

A Review of Food Service Selection Factors Important to the Consumer

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Abstract A literature review was carried out to identify the important factors perceived by consumers when choosing a food service. The review was carried out in Scopus, Scielo and the Web of Science. The price, atmosphere, food quality and location were the attributes most investigated by the researchers. The food quality and taste were perceived as essential by consumers for all types of restaurants. On choosing fast-food restaurants the price and speed of service were the most important factors. On selecting other types of restaurants, the most relevant factors were the food quality and taste, followed by attributes related to service. Price was shown to be important for the student population, lower-income populations and individuals who eat out less frequently. With respect to gender, women perceived the preferences of their families and the safety of food as more important than men. Differences in the degree of importance given to the selection factors were observed according to the meal context. This review showed that further research, applying accurate methods, is needed to broadly understand the choices of differing establishments by consumers.

Keywords Food Service Industry, Restaurant, Consumer

1. Introduction

Food consumption away-from-home is relevant in various countries [1, 2, 3]. In the United States, for example, 48.7% of the food expenses were used away-from-home in 2011 [2]. In Brazil, this proportion is increasing and reached the value of 31% in 2008 and 2009 [4]. In 2009, 48% of lunch meals were taken in restaurants in Canada, a proportion 4% higher than in 2008 [5].

The increasing relevance of food consumed away-from-home brings new challenges for public health policies. Although, the impact of consumption away-from-home in the diet and health is still unclear, studies have shown that consumers can make healthy food choices in restaurants [6, 7]. For example, in self-service restaurants with a wide variety of food offered, individuals can ingest more vegetables and low energetic density food [6]. However, the elevated consumption of high energetic density food has been associated with the frequency in certain types of food service [8, 9, 10], and in addition, some food borne diseases were shown to originate in the food services [11, 12].

Studies involving consumer behavior have looked for replies to questions such as: *what, why, when* and *where* the people do their shopping [13]. The consumer decision making process can involve 5 steps: 1) problem recognition;

2) information gathering; 3) evaluation of alternatives; 4) decision making; and 5) post-purchase behavior [14]. In the first step, the consumer identifies a problem or need (for example feeling hungry), then he or she searches for information about the product or service from different sources (personal, commercial, public and experiential). Next, the consumer evaluates the alternatives (for example, different restaurants). At this stage, the consumer may consider each service (or product) as a set of attributes (for example, the attribute price and the safety of the food to choose a restaurant), each attribute having different level of importance. In the evaluation of alternatives step the consumer defines preferences among the services, and can form an intention to use the preferred [14]. The monitoring of the post-purchase behavior can be important because it is possible to observe the level of consumer satisfaction, and failures can be corrected [14]. Cultural, personal, social and physiological factors may interfere in the consumer decision making process [14].

Previous studies have analyzed the food service consumer from different perspectives. For instance, Dunn et al. [15] verified the motives for eating in fast-food restaurants using the Theory of Planned Behavior, whereas Pettijohn et al. [16] and Namkung and Jang [17] investigated consumer satisfaction on frequenting food services. On the other hand, Han et al. [18], in addition to studying consumer satisfaction, focused their research on the intention to go back to that particular food service establishment. In parallel, Verma [19], on analyzing the hospitality industry, observed that the clients evaluated the advantages and disadvantages of the

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different services before making their choices, and their decisions could be associated with different factors simultaneously (e.g. price, brand and quality).

Although to the best of our knowledge no recent reviews on the relevant factors related to the selection of commercial restaurants by clients were published in the scientific literature. However, a general view on scientific evidence on this subject could contribute to the conception of public and private strategies with regard to food services. In addition, the scientific gaps and deficiencies on the subject should be pointed out.

Thus the objective of the present paper was to investigate and analyze studies concerning the factors perceived as relevant by consumers in selecting food services, when eating meals away from home.

2. Methodology

2.1. Mapping the Review

A review of the factors related to the choice of restaurants was carried out in the period from April 1st 2010 to August 25th 2011 using the Scopus, Scielo and Web of Science electronic data bases, with no restrictions for the year of publication. The search was made using the following descriptor terms: [away from home food] or [eating out] or [restaurant] or [food-service] and [attitude] or [perception] or [choice] or [selection] or [preference] or [opinion] or [behavior] and [consumer] or [customer], with a total of 56 combinations. The summaries of the articles were analyzed, and, when necessary, the whole manuscript, in order to verify the inclusion criteria and select the articles.

Papers meeting the following criteria were included in the review: (a) the study investigated the factors considered by consumers when choosing a food service, except when exclusively for delivery; (b) the article was published in a scientific journal; (c) the work had to be original and could not be a review; (d) the articles were published in English, Portuguese, Spanish or Italian.

The search in the data bases resulted in a total of 1,298 citations. After a review of the titles and summaries, 150 articles were selected by applying the inclusion criteria, and the entire articles obtained. After a detailed reading of the whole articles, it was shown that 126 of the studies did not satisfy the inclusion criteria and were excluded from the analysis, just 24 original articles remaining. Thus it was decided to include other papers cited in the chosen articles, these papers being identified by reading the articles, resulting in the addition of a further 21 articles which met the inclusion criteria to the review, giving a total of 45 original articles for analysis.

To characterize the studies investigated, the following data were analyzed: year published, place where the study was carried out, type of restaurant investigated, study methodology and type of consumer investigated. The results

of the studies were first analyzed by focusing on the factors of choice, in sequence focusing on the factors according to the characteristics of the population, and finally on the factors according to the type of restaurant and occasion investigated.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Characterization of the Studies

Forty-five studies on the selection of food services were analyzed. Table 1 shows the characterization of the type and nature of the survey, as also the data collection method employed in the survey.

The articles were published between 1979 and 2011, 66.7% of them being concentrated between 2001 and 2011 showing the current importance of this subject for the sector. With respect to localization, the majority of the studies were developed in North America (approximately 55.6%), and the surveys were carried out amongst adults or adolescents, 31.1% being undergraduate or postgraduate students (Table 2).

Table 1. Characterization of the Studies Analyzed Concerning the Choice of Food Services, Published in the Period from 1979 to August of 2011

Characterization of the studies	Number of studies (n)	Frequency (% of total studies)
Type of research		
<i>Survey</i>	41	91.1
<i>Qualitative</i>	3	6.7
<i>Experimental</i>	1	2.2
Nature of research		
<i>Exploratory</i>	8	17.8
<i>Descriptive</i>	37	82.2
Types of data		
<i>Primary</i>	43	95.6
<i>Secondary</i>	2	4.4
Method of data collection		
<i>Self completion questionnaires</i>		
<i>Postal</i>	3	6.7
<i>Self administered</i>	19	42.2
<i>Online</i>	3	6.7
<i>Interviews</i>		
<i>Telephone</i>	1	2.2
<i>Face to face</i>	15	33.3
<i>Focus groups</i>	1	2.2
<i>*NI</i>	3	6.7

*NI – not clearly informed in the study

The validity of the instruments used in their studies was only clearly reported in 9 articles (20.0%), [20-28]. In the other surveys, pre-tests were carried out before the data collection [29-35]. The instrument reliability was evaluated in 15 studies (33.3%) [22-28, 36-43].

The use of a theoretical model as a base for the study was cited in 24.4% of the papers [20-22, 25, 29, 32, 34, 39, 44-46],

and the model most used was that of multi-attributes[29, 34, 44].

Twenty-three studies used literature reviews to determine the attributes of the choice of restaurants to be analyzed in the survey[20, 23-29, 31, 34, 36, 37, 39, 41, 43, 47-54]. The factors that influenced the choice of restaurant varied according to the sample of individuals investigated. Thus it is important to determine these factors in the group studied by way of an exploratory survey with pre-structured interviews or focal groups, a procedure carried out in nine articles[26, 27, 33, 40, 41, 44, 46, 55, 56].

3.2. Food Service Choice Factors

The selection factors were categorized into 6 groups: 1) service, 2) installations and ambience of the place, 3) foods, 4) price, 5) localization, and 6) other factors (Table 3).

3.2.1. Attributes for Service

Of these, the speed of service was the attribute most studied by the researchers (44.4% of the studies) (Table 3). Ayala *et al.*[38], Kara *et al.*[48, 57], Tucci and Talaga[58],

Knutson[59] and Baek *et al.*[32] showed that the speed of service was an important to moderately important item for the consumers who ate meals away from home. However, in the surveys carried out by Gregory and Kim[51], Goyal and Singh[42] and Sanches and Salay[35], this item was not so highly valorized when compared with the other attributes analyzed.

In a study carried out by Sweeney *et al.*[47], the consumers perceived the behavior of the employees as the most important item in the selection of a restaurant. Similar findings were observed in other surveys[20, 22, 23, 26, 27, 33, 37, 48, 49, 58, 59]. Sanches and Salay[35] found that the most relevant attribute for the consumers was the hygiene of the employees. Another important attribute was the availability of employees ready to carry out their activities, this being considered the main item in the loyalty of choice of a food service in the survey carried out by June and Smith[29]. The “friendliness of the employees” in food services was also strongly related to consumer satisfaction on frequenting a food service[49].

Table 2. Characteristics of the Population Interviewed, Type of Restaurant and Results for the Principal Factors Considered in the Choice of Restaurant in the Articles

Author, year	Country	Type of restaurant studied	Population studied (number)	Age (years)	Principal factors considered in the choice of restaurants
Miller <i>et al.</i> 1979[44]	United States	Fast-food	General population (n=742)	NI	1) week-day lunch: food flavor, service speed, hygiene and convenience, price, variety on menu and popular with children; 2) lunch during visit to shopping: food flavor, hygiene, convenience, service speed, price, variety on menu and popular with children; 3) meal at night when short of time: food flavor, service speed, convenience, hygiene, price, variety on menu and popular with children; 4) meal with family when time not short: food flavor, hygiene, price, variety on menu and popular with children, service speed
Lewis 1981[60]	United States	Restaurant: family/popular, atmosphere, and gourmet	General population (n=110)	NI	Food quality. In the popular restaurant this was followed by the factors of atmosphere, price, variety on the menu and factors of convenience. In the atmosphere restaurant, the second attribute was price, followed by the atmosphere and factors of convenience. In the Gourmet restaurant it was the variety on the menu, atmosphere and factors of convenience
June <i>et al.</i> 1987[29]	NI	Restaurants	General population (n=50)	NI	Liquor license, followed by the availability of attentive employees to carry out the services and privacy. In intimate dinners and celebrations with friends: liquor license. In family dinners and work lunches: the presence of attentive employees. In intimate dinners: privacy
Auty 1992[61]	United Kingdom	Pubs and ethnic restaurants	General population (n=115)	>16	Type of food served, followed by the quality of the food, value for money, image and atmosphere. On social and convenience occasions: type of food followed by the quality of the food. For celebrations: indication
Sweeney <i>et al.</i> 1992[47]	Australia	Restaurants	Students (n=56)	NI	Behavior of the employees and indication of the restaurant. The price when the meal was with a group of friends, and the appearance of the other consumers when having a special meal with one friend
Kara <i>et al.</i> 1996[57]	United States and Canada	Fast-food	General population, (n=179 USA, 141 Canada)	< 25 to ≥ 46	Frequent consumers – delivery service, variety, service, quality, hygiene, and the agreeability of the employees (USA); seating capacity, hygiene, nutritional value, agreeability of the employees (Canada). Less frequent consumers – novelties for children, price and nutritional value (USA); price, localization and novelties for children (Canada)

Table 2. Continued

Author, year	Country	Type of restaurant studied	Population studied (number)	Age (years)	Principal factors considered in the choice of restaurants
Hsu et al. 1997[20]	Korea	Quick-service, family-style, fine dining restaurant	Students (n=292)	Mean age of 23	1) Quick-service restaurants – hygiene of the utensils, washroom area, food flavor, appearance of the employees, freshness, friendly service; convenient localization; quick service and varied menu; 2) Family-style restaurants – food flavor, famous items on menu, variety, presentation, portion and freshness, and all the aspects of hygiene, service, atmosphere and offer of products Frequent consumers – delivery service, variety, quick service, quality, hygiene and agreeability of employees (USA); place to sit, hygiene, nutritional value, agreeability of employees (USA); place to sit, hygiene, nutritional value, agreeability of employees and variety (Canada). Less frequent consumers – novelties for children, price and nutritional value (USA); price, localization and novelties for children (Canada)
Kara et al. 1997[48]	United States and Canada	Fast-food	General population (n=179 USA, 141 Canada)	<25 to ≥ 46	
Tucciet al. 1997[58]	United States	Table service restaurant	MBA students (n=161)	NI	Quick service, friendly employees and food quality
Anderson et al. 1998[50]	China	Fast-food	General population (n=797)	<25 to <50	Price, followed by a fast work pace and influence of friends
Clark et al. 1998[49]	NI	Restaurants	Adult university employees (n=31)	21 to 65	Food variety, food quality and flavor, price, environment and service, quick service, preference
Rumore et al. 1999[63]	United States	Fast-food	Students (n= 915)	≥ 17	Quality, price and localization
Verma et al. 1999[55]	United States	Pizza House	Under and postgraduate students (n= 89)	NI	Reliability of service and pizza filling
Knutson 2000[59]	United States	Fast-food	Students	NI	Hygiene, agreeability, price, speed, consistency of items on the menu
Susskind et al. 2000[62]	Canada	Restaurants	Students (n=200)	18 to 30	Food quality followed by service and decoration
Azanza 2001[30]	Philippines	Fast-food	University students (n=100)	16 to 22 Mean age of 19	Tasty food, offer of safe food, reasonable price of the food, cleanliness of the establishment and quick service
Mattila 2001[36]	United States	Casual-dining restaurant	Postgraduate students (n=124)	Mean age of 22	Food quality followed by service and atmosphere
Moschis et al. 2003[31]	United States	Restaurants	General population and senior citizens (n=2,082)	≤ 54 to ≥ 55	Individuals aged ≥55: Offer of special discounts according to age, comfort, located near to home or workplace, and recommendation by other people in same age range as consumer. Individuals aged ≤54: comfort, located near to home or workplace, recommendation by other people in same age range as consumer, located near to other places frequented by consumer
Gregory et al. 2004[51]	NI	Restaurants	General population (n=97)	NI	Food quality, followed by cost, localization, atmosphere and type of food. Information that most influenced their choice was that obtained from friends and relatives
Park 2004[37]	Korea	Fast-food	General population (n=279)	<18 to >30	Food flavor, followed by cleanliness, agreeability of employees, quick service and installations
Ayala et al. 2005[38]	United States	Restaurants and Fast-food	Latin women (n=357)	18 to 67 Mean age of 39.7	Taste of the food, distance from home, variety on menu and influence of children and family. 1) Fast-food: influence of children and family, followed by services, knowledge of foods offered, ease of access and quick service, price, distance from home or workplace, food quality. 2) Other establishments: knowledge of the food offered, followed by services, food quality, influence of children and friends, ease of access, quick service and price
Laroche et al. 2005 [21]	Japan	Fast-food brands	Postgraduate students (n=25)	18 to 28	The evaluation of consumer cognition has an impact on both their attitudes and level of confidence in a brand, and on their intention to buy the brand

Table 2. Continued

Author, year	Country	Type of restaurant studied	Population studied (number)	Age (years)	Principal factors considered in the choice of restaurants
Laroche et al. 2005[39]	China	Restaurants	General population (n=299)	<20 to ≥ 60	Discount with coupons (for low-income population)
Schroder et al. 2005[40]	United Kingdom	Fast-food	Postgraduate students (NI)	17 to 25	Speed and convenience, flavor of food, price, quality of ingredients used
Stewart et al. 2005[56]	United States	Fast-food and fine dining restaurant	General population (n=858)	NI	Fast-food: Convenience. Fine-dining: Ambience
Baek et al. 2006[32]	Korea and Philippines	Fast-food	Students (n=303 Korea, 329 Philippines)	Mean age of 22.09 (Korea) and 18.21 (Philippines)	The price, brand, factors related to the foods and factors related to the service and hygiene (Koreans); The price, followed by factors related to the foods and factors of hygiene, service and brand (Filipinos). Both valued positive past experiences
Henson et al. 2006[33]	Canada	Restaurants	General population (n=321)	NI	The perception of food safety
Knutson et al. 2006[41]	United States	Restaurants	Senior citizens (n=685)	≥ 50	Factors related to experience (friendliness, menu variety, location, value, price, convenience, speed of service) were more important than those related to incentives (early bird discounts, coupons, senior discounts, 2-for-1 specials, senior menu, doggie bag, combination meals)
Akbay et al. 2007[53]	Turkey	Fast-food	General population (n=384)	≥ 35	Price, concern with health and preferences of children
Goyal et al. 2007[42]	India	Fast-food	Adolescents (n=171)	20 to 27	Variety of foods, followed by food flavor and quality, ambience and hygiene, service speed, price, localization of establishment and preference of other people
Jang et al. 2007[52]	United States	Restaurants	Under and postgraduate students (n=318)	Mean age of 24	Association programs
Oyewole 2007[45]	United States	Fast-food	Afro-American adults (n=315)	≥ 18	Hygiene and reliability, expeditiousness, ample offers, courtesy/attention, quality
Zopiatis et al. 2007[22]	Republic of Cyprus	Restaurants	Students (n=237)	NI	Hygiene, followed by employee attitude, quality of menu items, professionalism of employees, atmosphere, speed of service, special discounts and promotions, localization of restaurant, price and privacy
Njite et al. 2008[34]	United States	Fine dining restaurant	General population (n=142)	24 to 48	Relationship between employee and consumer, followed by employee competence, convenience, atmosphere and price
Rydell et al. 2008[65]	United States	Fast-food	Adolescents and adults (n=594)	≥ 16	Speed and facility/ convenience, as also flavor and low cost of food
Tinoco et al. 2008[46]	Brazil	Full table service restaurant	Adults (n=24)	>25	1) group of couples without children: possibility of experimenting new dishes and respect for different cultures as criteria of choice; 2) group of friends: cost of service, type of food and size of portion; 3) group of family: options offered to distract children and practicality of the local; 4) group of executive clients: client preferences and availability of tables
Liu et al. 2009[23]	United States	Chinese restaurant	General population (n=284)	Mean age of 37	Food flavor, food safety, food freshness, cleanliness of ambient, and appropriate temperatures of the food were the five most important attributes
Mamalis 2009[24]	Greece	Fast-food	General population (n=400)	NI	Adaptation to locality, food quality and flavor, services offered by establishment, pleasure of visiting or being at a restaurant, promotional programs, quality attributes, high quality delivery service and ambience

Table 2. (Continued)

Author, year	Country	Type of restaurant studied	Population studied (number)	Age (years)	Principal factors considered in the choice of restaurants
Choiet al. 2010[43]	United States	Restaurants	General population (n=307)	< 20 to ≥ 50	Factors related to ambient and service, followed by concern with health and economic values
Ha et al. 2010[25]	United States	Korean restaurant	General population (n=607)	Mean age of 37.7	Cost, taste and menu options
Kim et al. 2010[26]	United States	Fine dining, Buffet and Family/casual dining	Senior citizens (n=76)	≥ 50	Fine dining: food and beverage taste, food and beverage quality and friendliness of service. Buffet: variety of menu items, food and beverage taste, parking and food and beverage quality. Family/casual dining: food and beverage taste, food and beverage quality and friendliness of service
Kim et al. 2010[27]	United States	Fine dining, Buffet and Family/casual dining	Senior citizens (n=393)	≥ 50	Fine dining: taste of food, consistency of food quality, servers' knowledge about menu, friendliness of employees and consistency of service quality. Buffet: taste of food, variety of menu choice, adequate parking space, consistency of food quality and comfortable seating. Family/casual dining: taste of food, consistency of food quality, friendliness of employees, consistency of service quality and servers' knowledge about menu
Kozak 2010[54]	Turkey	Restaurants	Married population (n=226)	Middle-aged individuals	Obligations
Jang et al. 2011[28]	United States	Green restaurant	Y generation (n=322)	17 to 30	Value and reliability of service, food quality and reputation of restaurant
Sancheset al. 2011[35]	Brazil	Restaurants	General population (n=250)	≥ 18	Hygiene of employees followed by hygiene of establishment, food quality, taste and appearance

NI: not informed

On the other hand, "service reliability" was the most relevant attribute studied by Verma and Thompson[55] and Jang et al.[28]. Liu and Jang[23] and Kim et al.[26, 27] also found that a reliable and consistent service was important. However, in the United States, Tucci and Talaga[58] and Moschis et al.[31] observed that the guarantee to the client that the service would be offered as expected was not an important factor at the moment of choosing a restaurant.

In some studies a "delivery service" was the factor that most contributed to the choice of an establishment[48, 57]. On the other hand this element was only perceived as moderately important in the survey carried out by Hsu et al.[20]. The "efficiency" and "high quality of the delivery service" were shown to be relevant by Azanza[30] and Mamalis[24].

In a study by Kara et al.[57] in Canada, the seating capacity was valorized by consumers who most constantly frequented food services. The possibility of remaining in the place after the meal and the parking facilities were attributes perceived as moderately important to important[20].

"Offers of promotional programs" were also analyzed by some researchers, and were cited as very important by consumer in the studies of Jang et al.[52], Mamalis[24] and Kim et al.[26]. Jang et al.[52] analyzed the influence of the cost of joining membership programs in restaurants, and showed a consumer preference for the cheapest ones.

As shown in table 3, other attributes were also analyzed, but were perceived as less relevant by consumers when

choosing a food service.

3.2.2. Installation and Ambient Attributes

The "atmosphere" of an establishment was shown to be a relevant factor in 33.3% of the studies analyzed[20, 22, 24, 26, 27, 35-37, 42, 49, 51, 56, 60-62]. However June and Smith[29] and Jang et al.[28] only found moderate importance for this attribute.

In a study carried out by Stewart et al.[56] the importance of the ambience was positively related to fine-dining establishments, and negatively related to fast-food restaurants. Similar findings were encountered by Hsu et al.[20], who observed that this attribute was highly perceived by consumers in selecting family and fine-dining type restaurants, but not in the choice of quick service ones. Kim et al.[26, 27] also found that this factor was more important in the choice of fine-dining and casual-dining restaurants than in those of the buffet type.

Another factor valorized in the selection of food services was hygiene[20, 22, 23, 30, 32, 35, 37, 42-44, 59, 63]. The general appearance of the restaurant and the hygiene of the kitchen, chinaware, dining area and restrooms stood out as elements perceived by the consumers as inferring the level of food safety of the restaurant[33]. The consumer perception of food safety can influence the choice of restaurant[33]. However, the individuals' knowledge about food safety practices in restaurants is limited, and consumer education action in this area is necessary[64].

Other attributes understood as moderately important to important were: an attractive external design, an area for non-smokers, a tranquil dining area, music, a spacious dining area and attractive presentation[20], privacy[20, 22] and the comfort of the place[26, 27, 31].

3.2.3. Food Attributes

The quality of the food was observed to be the most important factor in choosing to go to a restaurant by Lewis[60], Rumore et al.[63], Susskind and Chan[62], Gregory and Kim[51] and Goyal and Singh[42]. This attribute also showed considerable relevance in other studies[22, 24-28, 32, 35, 36, 38, 49, 55, 58, 61]. "Food quality" also affected consumer satisfaction, as shown by Clark and Wood[49].

In the survey carried out by Auty[61], the type of food offered at the establishment was the most valorized item in the selection of a restaurant. Gregory and Kim[51] and Tinoco and Ribeiro[46] also observed that this element influenced the choice made by the consumers interviewed.

On the other hand, the attribute that most contributed to the choice of a restaurant according to Miller and Ginter[44], Park[37], Ayala et al.[38], Goyal and Singh[42], Ha and Jang[25] and Kim et al.[26, 27] was the taste of the food. This aspect was also shown to be important in studies carried out by Hsu et al.[20], Anderson and He[50], Clark and Wood[49], Azanza[30], Rydell et al.[65], Liu and Jang[23], Mamalis[24] and Sanches and Salay[35].

The "variety of the menu" was another relevant factor in the selection of food services (Table 2), although in some studies this attribute was relatively less important in the choice of restaurant [22, 23, 35, 37]. The "variety of the menu" seems to affect consumer loyalty and satisfaction with respect to a specific food service [49, 25; respectively]. It should be mentioned that Choi and Zhao [43] observed the importance of offering a variety of healthy options to the consumers.

Other attributes related to the food that were also relevant in the selection of restaurants were: the nutritional value[43, 48, 57], the appearance[35], the coherence of the items on the menu, size of the portion, temperature of the food when served, freshness, offer of foods requested by the client and the offer of healthy foods (Tables 2 and 3). Some other items presented moderate value: authenticity, aroma and presentation of the food served[23]. The rest of the items were categorized as of little importance.

3.2.4. Price

The "price" was the attribute most researched in the studies analyzed (64.4%) (Table 3). This item was shown to be important in the selection of a food service in the majority of the studies that investigated it. Baek et al.[32] showed that Korean and Filipino consumers perceived price to be the most relevant factor in the choice of a restaurant. On the other hand, for American consumers the price was the

second factor in the selection of a family/popular restaurant or an atmosphere restaurant[60]. This item was also the third most valorized factor in the selection of ethnic restaurants and pubs[61], as also for fast-food restaurants[59]. Price was also shown to be important in the selection of restaurants by Rumore et al.[63], Gregory and Kim[51], Ayala et al.[38], Goyal and Singh[42], Njite et al.[34] and Kim et al.[26].

However, in other studies the price was considered to be an attribute of little importance when compared to other factors[20, 23, 29, 33, 35-37].

3.2.5. Localization

The attribute of localization was investigated in 44.4% of the studies (Table 3). A "convenient localization" and "localization" were attributes understood as important in the selection of food services according to Hsu et al.[20], Rumore et al.[63], Gregory and Kim[51], Ayala et al.[38], Stewart et al.[56] and Goyal and Singh[42]. When close to the residence or place of work, the "localization of the establishment" appears to be an important factor in selecting a restaurant[31]. According to Azanza[30], the proximity of the establishments to their residences was of greater importance for students than to be near their schools and/or work.

For individuals with a smaller degree of commitment to restaurant loyalty programs, the localization had greater importance than for individuals with a greater degree of commitment[36]. According to Gregory and Kim[51], the localization was a significantly more important attribute for individuals with no information concerning the establishment, than for individuals who had such information.

Stewart et al.[56] observed that consumers tended to choose establishments that offered more nutritive options, if they were also more conveniently located and had an agreeable ambience.

Mamalis[24] observed the importance of adapting the restaurant according to the characteristics of the locality (country, region or city). Thus when implanting an establishment in a new locality one should consider the particularities of the region, and, when necessary, always attend the likes of the local population.

3.2.6. Other Factors

The "indication of a restaurant" was the type of information most used by consumers for celebrations[61], and other authors made similar findings[31, 50, 47]. According to Moschiset al.[31], when the recommendation was made by individuals in the same age bracket, it could be more effective.

Gregory and Kim[51] showed that the information that most influenced the choice of restaurant was that passed on by friends and relatives (94.5%), this information being more used than that obtained from the media. Such results were also observed in other studies[20, 43, 47, 63].

In the studies of Auty[61] and Gregory and Kim[51], having a new experience was not a relevant factor for restaurant choice. Sweeney et al.[47] showed that past experience was moderately important in the choice of a restaurant.

Other attributes presented as important in the selection of food services were the premises, freshness, accurate guest check, pleasure of visiting or being at a restaurant, relationship with the client, obligation, influence of the company, novelties for children, appearance of the other consumers, parking space and liquor license (Tables 2 and 3). It should be mentioned that novelties for children appeared to be more relevant for those consumers who went less frequently to restaurants[48, 57], and that the appearance of the other consumers was more valorized by those individuals that went out for a meal with one friend than by those that went out for a meal with a group of friends[47]. In addition, the reputation of a restaurant was an additional motive to choose an establishment, according to Sweeney et al.[47], Park[37] and Jang et al.[28].

3.3. Factor Importance According to the Characteristics of the Population

Some studies showed that the behavior of students differed from that of other consumers, and so this group was analyzed separately[20, 31, 65].

For the student population, the following factors were considered more important: 1) price; 2) the behavior or friendliness of the employees, speed of service and food quality; 3) the taste of the food; 4) hygiene. Other factors considered important were: atmosphere and localization of the establishment, reliability of the service offered, food safety, past experience and sales incentive programs offered by the restaurants (Table 2). Indication of a restaurant by other people was also taken into consideration by students in their choice of an establishment.

The attribute perceived as most important by the students was price. However, in a survey carried out by Tucci and Talaga[58], it was shown that although there was a greater use of lower price services, the difference in price level was not significant in the choice of restaurants with full table service. On the other hand, Zopiatis and Pribic[22] showed that this item was more important for individuals who ate away from home less frequently, approximately once a month. In addition, Laroche et al.[39] observed that for the low-income population, discount coupons could influence their attitudes in the choice of restaurants. A low income was also shown to be significant for eating in fast-food restaurants[45].

The ethnicity, sex and age of the consumers also appeared to influence the perception of the individuals at the moment of selecting a food service.

In Cyprus, the locals were more influenced by the factors of speed of service, quality of the items on the menu and professionalism of the employees than students of other nationalities who lived in Cyprus[22]. On comparing consumers from different countries, Baek et al.[32] noted

that the price was the most relevant factor for Korean and Filipino consumers, but that the sequence of factors more important in the selection of food services differed from country to country (Table 2).

Considering the sex of the consumers, it can be seen that male students and younger students both perceived the price as relatively more important than female and older students. On the other hand, when making their choices, female students gave greater value to the hygiene of the establishment[63]. Ayala et al.[38] found that Latin women noted the following to a greater extent: the taste of the food, the distance from home, the variety on the menu and the preference of the children and the rest of the family. For their part Sanches and Salay[35] showed that women considered the service time, quality and appearance of the food and the appearance and friendliness of the employees more important than men ($p < 0.05$). Zopiatis and Pribic[22] made similar findings. Finally Rydell et al.[65] observed that women were more inclined to eat in fast-food restaurants than men ($p = 0.0005$), due to the preferences of their family and/or friends.

With respect to age, Rydell et al.[65] observed that consumers aged between 16 and 24 tended to eat in fast-food restaurants due to the preference of their family and friends, but this was not the case for individuals ≥ 55 years of age ($p < 0.0005$). Oyewole[45] also observed that the frequency of eating in fast-food restaurants decreased with age.

According to the survey of Auty[61], the type and quality of the food was a concern of all interviewees, with the exception of those over 56 years of age. Similar findings were made by Moschis et al.[31] who observed that for mature consumers the main reasons for choosing restaurants were the offer of special discounts for senior citizens, the comfort of the place, localization near to home or work, and recommendations by other consumers in the same age range. Kim et al.[26] also found that special discounts for senior citizens were important, and in addition, observed that the availability of nutritional information concerning the items on the menu was an important attribute for consumers, and that the older the consumer, the greater the degree of importance given to this item when choosing a restaurant. Nevertheless, in another survey carried out by Kim et al.[27] with senior citizens, discounts and nutritional information were given less emphasis when choosing a restaurant. Finally, Knutson et al.[41] found that initially discounts had less importance when compared with other factors related to the experience of the restaurants (Table 2), although they were highly relevant for a group of senior citizens.

It is worth mentioning that according to Auty[61], consumers over 56 years of age were inclined to always eat at the same places, and thus factors such as the type of food and the search for novelty had little effect on the choice of these consumers.

Although some studies showed that consumer age could be directly related to factors that influenced the choice of restaurants, 13 of the papers analyzed did not inform the age of the consumers interviewed (Table 2), partially limiting the

discussion of the results.

3.4. Factor Importance According to Type of Restaurant and Occasion Investigated

Some authors analyzed the selection of the choice of restaurant in more than one type of restaurant, and in the present review, it was observed that the type of restaurant most investigated was that of fast-food (40.0%) (Table 2).

3.4.1. Fast-food

3.4.1.1. Choice Factors

According to the frequency of citation in the studies, the most important factors in the selection of fast-food restaurants were: 1) price; 2) speed of service and quality of the service and/or of the food; 3) hygiene; 4) taste of the food; 5) friendliness and behavior of the employees and convenience (Table 2). Other studies additionally cited the following attributes as relevant aspects: the offer of quality delivery service, variety, installations, seating capacity, nutritional values, preference of other people, fast working pace, localization, menu, food safety, positive past experience, restaurant brand, reliability and service speed (Table 2).

It is worth mentioning that in a study carried out by Akbay *et al.*[53] in Turkey, where the consumers perceived price as a relevant factor when eating meals away from home, they were less inclined to eat in fast-food establishments. It was also shown in the same country that concern with food safety could be a limiting factor in the selection of fast-food restaurants.

Also with respect to the choice of fast-food restaurants, Baek *et al.*[32] observed that the students preferred local fast-food establishments when compared to restaurants with an international franchise.

3.4.1.2. Context

Miller and Ginter[44] investigated the selection of fast-food restaurants considering specific situations: 1) week-day lunch, 2) snack during a visit to a shopping center, 3) meal at night when time is short, and 4) meal with family when time is not short. Table 2 shows the order of importance of the factors in each situation, and the fact that the taste of the food was the most important attribute considered by the consumers on all occasions, stood out.

3.4.2. Other Restaurants

3.4.2.1. Choice Factors

In addition to fast-food restaurants, other types of restaurant were also investigated. Some studies did not specify the type of restaurant analyzed, considering the analysis of the choice of restaurant in general. The factors involved in the choice of restaurants in general, quick - service restaurants, fine-dining restaurants, family-style restaurants, table-service restaurants, Chinese restaurants,

pizza houses, Korean restaurants and “green” restaurants, are discussed below.

An investigation of the factors that determine the choice of restaurants in general was carried out in 15 studies (33.3%), (Table 2). It can be seen that, in this case, the results of the articles were more diversified than in the case of fast-food restaurants. The following attributes were noted as more relevant in the choice of establishments cited as “restaurants”: 1) food quality; 2) availability of attentive employees and their behavior, quality or speed of service and the atmosphere or ambience of the restaurant; and 3) localization of the establishment, taste of the food, hygiene and price (Table 2).

Other studies specified the type of restaurant investigated, and some researchers analyzed more than one type of restaurant. Hsu *et al.*[20] found that hygiene was the most valorized attribute in the selection of quick-service or fine-dining restaurants, whereas it was the taste of the food in the selection of family-style restaurants (Table 2). In the studies by Kim *et al.*[26, 27], the taste and quality of the foods were the relevant attributes in the selection of all the types of establishment investigated (fine dining, buffet and family/casual dining restaurant) (Table 2).

Njite *et al.*[34] also studied the motives used in the choice of fine-dining restaurants, and showed that the most important attribute was the relationship between the employees and the consumers, followed by employee competence and convenience. Stewart *et al.*[56] and Kim *et al.*[26] also found evidence that the ambience was positively related to fine-dining establishments. An analysis of the surveys carried out by Kim *et al.*[26, 27] showed that the attributes perceived in the choice of fine-dining and casual-dining restaurants by more mature consumers were similar, but differed at the moment of selecting a buffet-type restaurant (Table 2).

Tucciand Talaga[58], investigating the selection of table-service restaurants took the following into account to a special extent: hygiene, service, atmosphere and offer of products. In addition they observed a greater use of establishments that offered quicker service. On the other hand, Liu and Jang[23] surveyed Chinese restaurants and showed that the food quality and hygiene of the environment influenced the consumer decision more strongly, and could be understood as prerequisites in the choice of these establishments.

Pizza houses were investigated by Verma and Thompson [55], who showed that “service reliability” and “pizza filling” were the most important attributes when selecting these establishments (Table 2).

Ha and Jang[25] analyzed the choice of Korean restaurants, and their results suggested that American consumers considered the cost, the taste or the menu options at the moment of choosing an ethnic restaurant, as also when choosing an American restaurant. Of the attributes analyzed, the taste, menu variety and the option of healthy foods had a significant relationship with the satisfaction and buying

intention model. They also observed that when the consumers preferred healthier foods, they tended to select fine-dining establishments instead of fast-food restaurants. In the same way, individuals who practiced physical activities were less inclined to purchase food in fast-food restaurants[56].

On analyzing the choice of “green” restaurants, Jang et al.[28] observed that the most important attributes were the value and service reliability, food quality and reputation of the restaurant. The pro-environmental activities carried out by the food services were not perceived as relevant.

3.4.2.2. Context

In a study carried out by June and Smith[29], a liquor license in restaurants was shown to be more important in the case of intimate dinners and celebrations amongst friends, such as birthdays, whereas the presence of attentive employees was more relevant for family dinners and business lunches, and a secluded place for intimate dinners.

Sweeney et al.[47] also considered distinct situations, and observed that the price was more important when selecting a restaurant for a meal with a group of friends, than when having a special meal with one friend. Another attribute analyzed by the authors was the appearance of the other consumers, which was more important for individuals who go out for a special meal with one friend than for those who go out for a meal with a group of friends.

Auty[61] showed that the type of food was the most relevant attribute when choosing a food service for social or convenience occasions, followed by the food quality. On the other hand, for a celebration, the recommendation of the restaurant was the most important information. It was also apparent that for special occasions and celebrations, attributes related to service speed and the opening times of the restaurant were not cited, and for convenience occasions, recommendations were not cited. Service speed was the third most important attribute for convenience occasions together with value for money.

Tinoco and Ribeiro[46] determined the factors for the choice of full-service restaurants with four distinct groups of people: ‘couples without children’, ‘group of friends’, ‘family group’ and ‘executive group’. Differences were found between the groups and the factors considered (Table 2). Another type of establishment investigated was that used for the occasional dinner. In this case the three principal reasons cited by the interviewees were the food quality followed by the service and the atmosphere[36].

4. Practical Implications and Conclusions

This review of the body of studies regarding food service choice results in relevant conclusions and applications. The findings show that differences in the degree of importance given to the selection factors varies according to the type of

food service, the characteristics of the customers (ethnicity, sex and age) and the context in which the meals will be eaten.

The “food quality” and “food taste” appear to be important factors in the choice of all types of food service. For fast-food restaurants, the aspects observed to be more relevant were: price, service speed, service and food quality, hygiene and food taste. On the other hand, for general type restaurants and the other types of establishment analyzed, the most relevant factors were: food quality and taste, employee behavior and friendliness, service, atmosphere and ambience of the restaurant and its localization.

Price was the most relevant factor for the student population, and was also shown to be important for the lower-income populations, for individuals who eat out less frequently and for fast-food restaurant frequenters. On the other hand, for the mature consumer the importance of the following stood out: the offer of special discounts, the attributes related to food and service quality, the taste of the food and the comfort of the place. With respect to gender, it was shown that women were more inclined than men to valorize the preferences of their family and children when choosing a food service, and they were also more concerned about food safety, quality and taste.

The participation of food consumed away from home is relevant in the diets of several populations and also for their health. The few papers that have studied the nutritional information, nutritional value and the offer of healthy foods showed that these factors were not so relevant in the choice of a restaurant. Maybe policies should be designed with a view to increasing consumer awareness of healthy food choices when eating away from home. However, new studies regarding consumer perception about nutritional information and healthy food choices in restaurants are necessary. Food service managers should also search for strategies that take into consideration different occasions. For example, for every day contexts, the attributes considered most important by food service clients were the hygiene of the establishment and the quality and taste of the food, whereas for fast-food restaurants, an accessible price and speedy service appear to be indispensable. However for commemorations, amongst the factors perceived by the consumers, a liquor license, appearance of the other consumers and recommendations of the restaurant by other people stood out.

Some studies observed that “information passed on by friends and relatives” had more influence on the choice of restaurant than information obtained from the media. The value given to the “word of mouth” shows how important it is to satisfy the customer, since a satisfied customer tends to recommend the establishment[66], and can also encourage his or her intention to return[67].

Few studies cited the validity and reliability of the instrument used in the survey. When using a validated instrument the researcher is considering that the instrument used in the data collection really is measuring the variable it intended to measure. Instrument reliability is related to its consistency, repeatability and reproducibility. Thus the

validity and reliability of the instrument are fundamental requirements for research instruments [68].

Some studies did not clearly report the characterization of the population analyzed. The age of the interviewees were not reported in 13 papers. The lack of such information makes it difficult to compare the results of different papers. Thus it is recommended that future papers provide relevant data regarding the characterization of the population studied.

Amongst the limitations of the present study, one could say that there may be other articles published that analyze the choice of food services by consumers, but did not enter the present review because they were not in the data bases used in this review and/or were not cited in the articles found in these data bases. Nevertheless, the authors believe that the survey carried out managed to compile many studies that analyzed the selection of food services, and thus the results of the survey are of relevance to the sector.

Considering the diversity of types of restaurant on the market, there is a need for more surveys, since many types of food service have not yet been investigated, or were only involved in a limited number of surveys, such as full-service restaurants, buffet by weight restaurants, vegetarian restaurants, ethnic restaurants, etc. In addition, the development of new research with adolescent and elderly populations is recommended, since few papers have analyzed these population segments. Similarly the study of restaurant choice in several contexts is suggested.

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