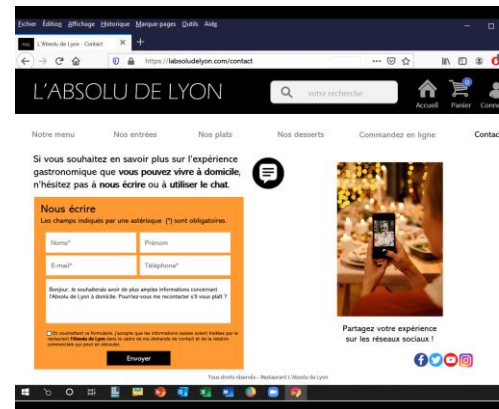
Delivery option and final online ordering

Online tutorial video from the chef about the food reheating process at home  
 Delivery option (click and collect or at-home delivery)  
 Secure online payment



Contact page and invitation to share

Invitation to contact the restaurant about this digitalized gastronomy experience (through an online form or a chatbot)  
 Invitation to share one's experience (e.g., post photos or stories) on social networks



<sup>3</sup>All photos and icons were provided by the Paul Bocuse Institute or were acquired from a royalty-free image bank.

## Appendix D

Table D.1. Wording of the items and the measurement model test.

	$\lambda$ stand.	$\sigma$	t-test	<i>p</i>
<b>Website elements</b>				
<i>Visual website elements (VISU)<sup>a</sup></i>				
VISU1. The website is visually appealing.	0.93	–	–	–
VISU2. The website is beautiful.	0.91	0.043	23.40	0.000
VISU3. The website features an attractive design.	0.93	0.039	24.34	0.000
<i>Verbal website elements (VERB)<sup>a</sup></i>				
VERB1. The website describes the restaurant's offerings in detail.	0.93	–	–	–
VERB2. The website describes the restaurant's offerings precisely.	0.94	0.049	21.24	0.000
<b>Psychological variables</b>				
<i>Mental imagery (IMAG)<sup>a</sup></i>				
To the idea of living a gastronomic culinary experience at home, you would say:				
IMAG1. I can easily imagine what it would be like to have a gourmet dining experience at home.	0.94	–	–	–
IMAG2. I can see what it would be like to have a gastronomic dining experience at home.	0.93	0.036	26.29	0.000
IMAG3. I can easily imagine the gourmet dining experience at home.	0.93	0.038	26.54	0.000
<i>Digital self-efficacy (DEFF)<sup>c</sup></i>				
DEFF. The probability that you will be able to successfully use a digital home catering service is: 0%–100%	–	–	–	–
<b>Evaluation of the digitalized gastronomy experience</b>				
<i>Informativeness (INFO)<sup>a</sup></i>				
Regarding the gastronomic catering at-home offering, you would say that the information presented on the web pages is...				
INFO1. ... useful for understanding L'Absolu de Lyon offering.	0.97	–	–	–
INFO2. ... instructive for understanding L'Absolu de Lyon offering.	0.87	0.044	21.63	0.000
INFO3. ... necessary to understand L'Absolu de Lyon offering.	0.89	0.037	2323	0.000
<i>Entertainment (ENT)<sup>b</sup></i>				
Regarding the entertaining nature of the gastronomic catering at-home offering, you would say the offering is:				
ENT1. Not funny/Very funny	0.91	–	–	–
ENT2. Not entertaining/Very entertaining	0.93	0.050	19.91	0.000
<i>Social presence (SOC)<sup>a</sup></i>				
Regarding the gastronomic catering at-home offering, you would say that it gives an impression of ...				
SOC1. ... human warmth	0.97	–	–	–
SOC2. ... human presence	0.89	0.045	20.55	0.000
<i>Sensory appeal (SENS)<sup>a</sup></i>				
Regarding the gastronomic catering at-home offering, you would say that the presentation...				
SENS1. ... awakens the senses.	0.97	–	–	–
SENS2. ... arouses envy.	0.90	0.038	25.88	0.000
SENS3. ... activates different sensory channels.	0.92	0.035	27.98	0.000
<i>Customer journey (CJ)<sup>a</sup></i>				
Based on the web pages viewed, how do you envisage...				
CJ1. ... the online ordering experience.	–	–	–	–
CJ2. ... the click and collect experience.	–	–	–	–
CJ3. ... the unboxing experience.	–	–	–	–
CJ4. ... the heating experience.	–	–	–	–

CJ5. ... the tasting experience.	–	–	–	–
<b>Intention to purchase</b>				
<i>Intention to purchase a digitalized experience (DIGI)<sup>b</sup></i>				
After viewing the website, you consider that using this type of gastronomic (or bistronomic) catering at-home offering is:				
DIGI1. Very unlikely / Very likely	0.99			–
DIGI2. Very uncertain / Very certain	0.97	0.021	45.83	0.000
DIGI3. Very implausible / Very plausible	0.92	0.029	32.15	0.000
<i>Intention to purchase a physical experience (PHYS)<sup>b</sup></i>				
After restaurants reopen, you consider that physically going to eat at a gastronomic (or bistronomic) restaurant is:				
PHYS1. Very unlikely / Very likely	0.95	–	–	–
PHYS2. Very uncertain / Very certain	0.94	0.035	29.97	0.000
PHYS3. Very implausible / Very plausible	0.98	0.028	36.82	0.000
<b>Moderator</b>				
<i>Involvement in gastronomy (INV)<sup>b</sup></i>				
Regarding your interest in gastronomy, you would say:				
INV1. Not at all interested / Very interested	0.795			–
INV2. Not at all involved / Very involved	0.859	0.084	14.22	0.000
INV3. Not at all important to me / Very important to me	0.932	0.080	15.12	0.000
<b>Control variables</b>				
<i>Online ordering habits (OOH)<sup>c</sup></i>				
OOH. I am used to ordering food online. (1) Never. (2) Once a year. (3) Once every 6 months. (4) Once a month. (5) Once a week. (6) More than once a week.				
	–	–	–	–
<i>Social desirability (SOD)<sup>a,c</sup></i>				
SOD. Index: To what extent would you agree with these statements:				
SOD1 I am always courteous even to people who are disagreeable.				
SOD2 No matter who I am talking to I am always a good listener.				
SOD3 There have been occasions when I took advantage of someone.				
SOD4 I sometimes try to get even rather than forgive and forget.				
SOD5 I sometimes feel resentful when I don't get my way.				
<i>Income (INC)<sup>c</sup></i>				
INC. Approximately, what is your household's net monthly income?				
(1) Less than €760. (2) From €760 to €1,520. (3) From €1,520 to €2,300. (4) From €2,300 to €3,050. (5) From € 3,050 to €3,800. (6) From €3,800 to €4,500. (7) From €4,500 to €5,340. (8) More than €5,340.				
	–	–	–	–

Fit measures:  $Khi^2/df = 1.62 (451.9/279)$ ; RMSEA = 0.054; TLI = 0.968; CFI = 0.975; SRMR = 0.028.

<sup>a</sup>7-point Likert scale ranging from 1, "totally disagree," to 7, "totally agree."

<sup>b</sup>7-point bipolar semantic differential scale.

<sup>c</sup>No result is indicated for the one-item scales.

## Appendix E

Table E.1. Means, standard deviation, and correlation matrix.

	m	$\sigma$	VISU1	VISU2	VISU3	VERB1	VERB2	IMAG1	IMAG2	IMAG3	DEFF	INFO1	INFO2	INFO3	ENT1	ENT2	SOC1	SOC2	SENS1	SENS2	SENS3	DIG11	DIG12	DIG13	PHYS1	PHYS2	PHYS3	INV1	INV2	INV3	OOH	SOD	INC		
VISU1	5.53	1.18	1																																
VISU2	5.50	1.21	0.847	1																															
VISU3	5.52	1.12	0.870	0.843	1																														
VERB1	5.62	1.01	0.557	0.650	0.592	1																													
VERB2	5.60	1.04	0.589	0.652	0.594	0.875	1																												
IMAG1	5.15	1.33	0.469	0.449	0.386	0.445	0.464	1																											
IMAG2	5.18	1.28	0.523	0.459	0.425	0.446	0.426	0.873	1																										
IMAG3	5.24	1.35	0.474	0.430	0.400	0.408	0.404	0.887	0.865	1																									
DEFF	65.7	31.2	0.148	0.091	0.098	0.147	0.159	0.314	0.351	0.309	1																								
INFO1	50.80	1.11	0.512	0.515	0.506	0.555	0.556	0.409	0.374	0.398	0.238	1																							
INFO2	5.68	1.18	0.514	0.516	0.484	0.577	0.533	0.389	0.362	0.386	0.256	0.841	1																						
INFO3	5.81	1.04	0.430	0.458	0.449	0.496	0.503	0.383	0.346	0.381	0.242	0.866	0.773	1																					
ENT1	4.57	1.48	0.495	0.513	0.513	0.464	0.463	0.459	0.465	0.391	0.086	0.431	0.384	0.349	1																				
ENT2	4.80	1.46	0.463	0.463	0.439	0.448	0.436	0.504	0.491	0.454	0.124	0.491	0.413	0.415	0.851	1																			
SOC1	4.61	1.48	0.516	0.555	0.569	0.526	0.515	0.512	0.535	0.499	0.106	0.398	0.417	0.349	0.665	0.636	1																		
SOC2	4.51	1.47	0.458	0.513	0.477	0.493	0.493	0.508	0.527	0.516	0.099	0.359	0.394	0.341	0.607	0.569	0.865	1																	
SENS1	5.39	1.32	0.690	0.648	0.653	0.572	0.589	0.615	0.639	0.602	0.225	0.508	0.445	0.432	0.595	0.626	0.625	0.569	1																
SENS2	5.47	1.37	0.617	0.594	0.601	0.571	0.563	0.588	0.604	0.578	0.239	0.529	0.483	0.468	0.573	0.633	0.614	0.559	0.878	1															
SENS3	5.19	1.36	0.629	0.622	0.605	0.593	0.618	0.586	0.601	0.538	0.191	0.450	0.416	0.395	0.657	0.646	0.649	0.622	0.894	0.817	1														
DIG11	4.56	1.78	0.426	0.400	0.421	0.399	0.372	0.633	0.662	0.603	0.277	0.433	0.391	0.398	0.583	0.632	0.615	0.552	0.613	0.664	0.589	1													
DIG12	4.45	1.76	0.410	0.382	0.403	0.386	0.368	0.616	0.642	0.580	0.258	0.438	0.364	0.398	0.558	0.612	0.578	0.500	0.591	0.627	0.567	0.957	1												
DIG13	4.76	1.77	0.433	0.399	0.418	0.375	0.339	0.604	0.645	0.580	0.304	0.429	0.390	0.402	0.502	0.557	0.601	0.528	0.602	0.623	0.570	0.912	0.890	1											
PHYS1	5.58	1.50	0.165	0.096	0.177	0.172	0.137	0.207	0.310	0.247	0.146	0.227	0.202	0.195	0.204	0.203	0.170	0.109	0.212	0.209	0.207	0.277	0.295	0.273	1										
PHYS2	5.46	1.58	0.143	0.057	0.141	0.143	0.131	0.156	0.225	0.174	0.088	0.194	0.163	0.132	0.237	0.255	0.129	0.088	0.193	0.198	0.200	0.249	0.269	0.208	0.897	1									
PHYS3	5.61	1.49	0.181	0.110	0.178	0.176	0.162	0.207	0.292	0.228	0.108	0.244	0.225	0.177	0.259	0.261	0.152	0.103	0.211	0.202	0.225	0.286	0.292	0.256	0.934	0.924	1								
INV1	5.57	1.30	0.180	0.116	0.229	0.183	0.152	0.255	0.277	0.180	0.088	0.255	0.180	0.238	0.214	0.252	0.163	0.117	0.319	0.285	0.309	0.338	0.324	0.335	0.372	0.355	0.381	1							
INV2	5.50	1.37	0.146	0.096	0.171	0.149	0.142	0.301	0.353	0.258	0.090	0.191	0.118	0.181	0.250	0.291	0.203	0.160	0.326	0.281	0.295	0.359	0.357	0.309	0.378	0.387	0.362	0.669	1						
INV3	6.00	1.02	0.169	0.117	0.191	0.165	0.144	0.291	0.340	0.249	0.123	0.260	0.228	0.233	0.239	0.286	0.183	0.144	0.358	0.325	0.322	0.344	0.334	0.319	0.358	0.318	0.344	0.743	0.804	1					
OOH	2.42	1.39	0.039	0.106	0.056	0.129	0.139	0.217	0.238	0.217	0.371	0.195	0.141	0.189	0.171	0.189	0.120	0.114	0.229	0.239	0.229	0.287	0.299	0.234	0.110	0.089	0.085	0.138	0.101	0.123	1				
SOD	4.04	0.81	0.136	0.063	0.114	-0.023	-0.009	0.036	0.117	0.070	0.117	0.080	0.043	0.088	0.054	0.054	0.056	0.106	0.011	-0.002	-0.030	0.041	0.025	0.038	0.109	0.071	0.130	0.094	0.092	0.094	0.016	1			
INC	8.82	3.76	0.203	0.203	0.134	0.100	0.149	0.255	0.225	0.199	0.143	0.135	0.069	0.152	0.201	0.226	0.180	0.169	0.193	0.205	0.216	0.321	0.314	0.297	0.114	0.110	0.142	0.130	0.076	0.057	0.264	0.056	1		