

-RESEARCH ARTICLE-

FACTORS INFLUENCING CONSUMER PREFERENCES OF RESTAURANTS IN THE GREATER BUFFALO CITY

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—Abstract —

Consumer choice has traditionally been the primary focus of decision-making research, with the goal of understanding how consumers make decisions within a given set of alternatives. Using contemporary studies as a foundation, the present study explores the factors influencing consumer preferences regarding restaurants in the greater Buffalo city, East London. The primary goals of this research are to: explore the most influential factor(s) that influences consumer preferences of restaurants, and determine attributes that Buffalo city residents perceive to be critical in the selection of restaurants. The study also aims to suggest ways to improve service quality in Buffalo city restaurants. Non-probability sampling is adopted whereby a convenience sampling approach is used to select 30 respondents. A self-administered questionnaire is used for quantitative analysis. The results of the study indicate that food quality, price, hygiene, and service quality are key determinants of restaurant preference amongst Buffalo city customers.

Keywords: Types of restaurants, consumer preferences, service quality, customer satisfaction

JEL Classification: M31

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1. INTRODUCTION

Consumers' way of life is changing dramatically as a result of the increase in disposable income and the increased availability of information as a result of the unprecedented expansion of social media (Martins, 2016). Changes in lifestyle and work culture are also causing shifts in consumption habits, as we can see in the graph below. Food consumption patterns have been influenced significantly by western culture, as well as by other factors. The lack of available time is another issue that influences food consumption. Families with two incomes find it difficult to find the time to prepare their meals (Mhlanga, 2018). This has led to a continuous rapid growth of the restaurant industry across the world. The restaurant industry consists of individual businesses that prepare and serve food and drinks to customers (Donthi et al., 2019). Food purchased at these business outlets can be eaten on-site, taken out, or delivered. The main segments of the restaurant industry are full-service, gourmet food, casual dining, and quick dining (Gallarza-Granizo et al., 2020).

The restaurant is segmented by the level of services it offers to the customers. As the number of restaurants increases, there are a greater number of options to choose from. Consumers dine out for different reasons, such as increased female labour force involvement and longer working hours, which means that there is less time to cook. Moreover, university students mostly eat out for amusement and pleasure, and some professionals visit restaurants to conduct business meetings (Huhn, 2020). When consumers eat out, they begin to assess what they are experiencing and form a perception of restaurants from any previous encounters or other references. Satisfying consumers is a crucial factor for a restaurant because a happy customer will come to the same restaurant (Kukanja et al., 2020).

Therefore, customer service is more than simply listening to what the customer needs (S. Lee et al., 2020). It is just as important to anticipate a customer's needs to respond. Fully understanding the needs of customers before they buy, allows a business to create an even better experience. Moreover, managers must be prepared to recognize and fulfill advancing consumer wants emerging from changes within the industry's statistic, mechanical, financial, lawful, social, or moral characteristics (Kukanja et al., 2020). As they have distinctive characteristics, they tend to choose restaurants for particular and distinct reasons. Therefore, restaurants need to study consumer preferences of their existing consumer base and those of prospective consumers (S. L. Lee et al., 2018). This will help restaurants to create a competitive advantage, and in doing so, attract and retain more consumers by providing for their exact needs and desires. From the foregoing points, consumers with multiple personality traits are consistently expected to have distinct motives for preferring a restaurant. With this being said, this study will investigate factors that influence consumer preferences of restaurants. The study will be focusing on the greater Buffalo City Metropolis as the context of the study which is known as one of the tourist destinations in the Eastern Cape Province.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A long line of establishments preceded the invention of the restaurant industry. The restaurant industry has been around since the 17th century. The restaurant development was assisted by the French Revolution in 1789 when many chefs found themselves jobless, so they decided to set up their own private restaurants. The restaurant's birth was an integral part of the social background. People were able to sit and eat whatever and whenever they wanted to, for the first time, knowing beforehand how much the meal will cost. Dining back then was a luxury for the rich who employed their chefs and ate what was dependent on their social standing. The opening of the new restaurants brought social equality and the opportunity to eat well within everyone's reach. This also permitted everyone a choice as to what they ate (Pedruco, 2018). It was only in the 18th century, on the verge of the French Revolution, that modern restaurants came into "existence, becoming boisterous places to eat in the following centuries. In the 20th century, habits changed and dining at lunchtime restaurants became popular for people. Restaurants continued to specialize and attract their clientele. Eating at a restaurant in the evening started to be practiced as a leisure activity integrating adventure, enjoyment, and conviviality.

An anti-competitive business system was essentially established by the South African restaurant industry, but a new database display that incorporates independent and chain restaurants have advanced at present. Hence, South Africa has many independent restaurants (Nair, 2016). South Africa has the most established food service industry in Sub-Saharan Africa, as well as a thriving hospitality industry. Some of the growth factors include a rise in the number of visitors, a high level of consumer spending, and world-renowned wine and cuisine. In an award ceremony held in Singapore 2019, two South African restaurants which were the only ones from Africa, made it on the top 50 restaurants list in the world. Also, the restaurant, fast-food, and catering industry in South Africa reported generating a revenue of R68.27 billion, reflecting 28 per cent real revenue growth. This reflects the state of the South African restaurant industry. The industry is projected to see an unflinching rise in revenue from R5.6 billion in 2018 to 6.7 billion in 2023 (Huhn, 2020).

The competition in the restaurant industry is tough. Fierce rivalry, a sluggish economy, rising rental costs as well as the high cost of living, have all conspired against the restaurant industry. However, amid the doom and gloom, restaurants that codify meeting and exceeding customer satisfaction and also identify ways to enhance their customer experience which can potentially entice customers to revisit a restaurant, those restaurants have room for expansion in the industry. Although individual consumers do not worry much about why they chose one service over the other, restaurant managers need to investigate the consumer preferences of their target market. Consequently, restaurants face intense rivalry among each other, fiercely competing for consumers (Mhlanga, 2018). Therefore, restaurants need to take note of the consumer preferences of their target market. Weedmark (2018) states that consumer preferences define the

reasons that consumers make decisions when considering a good or service. The authors assert that examining variables that determine consumer preferences can help businesses tailor their brand to particular groups and build marketing strategies that will help the business managers understand consumers better, assess why some restaurants are more successful than others, and attain the highest level of customer satisfaction.

2.1 Types Of Restaurants In South Africa

Fast-Food Restaurants

The fast-food restaurant industry is one of the fastest-growing industries in the world. With an improvement in the discretionary income of consumers and an increase of women in the working-class, consumers are on the lookout for convenience as a result of which, the industry is gaining steam providing convenient and inexpensive alternatives (Wu et al., 2015).

According to Kukanja et al. (2020), low food prices, easy service, a convenient location, long hours of operation, and drive-through service are all characteristics of fast-food restaurants. Food is processed in a structured procedure that can be instantly delivered for ordering and consumption (Canziani et al., 2016). Fast-food restaurants usually have a small selection of foods that can be prepared easily. These restaurants are becoming a basic necessity in today's fast-paced world. As fast food offers quick services at a low price, consumers can walk in and order a meal that can take five to ten minutes to prepare. One can either opt to eat at the restaurant or leave with a takeaway package (Jogarathnam, 2017). Burger King and Kentucky Fried Chicken are examples of such restaurants.

Full-Service Restaurant

A full-service restaurant by description is a man-sized, sit-down eatery where food is served directly to the customers' table (Martins, 2016). These establishments may also sell alcoholic beverages, provide takeout and/or delivery, or present live entertainment. The author adds that full-service restaurants can encompass anything from a family-style eatery to a lavish restaurant.

A full-service restaurant offers table service and frequently provides a wider menu range. These products normally necessitate further steps and time to plan. A wider variety of cuisines is generally available, and the cost of the meal is usually higher than in fast-food restaurants. In an upscale or midscale dining area, a full-service restaurant offers meal courses and professional services by well-trained staff (Bhadra et al., 2018). Customers who consider emotional worth to be a major factor when eating out favor full-service restaurants (Skinner et al., 2020).

There are two types of full-service restaurants

Fine Dining

Fine dining restaurants are full-service establishments with a high-quality menu and elegant décor, as well as more scenery and extensive cocktail choices. The waitressing staff is usually well-trained, and customers are also asked to dress accordingly (Bhadra et al., 2018).

Fine dining is synonymous with the highest price level among restaurants that offer excellent service, ambiance, and scenery. Food security and neatness of the place are also vital to the customer's experience, as they expect everything to be hygienic in the restaurant. Fine dining restaurants are expected to be outstanding in terms of everything compared to ordinary and regular restaurants. Based on the criteria, the staff is required to be well-trained and to have adequate experience in customer management in a fine dining restaurant (Parpal, 2015).

Casual Dining

Casual dining restaurants are described as having a broad appeal, serving a wide range of food from appetizers and salads to main courses and desserts, and providing comfortable settings at mid-range prices (S. L. Lee et al., 2018). Casual dining restaurants provide limited service dining with servers serving reasonably priced, high-quality food in a comfortable environment. These restaurants typically serve a table and close the void between fast food outlets and fine dining restaurants, they also have a large beer menu and a minibar menu (Mhlanga, 2018). It is cheaper than a fine dining restaurant and offers more high-quality food than fast-food restaurants. Food is made to order and creative food can be used to appeal to sophisticated tastes. Consumers are attracted to casual dining restaurants because they deliver high-quality food at an affordable price in a relaxing environment (Parpal, 2015).

Services Offered in Restaurants

S. Lee et al. (2020) mention that consumers are presented with three specific characteristics of food, service, and physical atmosphere by each restaurant. Each type of restaurant has a separate service to distinguish the features of the restaurant from other types of restaurants and to cater to its target market. Based on the facilities offered by restaurants, consumers demand a certain degree of consistency (Wu et al., 2015). Restaurant services are divided into three categories in the current study: full-service, home delivery, fast-casual, fast-service, and takeout services (S. Lee et al., 2020).

Full-Services

According to S. L. Lee et al. (2018), full-services are offered in restaurants where well-trained employees in a luxury or midscale dining environment with meal courses and specialist services. In a full-service restaurant, customers can make reservations. This service allows customers to secure a table in advance for a specific time within the restaurant's working hours (Barton et al., 2016). Naude (2015) states that full-service

restaurants cater to a wide variety of customers, many of whom have preconceived opinions about what they want and anticipate from the restaurant. During the dining experience, each customer has a unique experience with the service and subconsciously assesses it differently. Full-service restaurants draw consumers when eating out who perceive emotional worth to be a significant factor (An, 2016).

Quick-Casual Services

Quick-casual services are served in a casual setting in moderately-priced food where tables and chairs with non-disposable plates and cutlery are available (Quang et al., 2018). They usually have a full kitchen with different staff from the bar and a small menu of food. A better level of food and environment than fast service is quick-casual services. This category is an increasing idea that fills the gap between full-service and quick-service (Gallarza-Granizo et al., 2020).

Quick-Services

According to Donthi et al. (2019) restaurants providing quick-services are restaurants that normally deliver fast, cheap take-out food offering finger food that contains mostly fast food that can be served without kitchen utensils, including fish and chips, sandwiches, salads, pizzas, hamburgers, fried chicken, fried chips, and chicken nuggets to name a few. This service focuses on cooking and delivering time in minutes and is relatively cheap and mostly comes with a drive-through service that allows consumers to order and pick up food from their vehicles, but often have a seating area where customers can consume the meal on-site (Gallarza-Granizo et al., 2020). Generally, these kinds of foods are easily served in cartons or packets, or plastic packaging.

Home Delivery And Take-Out Services

According to the National Restaurant Association, delivery profits have improved for the majority of restaurant operators across segments. In recent years, home delivery and takeout services have grown in popularity. These are services that are cooked on the restaurant's premises and consumers call the restaurant for order and it gets delivered to their place of work or residence. In much the same way as a take-out, consumers go and purchase food from a respective restaurant but they decide to not eat at the restaurant premises (Hirschberg et al., 2016). Most restaurants have home delivery and take-away while some do not which becomes a competitive advantage for those who have such services because customers who want home deliveries and take-outs will consider them over their competitors (Suhartanto et al., 2019).

Factors Influencing Consumer Preferences Of Restaurants

Consumers choose their restaurants based on a variety of criteria. Several reported research studies analyze the key criterion used by consumers in the selection of restaurants and provide a variety of distinct preference considerations. The influences that have been reported to affect restaurants decision are as follows;

Service Quality

Xia et al. (2021) argue that the quality of service plays a critical role in the consideration of customers and generates a favourable view of a restaurant and its dining experience. Numerous authors have attempted to define service quality from a different point of view. Parasuraman et al. (1985) define service quality as the conveyance of predominant service relative to consumer expectations. On the other hand, Ramya (2016) propose that service quality is the capacity of a service business to fulfill the customers' expectations in an efficient way, through which it can better the performance of the business. Service quality in the restaurant industry is considered, according to Slack et al. (2021), to be the level of service rendered by restaurant employees, which in turn depends on customer and restaurant employee involvement.

In the restaurant industry, service quality is an imperative element for the success of the business. Quality service is found to have a positive influence on profits, market share, and the level of customer satisfaction among customers (Ramya, 2016). Quality of service is one of the main pillars shaping customer preferences (Ryu et al., 2017). By delivering reliable service, restaurants can eventually increase loyalty and reduce service failure, and in doing so, effectively gain and maintain consumers (Tesform and Birch, 2015). In an intensely competitive market for restaurants, the emphasis on quality of service is key to the sustainability and profitability of individual restaurant businesses. Restaurants can achieve this by, building and monitoring customer-employee relationships which can lead to a high degree of restaurant service quality, which can contribute to customer loyalty (Ryu et al., 2017). Mmutle et al. (2017) also concur that service quality monitoring allows managers to ensure continuity in service delivery and to satisfy evolving customer expectations more quickly and effectively. We should also assume that service quality affects not just the estimation of the overall experience of users, but also their post-purchase conduct, such as loyalty and re-examination intentions.

Food Quality

One of the most important facets of the restaurant experience is food quality. Quality food can be defined as well-presented food, fresh and tasty or service, concerning its expectations (Kotsanopoulos et al., 2017). It is ranked as the most significant trait that influences restaurant decisions in many customer preference behaviour research and one of the central elements that attract consumers to visit restaurants. Specific flavours and ingredients, menu selection, design, and appearance are the food quality elements indicated in this review. Healthy living and popular ingredients are also important elements in this regard. When choosing a restaurant, tastes and seasoning have an important role to play for consumers. Food taste is known to be the most significant aspect of food attributes in a variety of restaurant studies. Furthermore, Sriwongrat (2018), states that special food tastes and recipes are especially relevant in restaurants because people dine out to get the food they cannot prepare at home.

Customers in restaurants find unique tastes and fresh ingredients to be the most significant components of their fresh dining experience (Weedmark, 2018). Quang et al. (2018), establish that restaurateurs regularly implement new menus and offer a range of menu items to draw consumers. The menu has been also been described as a significant attribute of food quality in evaluating customer loyalty in the theme of the restaurants. Raajpoot (2002) adds that the range of food items, menu design, serving size and food appearance in the foodservice industry are essential determinants of food quality. In today's age, consumers are more worried about their health and thus tend to demand safe food options.

Price

McCluskey (2015) define price as the way of deciding the amount a manufacturer would receive through the sale of products and services. Simply, the pricing approach is used to determine the price of the producer's offerings applicable to both, the manufacturer and the consumer. Meanwhile, Nagle et al. (2017) suggest the function of price as a monetary measure used by buyers to negotiate with suppliers for products and services. Consumers tend to distinguish higher prices from higher quality and, conversely, lower prices from lower quality because almost all consumers' understanding of high-priced products and services is equivalent to high quality (Sharma et al., 2015). Therefore, if the quality of products and services matches the needs of customers, they should embrace a higher price to satisfy their demand. Consumers would consider the price to be fair and be happy to pay a higher price if merited by the quality of the service provided.

Hygiene

It is difficult to overstate the value of maintaining high hygiene standards in the restaurant industry. According to Lelieveld et al. (2016), hygiene in restaurants is important not only to protect the health and safety of staff and customers but also to help create the restaurant's brand image. It is of paramount importance to instill trust in consumers, therefore, it is vital to ensure implementation of hygiene and safety practices. Customers will leave a restaurant in a heartbeat if they believe it is unsanitary or unclean. Unhygienic food preparation can result in an unsafe atmosphere, as well as irritate valuable customers. Proper restaurant hygiene will assist in gaining customer interest and attracting potential new customers. Things that are dirty and disorganized will distract from the restaurant's positive energy (Lelieveld et al., 2016). Maintaining restaurant hygiene standards is important, as restaurants with bad hygiene practices are more likely to fail. As a result, keeping the restaurant dining and kitchen areas clean and upholding restaurant hygiene quality is crucial to the restaurant's success. Maintenance of hygiene will also assist in attracting attention from customers.

Location

The location in which a business performs its operations is a primary determinant of potential progress. For example, for a restaurant to differentiate itself from rivals and ensure the long-term longevity, it has to strategically position itself. The main factors behind top restaurants relate to where they are located. Without a good place, expert management and high-quality food will not be able to solve the restaurant's difficulties (Lovelock, 2019). Location plays an important role in consumer tastes when choosing a restaurant, therefore a strategic position that is noticeable and located in a region with a significant population is one of the main metrics of brand success (Rajput et al., 2020). (Weidenfeld et al., 2016) narrate that a good place for a restaurant should offer a variety of services to its customers, such as adequate convenient access to parking or proximity to the town, which gives the brand a tactical advantage over those whose locations are unable to provide such services. When markets have achieved a penetration depth, the role of a restaurant's location becomes particularly important in consumer preferences. Furthermore, Hanaysha (2016) conclude that a decent location takes geographical, demographic, and psychographic variables into account, and any change in these variables has a significant effect on the location's degree of attractiveness.

Ambiance

The ambiance is the term used to describe the atmosphere and mood of a restaurant. Since customers' expectations of a restaurant's ambiance vary, changing this atmospheric aspect is difficult. A positive experience of a restaurant's ambiance can contribute to positive beliefs and connections with the establishment (Triana et al., 2019). In other words, the restaurant should interact with its customers in an atmosphere that profoundly affects the dining experience of its customers (Kotler et al., 2020). The physical environment of a restaurant has a significant impact on prospective customers' pre-purchase preferences as it can shape consumer feelings. The comfortable interior affects customers' dining satisfaction and repeat patronage intentions. Any part of the environment can bring consumers to develop a more optimistic evaluation of their interactions.

3. METHODOLOGY

The current study was explanatory and quantitative in nature. Explanatory research was carried out to obtain a deeper understanding of the research problem. According to Sekaran et al. (2019), the objective of exploratory research has been to learn more about a phenomenon. It is used when the problem needs to be described more clearly and more knowledge is needed before a solution can be established. The study followed a quantitative research approach. This approach can be defined as a research strategy that relies on the quantification of data processing and analysis (Bryman, 2016), and according to Meneghini et al. (2018), the quantitative research approach permits the research to induce actualities and not theoretical assumptions.

A survey was utilized as a data collection method for primary data from respondents. Self-administered questionnaires with closed-ended questions were utilized to collect data from a sample of 30 respondents selected through convenience sampling. According to [Vannette et al. \(2017\)](#), surveys are methodical ways to obtain data from a significant number of individuals using questionnaires. Data obtained from the questionnaires were carefully scrutinized to ensure that it was accurate and reliable.

4. FINDINGS

The data collected from questionnaires is counted, collated and re-checked for any errors before it is interpreted to reach any conclusions. These questionnaire results are presented in visual formats such as graphs, bars, and pie charts. These graphic presentations are followed by a short interpretation of the figures and graphs as well as conclusions of the findings.

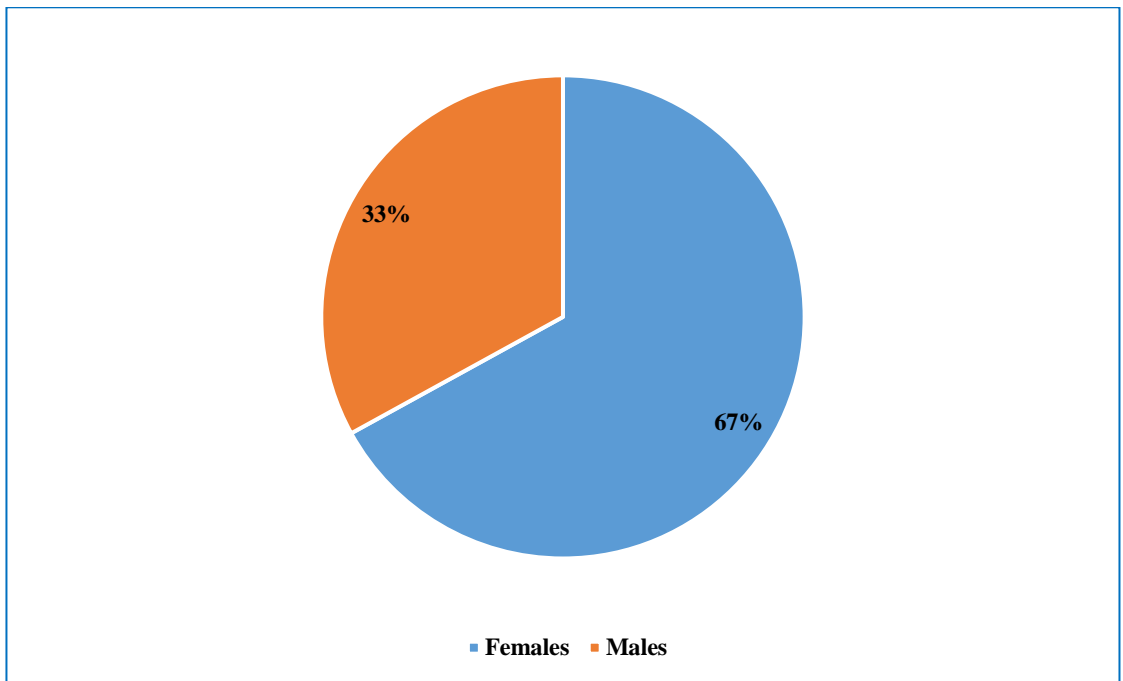


Figure 1. Gender of Respondents

According to the pie chart above, 33% of respondents are males, while 67% are females. As a result, it is fair to say that females are the most active participants in this analysis.

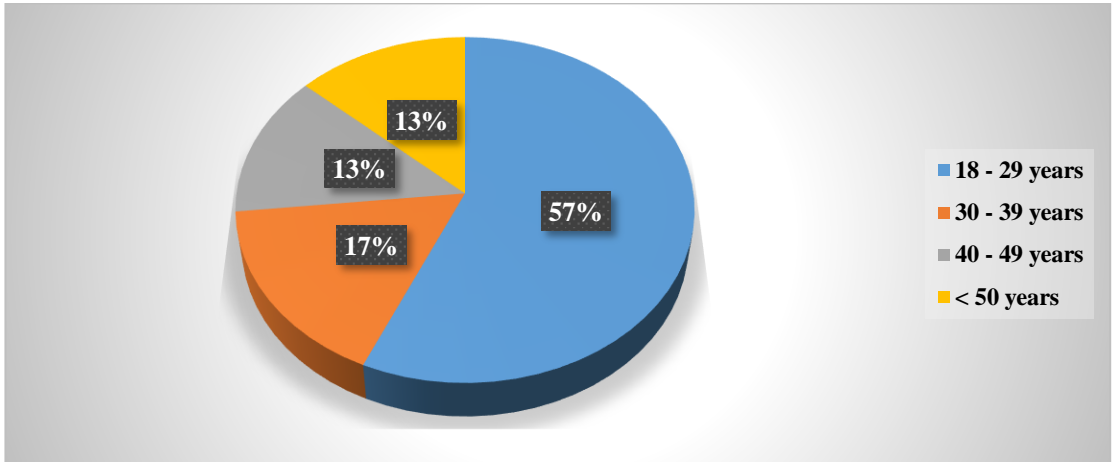


Figure 2. Age of Respondents

Figure 2 above, depicts that 56% of respondents are between the ages of 18 – 29 years, 17 % are between 30 – 39 years, 13% range from 40 – 49 years of age, and also 13% of respondents who are 50 years and more. This means respondents between the ages of 18 – 29 participate the most in this study.

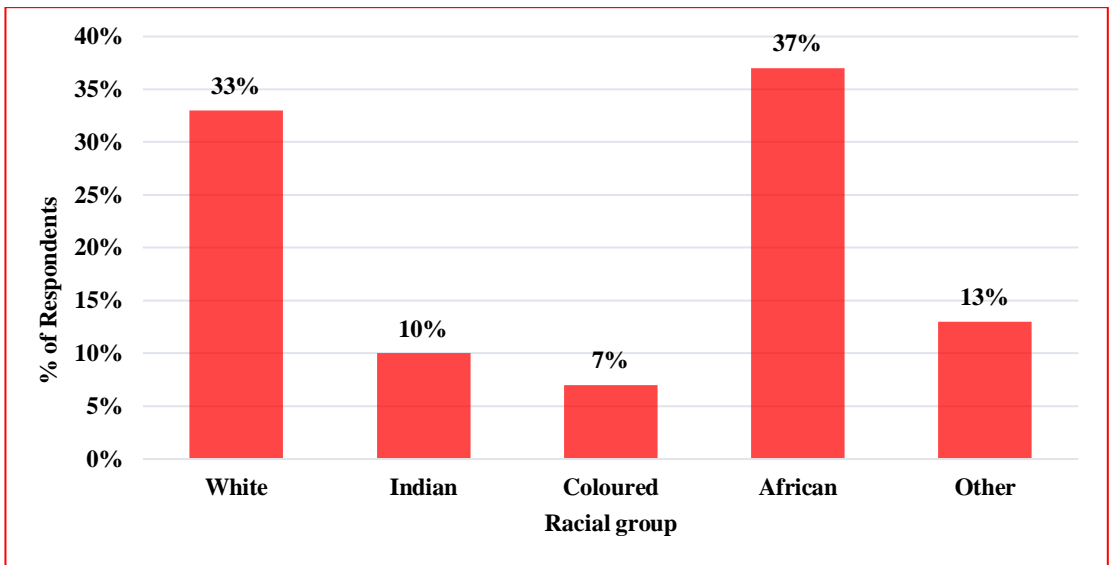


Figure 3. Race of Respondents

The Buffalo city metropolis is very diverse. 37% of respondents classify themselves as African, while 33% of respondents classify themselves as White, 13% of respondents represent themselves as other, 10% are Coloured respondents, lastly, 7% represent Indian respondents. This implies that Africans participate the most in this study.

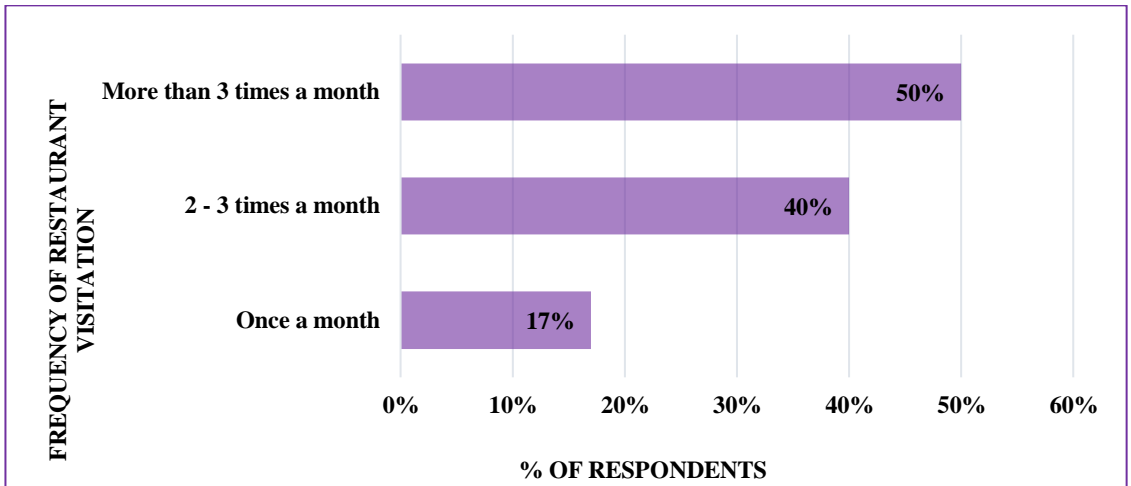


Figure 4. Frequency of Visiting A Restaurant

The graph above shows that most respondents visit restaurants regularly as 50% of respondents visit the restaurant more than 3 times a month. Followed by 40% which represents the number of respondents who visit a restaurant 2 to 3 times a month. Lastly, 17% of the respondents visit a restaurant only once a month.

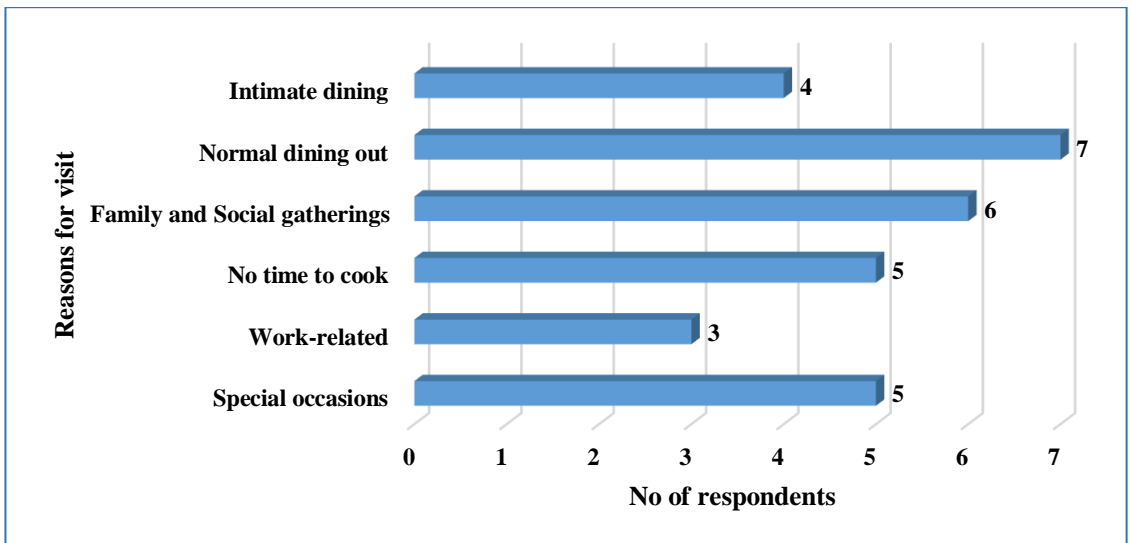


Figure 5. Respondents Reasons for Visitation

The graph above depicts that many respondents visit a restaurant for normal dining, followed by respondents who visit restaurants for family gatherings or just for social purposes and on special occasions. Respondents do not usually visit restaurants for work-related purposes as shown in the graph, only 3 respondents visit for work purposes.

4.1 Respondents' Level of Satisfaction

This question is designed to determine how pleased respondents are with these influential factors in Buffalo city metropolis restaurants, as these factors may be important in a restaurant and can help improve customer satisfaction. Each of these elements has its own set of categories. Service quality, food quality, price, hygiene, place, and ambiance are all taken under consideration. On a scale of 1 to 5, respondents were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with the service on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 representing the highest level of satisfaction and 5 representing the lowest level of satisfaction.

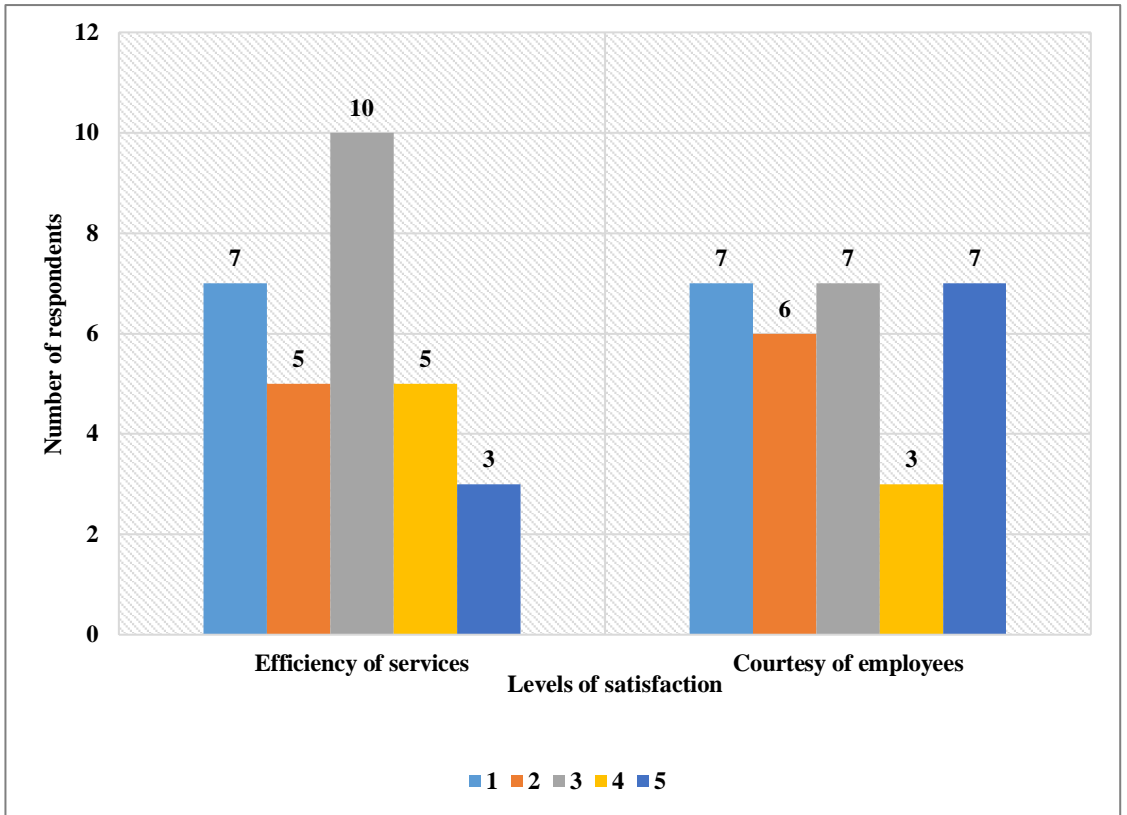


Figure 6. Respondents' Level of Satisfaction with Service Quality and Courtesy of Employees

According to [Figure 6](#), 10 respondents are neutral about the efficiency of services received and 7 respondents are satisfied. While 3 respondents are least satisfied with the efficiency of services. With regards to the courtesy of employees, 7 respondents are most satisfied and 6 respondents are satisfied, satisfied respondents were 3, while 7 respondents are least satisfied.

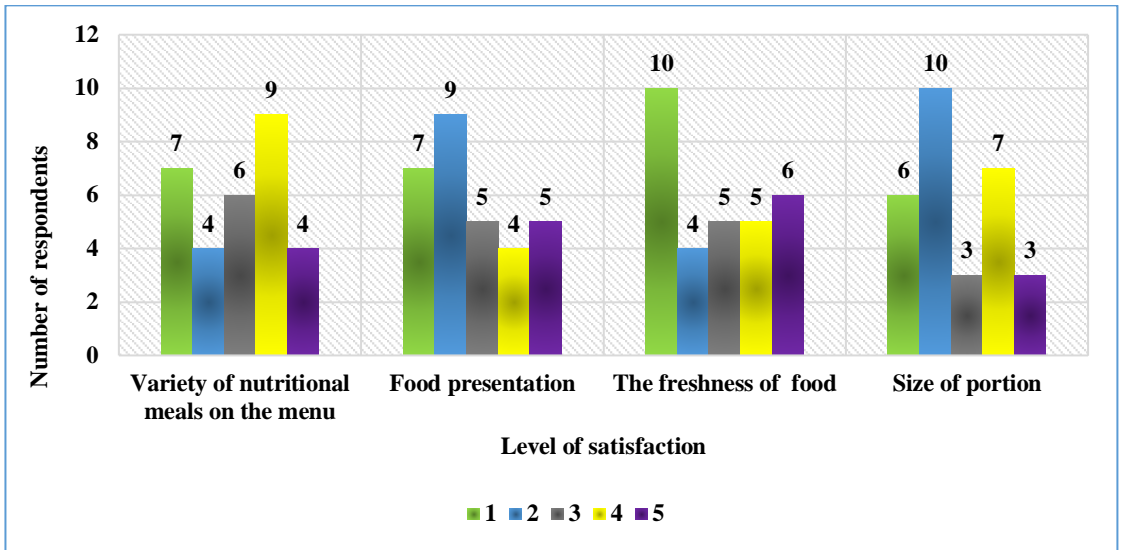


Figure 7. Respondents' Level of Satisfaction with Food Quality

In a variety of nutritional meals on the menu, 9 respondents are dissatisfied followed by 7 respondents who are most satisfied, and 4 respondents who are least satisfied with the variety of nutritional meals on the menu. 9 respondents are satisfied with the food presentation and 5 respondents are least satisfied. Regarding the freshness of food, 10 respondents are most satisfied and 6 respondents are least satisfied. 10 respondents show that they are satisfied with the size of a portion of food offered, followed by 7 least satisfied respondents.

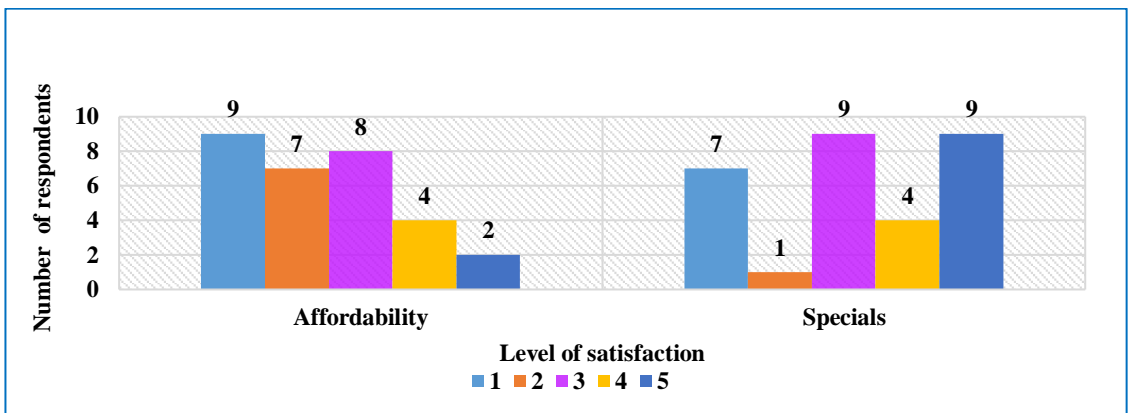


Figure 8. Respondents' Level of Satisfaction with Price

With regards to affordability, 9 respondents are most satisfied, while 3 respondents are least satisfied with the affordability of Buffalo city metropolis restaurants. 7 respondents are most satisfied and 9 are found to be least satisfied with the specials offered in Buffalo city metropolis restaurants.

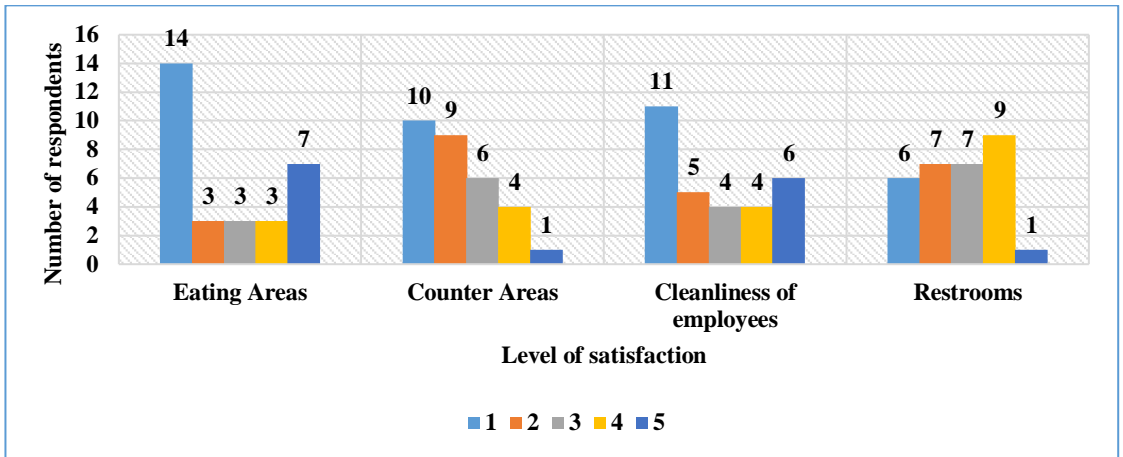


Figure 9. Respondents Level of Satisfaction with Hygiene

Figure 9 depicts that 14 respondents are most satisfied with the hygiene of eating areas and 7 respondents are least satisfied. 10 respondents are most satisfied with counter areas and 1 respondent is least satisfied with the hygiene of counter areas. In cleanliness of employees, 11 respondents are most satisfied and with 6 respondents being dissatisfied. Most respondents were not satisfied with restrooms in the Buffalo city metropolis with 6 respondents being most satisfied, 9 respondents are dissatisfied and 1 respondent are least satisfied.

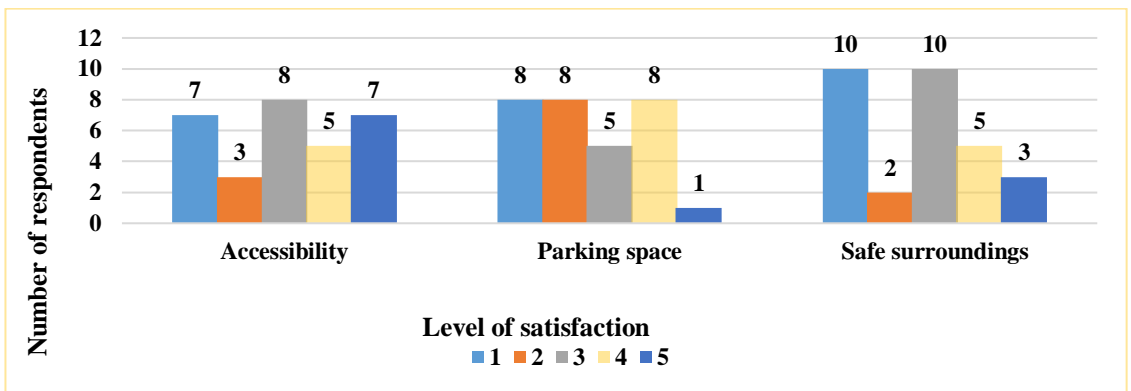


Figure 10. Respondents' Level of Satisfaction with the Location

Pertaining to accessibility, 7 respondents are most satisfied and 7 respondents are least satisfied with the accessibility of restaurants in the Buffalo city metropolis. 8 respondents are most satisfied with packing space, while 1 respondent is least satisfied with the packing space of restaurants of Buffalo city metropolis.

10 respondents are most satisfied with the safe surroundings and 3 respondents are least satisfied with the safe surroundings of Buffalo city metropolis restaurants. These results

imply that Buffalo city metropolis restaurants are mostly located in safe surroundings, they have enough or limited parking spaces for their customers and are accessible to their target audience.

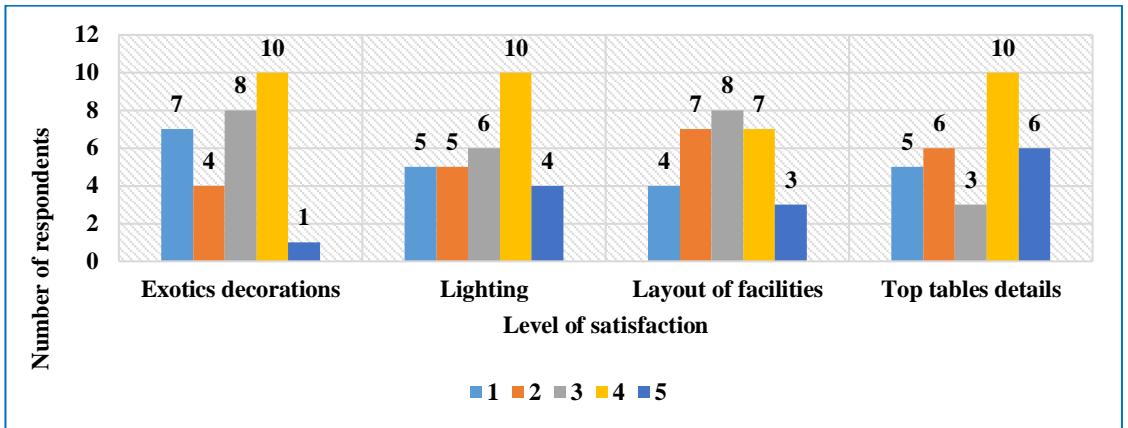


Figure 11. Respondents' Level of Satisfaction with Ambiance

7 respondents are found to be most satisfied and 10 respondents are least satisfied with exotics decorations. With regards to lighting, 5 respondents are most satisfied and 6 are neutral, followed by 10 dissatisfied respondents. 4 respondents are mostly satisfied and 3 respondents are least satisfied with the layout of facilities. These results indicate that restaurants in Buffalo city do not invest more in the interior design of their restaurants as most respondents are not satisfied with the ambiance of Buffalo city metro restaurants.

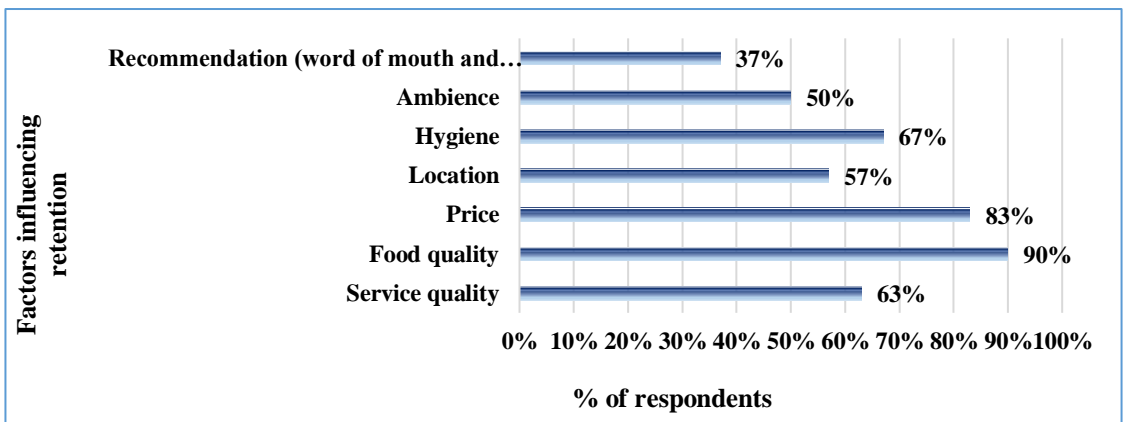


Figure 12. Factors Influencing Customer Retention

Figure 12 illustrates that 90% of respondents will revisit the restaurants and are loyal because of the food quality, followed by 83% of respondents who will revisit because of affordable prices, 67% of respondent revisit because of hygiene and 37% of respondents will revisit because of recommendations.

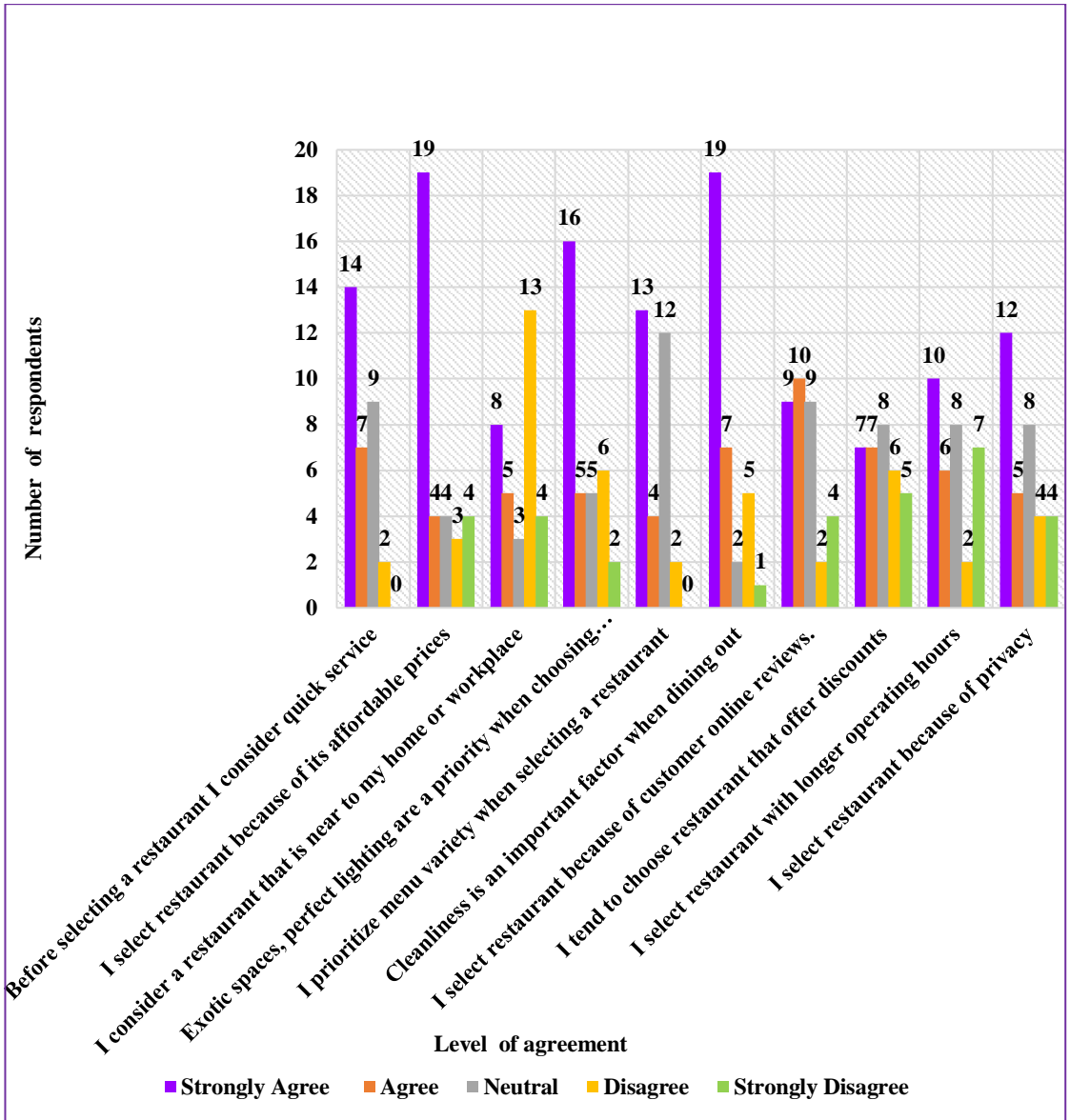


Figure 13. Restaurant Attributes

The aim of this question is to explore key characteristics that customers look for when choosing a restaurant. Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with statements describing factors that may affect a consumer's decision when choosing a restaurant. 14 respondents strongly agree that they consider quick service before selecting a restaurant. 2 respondents disagree that they consider service before selecting a restaurant, while 9 respondents are neutral. Most respondents strongly agree that they

select a restaurant because of its affordable price. 4 respondents report being neutral, 3 respondents disagree while 4 other respondents are found to strongly disagree.

As illustrated in [Figure 13](#), 13 respondents disagree that they consider restaurants near their homes or workplace followed by 8 respondents that strongly agree. While 4 strongly disagree that they consider restaurants that are near their workplace or homes. 16 respondents make exotic spaces and perfect lighting a priority when choosing a restaurant, with 2 respondents strongly disagreeing and 5 being neutral as to making exotic spaces and perfect lighting a priority when choosing a restaurant. Cleanliness is an important factor when selecting a restaurant as 19 respondents strongly agree, 12 respondents are neutral. 2 respondents disagree with cleanliness being an important factor when dining out.

As shown in [Figure 13](#), 10 respondents agreed that they select a restaurant because of customer online reviews. 9 respondents were neutral, 2 disagreed that they select a restaurant because of customer online reviews and 4 respondents strongly disagree. 8 respondents were neutral about tending to choose restaurants that offer discounts, 5 respondents strongly disagreed and 7 respondents strongly agreed that they choose restaurants that offer discounts. 10 respondents strongly agree that they select a restaurant with longer working hours, 7 respondents strongly disagree while 8 respondents were neutral and 2 disagreed about selecting restaurants with longer working hours. In selecting a restaurant because of privacy, 8 respondents were neutral. 12 respondents are strongly agreeing that they select a restaurant because of privacy and 4 respondents disagreed and also 4 respondents strongly disagreed that they select a restaurant because of privacy.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has been designed to examine the factors influencing consumer preferences in greater Buffalo City. Food quality followed by price, hygiene, and service quality respectively, are all found to significantly influence consumer preferences of restaurants. These factors also have a significant effect on customer loyalty and retention at restaurants in Buffalo city, and restaurateurs must ensure that their patrons are happy. Most notably, the results of this study could be used to spur the creation of a quality-measurement scale for ambiance for independent restaurants in Buffalo. Many respondents indicate that ambiance is one of the factors that influences customer preferences for a restaurant, stating that they favor exotic spaces and perfect lighting when selecting a restaurant.

6. RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

Since restaurateurs currently focus their marketing message on food quality and price, these findings have management implications. The present research sheds light on the factors that affect customer retention, as well as on the need for restaurateurs to understand the competitive nature of the restaurant industry to boost customer

satisfaction. Since ambiance has a considerable effect on the dining experience, therefore, restaurateurs should not only focus on the outlook of the restaurant (i.e. lobby orientation) but also on the need to educate potential customers about it. This is so that they understand the importance of it and prefer the same restaurant in the future to spend their valuable personal time and celebrate their memorable events.

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