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# Социално- икономически анализи

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## FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CHOICE OF CATERING ESTABLISHMENTS AMONG BULGARIAN CONSUMERS

**Abstract:** This study examines the factors that influence the choice of catering establishment. For this purpose, an online survey has been conducted, which has been distributed on social media and completed by 147 users. The results show that the most important factor for consumers is the pleasant atmosphere in the restaurant, the second is the professional service and the third is the diverse menu. Conclusions and recommendations to catering establishments have been made based on the study.

**Keywords:** restaurant, consumer behavior, services.

### Introduction

Foodservice activity is a major tourist activity involved in the formation and sale of the tourism product as a package of tangible and intangible components designed to satisfy the needs, desires and expectations of tourists at a certain price. It is part of the hotel and restaurant services system and ensures the quality realization of tourists' stay at the destination. As a subsystem of tourism, services for providing food and drink ensure that people's basic need for food is met.

The purpose of this study is to determine the factors of consumer behavior when choosing a catering establishment based on an online survey.

### 1. Consumer behavior

Every day, consumers of goods and services have to choose from the diversity on the market, and on the other hand, business representatives have to study consumer behavior to make the best decision about what, where, how and how much to sell. There are two main factors in consumer choice: *marketing* (determined by the business and which include the type of product/ service, its price, distribution and supply) and *environmental factors* (including economic, technological, political and cultural factors). And despite all the efforts of the business to offer its products in the best way, there is always a considerable per-centage that cannot be predicted and is related to the subconscious of the consumer, namely a decision that is related to certain personality characteristics affecting the purchasing/ consumption decision-making process.

The change of consumer types (X, Y, Z, Alpha Generation) in tourist services necessitates a change in supply, as well as an adaptation of an already finished product to the requirements of solvent buyers. These generations necessarily use the internet and, respectively, new technologies to be competitive in their business<sup>1</sup>. Y generation (as known as Millennials) represents a significant target group for the business, including tourism. It is a generation interested in a healthy way of life, wellness, looking for new trends, sharing and creative life. About tourism, they are looking not only in typical and emblematic places to visit but to learn

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<sup>1</sup> **Varadzhakova, D.** MICE Tourism in the digital transformation era. *Collective Scientific Book „MICE tourism: festivals, incentives, conferences, exhibitions“*. XII Black Sea Tourism Forum, 2019. Slavena Publishing House, Varna, 2019, p. 175.

more about the local culture, the everyday life of the people, their history, traditions and customs<sup>2</sup>. The different cultural, educational and age characteristics determine the differences in the tourism preferences of these groups of consumers. The old teens are free of family obligations, they have the chance to think about their improvement and, normally, they are looking for all of the opportunities the life offers to them to learn. The early Millennials are tired yet of the long and exhausting daily routine, the traffic, the long working days, the responsibilities and the lack of freedom of using their vacations when they want and not when their employer prefer. They are dedicated to the work; sometimes pass more than 10 hours a day at the office. In the daily routine, they have no time to think so much in a healthy way of living and eating<sup>3</sup>.

## 2. Data from the online survey

Instead of the product – today the consumers are first and foremost with their needs and aspirations<sup>4</sup>. An online survey was conducted to identify the factors that influence the consumer choice of a catering establishment, from which 147 responses were collected – 83.2% of them given by females and 16.8% by males. The survey does not claim to be representative, but it can largely be said that it outlines consumer attitudes when choosing a catering establishment.

An important part of the survey is the presentation of the respondents by educational level. It can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Educational level of the respondents

<i>Education</i>	<i>%</i>
Secondary (including students)	21.8
Higher – Professional Bachelor’s degree	2.0
Higher – Bachelor’s degree	23.1
<b>Higher – Master’s degree</b>	<b>46.3</b>
PhD degree	6.8

The highest is the percentage of respondents with a Master’s degree, followed by a bachelor’s degree, with secondary education (including students), a PhD, and a professional bachelor’s degree.

Another important aspect of the survey is the occupation/ employment. Its dimensions can be traced in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Occupation/employment of the respondents

<i>Occupation/employment</i>	<i>%</i>
Learners	16.2
<b>Workers</b>	<b>70.3</b>
with own business	7.4
unemployed/maternity leave	6.1

The most numerous among the surveyed are workers, followed by learners, and people who have their businesses, and the smallest is the percentage of the unemployed and those on maternity leave. The target

<sup>2</sup> **Varadzhakova, D., V. Statev.** The Millennial: between creative and slow tourism. *Collective Scientific Book from International Scientific and Practical Conference “Development of the Bulgarian and European Economies – challenges and opportunities”*, vol. 1, University of Veliko Tarnovo, 2018, p. 248.

<sup>3</sup> As the above, p. 251.

<sup>4</sup> **Lyubenov, L.** Digital marketing transformations. *Socio-economic analyzes*, 2/2018 (14), p. 154.

group of the survey is people aged 19 plus who choose their catering establishment. The age structure of the respondents is presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Age structure of the respondents

<i>Age group (years)</i>	<i>%</i>
19 – 29	35
<b>30 – 39</b>	<b>40</b>
40 – 49	17
50 – 59	6
60 – 69	2
<i>over 70</i>	0

The prevailing percentage (98%) of the interviewed are of working age, of which the largest share in the survey are people aged 30–39.

To get a more accurate picture of the profile of the respondents, it is important to note that they are people who eat out relatively often, with 36.7% who responded that they visit a restaurant 1–2 times a week, 26.5% do this 1–2 times a month. The number of daily goers is also small, 11.6% of the respondents.

And based on the received and processed survey results, where the main question is: “Please indicate which factors influence your choice of catering establishment”, we have the following answers, presented in Table 4<sup>5</sup>.

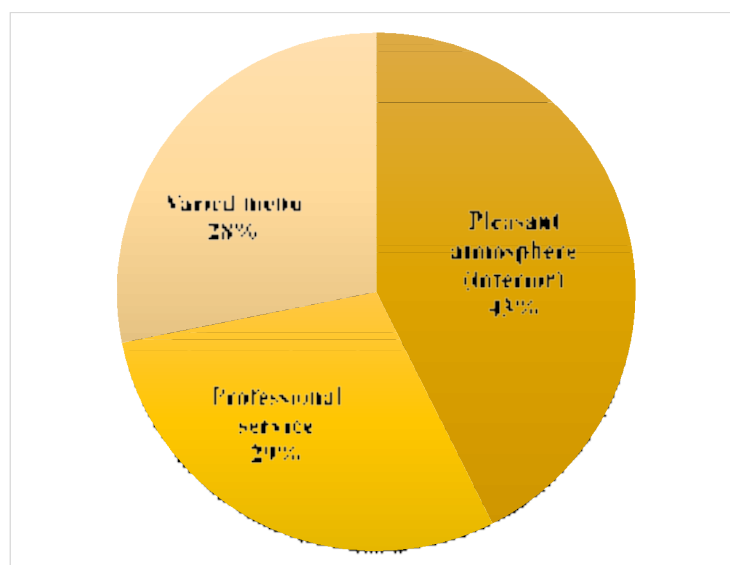
**Table 4.** Factors that determine consumers’ preferences when choosing a catering establishment

<i>№</i>	<i>Factors</i>	<i>Number of responses</i>
1	Category (number of stars)	1
2	<b><i>Pleasant atmosphere (interior)</i></b>	115
3	Image	10
4	<b><i>Professional service</i></b>	79
5	Music program	13
6	Theme nights	5
7	<b><i>Diverse menu</i></b>	76
8	A large number of culinary products	23
9	Prices of culinary products	53
10	Parking facilities available	15
11	Specialty menu	1

<sup>5</sup> It is a copyrighted survey conducted in the period 2018–2019 with the Google Poll Tool. The participants could select up to 3 responses from the suggested ones, which they find important for them when choosing a restaurant.

What made an impression when processing the results was that the atmosphere of the establishment, namely the interior, which is the primary reason for the visit, is the leading factor. As expected, professional service is among the top three. Considering that service is offered, this factor is very strong and crucial for the business. The third factor is the diverse menu.

Contrary to some expectations, the prices of culinary products are ranked fourth, which proves the maxim that the atmosphere, service and quality of food are the leading factors for consumers. The data is converted in percentage and presented in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** The three factors that have the greatest impact among restaurant customers

The search for a pleasant atmosphere also reinforces the emotional impact that catering establishments have on their customers and the fact that, in addition to dining, they are an environment for social and cultural experiences. Eating out is primarily an emotion, but it can be added that the main experience, the emotion, is particularly noticeable at the stage of consuming or using the service. The atmosphere in the restaurant coincides with the time and place of consumption of the actual restaurant service and in this sense, it is at this stage that the “unique experience” of the consumer is realized<sup>6</sup>.

### 3. Conclusions and recommendations

Decision-making and consumption in tourism are often highly interpersonal and emotional. Much of the research on consumer behavior in tourism is due to the assumption of limited rationality and decision-making frameworks developed for consumer goods, without taking full account of the specificity of tourism consumption<sup>7</sup>.

It can be *concluded* that:

- There is a presumption that a relationship exists between the *level of education* and the *consumer choice of a catering establishment*. Respondents' high level of education may underlie higher requirements for a visit to a catering establishment related to emotional experience in a pleasant environment;
- *Consumers are looking for a finished restaurant product, not just satisfaction with culinary production* – good food is accepted as an accompaniment to restaurants with nice interiors. When a restaurant owner has tried to create a cozy and beautiful place to meet their customers, they should also try to offer a varied menu of high-quality food;

<sup>6</sup> **Kostadinova, N.** The personalized conference product in the hospitality industry. *Collective Scientific Book from the international scientific conference dedicated to the 55th anniversary of the establishment of the College of Tourism – Varna “Tourism and Innovation”*. Science and Economics Publishing House, Varna, 2018, pp. 302–313.

<sup>7</sup> **Decrop, A., H. Snelders.** Planning the summer vacation: An adaptable process. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 31(4), 2004, pp.1008–1030.

➤ *The categorization of a food establishment has little relevance in consumer choice* – this fact draws attention to the importance of categorization of a catering establishment. Furthermore, the categorization requires minimum star requirements, and higher categorization entails higher fees for receiving it. The question remains how compulsory categorization influences consumer choice, and if an establishment that has high categorization but does not meet the requirements and expectations of the user will be visited, attractive and interesting;

➤ *The human factor is one of the most important for the users of services.* The service staff ranks second in importance after the interior and it is important for the enjoyable experience and consumption of restaurant services. Professionally trained staff is at the heart of business success, and important criteria for consumers when choosing a restaurant, and “*the effectiveness of each team member’s performance depends on their ability to perform the necessary functions and their motivation*”<sup>8</sup>.

*The recommendations are intrinsically linked to the conclusions, and it can be said that:*

➤ *A clear definition of the target group (s) is required when starting a catering establishment.* To accurately plan the costs for the operation of the site, it is necessary to answer the questions to whom it is intended, what their needs, desires and opportunities are, in other words, one need to create a profile of potential users who they seek to attract. This can best meet customer requirements and expectations without incurring unreasonable costs for the functioning of the catering establishment;

➤ *The business should not underestimate the creation of goods/services* and offer the best products to its users according to its capabilities. Restaurant owners cannot exceed their capabilities, but they should not compromise with the service offered. They should strive for achieving high results with good planning and management of the available goods and services;

➤ *Categorization is a prerequisite for the functioning of catering establishments, but the restaurant owner chooses the number of stars they want to have.* The important thing here is compliance with the Bulgarian legislation, but at the same time it is essential to choose the most optimal opportunity to operate without incurring unnecessary costs for a higher category, given its low impact on consumer choice;

➤ *Investments in human resources lead to a competitive advantage for the business.* This can happen with the provision of social and economic benefits, as well as training, qualifications and other professional competency courses and training. Staff are grateful and show loyalty and diligence when they are highly appreciated by their employer.

The achievement of a high-quality and competitive tourism product involves investing in tangible and intangible resources, but to optimize and be more effectively invested, these resources need to be well-planned and analyzed.

In today’s business environment, organizations rely on different experts who work together to achieve better risk management. These are various professionals with specific qualities and competencies that can be indispensable to their field of work. Nevertheless, problems can occur in any organization. This is the reason why responsibilities are clearly defined and coordinated<sup>9</sup>.

These competencies are of managerial level and *managers should acquire knowledge of more methods to support their strategic planning, as well as familiarize their company staff with long-term marketing strategies*<sup>10</sup>.

## Conclusion

From the survey conducted it can be summarized that the restaurant product has a complex character and for its creation and realization it is necessary to make management decisions related to planning, organization, offering and marketing of the product/service. This task requires a lot of effort and resources in the right direction, given that one of the most difficult tasks in business is the achievement of customer satisfaction. The conclusions and recommendations made are based on a survey of consumer opinion and concrete results.

<sup>8</sup> **Dimitrova, V.** Opportunities for optimal project portfolio management under resource constraints. Publishing house of NMU, 2008, pp. 124–125.

<sup>9</sup> **Tsanevska, V.** Risk management – stages and concepts of banking risk management. *Socio-economic analyzes*, 2017, № 2, p. 139.

**Stefanov, Ts.** Market strategy and development of company competitiveness in Veliko Tarnovo region. Faber Publishing house, Veliko Tarnovo, 2018, p. 190.

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