

Consumers' Behavior of Restaurant Selection

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Abstract—The main goal of this research is to study the consumer's attitude for choice of a restaurant, that place importance on the ingredients quality and origin, composing the menu and to characterize the potential necessity of developing an online B2B platform, which main purpose is to build a link between local farmers of food and beverages and the representatives of the HoReCa sector in Plovdiv region. B2B commerce is a concept that describes the process of buying and selling of products, services and information and both sellers (suppliers) and buyers are business corporations.

Design/Methodology/Approach – The methodology of this study involved conducting surveys and the data are collected from local and foreign tourists (n=250) who visited Plovdiv region.

Findings – Based on the analysis, we can find out that one of the main factors, affecting consumers behavior for restaurant selection are quality of the food, demand for fresher and higher quality food products mostly influence the selection of full-service restaurants. Obtained results describes the need of identification trends for environmental movement and growing popularity of locally produced fruit and vegetables, provided by local farmers and agribusinesses.

Practical implications – The present study is important because characterize the consumer's behavior toward restaurant selection. From the perspective of B2B platform, the obtained results provide data on how restaurateurs can meet the consumer's desire in order to provide quality food while creating link with local farmers.

Keywords—consumers' behavior, Plovdiv region, food quality

I. INTRODUCTION

Factors affecting consumer selection criteria in full service restaurants

In today's business world a strong relationship with customers creates basics for competitive and successful business conditions for suppliers. One of the most important factors in the relationship between suppliers and customers is the quality of relationship, which determines the probability of their future interchange.

Nowadays, restaurant's main purpose is not only to satisfy customers needs for nutrition but also to reply on the necessities such as having good time, relaxation and socialization. Businesses that want to outrun this competition should primarily understand the changing demand and best meet those requirements in order to survive in an intense competitive environment.

Today, the main point of marketing activities of restaurants is the customer. Large number of businesses for similar purposes are in operation and it is important to have competitive advantage in this environment. Businesses that want to increase their profitability and get more shares from

the market must try to understand the desire and needs of their customers.

The five most important factors, influencing restaurant choice, as it has been compromised on the researches and different studies are food quality, variety of food, price, atmosphere and location.

It seems that consumers have taken numerous factors into consideration when make decision of selecting a restaurant. Lewis ^[9] and Auty ^[10] describes the five factors that may be effective in restaurant selection; food quality, menu variety, price, atmosphere and convenience. On their study, Clark and Wood ^[7] presented that the speed of service in addition to food variety, food quality, price, and atmosphere are the most important factors in choosing a restaurant.

As emphasized by Lewis ^[9] the factors that influence for selecting of a restaurant may differ according to the type of restaurant, being visited. Auty ^[10] suggests that the order of importance of restaurant selection factors may vary if eating outside is associated with any particular event.

According to these factors, the consumer is creating a restaurant set consisting of several restaurants with almost equal levels of food quality and service among the many alternative restaurants. Since there is not much difference between these restaurants in terms of food quality, variety of food and price, the consumer make the selection according other factors as image and atmosphere. Thus, the choice of restaurant is influenced by food quality, variety of food and price as well as atmosphere.

Consumers' preferences and demand for alternative foods, such as local products, are increasing dramatically. More and more people are starting to recognize the multiple benefits of adopting responsible eating habits. These reasons are leading to the rise of searching variety of different initiatives, with the aim to shorten food supply chains and to provide possibilities for consumers to create new alliances with the local farmers. It is obvious, that there are multiple and different reasons which creates difficulties in the bridge between consumers and farmers, such as inconvenience of the farmers' location, missing clear information about the location, difficulties in reaching the distance etc. Restaurants that offer local products can respond to the expectations of the customers.

Changes in customers' standard of life; income and learning levels and personal characteristics, preferences are causing differentiation. For this reason, it is very important for restaurant businesses to be aware of the factors that affect customers' restaurant preferences in order to develop successful marketing strategies.

II. METHODOLOGY

Questionnaire and data collection

250 questionnaires were distributed to the randomly selected respondents, who were requested to complete the survey. The participants were assured that their individual responses were anonymous and confidential. The survey was developed for the purpose of collecting data about the factors influencing the respondents' decision to select restaurants for dining in Plovdiv/Bulgaria. The data for this research were collected from 18 years and older visitors of Plovdiv/Bulgaria during May 2018.

The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended questions and its items were phrased both in Bulgarian and English. The respondents were with different lifestyles, occupation, income, age and gender. The survey comprised the importance of various factors when making a decision to dine out, using a five-point Likert scale. The points on the scale are: 1 = most (extremely) important; 2 = more/very important; 3 = important; 4 = somewhat important; and 5 = unimportant. The Microsoft Excel software was used for data analysis.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to attract new customers, restaurants need to identify the criteria on which consumption criteria and if there is any difference in selection criteria across customers' sociodemographic characteristics such as gender, age and nationality. For collecting of data was used a questionnaire, which encompasses visitors of Plovdiv from diverse socio-economic groups. The results for the distribution of restaurant selection factors according to their nationality are shown in Figure 1.

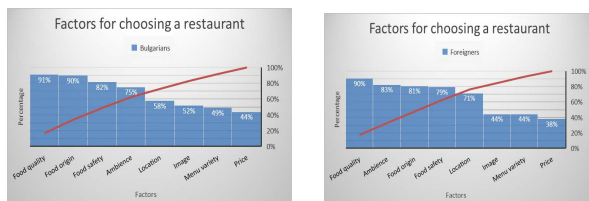


Fig. 1. Distribution of restaurant selection factors according to the demographic characteristics of the participants

According to the Bulgarian respondents, among the factors that determine which restaurant will be visited, quality of the food, the origin of raw materials, which are used for the preparation of the dishes and food safety and cleanliness, are the most significant factors (91%, 90% and 82%, respectively), whereas sequences of factors according to the foreign visitors were as follows: food quality, ambiance and raw food origin (90%, 83% and 81%, respectively). Obtained results describe the need of creation new trends for environmental movement and growing popularity of locally produced fruits and vegetables, provided by local farmers and agribusinesses.

Akbar and Aladuen [11] revealed that the food quality is the criteria that consumers put heavy priority, followed by trustworthiness, service quality, price, environment, and location. The results of Auty [10] were in agreement with that reported in this study, regarding food type and food quality as the most frequent cited choice variables regardless of the occasion, followed by atmosphere and image, suggested as are critical determinants of choice. Albayrak [1] studied the critical determinants of choice, as gave particular

consideration on how the demographic findings influenced consumer's decision when they select restaurants and determined that according to respondent's age, income and educational level, the most frequently selected were the determinants- restaurant characteristics, food and beverage, and the service supplied. Jung et al. [5] again revealed that food quality is the most important attribute in restaurant selection with considerable percentage (24.57%) of respondents who did not rule out the food quality for better service or an economic factor.

It could be said that the food is the element of tourist product that give the authenticity of the tourism. On their research, Youn and Kim [3] confirmed that ingredients and origin of food, their names in combination with the history of the meal have positive influence on the perception of consumer for authenticity, the key factor that all the travelers want to find during the travel. Authenticity has been specified as a crucial factor for ensuring customers' satisfaction in these types of restaurants.

The results for distribution of menu selection reasons, influenced by the gender of participants are given in Figure 2.

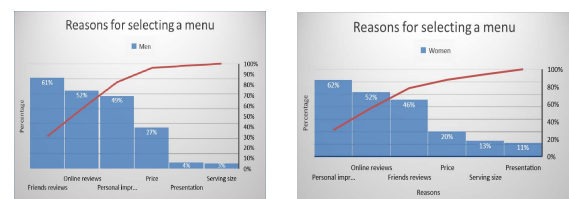


Fig. 2. Distribution of menu selection reasons influenced by the demographic characteristics of the participants

The results clearly show that among all variables, the personal impression from a previous visit for female (62%) and reviews from friends for male (61%) are the most decisive reasons for selecting a menu.

It is known that besides good service and quality of food, the perception of guests is influenced by the sense of authenticity, which is ensured by proper interior, atmosphere and music in the restaurant. All of these indicators create an emotional relationship between space and the customer, creating a special experience in the mind of the user when are used strategically. They affect the length of customers' stay and even may provoke overspend (Mhlanga and Tichaawa, 2016).

Our results are in agreement with that reported by Ha *et al.* [4], who revealed that "others' choice" as well as the online review ratings and consumers' last minute observations are among the most influencing and stimulating factors on the crowdedness of the restaurant, especially when they choose a restaurant for the first time in unfamiliar place.

Tourists' attitude to eat traditional foods and beverages and assessment of food quality when it's prepared by traditional raw ingredients and with traditional technology were studied (Figure 3 and Figure 4).

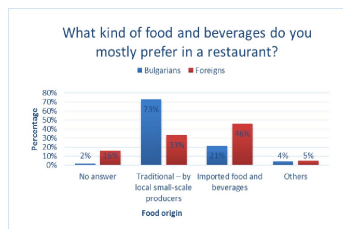


Fig. 3. Customers' attitude to consume traditional food and beverages

Both, Bulgarian respondents and foreign visitors showed preferences for having traditional foods, which again reveals the necessity of providing high quality ingredients, composing the menu.

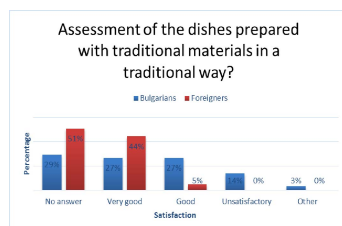


Fig. 4. Consumers' assessment of food quality when it's prepared by traditional raw ingredients with traditional technology

Eating is an activity that meets the needs of tourists during their travels. It is natural to choose local dishes as a tourist product, because the local food combines preparation with carefully selected local products, prepared by a special traditional technology, which reflects the history of the food and the way of serving, respectively. The tendency to integrate the local producer into the overall chain of culinary performance is recognized. Local products are precisely chosen and involved in seasonal menus. On their study for the perception and preferences of consumers for local food, C. Feldmann and U. Hamm [2] concluded that they would prefer the local food despite its overcharge. The results stated by Lu and Gursay [6] again confirmed that the quality of food, in particular the ingredient's origin may affect the consumers' choice, because organic ingredients offer greater advantage for food quality, even when the general perception for organic ingredients are characterized with premium prices and that may influence negatively to the choice of the consumer.

IV. CONCLUSION

The findings from this research offer valuable data showing that it is important for restaurants to gain information about the factors that affect customers' preferences for restaurants as they understand consumers' needs and strive to provide satisfaction in order to develop successful marketing strategies. Restaurants have to meet not only the nutritional needs but also the necessity of entertainment, relaxation and socialization in an intensive competitive environment, in order to maintain their assets and to be permanent. Businesses that aim to overcome this competition must first understand changing requirements and respond to these requirements in the best possible and quicker way. The presented results show that good food to a large extent determines the choice of a restaurant, but it is

not a sufficient condition. Regardless of the scale, restaurants should be managed as a professional business beyond the good kitchen. The results also indicate that consumers prefer restaurants that prepare tasty dishes of high quality with fresh ingredients and appealing presentation and also offer a variety of choices on the menu.

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