Articles and essays

Choosing a Restaurant: important attributes and related features of a consumer's decision making process

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Abstract

The identification of the attributes considered by consumers in their decision-making process is a competitive factor for organizations and consists of a field of research on the products and services available on the market. This study aimed at identifying which are the attributes and related features taken into account by consumers in their decision-making process for choosing a restaurant. Two studies were thus conducted, the first being a qualitative study based on interviews with 23 restaurant consumers. The research contributions were used for the development of a questionnaire for the second study carried out in the city of Belo Horizonte, Brazil, in March 2014, which consisted of a survey made up of a sample of 600 customers of fast-food restaurants, continuous service (all-you-can-eat restaurants), buffet, and *a la carte*, totaling 438 valid questionnaires analyzed statistically, obtaining 12 groups with 46 attributes (service, beauty, comfort, nearby location, convenient location, choices, children, convenience, offers, perceived value, entertainment, and queue). On food evaluation, two groups were identified (organoleptic and presentation), regarding beverages, a single group was formed for seven indicators. The attributes on hygiene, food quality, service, and price made up the list of the most important aspects in the consumers' decision-making process for choosing a restaurant (fast-food, continuous service – "all-you-can-eat restaurants" –, buffet and *a la carte*). The identification of these attributes showed similarities between the restaurants surveyed and allowed the comparison of results with other surveys conducted in that field.

Keywords: Consumer behavior; Product attributes; Consumer's decision-making process; Restaurant.

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Resumo

Escolhendo um Restaurante: atributos importantes e suas respectivas dimensões consideradas no processo de decisão do consumidor

A correta identificação dos atributos considerados pelos consumidores em seu processo decisório de compra é um fator de competitividade para as organizações, bem como constitui um campo de conhecimento teórico sobre produtos e serviços existentes no mercado. Este trabalho buscou identificar quais são os atributos, e suas respectivas dimensões, considerados pelos consumidores em seu processo decisório para a escolha de restaurantes. Para tal, foram realizados dois estudos, sendo o primeiro um estudo qualitativo baseado em entrevistas com 23 consumidores de restaurantes. As contribuições dessa pesquisa foram utilizadas na elaboração do questionário usado no segundo estudo na cidade de Belo Horizonte em março de 2014. O questionário consistiu em um levantamento com amostra de 600 consumidores em restaurantes *fast food,* rodízio, *self service* e *a la carte*, resultando em 438 questionários válidos que foram analisados estatisticamente, obtendo-se 12 grupos formados a partir de 46 atributos (atendimento, beleza, conforto, localização próxima, localização conveniente, possibilidade de escolha, crianças, comodidade, promoções, valor percebido, entretenimento e fila). Na avaliação da comida, foram identificados dois grupos (organoléptica e apresentação) e no caso das bebidas foi gerado somente um grupo formado por sete indicadores. Os atributos relacionados à higiene, qualidade da comida, atendimento e preço compõem a lista dos aspectos mais importantes no processo decisório do consumidor dos restaurantes (*self service*, rodízio, *fast food* e à *la carte*). A identificação desses atributos revelou similaridades entre os restaurantes pesquisados, além de possibilitar a comparação dos resultados obtidos com outras pesquisas realizadas na área.

Palavras-chave: Comportamento do consumidor; Atributos do produto; Processo decisório do consumidor; Restaurante.

Resumen

Eligiéndose un Restaurante: atributos importantes y sus respectivas dimensiones del proceso de toma de decisiones del consumidor

La identificación de los atributos que son considerados por los consumidores en su proceso de toma de decisiones es un factor de competitividad para las organizaciones y consiste en un campo de investigación sobre los productos y servicios disponibles en el mercado. Este estudio tuvo como objetivo identificar cuáles son los atributos y características relacionadas que son tomados en cuenta por los consumidores en su proceso de toma de decisiones para elegir un restaurante. Dos estudios se llevaron a cabo por lo tanto, siendo la primera un estudio cualitativo basado en entrevistas con 23 consumidores de restaurantes. Se utilizaron las contribuciones de la investigación en la elaboración de un cuestionario para el segundo estudio –en la ciudad de Belo Horizonte, Brasil, en marzo de 2014–, que consistió en una encuesta realizada con una muestra de 600 clientes de los restaurantes de comida rápida, servicio continuo (todo-lo-que-puedas-comer restaurantes), buffet y a la carta, por un total de 438 cuestionarios válidos analizados estadísticamente, obteniendo 12 grupos con 46 atributos (servicios, belleza, comodidad, cerca de la ubicación, ubicación conveniente, opciones, niños, conveniencia, ofertas, valor percibido, entretenimiento y cola). En la evaluación de alimentos, se identificaron dos grupos (organoléptica y presentación) y en la evaluación de las bebidas se formó un solo grupo de siete indicadores. Los atributos con respecto a la higiene, la calidad de la comida, servicio y precio componen la lista de los aspectos más importantes en el proceso de toma de decisiones del consumidor de restaurantes (comida rápida, servicio continuo –todo-lo-que-puedas-comer restaurantes–, buffet y a la carta). La identificación de estos atributos mostró similitudes entre los restaurantes encuestados y se les permitió la comparación de los resultados con otros estudios realizados en este campo.

Palabras clave: Comportamiento del consumidor; Atributos del producto; Proceso de toma de decisiones del consumidor; Restaurante.

INTRODUCTION

The word "restaurant" originated in France, in the sixteenth century, to describe the business houses that provided restoring food, which consisted of a soup that rehabilitated the sick (Ferreira, Valduga & Bahl, 2016; Spang, 2003). Initially, the act of eating had the unique purpose of meeting the nutritional needs of the person. However, eating became responsible not only for satisfying a person's hunger over time, but also to satisfy hedonic desires through meals (Ferreira, Valduga & Bahl, 2016; Barreto & Senra, 2001; Jesus, 2005). In addition, the number of people who eat out increased largely, thus generating variety of restaurants that meet the desires of different market segments (Leal, 2010).

Data from the Brazilian Household Budget Survey (POF), organized by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics in 2008-2009 (IBGE, 2010) indicate that more than 30% of the Brazilian food expenditures were made out of home. Moreover, in recent years, food services had a higher growth than the sale of food products in retail (Carneiro, 2012).

From that phenomenon, this study presents the following question: which are the attributes and related level of importance in consumers' decision-making process to chose a restaurant? The main objective is to identify the attributes and their level of importance to consumers in the decision-making process for the choice of restaurants. In addition, other important objectives are to group these attributes in similar dimensions or corresponding factors and validate them statistically. A total of 600 questionnaires were collected in Belo Horizonte, a metropolis of Brazil's southeast region, in March 2014.

The theoretical contribution of this study refers to the development of issues related to consumer behavior and the relevance of the attributes related to the area of food services and identified by consumers. In addition, it motivates the scientific community to explain the phenomena of this expanding sector in Brazil.

Previous studies have already addressed restaurants, identifying aspects and attributes that create value for consumers, such as the ones by: Singh (2006), which identified how colors can be used by managers to increase or decrease appetite, improve mood, calm down consumers and reduce the perceived waiting time, for example; Park (2004), which sought to measure the attributes, as well as utilitarian and hedonic values at Korean fast-food restaurants; and Glanz et al. (2007),which described the process, motivation, and challenges of offering healthier options in restaurant menus. Furthermore, the diversity of options tends to complicate the decision-making process. Therefore, researchers get more interested in understanding consumer behavior, hence seeking to identify the relevant attributes in the evaluation and choice of a restaurant among the existing options (Aguiar & Carvalho, 2010; Leal, 2010). The misidentification of attributes generates difficulties in measuring the quality of the provided service (Deng, 2008).

This study may also provide better understanding on the factors that influence the choice of restaurant, in management terms, also contributing to companies, which will know what generates value for consumers. From this information, companies can tailor their characteristics, such as the place they operate, products, brands, price and payment terms, advertisements and sales, among other features. They may, therefore, prioritize their efforts to meet the

most important attributes, according to the consumers, promoting the creation of competitive advantages opportunities in the area of operation.

Furthermore, the identification of the relevant attributes according to consumers is essential. Through a list of attributes, it is possible to improve the restaurant's marketing process based on consumer needs, thus creating value (Angnes & Moyano, 2013; Aguiar & Carvalho, 2012), contributing to the improvement of perceived quality and, therefore, to consumer satisfaction and loyalty (Angnes, Lengler & Moyano, 2015). Companies should focus their efforts on identifying attributes and benefits that improve their performance and bring satisfaction to consumers. The essential investment must be on the aspect that has high importance and low performance, i.e., aspects that can be improved and have more impact on consumer satisfaction and loyalty. High performance and impact aspects become a competitive advantage for the company (Gustafsson & Johnson, 2004), while ensuring consumer satisfaction becomes crucial to the companies for staying on the market (Moura et al., 2007).

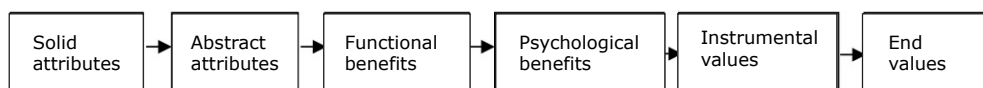In financial terms, the food service sector (restaurants, bars, coffee shops, and even meals served at supermarkets) earned R$235 billion in 2012, a growth of 16% compared to 2010 (Carneiro, 2014). The importance of the food service sector in the national economic context, coupled with fierce competition among the wide variety of types and existing establishments options, as well as, especially, the constant need for new consumers to ensure survival in a highly competitive market, demand the identification of criteria by which consumers evaluate service excellence in a restaurant.

LITERATURE REVIEW

New habits are developed in society with the creation of new products, cultural, social and technological factors, consumer's needs, and modification on the relevance of attributes (Aguiar & Carvalho, 2012; Gomes & Hein, 2011). Therefore, one of the main tasks of managers is to identify the reasons that lead consumers to purchase a product (Espinoza & Hirano, 2003).

By analyzing the options among the different types of available products, services, brands, and stores, the consumer compares process between the already known items and what is considered important to meet consumers' needs. The assessment criteria used in this process vary according to each person (Blackwell, Engel & Miniard, 2005), and the main types are the attributes or characteristics of the good or service, the benefits of its use or even the values they help consumers to meet or achieve (Olson & Peter, 2009). The products must, therefore, be evaluated from the sum of attributes, benefits, and values. In general, attributes are related to tangible features that integrate the preference creation, while benefits correspond to utility and performance of the good/service (Espartel, 1999).

Figure 1 – Consumer's Cognitive Structure

Source – adapted from Wu, Day and MacKay (1988)

On the other hand, solid and abstract attributes and instrumental and end values represent a short chain of four levels. Even with this change, the function of the model is preserved as being the provision of analysis of the consumer knowledge under the influence of attributes and its impact on the perception of benefits and values/risks. The rational structures of means and ends are described in that model, in which solid attributes (corresponding to the physical characteristics of the product) are linked to abstract attributes (intangible aspects, such as quality), functional benefits (tangible benefits of using the product), psychological benefits (social and psychological benefits of using the product), instrumental values (behavior), and, finally, end values (way of being). The attributes are, therefore, taken as the main influence on consumers' decision--making process, according to their experiences, values and beliefs (Peter & Olson, 2009). The purchase decision is influenced by the assessment of intrinsic (composed by tangible characteristics, such as design, durability, and size) and extrinsic attributes (intangible characteristics of a product, such as price and brand) (Zeithalm, 1988).

Regarding services, some attributes are more relevant than others on the consumer's perception of value. That influence may come from the level of importance given by the consumer to these attributes. Identifying these critical attributes linked to satisfaction enables the segmentation and adaptation of the service provision for its audience. This adaptation favors the evaluation of the quality and satisfaction of service, as well as the implementation of improvements and adaptations (Ghisi, Merlo & Nagano, 2006; Mowen & Minor, 2003; Espinoza & Hirano, 2003).

There are several ways of categorizing attributes (Grohmann, Battistella & Schoedler, 2012). For example, consumers use three different categories of attributes during their buying process (Zeithalm, Bitner & Gremler, 2014):

a) Search attributes: product features that consumers can immediately evaluate before purchase, which reduce the purchase risk perception. The location of a restaurant, image and reputation in social media, tangible aspects, among others, are specific features for restaurants.

b) Experience attributes: performance of the product that consumers can evaluate only during service delivery. Regarding restaurants, it is represented by the service, food and drink, among others.

c) Trust or credibility attributes: characteristics of the product that consumers may not be able to evaluate even after purchase and consumption. They are related to trust or credibility of the company or brand. Regarding restaurants, it is presented in the manufacturing process of the dishes, suppliers' reliability, storage conditions, and others.
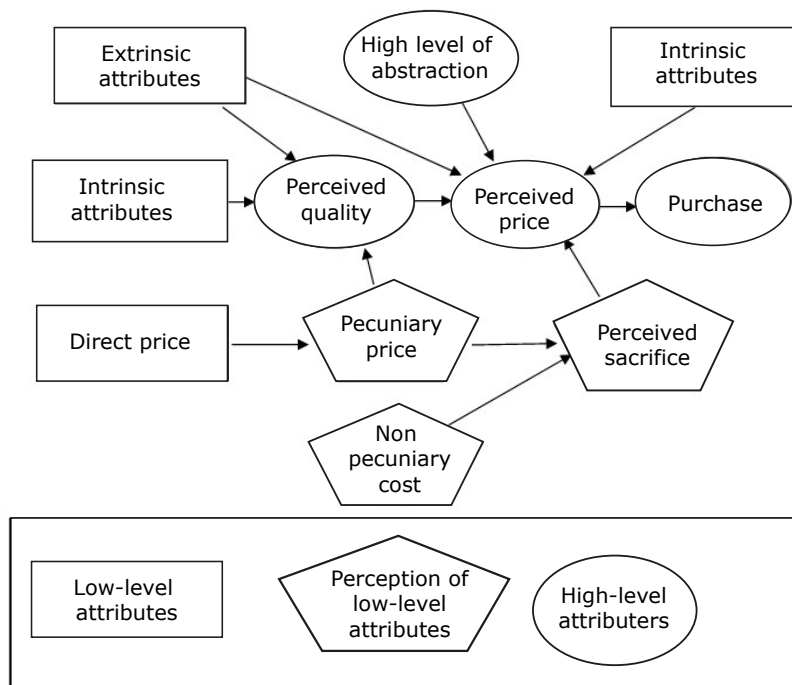
Based on the foregoing classification, it is possible to describe the credibility attributes as the most difficult to be assessed by consumers. The tangibility of the service directly influences the prevalence of some types of attributes, and the "most tangible" services thus have a higher amount of search attributes and experience attributes (Zeithalm, Bitner & Gremler, 2014).

Restaurant consumers often evaluate different criteria, related to food quality, prices, and other benefits that generate value (Harrington, Ottenbacher & Kendall, 2011). This is consistent with the perception of the wide range of products/ services from which consumers can choose from, to meet their needs. In this process, relevant information are selected, integrated, and judged, concerning brand and other aspects, thus arriving at a judgment that will set the purchase (Espinoza & Hirano, 2003), while the most common approach to be used by consumers is the use of products and services' attributes to evaluate alternative options and make their decision. This method is defined as a multi-attribute approach (Grunert, 1989).

Consumers constantly monitor the attributes considered relevant, such as quantity, size, quality, and price. Changes in these indicators may directly affect brand and product choices (Blackwell, Engel & Miniard, 2005).

Zeithaml (1988) proposes a model to identify this trend that seeks to understand what consumers consider to be quality, value, and price. The model is set to measure how the concepts of perceived price, quality, and value influence the purchase decision, with a direct relationship between product attributes, both intrinsic and extrinsic. These aspects integrate the perceptions of quality, price, and value of the different alternatives considered at the purchase moment. People can identify the presence of benefits (or absence of sacrifices) through the attributes, thus forming a general perception of the product (Portolan, 2011).

Figure 2 – A model relating price, quality, and value

Source – adapted from Zeithaml (1988)

This model, proposed by Zeithaml (1988), is based on the intrinsic and extrinsic attributes, and the price is divided between the neutral price (refers to the monetary price) and perceived price (corresponding to cheap or expensive

evaluation). This model shows the connection between the purchase decision process and the assessment of intrinsic and extrinsic attributes of the product by the consumers, who perceive the standards of quality, price, and value of the different alternatives at the purchase time (Borges, 2010). The question made refers to the identification of which attributes (intrinsic or extrinsic) of a product the consumers use as quality indicators (Espartel, 1999).

This article presents two surveys, with two different approaches. The first, is exploratory and qualitative, while the second, is descriptive and quantitative.

STUDY 1

Methodology

In the first study, 23 individuals who often go to restaurants were interviewed, using a convenience sample. The research script consisted of open-ended questions regarding general attributes (e.g., what is important in a restaurant, what cannot be missing etc.), price (e.g., how it can be an indicator of quality, why would they pay more etc.), food/beverage (e.g., which are the desirable characteristics etc.), behavioral (e.g.: how to encourage word of mouth advertising etc.), offers (e.g., discounts granted by restaurants etc.), environment (e.g.., which are the best physical characteristics, how the restaurant should be etc.), cleaning (e.g., importance of hygiene, how they evaluate the hygiene etc.), parking (e.g., whether parking is important or not, when is parking relevant etc.), security (e.g., what creates security and insecurity etc.), entertainment (e.g., which attractions do they value, entertainment for children etc.), service (e.g., what good service is, what they value the most, what please or displease etc.), location (e.g.: the importance of location, what does it mean to be well located etc.).

To develop the interview script, we consulted marketing experts, as well as literature on consumer behavior at restaurants, based on Angnes and Moyano (2013), Liu and Jang (2009), Tinoco and Ribeiro (2008), Namkung and Jang (2008), Siebeneichler et al. (2007), Rodrigues and Sabes (2006), Andaleeb and Conway (2006), Mehta and Maniam (2002), and Yuksel and Yuksel (2002).

The content analysis proposed by Bardin (1977) was used for better data understanding, which covers the thematic categorization of discourse, allowing the organization of the most cited attributes by the respondents.

Data analysis and results achieved

We obtained 12 dimensions, formed by several attributes, through content analysis:

- Price: cost, benefit, payment method, credit card, debit card, cash, food vouchers, restaurant coupon, company benefits card, bank check, fair price, price, price-performance, variety of payment methods, and good price.

- Food, consisting of: eat, drink, good food, meal, lunch, food, healthy food, variety in dishes options, good menu, food quality and attractive taste, good seasoning, excellent variety of foods on the menu, variety, quality and taste of the food, varied menu, bad food, varied seasoning, problem in food preparation, flavor/taste, brand, aspect, quality, variety, presentation, and feeling of being a fresh and clean product.

- Behavior: leaving, comfort, tranquility, comfort, satisfaction in eating, pleasure to be in good company, happiness, joy in satisfying hunger, comfort, daring, glamor, relax, gluttony, concern with general hygiene, fear of food quality, frustration with the taste and seasoning, feeling of disorganization, lack of peace and quiet due to excessive noise, sadness and dissatisfaction with service, rudeness, waiter/chef's suggestion, spouses/valentines, and family and friends.

- Offers: discounts, gifts, feeling of winning, feeling of advantage, attractive, satisfied consumers, generate loyalty to the establishment, attract new consumers, represent a sign of attention and thank the consumer for attending the restaurant, relationship program, consumer bonus with points to exchange for products or free meals on birthdays or even free dessert.

- Environment: comfort, sophistication, coziness, beauty, utensils, cozy atmosphere that offers a pleasant experience, good taste in decor, adequate lighting, air conditioning, good ventilation, comfort, enough space for foot traffic between tables and chairs, comfortable furniture, provide privacy at meal time, beauty and decoration, unprepared waiters, dark place, noisy, crowded place, lack of tables and chairs to make the meal, and proximity between smoking and non-smoking areas.

- Cleaning: clean place, hygiene, cleanliness/hygiene in the rooms (hall, bathroom, kitchen, facade, parking etc.), utensils (plates, glasses, cutlery, trays etc.), furniture (tables, chairs, buffets etc.), good hygiene, appearance of the restaurant, lack of cleanliness, conservation problems in food, feelings of disgust, objects located in the food, dirty, poor hygiene at the restaurant, lack of cleanliness in food preparation, and ingredients that do not match the dish chosen.

- Parking: parking, not bothering to find a place to park near the restaurant, convenience, safety of consumers who have cars, do not want to leave the car on the street or in outsourced parking near the restaurant to be attended as justification, parking space, and to park.

- Security: security, secure place, dangerous, dark place, and remote and non--trustable location.

- Entertainment: having fun and a moment for relaxing, television to watch the news, children's playground, music, happy hour, dinner, special dates (Mother's Day, Valentine's Day, and Children's Day), weekends, nice, relaxed, music volume must be low, allowing the conversation between people and hearing the television.

- Service: service, line, quickness, service quality, well-trained and friendly staff who like to work, good organization of the restaurant, good service, organization, wrong order, service delay, lining up to serve and pay for the meal, delay for preparing the food, problems with the card machine, and minimum price for paying by card or check.

- Drink: variety of beverages, alcoholic beverages, non-alcoholic, beer, soda, wine, champagne, sparkling water, mineral water, and natural juice.

- Location: good location, location, distance, near and far.

STUDY 2

Methodology

The second survey – of descriptive and quantitative approach – was conducted after the analysis of the first survey's data. The data were used for the formulation of the questions, using a scale of 11 points, with extreme points accounting for "strongly disagree" and "strongly agree" from statements, which began with the phrase "my perception of importance regarding…". The scale with 11 points was chosen as it can register with accuracy and detail when the respondents change their minds (Nunnaly & Bernstein, 1994). Before the field work, the questionnaire was pretested, which led to the implementation of minor changes.

The final version of the questionnaire consisted of 46 attributes regarding restaurants, 11 attributes regarding food, 7 attributes related to drinks and some behavioral and demographic questions.

Consumers of fast-food restaurants, continuous service (all-you-can-eat restaurants), buffet and *a la carte* were chosen to compose the sample. Despite having differences in the importance of the attributes for each type of restaurant, the aim of the research was to identify the dimensions or factors considered by consumers when choosing a restaurant. We decided, therefore, to choose the four most significant categories, based on the opinion of the marketing experts consulted. A total of 600 questionnaires were collected in Belo Horizonte, a metropolis of Brazil's southeast region, in March 2014.

DATA ANALYSIS

Characteristics of the sample and data processing

By analyzing all the 600 questionnaires, inconsistencies were found in 162 of them. As a result, the 438 valid questionnaires were divided for each type of restaurant, as follows: 106 for *a la carte* restaurants (24.2%), 108 for buffet restaurants (24.7%) and 112 questionnaires for fast-food and continuous service restaurants (25.6%).

Regarding the respondents, 222 are female and 216 are male. Singles are the majority, totaling 222 cases – about 50.7% –, followed by 183 married or in

stable union respondents, about 41.8%. Over 60% of respondents received up to five times the minimum wage and the vast majority completed elementary education or are in higher education. Considering the behavior as a consumer, the largest group of respondents – over 46% – have been going to the restaurant they filled out on the questionnaire for more than 10 years and over 60% have been attending this type of restaurant for less than a month; also for over 60% of respondents, there is not a specific time for going to this restaurant.

Regarding missing data, there was not any question that showed up to 5% of missing data, which indicates that these issues can be kept for analysis (Hair et al., 2009). The validity of the samples was checked through Kolgomorov-Smirnov test (Malhotra, 2011), and no sample had normal distribution. Finally, the verification of outliers was performed by calculating the distance, using the D^2 of Mahalanobis, with 64 degrees of freedom for the chi-square test. When analyzing the samples from the four restaurants separately, no multivariate outlier was found. As subsequent analyses used the samples of the four types of restaurants, these outliers were removed from the analyzed sample.

Dimensionality, reliability and validity

First, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was performed with the 46 attributes regarding the restaurant, 11 attributes regarding food, and 7 attributes regarding drinks. As for the restaurants, the 46 attributes were grouped into 12 dimensions (service, beauty, comfort, nearby location, convenient location, choices, children, convenience, offers, perceived value, entertainment, and queue), totaling 33 items. For food, the 11 attributes for the assessment of food were grouped into two dimensions (organoleptic and presentation), totaling eight items. Finally, for the evaluation of the drinks, the seven attributes were grouped into only one group. In the case of organoleptic characteristics, the perception of food is considered through the five senses – smell, color, beauty, brightness, and others.

Concerning the assumptions for performing EFA: (1) Barlett's Sphericity Test – measuring correlations between variables (Hair et al., 2009), in which a favorable result is the one that presents a significant correlation of 95% (Morgan & Griego, 1998); (2) Adequacy of sample Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) – shall present values above 0.80, being accepted values above 0.60 (Malhotra, 2011; Hair et al., 2009) for exploratory studies; (3) significant correlations between the items that form the constructs, which showed adequate results. All assumptions of EFA are met and the values of the components have very good values. Moreover, only items with value above 0.40 of commonality were retained.

Table 1 – Features of dimensionality, reliability and validity of a restaurant's attributes assessment

Construct	Description of Items	Average	Component	Standardized Load Factor
Service E.V. = 34..99% KMO = 0.780 B.S. =327.435 Sig. = 0.000 C.A. = 0.703 A.V.E. = 0.346 C.R. = 0.784	Waiters/attendants who take orders correctly	9.1	0.622	0.591
	High quality service	8.8	0.668	0.635
	Friendly waiters/attendants	8.7	0.625	0.645
	Employees with professional appearance (e.g. waiters, attendants, cashier etc.)	8.1	0.522	0.401
	Waiters/attendants who know the products offered, helping customers in their choices	7.7	0.616	0.623
	Personalized service	7.1	0.576	0.585
	Waiters who know the preferences of customers	6.5	0.635	0.600
Beauty E.V. = 69.86% KMO = 0.701 B.S. =326.868 Sig. = 0.000 C.A. = 0.774 A.V.E. = 0.697 C.R. = 0.874	Beautiful ambience	7.9	0.852	0.868
	Beautiful restaurant	7.1	0.837	0.810
	Elegant decoration	6.7	0.818	0.826
Comfort E.V. = 73.67% KMO = 0.500* B.S. = 97.082 Sig. = 0.000 C.A. = 0.623 A.V.E. = 0.735 C.R. = 0.847	Pleasant ventilation	8.8	0.858	0.827
	Proper lighting to the restaurant atmosphere	7.4	0.858	0.887
Nearby Location E.V. = 77.30% KMO = 0.500* B.S. =135.399 Sig. = 0.000 C.A. = 0.706 A.V.E. = 0.772 C.R. = 0.871	Located close to home	6.7	0.879	0.903
	Located close to work	6.3	0.879	0.853

(continues...)

Table 1 – Continuation

Construct	Description of Items	Average	Component	Standardized Load Factor
Convenient Location E.V. = 52.45% KMO = 0.584 B.S. = 95.048 Sig. = 0.000 C.A. = 0.529 A.V.E. = 0.521 C.R. = 0. 765	Located in a city region considered safe	8.4	0.799	0.742
	Convenient location	8.0	0.626	0.698
	Located in an upscale neighborhood of the city	4.8	0.737	0.725
Choices E.V. = 66.84% KMO = 0.500* B.S. = 46.032 Sig. = 0.000 C.A. = 0.500 A.V.E. = 0.667 C.R. = 0.800	Wide range of products	8.3	0.818	0.780
	Ease of understanding the menu	8.2	0.818	0.852
Children E.V. = 73.86% KMO = 0.627 B.S. = 91.955 Sig. = 0.000 C.A. = 0.820 A.V.E. = 0.739 C.R. = 0.893	Place for children to play	5.5	0.923	0.925
	Assistants to take care of children	5.0	0.921	0.922
	Gifts for children	4.2	0.717	0.713
Convenience E.V. = 91.39% KMO = 0.500* B.S. =442.204 Sig. = 0.000 C.A. = 0.906 A.V.E. = 0.914 C.R. = 0.955	Easy access for parking	8.9	0.956	0.956
	Free parking for customers	8.8	0.956	0.956
Offers E.V. = 71.01% KMO = 0.500* B.S. = 74.301 Sig. = 0.000 C.A. = 0.580 A.V.E. = 0.704 C.R. = 0.826	Specials (e.g. free meal or dessert on the customer's birthday)	7.7	0.843	0.899
	Low price	7.4	0.843	0.775

(continues...)

Table 1 – Continuation

Construct	Description of Items	Average	Component.	Standardized Load Factor
Perceived Value E.V. = 65.00% KMO = 0.500* B.S. = 36.071 Sig. = 0.000 C.A. = 0.455 A.V.E. = 0.649 C.R. = 0.787	Adequate price-performance, considering what is paid and what is received	9.1	0.806	0.852
	Range of payment methods	8.9	0.806	0.756
Entertainment E.V. = 70.80% KMO = 0.647 B.S. = 415.86 Sig. = 0.000 C.A. = 0.791 A.V.E. = 0.704 C.R. = 0.877	Musical, pleasant atmosphere	6.6	0.889	0.786
	Fun atmosphere	6.0	0.732	0.922
	Entertainment for customers. (e.g. concerts, presentations etc.)	5.4	0.893	0.944
Queue E.V. = 79.94% KMO = 0.500* Sig. = 0.000 B.S. =169.805 Sig. = 0.000 C.A. = 0.745 A.V.E. = 0.799 C.R. = 0.888	No queues to pay for food or the waiter to quickly bring the bill	8.3	0.894	0.892
	No queues for serving the food	8.0	0.894	0.897

Notes. 1) E.V. is the factor explained variance. 2) KMO is the value of KMO test. 3) B.S. is the value of Bartlett's sphericity test. 4) Sig. is the statistical part of Bartlett's sphericity test. 5) C.A. is the value of Cronbach's Alpha. 6) A.V.E. is the average variance extracted. 7) C.R is the composite reliability. 8) * As the construct is formed by two factors, the value of KMO is 0.500.

Souce – Research data

Regarding the reliability of the scale of the constructs, the Cronbach's Alpha was calculated for each of the dimensions obtained from the EFA, which had appropriate values for most cases. However, some factors, such as convenient location, choices, offers, and perceived value have a Cronbach's Alpha lower than 0.600, considered inadequate, even when creating dimensions for the first time as the case of this study (Malhotra, 2011; Hair et al., 2009). Moreover, although the values are not present in the table, the withdrawal of items will not increase the value of Cronbach's Alpha in these dimensions. The explained variance of the 12 dimensions values also showed suitable values, with 10 of them showing an explained variance above 50%.

Another item discussed is the validity of the constructs. Convergent validity was verified to reflect how much the same construct variables are positively related (Malhotra, 2011). Except for one item from service construct, other results for all indicators showed convergent validity, hence the loads of standard values are above 0.500 (Hair et al., 2009). Moreover, except for the construct service, the average variance extracted (AVE) has a value of at least 0.45 (Netemeyer, Bearden & Sharma, 2003) for each of the constructs. Composite reliability (CR) has values above 0.7 (Hair et al., 2009).

Table 2 – Features of dimensionality, reliability and validity of a restaurant's food attributes assessment

Construct	Description of Items	Average	Component	Standardized Load Factor
Organoleptic E.V. = 66.56% KMO = 0.800 B.S. = 574.512 Sig. = 0.000 C.A. = 0.825 A.V.E. = 0.665 C.R. = 0.888	Good hygiene	9.8	0.770	0.757
	Fresh food	9.7	0.845	0.844
	Pleasant smell	9.6	0.854	0.859
	Suitable temperature	9.5	0.791	0.800
Appearance E.V. = 50.59% KMO = 0.647 B.S. = 252.296 Sig. = 0.000 C.A. = 0.667 A.V.E. = 0.503 C.R. = 0.799	Method of preparing the food	9.2	0.782	0.822
	Good looking	9.0	0.579	0.596
	The wide variety of dishes options or food choices	8.6	0.685	0.627
	Seasoning used in food preparation	8.6	0.779	0.767

Notes. 1) E.V. is the factor explained variance. 2) KMO is the value of KMO test. 3) B.S. is the value of Bartlett's sphericity test. 4) Sig. is the statistical part of Bartlett's sphericity test. 5) C.A. is the value of Cronbach's Alpha. 6) A.V.E. is the average variance extracted. 7) C.R is the composite reliability. 8) * As the construct is formed by two factors, the value of KMO is 0.500.

Souce – Research data

In the case of constructs relating to food, the results are very good. The explained variance of the two factors has value above 50%. Cronbach's Alpha also has adequate values for EFA on the scales resulting from exploratory studies.

For convergent validity, both the load factor of each item of the constructs and the AVE's value have adequate results, indicating convergent validity regarding the evaluation of food. Moreover, the present composite reliability shows value above 0.7.

Table 3 – Features of dimensionality, reliability and validity of a restaurant's drinks attributes assessment

Construct	Description of Items	Average	Component	Standardized Load Factor
Drinks E.V. = 44.73% KMO = 0.791 B.S. =726.866 Sig. = 0.000 C.A. = 0.761 A.V.E. = 0.446 C.R. = 0.848	Good hygiene of glasses or bowls	9.8	0.709	0.682
	Suitable temperature	9.7	0.72	0.694
	Taste	9.3	0.674	0.657
	Quality of the ingredients (e.g. as the case of drinks and juices)	9.3	0.705	0.711
	Preparation method (e.g. as the case of drinks and juices)	9.0	0.727	0.750
	Good looking	8.9	0.636	0.644
	Wide range of drinks	8.6	0.475	0.512

Notes. 1) E.V. is the factor explained variance. 2) KMO is the value of KMO test. 3) B.S. is the value of Bartlett's sphericity test. 4) Sig. is the statistical part of Bartlett's sphericity test. 5) C.A. is the value of Cronbach's Alpha. 6) A.V.E. is the average variance extracted. 7) C.R is the composite reliability. 8) * As the construct is formed by two factors, the value of KMO is 0.500.

Souce – Research data

For the evaluation of drinks, only one group was formed. In this case, seven items formed the evaluation factor of drinks. The explained variance is about 45%. The Cronbach's Alpha showed a good and proper value, indicating the reliability of the scale.

Regarding convergent validity, the values of the load factor of each item presented values above 0.500, and AVE value of 0.45, which are the limit defined by Netemeyer, Bearden and Sharma (2003). The composite reliability has a high value of approximately 0.85.
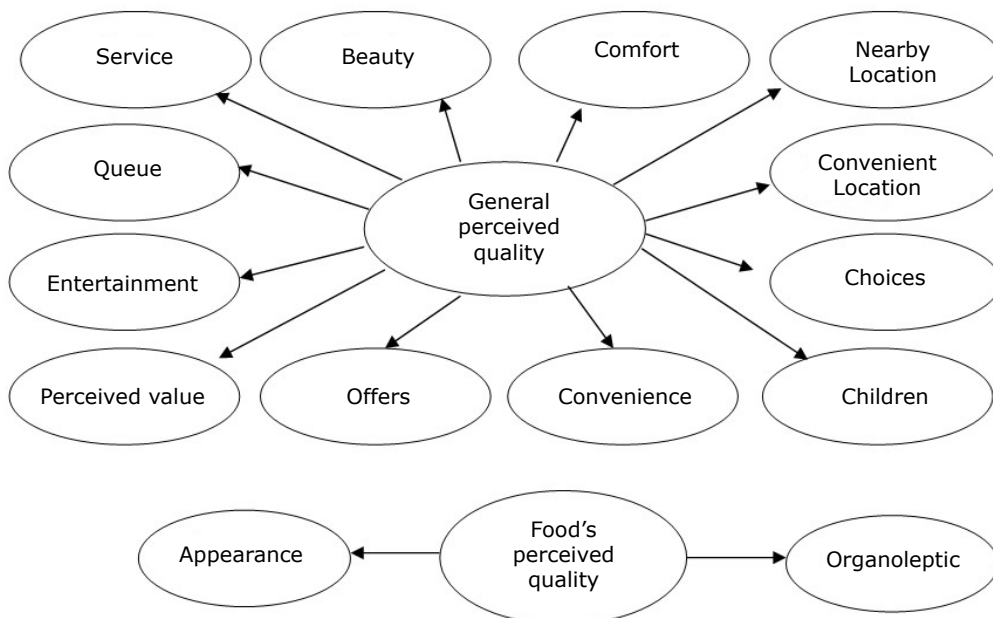
The discriminant validity of the constructs was obtained by comparing the square roots of AVE values to the correlations between them and the analysis of the correlation value between the constructs. The values of the average variance extracted from two constructs should be larger than the square of the correlation between them, while the correlation value between constructs should be at most 0.85 (Hair et al., 2009). The results indicate that all values used to verify the discriminant validity were achieved, which indicates that the constructs have different meanings to each respondent. Correlations between constructs do not exceed the roots of the average variance extracted in convergent analysis and all correlations between constructs have values below 0.85.

Finally, regarding the most important attributes for consumers, it is possible to identify hygiene, quality, and characteristics of food and drink – temperature, freshness and smell – in addition to waiters' service and qualification, parking and perceived value, as the most relevant items from consumers' points of view for choosing a restaurant.

FINAL REMARKS

The qualitative step of this study identified features considered for choosing a restaurant. The highlighted attributes were grouped into corresponding subjective dimensions in quantitative research, allowing the categorized analysis to identify their level of importance in the decision-making process. These dimensions are consistent both at the level of qualitative and quantitative results. The generated dimensions are: service, beauty, comfort, nearby location, convenient location, choices, children, convenience, offers, perceived value, entertainment, and queue, totaling 33 attributes for assessing the restaurant in general; organoleptic and presentation for evaluating the food, totaling eight items; while the evaluation attributes for drinks were clustered into only one group. Figure 3 shows the results obtained for the evaluation of restaurants and food.

Figure 3 – Dimensions of the perceived quality regarding restaurants and food

Souce – Research data

Regarding the most valued attributes in relation to restaurants, service, qualification of the waiters, and perceived value can be categorized as experience attributes. On the other hand, parking can be classified as a search attribute, since, in theory, it can be evaluated before purchase.

Based on Figure 3, in relation to managerial implications, it can be concluded that the identification of the most relevant attributes provides to the managers an opportunity to invest assertively in ways that shows the excellence of these same factors that, in fact, influence the decision-making process. When these factors are considered satisfactory, consumers shall feel safer in that dining experience and enable the restaurant the possibility to develop a lasting relationship (loyalty). Ensure that the customer has met a customer's expectations creates incentive for the customer to positive comment and recommend to others. This is really important for restaurants, since the recommendations of nearby people who have attended a certain restaurant are

considered by many as the most reliable source of information for choosing the best option during the decision-making process.

The restaurant's hygiene is mentioned by consumers as an essential aspect. It is, therefore, important that the atmospheres (facade, corridors, access, ramps, main room, bathroom, kitchen, storage, parking, floors in general, playgrounds, and gardens), furniture and household appliances (tables, chairs, desks, freezer, refrigerator, stove, hoods, sinks, display cases etc.), utensils (plates, cups, bowls, spoons, knives, forks, tongs, pans, trays etc.) and other equipment (table liners, employee dress, dumps, spice holders, salt shaker, toothpicks etc.), which make up a restaurant, are well maintained, organized and clean. In this case, considering the classification of the attributes described in the theoretical basis, the hygiene attribute can be considered in terms of experience, since the consumer observes the hygienic conditions through the five senses (touch, taste, smell, sight, and hearing), but there also are aspects of service that can only be proven after the service experience.

As well as hygiene, the food quality attribute was remembered as one of the most important attributes for consumers. The high quality of the food served is a relevant aspect (as well as meeting the organoleptic aspects and appearance). To, therefore, ensure the quality of the food served, it is important that food, raw materials and spices have guaranteed origin and adequate quality. Food (non--perishable) and raw materials must be packed in cool, ventilated places, while perishables must be kept in proper validity and temperature, also ensuring the quality of water used in food preparation. As in the case of the hygiene attribute, some attributes can be classified as "experience", as they can be evaluated in the service, but others – such as the origin of the food and quality of raw materials, for example – are considered credibility attributes.

Organoleptic aspects of food enable consumers to evaluate the characteristics through their senses, allowing prior verification of the food. Details such as the color of the food and selection of products used in the preparation or decoration of dishes (for example, avoid wilted leaves) contribute to a positive evaluation. Water droplets on fruits refer to the freshness of the morning, the lighting on the food highlights colors, cleaning the edge of the plates and containers in which the food is served refers to hygiene and appearance of the food connotes organization and food freshness. Aspects such as these are simple and add sensitive factors to the senses, which, in turn, provide approval regarding the subjective questions of freshness, hygiene, temperature, and other attributes that make up the food. In the case of organoleptic characteristics, they can be classified as experience attributes.

Among the items evaluated in the drinks' dimension, hygiene is the most relevant to the four types of restaurants. Hygiene of glasses and bowls was indicated as extremely relevant, as well as vases, shakers, and other items that support the consumption of juices, drinks, soft drinks, water, beer, wine etc. They must be washed well with water (preferably hot) and soap. It is essential that the fruit used in juices and drinks are sanitized before use. It must be ensured that water used to produce juices and ice cubes is filtered and straws and mixers are discarded and never used again. Another aspect of great importance to consumers is the proper temperature of the drink. It is, therefore, important to invest in ice buckets, tongs, and thermal containers, which help conserve the

beverage's temperature. It is important that refrigerators and freezers be able to achieve low temperature levels.

When comparing the results obtained by other studies, it appears that few are those that specify the type of restaurant being rated, as opposed to this research, which was conducted with specific focus on four types of restaurants: fast-food, *a la carte*, buffet, and continuous service. In general, as in this study, attributes related to service, cleanliness, price, service, food, security, parking, location, among others, were evaluated and considered relevant from the perspective of consumers.

In a study (Angnes & Moyano, 2013) aimed to identify the attributes of choice on restaurant services (type was not specified) in Santa Cruz do Sul (Brazil), 27 attributes were identified and the highest incidence was similar to the results in this study. Another study, by Siebeneichler et al. (2007), aimed to capture the importance of the attributes of restaurants (type was not specified), identified the most important attributes: cleanliness, service, quality of food, and price, thus also consistent with this research.

The food was considered crucial in both surveys. We noticed a wide range of attributes considered the most valuable for a restaurant, including the quality of food and ingredients, good hygiene of products, fresh food, pleasant smell, proper temperature, and taste.

This subject is also studied in other countries. Yüksel and Yüksel (2003) measured the satisfaction of tourists at restaurants (type was not specified). Among the cited aspects stood out quality of service and product, diversity of dishes, cleanliness, convenience, location, fast service, prices, and atmosphere. Even though not finding an attribute that stood out among the others in the evaluation of fast-food, buffet, *a la carte*, and continuous service restaurants, the participants of this research also analyzed the relevance of the menu, location, convenience (parking and assistants to take care of children), and atmosphere.

Regarding the limitations of this study, the convenience sample makes it impossible to assume the results as generic, considering the lack of randomness of respondents. Given that some respondents were inquired in public spaces, we must consider the possibility of lack of accuracy when responding due to survey size and lack of time. As for the results obtained from the statistical analysis, the KMO values and Barllet's sphericity test in addition to the indexes of one-dimensionality and internal reliability of the constructs all had appropriate indicators, generally. The constructs that showed lower indicators to those recommended by the references of the statistical area may have been impacted by the review process, in which we decided to process the data of the four types of restaurants together (fast-food, *a la carte*, continuous service, and buffet) and not separately, taking into account an individual analysis for each type. In this case, it may happen that some items have presented disparate values concerning the type of restaurant, i.e., showed low values when closer values were expected for the same attributes.

The performance of a new research is encouraged, considering the same analysis used in this study, but with a larger sample. It also would enable a statistical analysis of constructs related to attributes individually created for each of the four types of restaurant. It is also possible to develop a study to evaluate the quality of a restaurant in which the used constructs would be obtained from this research, adding one more for "overall quality". It would thus create a structural model for analyzing the consistency of the scale and its nomological validity.

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