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Sociocultural influences on customer's food choices in the restaurant industry

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Abstract

Introduction:
This thesis aims to study the impact of socio-cultural factors on customers' food choices in case of restaurant industry. The study also explores the different food choices challenges that the restaurant industry face. The following study questions guide the research: What are the various socio-cultural factors and how do these factors impact on customers' preferences in case of buying foods from restaurants in Australia?
Methodology:
The study answers the questions using primary research. In particular, a total of 100 participants were sampled through the convenience method of sampling. Data collection was done through the survey method, utilizing questionnaires as the data collection tool. The data was analysed using inferential statistics including correlation and regression in SPSS to answer research questions.
Results:
Overall, the findings indicate a negative and moderate correlation between the kind of food restaurant users prefer nationality, gender, and marital status. This implies that nationality, gender, and marital status have an adverse impact on customers' choices, but a little bit not too much. It also implies that people with a strong sense of nationality and family are less likely to have a positive preference about eating in restaurants. Conversely, there is a positive and weak correlation between food preferences and income level and the same was for religious background. This means that different religious or social groups are directly affected by the factors like the price of food and the type of food they eat when they go out However, there is a need for further research to confirm these findings, considering the high significance scores. Nevertheless, the results help indicate that food preferences are an important consideration for restaurants owner to consider when designing their menus depending on their target audience and locations.

Keywords/tags (subjects): Food choices, food preferences, social factors, family values.

Miscellaneous information:

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1. Introduction

1.1 Research Motivation

Modern restaurant business development depends mainly on the enterprises' adaptation to the new management conditions in the market. This process entails increasing restaurant's competitiveness and ensuring competitive advantage creation in market volatility times (Yakubiv & Boryshkevych, 2020). Berry and Waldfogel add that a firm uses a pricing strategy or focuses more on quality to deal with competition in the market. In the restaurant's case, restaurant owners likely focus on improving the quality of food or reducing food prices to attract new customers as well as motivate them to visit again. With the rise in demand for restaurants, one of the major vital factors that people consider is the evaluation of customer satisfaction. Consequently, restaurants endogenously chose quality (Berry & Waldfogel, 2010). Suppose two restaurants offer their customers a similar price for a specific type of food. In that case, a restaurant that offers superior quality can become successful if they are located in a similar place as its rivals. Similarly, being alert to the quality that consumers expect provides restaurants with an upper hand in a highly competitive market. Thus, from this instance, the scenario that is highly likely is that rivalry changes restaurants' quality simultaneously. Consequently, they modify the quality on the basis of the quality that other competing restaurants offer (Movahed, 2018).

Even though the quality is challenging to measure in restaurants, customer reviews serve as the proxy for restaurants' quality. According to Yakubiv & Boryshkevych (2020), one of the techniques of improving the quality of restaurants is through the food or services quality offered. This quality, in turn, influences the food choices of consumers in restaurants. Adhering to quality entails incorporating various factors into food or services to ensure that restaurants offer customer-specific foods or services. Therefore, restaurants need to understand and incorporate determinants of food choices among consumers into their quality components, such as socio-cultural factors. Mon-

terrosa et al. (2020) add that the restaurant industry's competition is increasing, and those restaurants are successful that are capable of fulfilling the expectations of consumers for food. The expectations of consumers for food are directly linked with their socio-cultural backgrounds. Therefore, it is essential to understand how socio-cultural factors impact the food choices of consumers food choice. The restaurants have to be clear about their target consumers, and accordingly, they need to design their menus. Service plays a huge role and the type of utensils used, and the way of serving and presenting food has to be in accordance with the target consumers and their culture. Thus, the thesis will help to improve the understanding about those factors that can play an important role in the formulation of marketing tactics and food menus in the restaurant industry.

1.2 Research objectives and questions

Several research objectives are developed as per topic to accomplish the purpose of conducting this study. The study will explore the different food choices challenges that the restaurant industry face. Some objectives for the research are as below:

1. What are the various socio-cultural factors that influence the food choice behaviours of consumers?

2. How do consumers' food choices influence by social and cultural factors in the Australian restaurant industry?

The relevant data will be collected through the survey method and further will be analysed to test the hypothesis. The results obtained will be compared and analysed against other research findings on the topic, which will enable the research to draw a conclusion.

Justification of the study

The study is justified in three main areas. First, the study is justified because it is relevant for academicians and researchers who want to understand how food preferences are impacted by social factors such as religion, gender, family background and social classes. While there may be a pre-

conception that these factors inevitably affect food preferences, there is a need for an empirical study that looks directly at the extent to which such impacts may exist, if they exist at all. Existing literature on the subject is currently contradictory but also few and far between. Thus, this study will make a notable addition to the continuously growing literature body in this respect. As a resource, it will form a useful reference point that both reviews currently existing studies, while also making a new addition that makes a small but meaningful contribution to academia.

Second, this study is justified because it is relevant to marketers, owners and managers within the food industry. In particular, while the food industry is increasingly growing, so has the studies in regard to food preferences. As such, studies like this contribute to three important areas for these stakeholders. Firstly, they can get a meaningful and up-to-date reference point for understanding what in particular, affects their consumers' choice of cuisine. Second, with such an understanding, the stakeholders can take steps that help them improve their value proposition to customers, while also knowing how to segment and target their customers properly, especially in the ever-increasingly dynamic food industry. Lastly, the contribution from this study can also help managers and marketers within the food industry understand what does not work and what does not differentiate consumers, which may be a cost-saving as they may avoid spending capital pursuing food choices that are unlikely to make a difference in the customer's palette.

The third rationale for this study is its significance to policy direction. Specifically, the food industry is one of the most sensitive industries as it relates directly to consumer health. Thus, it is unsurprising that it is one of the heavily regulated industries, with laws and regulations from government agencies, acts, and pronouncements made on a regular basis. However, lawmakers and regulators need a relevant and informed source of reference in making informed regulations. While this study may not claim to be the most authoritative voice on the linkage between food preferences and social issues, it provides a starting point, or perhaps a reference point with rele-

vant literature collated in one place that discusses some fundamental social aspects that influence food choices.

This paper is organized into five main chapters. Chapter one covers a brief description of the study with objectives and questions. A literature review will be the second chapter that analyse previous studies related to sociocultural factors influencing food choices and compares the opinion of various. Chapter three outlines the methodological framework utilized in this study. It highlights the research strategy, data collection, research approach, data ethical considerations and analysis technique. Chapter four will present the data collected. Additionally, the chapter provides an in-depth methodology effectiveness analysis combined with the study findings. Chapter five offers a discussion and a critical evaluation of findings about relevant literature and also provides a conclusion of the whole thesis by presenting the summary of findings and providing suggestions for further research in the same field.

2. Literature review

This chapter analyses previous works of literature to develop a conceptual understanding of social and cultural factors, and their influence on customers' preferences. First, this chapter's secondary information presentation reviews the concepts of consumer behaviour, the restaurant industry, and sociocultural influences on consumer behaviour. The second section examines consumer behaviour theory to establish a relationship between dependent and independent variables. Finally, the last part reviews the extant literature on sociocultural influences on consumer food choices in the restaurant industry.

2.1 How food choices happen

One way of understanding the occurrence of food choices is through the life course perspective. In this background, the life course is the prior experiences and events of people and involves numerous trajectories, turning points, transitions, and context. The life course has become the setting

from which present effects on food choices take place (Sobal & Bisogni, 2009). Intrapersonal, biological, environmental and social factors (culture, physical, economic and informational) all impact food choice in intricate ways. For instance, ideals formulated through individual beliefs, attitudes, and cultural norms offer people references for evaluating food behaviours. The role of intrapersonal factors and biology may result in individual identities that people develop with time and through which they take action. Thus, personal resources like skills, income, and relationships may be utilized in a selection of particular foods and patterns of food over others. For instance, a lack of time might make an individual prefer more convenient foods, or insufficient cooking knowledge may influence eating out in a restaurant. Ideally, resources are the many asset types that a person weighs when making a food choice. These assets include wealth and income, lack of space to cook or cook equipment, proper knowledge and skills, networks and relationships, and traditions and values, among other factors. On the one hand, specific resources may improve food choices, for instance, income to offer access to foods. On the other hand, other resources may limit food choices, for instance, lack of time that dictates convenient foods and power trade-offs among various resources mentioned (Monterrosa et al., 2020).

Cruwys et al. (2015) accentuate that social systems consist of relationships of people that afford people the opportunity of encountering food with other individuals; individuals make choices considering their interests and values. Thus, food choice, at a personal level, takes place within the individual food systems displayed as thinking processes that guide their food choices in contexts. Central to the personal food system is food choice values, including health, taste, relationships, convenience, cost, and the feelings and meanings linked to those food beliefs. The values attached to food choice differ among people over their entire life. Also, the negotiations of food choices values are vital to sort out the values that are most significant for satisfaction. These negotiations may be less deliberate, automatic, or subconscious. Overall, however, the process of negotiation is essentially conscious, frequently among the values of a person, but also can be among the values

of several people (for instance, those who belong to a family). Linking the food choice and cognitive behaviour evaluation are referred to as food choice tactics or strategies. These strategies refer to basic rules acting as a guide and are utilized by people to convert food choices. Thus, strategies serving well become constructed judiciously over time into habits of making food choices comfortable and expectable while accounting for other demands in life (Monterrosa et al., 2020).

2.2 Determinants of food choices

Choices of food are related to the concept of consumer behaviour. The individual food system is significant in understanding the several factors which influence food choice at the personal level and the role that social and cultural factors play in driving these choices. In this context, food choices entail why individuals eat the types of food they do. The decisions concerning food result from intricate processes influenced by social, biological, economic, physical, psychological, political, and cultural factors. Thus, behaviours of food choice are linked to economic and social expression identities, cultural meanings, and preferences and are significant determinants of health and nutritional status (Monterrosa et al., 2020). As discussed by Leng et al. (2010), the eating habits of people are impacted by economic factors and the way foods are labelled and marketed. They reflect both goals and habits, moderated, although imperfectly, by understanding a person what entails healthy eating.

Additionally, psychological mechanisms influence our food choices, including brain signals from the adipose tissue and gastrointestinal tract that have an effect not only satiety and hunger but also on people's motivation to consume certain nutrients and the benefit obtained from consuming such nutrients. Moreover, against this nurture and genetic background, Leng et al. further assert that the environment shapes people's preferences, behaviours, knowledge, eating habits, and lifestyle. In an individuals' everyday consumption, they are far from sensible agents; people do not only use evidence-based data when making a decision about which foods to eat, but they are also

influenced by the larger information surroundings that are fashioned by cultural factors, including other media and advertising, and are sturdily affected by earlier habits and decisions, even when these factors have not proven to the optimum.

Bellisle (2005) further affirms that hunger is the key driver for eating but nutritional and physiological needs do not solely determine what individuals eat. Other factors include biological determinants, for instance, appetite and taste also economic elements like price and availability; psychological elements like a person's mood and stress; physical factors like time, access, education and abilities; social determinants like family, culture, mal patterns and peers; and the beliefs, knowledge and attitudes about food. Notably, decisions concerning individual food choices entail numerous behaviours, including acquiring, preparing, sharing, storing, serving, cleaning up, and eating. These intricate decisions comprise several considerations regarding what to eat and where, when, and with whom to involve in food behaviour. Moreover, these decisions are dynamic within a person's life course for long- and short-term-time frames and historical time (Sobal&Bisogni, 2009).

According to Monterrosa et al. (2020), three central viewpoints exist for food choice analysis. The rationalist viewpoint presumes that people make decisions to minimize costs and take full advantage of benefits. On the other hand, the structuralist viewpoint assumes that environmental factors and social institutions govern (by constraining or enhancing) individual decisions. At the same time, the constructionist viewpoint presumes that people define the experience, manage, interpret, symbolize, and negotiate the world or their surroundings in the decision-making process. Therefore, structuralist perspectives assist in understanding the personal food choice determinants, while constructionist perspectives help in understanding methods by which food choices take place.

According to Contento and Koch (2020), the representation of food choice determinants in a multilevel sociological framework can take centric circles like in figure 1 below. The interaction of

these determinants influences beliefs and attitudes related to food, and the individual's interactions with the physical and social environment further influence dietary behaviours and food choices. As per the given figure, practices, social structures, social relations, and public policy are some key cultural and social factors that have potential to affect food choice behaviour of people.
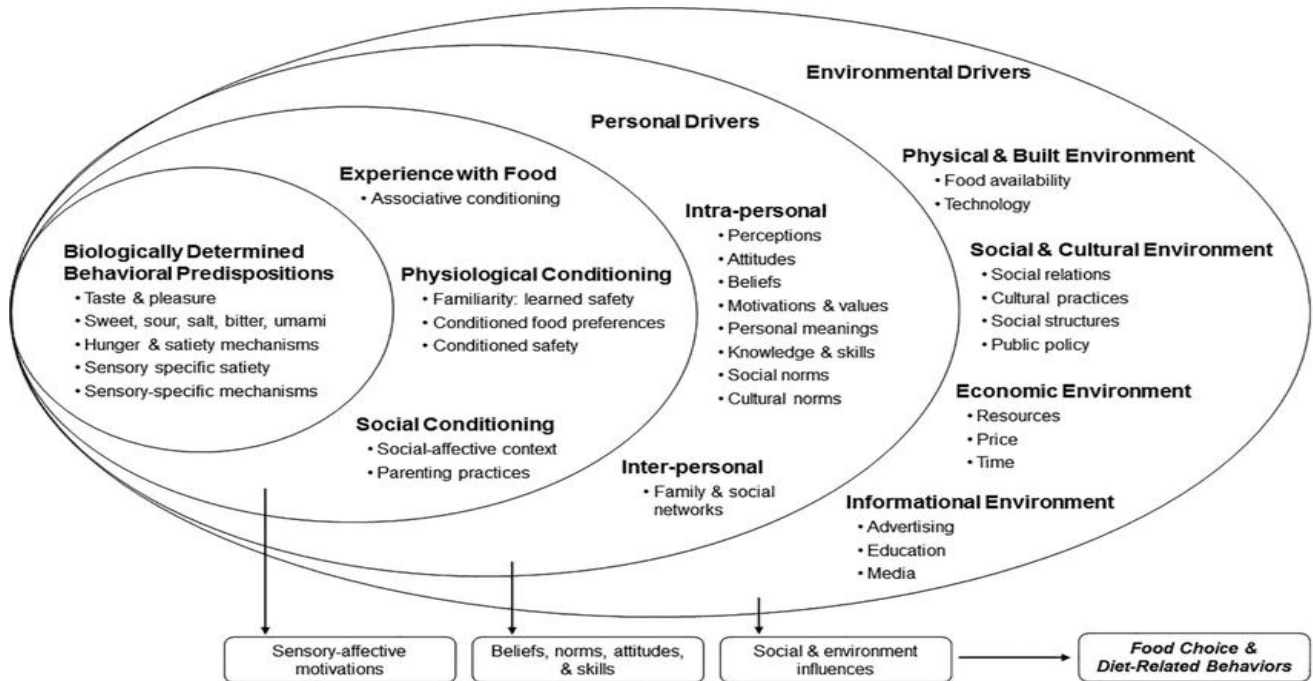
Figure 1: Environmental and social influences at multilevel on dietary behaviours and food choice (Contento & Koch, 2020).

2.3 Social, cultural factors influencing food choices

Socio-cultural influences represent a range of various social and cultural factors that can be considered as key determinates for eating pattern of restaurants' customers. The different socio-cultural factors highly impact the restaurant industry because these factors are responsible for the different expectations of consumers and their food choices. Some people like to eat hot food while others prefer cold food. This difference in food choices is region-specific and cultural backgrounds are responsible for taste and food choice differences. Social factors are all those determinants that impact the lifestyle of an individual. These are the income level of an individual, family background, social status, buying habits, educational background, family size and structure, reli-

gious background, population density, friends and acquaintances, and more. The cultural factors are those factors that represent the set of values and ideologies of a group of people or a specific community. The behaviours of an individual are highly dependent on cultural factors. Different cultural factors languages, ethics, values, social organization, material culture, aesthetics, attitude, religion, habits and customs, early childhood experiences, and many more (EUFIC, 2006). Dindyal and Dindyal (2003) add that sociocultural variables contribute to eating practices and food selection, affecting the buying behaviours of people. These factors include religion, ethnicity, reference group, family, social class, and demographics such as marital status, gender, income, education, age, occupation, and attitudes and beliefs.

Cultural practices and social factors in many nations greatly influence the kinds of food people eat, the way they make food, their patterns of feeding, and their food preferences. Ideally, all individuals have their dislikes and likes and their beliefs concerning food, and many individuals are conventional in their food habits. People eat as per their learned behaviours concerning the meals, etiquette, acceptable foods, snack pattern, portion sizes, and food combinations. A typical pattern observed in all cultures is breakfast, dinner, and lunch intertwined with snacks between meals (Monterrosa et al., 2020). Thus, culture is a significant determinant of what people eat. Attitudes, beliefs, and personal values regarding food and food choices are mainly shaped during the early period of socialization and are thus a cultural product. Notably, food preparation, cooking method, food chosen, eating pattern, meal number daily, size and time of portion taken comprise foodways and are part of the coherent culture that each practice and custom has a role to play (Dindyal & Dindyal, 2003).

In line with this, Contento and Koch (2020) resonate that in each society, there are rules (usually unwritten) that specify what food is or not. What a particular society considers normal or highly desirable may be regarded as totally inedible or revolting in another community. Thus, food habits differ broadly regarding which foods are disliked, liked, not eaten, or eaten in a society. Typically,

cultural groups offer guidelines concerning food combinations, acceptable foods, eating behaviour, and eating pattern compliance with the policies generates a belonging and identity sense for a person. Ideally, an individual repeatedly exposed to particular foods becomes less hesitant to eat them. For instance, traditionally, lobster was only available on the coasts, and coastal dwellers are much more likely to accept it (Dindyal & Dindyal, 2003).

Cultural values

Values have greater relevancy in the context of the restaurant industry. Values entail ideational cultural elements like ideas, meanings, and symbols (Monterrosa et al., 2020). According to Lewin (2003), values assist in the negotiation of food choices and also simplify food choices. Lewin contends that the value system is the basis that impacts food decisions and causes clashes in differing intensities. In this context, values are associated with emotions and feelings. Cultural values comprise the shared standards of what is desirable or suitable for a group, and these values form the foundation for behaviour standards. For both societies and individuals, there is a hierarchy of the comparative significance of values, which varies over time. In the literature on food choice, the value of food choice involves different ideas from a food feature (such as appearance, taste, and naturalness) to the procurement of food (cost and availability) and food eating and preparation (convenience and variety). Other values of food choice refer to an end state (such as healthfulness and safety), conduct modes (farness and relationships management), or the physical world (environmental influence and origin) (Sobal & Bisogni, 2009). Since we use values for food choice negotiation, it is essential to determine the way values of food choice are linked to food behaviours, symbols, and meanings (Monterrosa et al., 2020).

Food attitudes and beliefs

Food beliefs are rooted in socio-cultural traditions, religion, and folk beliefs. Irrespective of the rapid food habits changes that have occurred in the past, food beliefs endure. Notably, many food beliefs are embedded in economic conditions and frequently limit protein foods intakes like meat,

milk, and eggs. Additionally, these limitations apply primarily to children and mothers whose psychological needs for high-protein foods are higher compared to the needs of men. This is particularly true during lactation and pregnancy when there is a prohibition of many foods, and there is a preference for others (Dindyal & Dindyal, 2003). For instance, in Oman, pregnant women eat less, believing that fish scales and bones will harden the fetus' bones and result in delivery difficulty. Similarly, in certain parts of Sudan, pregnant women do not eat meat from the head of a lamb, fearing that it might enlarge the fetus' head. In Iraq, melon, radishes, onions, spicy foods, and leeks are avoided because they believe that they generate injurious effects on the fetus and result in abdominal disturbances (Musaiger, 2003).

In Egypt, women eat more food rich in protein during post-partum such as milk and meat, irrespective of their families' income level. In Sudan, during post-partum, women majorly consume high-energy and high-protein foods. This food consumption change is to assist the mother in regaining strength for compensating for losses during childbirth and increasing the production of milk. On the contrary, in Oman, breastfeeding mothers abstain from citrus fruits, rice, fried and salted fish since they believe these foods will inhibit milk production and form worms in their intestines (Monterrosa et al., 2020). The majority of these food beliefs are linked to diseases and health. For instance, in Bahrain, people believe that seeds and nuts increase male sexual ability, and hence males consume these foods during their weddings. In Iraq, girls avoid cold beverages, spicy foods, sweet and sour foods during their menarche period because they believe during menstruation; these foods may hasten the bleeding (Musaiger, 2003).

Religious background

Religion has a substantial role in food choices among people in particular societies. It can forbid the consumption of specific types of foods while allowing others. For instance, Jewish and Muslim people do not consume pork because they consider it unclean. Also, Buddhists and Hindus do not consume pork because it is not clean meat, and they have taken this restriction to the extreme

level that they no longer take any meat. Still, instead, they are firm vegetarians still they are allowed to take lamb and chicken. On the contrary, Christianity enables the consumption of meat, including pork, without the need for any special prayers to cleanse the meat, as is the case in Judaism and Islamic religions.

Similarly, some Christians, like the Seventh Day Adventists, discourage alcohol consumption which Catholics allow (Musaiger, 2003). Monterrosa et al. (2020) affirm that religion assists in defining food practices through different meanings, rules, and symbols. In this case, foods serve six general functions in religious traditions, including communicating with God or other mystical forces, showing faith through rituals and symbolic acts, worldliness rejection, heightening of belongingness or identity feeling, separateness expression, and ecological pragmatism strengthening. These functions frequently define food acceptability, food practices, and proscriptions among religions. Notably, within particular religious groups, different levels of acculturation exist. This implies a large diversity regarding the extent to which certain people follow their spiritual teachings. Some people devote themselves to following their religious instructions while others loosely follow these doctrines, and all of these influence their beliefs regarding their food choices with varying degrees (Dindyal & Dindyal, 2003). Overall, religion plays a critical role in the options and consequent food choices in particular communities.

Ethnicity

Ethnicity affects the selection and choice of foods individuals consume. Diverse ethnic groups will select and pick various foodstuffs since people from ethnic groups are brought up in a particular manner and style. This implies that factors such as their attitudes and outlook towards people and life, food choices, and even health are greatly influenced by their ethnic group. Parents or caregivers instil these factors in individuals of various ethnic groups when they are young (Dindyal & Dindyal, 2003). The multiple values influencing these factors come from the nation where each group emanates. For instance, Afro Caribbean and African groups typically consume foods contain-

ing different meat, rice, and wheat. On the contrary, far Eastern and Eastern groups typically consume various spices and herbs. Typical groups from Western nations consume much plainer foods and dryer compared to other ethnic groups (Monterrosa et al., 2020).

Reference group

Reference groups act as devices that give certain people identity. Thus, food practices communicate what people are in different ways and reference groups, most from family and friends. In this case, food can be a personal identity symbol or symbol of an entire society. For instance, adolescents may associate with junk foods to signal to belong to a specific peer group, whilst eating healthy foods signify family (Monterrosa et al., 2020). Similarly, due to peer pressure, adolescents may adopt a pattern of going out to have fun and eating out. This may, in turn, influence their food choices which they use as a symbol of belonging to a group. For instance, eating low-fat foods or exploring junk food to associate with the group (Roudsari et al., 2017).

Bellisle (2005) adds that social context is a major social influence of food choices. Social context entails the effect that an individual or many people have on the eating conduct of other individuals, either indirectly (learn from the peer's behaviors) or directly (purchasing food), either subconscious or conscious (beliefs transfer). People have differences in terms of attitudes and habits when they interact with each other. Food choices of people can be affected even when they eat food alone due to interpersonal factors. However, it is challenging to measure the how food choices of people are affected by internal and external factors. It is because consumption patterns of people are different from each other due to a lack of awareness of social effects on their eating behaviour. Consequently, social contexts such as family are significant in food choices/decisions that people make.

Social setting

According to Faugier et al. 2001, generally, people eat foods that prepare at home rather than go outside. But, sometimes, foods are being taken in restaurants due to busy schedules or meetings with clients. Therefore, the venue where food is taken can influence food decisions, particularly regarding what foods are offered. In this case, healthy food availability away and at home proliferates the consumption of these foods. However, an option for food access that is healthy is inadequate in the majority of schools and work settings. This is especially true for people having uneven hours or those with specific requests, for instance, vegetarians. As such, social setting is a significant determinant of food choices as many people will eat what is offered, for example, what is on the menu in a restaurant.

Family

Roudsari et al. (2017) affirm that family is primarily recognized as necessary in food choices. Research indicates that food choices shaping occurs in the homes. In this case, friends and family can be motivational source in selecting food among individuals. Nestle et al. (2008) add that family act as social facilitation during food consumption such that lack of it (eating food alone) leads to lower food consumption levels and vice versa. In this case, friends and family members pressure to eat low-fat food for health reasons or try new foods. Thus, involving families is significant in supporting and making a change in diets, as indicated in cardiovascular disease risk minimization and treating eating disorders and obesity studies (Nestle et al., 2008).

Social class

People with favourable socioeconomic status prefer foods that satisfy them and eradicate their hunger. Because of limited income, these people also engage in food choice techniques like reduction of the quality and quantity of foodstuffs, engaging in basic food preparations because they are cheap, they avoid costly foods, and diminishing other costs of living to offer food costs for

managing difficulties of the process of food selection (Roudsari et al., 2017). On the contrary, people with higher socioeconomic status tend to engage in healthier diets and food choices. Their healthier food choices could be due to their higher levels of education, and they may be more health-conscious with healthier lifestyles (Dindyal & Dindyal, 2003).

Education

Nutritional knowledge and education play a vital role in choosing and identifying healthy foods. Individuals with knowledge and are educated concerning healthy food consumption are highly likely to prefer more nutritious food choices. This, however, largely relies on whether the person can apply their knowledge. Consumers are knowledgeable and become health-conscious, as many of them tend to eat healthy foods with low calories and fats (Monterrosa et al., 2020). In this case, the knowledge of people regarding skills to prepare food, food properties, health relations, and foods may shape the process of food choice. This healthy food knowledge is commonly obtained from educational background, readings, occupation-induced information, and training courses. The more knowledgeable a person is about healthy eating, the more their food choices comprise healthy meals and snacks (Roudsari et al., 2017).

Gender

Gender as a social factor also influences food choices among consumers. It expresses many normative and ideational food practices aspects. Beliefs that surround masculinity or familiarity contribute to the gendered selection of food, such as the masculinity and strength that people afford meats. Thus, in Western nation's cultures, variances exist among male and female patterns of food consumption. For instance, women consume less food and delicate and lighter meals like fruits and vegetables.

Contrary to patrilineal societies, men receive preferential treatment regarding prestigious foods such as animal-source foods (Monterrosa et al., 2020). On the other hand, women are prohibited from certain foods based on pregnancy, fertility, and breast milk quality. For instance, women in

rural Nepal eat less prestigious food and have lower calorie, vitamin, and carotene intake compared to men. Similarly, tasks linked to food acquisition, production, cooking, disposal, and preparation are also gender-specific, and this differs from one culture to another culture. For instance, in some communities, women are considered unpaid homemakers tasked with food caring, and this, in turn, impacts their food choices and limits their leisure time (Lee et al., 2009).

Food preferences

Many consumers' food choices are mainly determined by taste instead of other social factors, food safety, or nutrition. The concept of consumer food tastes also entails smell and oral food texture perception. Notably, people's sensory responses to texture, sight, smell and taste of foodstuffs are crucial influences on eating habits and food choices, For instance, rich foods in terms of their quality and prices are preferred by health-conscious people to eat healthy foods and protect health from diseases (Nestle et al., 2008).

Cultural food practices

Within the context of cultural factors impacting food choices, Monterrosa et al. (2020) argue that food practices that are culture-specific involve ideational (cognitive) and material elements which result in precise dietary patterns within a social group or geographic area. Ideally, physical aspects entail systems of producing food that includes transporting, growing and distributing food; financial resources for acquiring food; and preparing a meal, including storage, cooking and purchase, and place of eating. Ideational facets entail cuisine, meal rules, ritualistic food practices, status and prestige ascribed to foods, and social association (status and roles) around the consumption, production, and preparation of food.

Cruwys et al. (2015) affirm that people learn food practices majorly through transmitting them from parents to children. Social groups such as peers, families, and schools help people understand things like the timing and structure of meals, the place of food consumption (with others or at the table), and the way we eat (such as food pleasures and eating manners). This process of

learning is both implicit, like daily routines designed for children and in food behaviour modelling, and explicit such as verbal communication regarding information exposure and what to eat. Notably, cuisine (flavours, seasonings, and food combinations) is a significant food acceptance influence. Additionally, experiences shaping the learning process also convey some information concerning attitudes and values for eating and food. This transmission is accountable for the comparative food practices' stabilization over time. Nonetheless, a shift in cultural food practices takes place during the acculturation process when migrants get exposed to unique foods and various food acquisition and culinary techniques (Lee et al., 2009).

2.4 The concept of consumer behaviour and the restaurant industry

Consumer behaviour is all about the behaviour that consumers exhibit in various situations. In this context, consumer behaviour refers to the behaviour displayed by consumers in purchasing, searching for, evaluating, utilizing, and disposal of products, ideas, and services (Glanz et al., 2012). Overall, consumer behaviour comprises the reactions, consequences, and activities that occur as the consumer undergoes a process of decision-making, reaching a decision, and then using the product (Parsa et al., 2012).

Meanwhile, the restaurant industry comprises eatery places, bars, or food service providers that enable customers to enter, eat and order food on the premises. The sector ranges from the most expensive eateries to fast-food locations located as standalone or part of a plaza or remote place. It entails an eating establishment that includes but is not limited to cafeterias, coffee shops, sandwich stands, hotels, and public and private school cafeterias offering the sale of food to guests, the public, or employees (Glanz et al., 2012). According to Glanz et al., the various segments of the restaurant industry include ethnic restaurants that specialize in national or ethnic cuisines such as Greek or Chinese restaurants; fast-food (quick-service) restaurants such as Burger King or McDonald's; fast-casual restaurants, which are chain restaurants that prepare more quality foods than

quick-service chains; casual dining restaurants (sit-down) serving averagely priced food in a casual environment; cafes dealing with both food and beverages; and fine dining which are full-service that have a range of high-quality foods and popular items in the menu. Consumer food choices in these restaurants are influenced by various factors extending beyond nutrition or hunger and frequently include cultural, social, personal, and behavioural factors (Kokkoris&Stavrova, 2021). These factors determine what people eat or do not eat in restaurants, and therefore, they are essential in determining consumer behaviour in the restaurant industry. This paper focuses on sociocultural factors influencing food choices in the restaurant industry.

2.5 The correlation between food choices and social-cultural factors among consumers

Various studies have been done to determine sociocultural factors that influence food choices in different countries and contexts. One of the studies is by Waqa and Mavoa (2006), who investigated the effect that sociocultural factors have on food choices among indigenous Fijian females aged 16–18 at school using semi-structured interviews done with indigenous Fijian females subsample regarding their explanations for and description of their pattern of eating at school. The findings indicated that even though participants knew which drinks and foods were healthy, many of them did not take breakfast and ate junk after school and at recess. The primary reasons for this unhealthy pattern of eating were poor management of time during the daybreaks and having access to unrestricted money to spend to buy junk foods. Participants pointed out that friends and family members were the key influence on their pattern of eating.

Simon et al. (2017) did a study to determine the influence that cultural factors have on hospitality clientele's food choices. Using data collected, the authors explored the correlation between the controlling impacts of ecological factors on the link between food choices and cultural elements. The study results demonstrated that many respondents showed that cultural factors determine

their food choices such as beliefs about foods, taboos, traditions, and rituals. Accordingly, the results indicate that environmental factors influence the moderation of hospitality clientele's food choices. The authors concluded that hospitality professionals need to consider and factor in cultural elements when planning a menu to strike a balance on food choices.

Similarly, another study by Musaiger (2003) explored the effect of religious and social factors on eating habits of people in Arab countries. The author asserts that the policy of food subsidy has negatively impacted the food choices in the Gulf States by motivating the intake of foods such as rice, sugar, fat, meat, and wheat flour. The author found that sociocultural elements like beliefs, gender discrimination, preferences for food, religion, employment of women, and education are important determinants of food choices that have potential to influence the eating patterns of people. Additionally, mass media, particularly televised food adverts, lay a noteworthy role in adjusting the food choices and dietetic habits of people in the region.

The above findings support the Enriquez and Archila-Godinez (2021) study, which reviewed the cultural and social influences on food choices. The authors affirm that there is a direct role of consumers in the changing trends of food choices in the society or country due to influences of their behaviors and habits. The authors further accentuate that food is an expression of the identity, lifestyle, and values of people. The review documented that the influence of sociocultural aspects like social stratifications, inequalities, and cultural capital can trigger the food choice of consumers. Additionally, the study demonstrated that the effects of various factors like social environments, foodscapes, taste, and nutritional information make consumers make food choices under pressure or make have an uninformed option which is generally not healthy.

Confirming the above findings is Ngugi et al.'s (2018) study. The authors conducted empirical research to explore impact of personal, religious and demographic factors on household attitudes and behaviour towards food choices. The study findings documented a statistically significant relationship between food choices and sociocultural factors in the region. Social interactions (at 86 per

cent), which entails interpersonal relationships, nature, traditions at 78 per cent, and social status at 70 per cent, provided a significant interpersonal relationship set in influencing food choice. The study concluded that factors that influence food choices are negative and positive, and thus, considering the sociological food choices methodology is essential.

2.6 Theoretical framework

Reasoned Action Theory (TRA)

TRA was established by Ajzen and Fishbein in 1980 to describe the instantaneous behaviour of people and their intention to perform that behaviour. Ideally, behavioural intentions rely upon the attitude of a person towards that behaviour and the values that other people attach to it. In this case, perspectives capture beliefs concerning behavioural outcome/results (behavioural views) combined with the outcome evaluation of that behaviour subjective norms entail social pressures that are received for behaving in a particular way and the morale for compliance with other people's wishes (Petrovici et al., 2004). TRA was not precisely developed for modelling food choice, but still it applied for analysing the connection between socio-cultural factors and food choices. For example, McCarthy et al. (2003) used this theory to explain attitudes of people toward beef as a food choice in Ireland. As per their research findings, subjective norms and attitudes are significant behavioural intention determinants and the former were significantly correlated with their behaviour measure. Other studies that have used TRA on food choice, such as Saunders and Rhilly (1990), have also documented essential correlations between the main TRA components (Matthew & Dominique, 2013).

This particular they were established to explain the behavioural performance factors as the intention formation to perform that behaviour successfully. Thus, Ajzen 1991 developed the concept of planned behaviour (TPB) to address partial volitional control cases. The planned behaviour theory

is the extension of TRA by introducing a new concept: the perceived control of behaviour (PBC), considered as an element of both behaviour and behavioural intentions. PBC combines external control factors (situational factors and dependence on others) and internal control factors (skills, abilities, and information). Therefore, according to TPB, intentions for performing a behaviour are impacted by three factors, including attitude towards that behaviour (whether the individual is in favour to do the specific behaviour); the way the individual perceives the social weight of doing it and whether the individual feels self-efficacy or in control of the action to be performed concerning the behaviour (PBC). Notably, TPB still embodies a rational action consumer behaviour method. In this field, behaviour and intentions reasonably follow the normative, control, and behavioural beliefs that individuals hold concerning the behaviour. Even though the views individuals have may be inaccurate, irrational, or unfounded, perceptions and attitudes of behavioural control are perceived to make sure that beliefs of people generate a conforming behaviour that leads to such behaviour which aligns with the general beliefs' tenor. So, it can say that personal attitudes and choices can be directly measured are consumer decision determinants (Bosnjak et al., 2020).

Since it was developed, TPB has been the most primarily adopted theory to model food choice. In this context, Cox et al. (1998) and Nguyen et al. (1996) states that sometimes behaviour of individuals can be planned when they go for an outing. These studies found each factor has significant components, with attitudes as the most significant predictor of food choice among the participants (Matthew & Dominique, 2013). Therefore, given much empirical research has validated the TPB model, particularly for food choice study, this theory will be used in this study as the core theoretical framework. This theoretical framework will assist in explaining the food choice behaviour among consumers. The theory will be used to describe how sociocultural factors like culture and religious background influence consumers' food choices in the restaurant industry in Finland.

As Bosnjak et al. (2020) affirm, many food choice influences are most likely mediated by attitudes and beliefs that people hold. Thus, food's health effects and views may be more significant than

actual health repercussions and dietary quality in defining a person's food choice. Likewise, different social, religious, cultural and other relevant factors are reflected in the attitudes of individuals. As such, the study of the relationship between the beliefs, attitudes, and choices provides one probable way for comprehension of the impact of various factors on eating decisions of consumers.
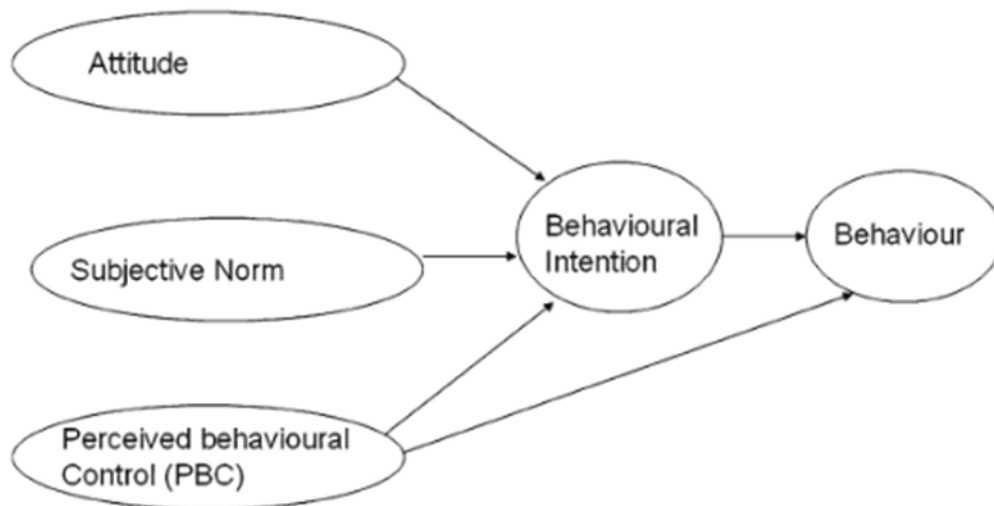

Figure 2: Theory of planned behaviour (TPB) (Matthew & Dominique, 2013).

From the figure, it is found that norms and attitudes of people and their perceived control of behaviour result in the intent to perform the behaviour and eventually lead to accomplishing the eventual behaviour, which is the food choice. As shown in the diagram, individual attitude is influenced by social-cultural factors, including social class, education, gender, family, reference group, cultural values, traditions, food beliefs, ethnicity, and religious background. These factors influence consumers' intention of the food they eat in a restaurant and eventually lead to the actual behaviour.

2.7 Research hypothesis

The research will be guided by the following hypothesis, which will test with the survey.

H1. The religious background has an influence on consumers' food choices.

H2. The customs and habits influence an individual's restaurant food choice.

H3. Family background and upbringing impact on food choice behaviour of people in restaurants.

H4. Values have a direct impact on food choices of customers when they visit restaurants.

H5. Social class influences an individual's food choices in a restaurant.

3. Research Methodology

The next section of the dissertation covers details about the approaches, methods and techniques used to conduct the study. It comprises the consideration of the approach employed for this study and then justifies its use. Also, this chapter provides the rationale for selecting a quantitative research design and elucidates data collection methods and procedures for data analysis. Moreover, the chapter presents the practical ethical considerations and ends by remarking on the limitations of the methodology for this study.

3.1 Research Approach

According to Ormston et al. (2014), the research approach involves the plans and methods that the researcher utilizes to explain the extensive assumptions and techniques applied in the collection of data and their interpretations. The study will employ quantitative research methods. Quantitative research involves quantification of the study problem through producing numerical data. It entails the quantification of the opinions, behaviors, and attitudes and the generalization of results accessed from a bigger sample (Taylor et al., 2016). The study will adopt this approach because quantitative research design enquires the identified issue based on number measurement and theory testing. Therefore, this approach helps test objective theories by investigating the relationship among variables.

Moreover, it helps determine whether the predictive theory generalizations hold true (Saunders et al., 2012). The quantitative approach helps to explore the connection between food choice behaviours and various factors related to the culture and social environment of individuals. Nonetheless, quantitative methods are employed due to their ability to gather data from a larger population sample size hence increasing the study's validity (Taylor et al., 2016).

3.2 Research context

The research was conducted on the general public in Australian restaurants. The restaurant industry entails any eating or drinking places that prepare and offers beverages or food to customers on its premises or through services like banquets, catering, or box lunch. In this study, these included fast foods, restaurants, and small hotels within Brisbane. The types of restaurants where the researcher collected data include fine dining restaurants, casual dining restaurants, contemporary casual dining, fast-casual, fast foods, cafes, buffets, and pop-up restaurants in Brisbane. The researcher visited and collected data from different restaurants across Brisbane

3.3 Data Collection

The commonly used methods of data collection that researchers can employ include questionnaires, focus groups, and interviews (Wilson, 2014). This study employed questionnaires. Questionnaires involve gathering information from participants through utilizing open or close-ended questions. It has been used to allow for quantitative data collection, which can be analysed using quantitative techniques like descriptive or inferential statistics. Moreover, a questionnaire-based survey provides a platform where the researcher can gather useful data from a large sample size of the population at little cost and effort (Bryman, 2015). Unlike the interview method which consumes a lot of time because it entails training performing the interview and interpreting the responses that take a lot of time.

Moreover, interviews carry the possibility of since the process engaged in interviewing the participants can be prejudiced and manipulated by the interviewer's biasness (Wilson, 2014). Therefore, the questionnaire is appropriate as per the nature of the research topic to collect data in terms of the opinions and views of participants. However, questionnaires are criticised because of the rea-

son that participants may not be when they answer questions and might do so in a casual manner, thereby interfering with the study's reliability (Bryman, 2015).

The author constructed close-ended questionnaires to inquire about the attitudes or opinions of people concerning how socio-cultural factors influence their food choice in restaurants in Australia. According to Wilson (2014), a close-ended survey offers respondents a fixed number of responses that they can choose an answer. The questionnaires were designed to give respondents the option to select from a distinctive set of pre-determined responses such as "yes/no" and a set of multiple answers.

Data were collected from the general public in Australia. Therefore, some of the questionnaires were distributed to the public, who filled in the information and return the papers immediately. The researcher briefed the respondents about the research and assures them of anonymity to encourage them to answer the questions honestly and appropriately. Some of the data were collected from food festivals. The writer also went to shopping mall food courts to collect data, where he applied the same procedure. Most of these surveys were done in the evening or at night since all restaurants open after the evening and close at midnight. Additionally, the study used secondary research, which was collected from Facebook pages and direct contact with people during night shifts at some food venues.

3.4 Data Analysis Technique

Data were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). This technique is a software program that enables the quantitative analysis of complex survey data. Additionally, this technique SPSS is a comprehensive software with several complex statistical tests as built-in features. Moreover, the interpretation of the results is straightforward as it can quickly and easily

exhibit data tables (DeCoster and Claypool, 2014). This study sought to measure the social-cultural factors (independent variables) and their influence on food choices (dependent variable).

The researcher sorted the questions into nominal, Likert scales, interval, and ordinal scales to measure the variables. In this case, the variables will be assigned as categorical or continuous. For instance, in questions answered NO will be the 0 variable, and yes will be the 2 variable. Gender question, female will be the number 1 variable, and the male will be the number 2 variable. Regarding the question of nationality, the group of Australians will be 2, New Zealanders will be 3, English will be 4, and others will be 5. On the question of the level of education, the category of primary education will be 2; secondary education will be 3, and tertiary education will be 4.

On the question asking about the religious background, Christians will be 1, Muslims will be 2, Atheists 3, Buddhists 4, Sikhism 5, and Hindus 6. Regarding the variable of income level, the low-income category will be the first option, and further, it will increase to the high-income level as the fourth option.

What is your marital status? Respondents who are single will be 1, married and kids will be 2, and married with no kids will be 3. Regarding this variable, "Who influences your food choice more often (whether fatty, natural, sugary or fast foods)?" the category of respondents saying family friends will be 1, friends will be 2, peer group will be 3, and influencer will be 4. What kind of food do you prefer when you visit a restaurant? Respondents with a choice of fish and seafood will be 1; meat and poultry in 2; vegan in 3; fast food in 4; dairy free in 5 and persons having no preferences come in 6.

Further, as an advanced statistical package program, SPSS allowed the testing of hypotheses through correlation and regression, which would not be possible in Excel. The result of the analysis

is presented in tables and graphical forms followed by a detailed analysis as per Bryman's (2015) recommendations.

Description of the data analysis process

The data collected from the questionnaire survey is put into the 'Data tab' of SPSS using the assigned values for each variable as explained in section 3.4 of Data Analysis of this thesis. After putting all the values for each variable in the 'Data tab', those are further coded in the 'Variable view' tab in SPSS by coding the respectively assigned quantitative values for each value in each variable as shown in the pictures here:

Figure 3: A screenshot of the data entry process in SPSS

All the variables indicating the income of respondents who participated in the survey are as shown below:
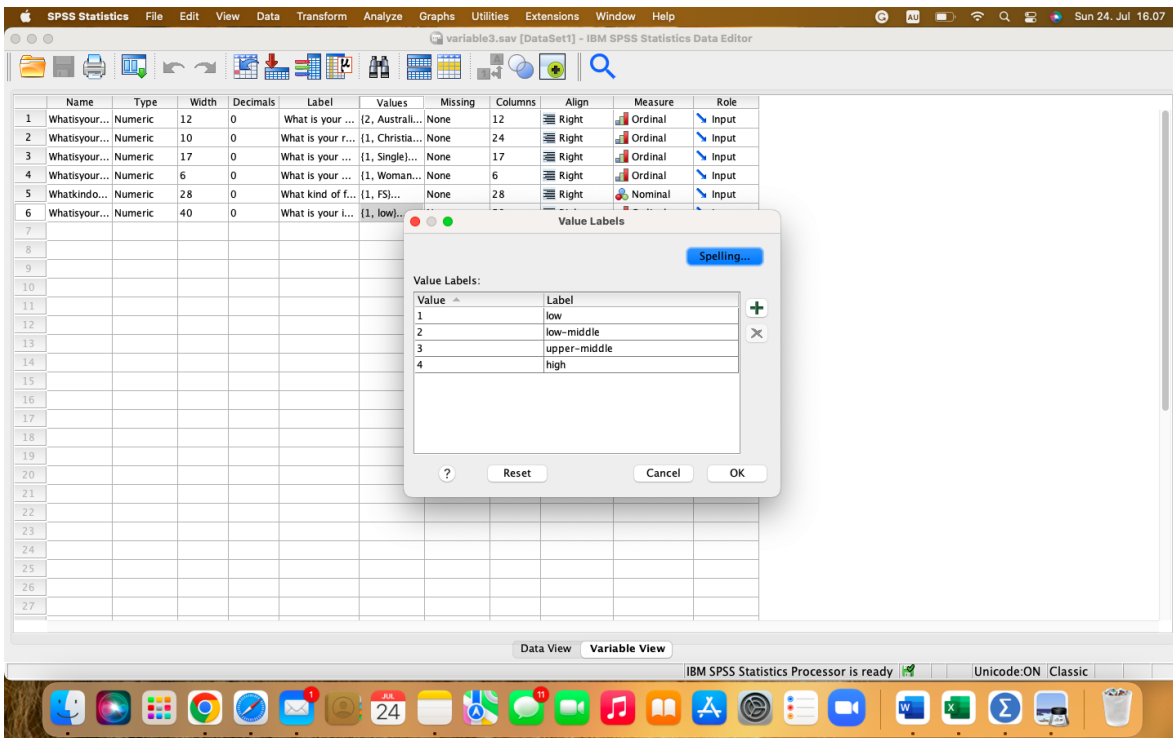
Figure 4: A screenshot showing the coding of income level responses in SPSS

For the variables indicating nationality, Australians are represented by 2 in the data, New Zealand

as 3, English as 4 and others coded as 5 as shown below.
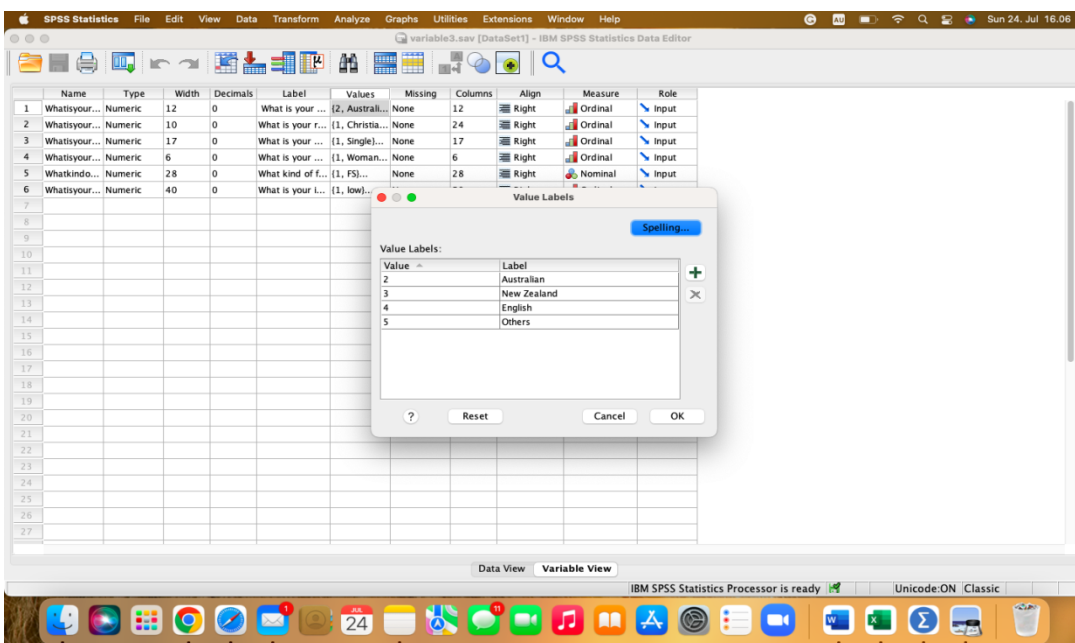
Figure 5: A screenshot showing the coding of nationality responses in SPSS

For the religion, Christians are represented by 1, Muslims by 2, Atheists by 3, Buddhists by 4, Sikh-

ism by 5 and Hindus by 6 as shown below.
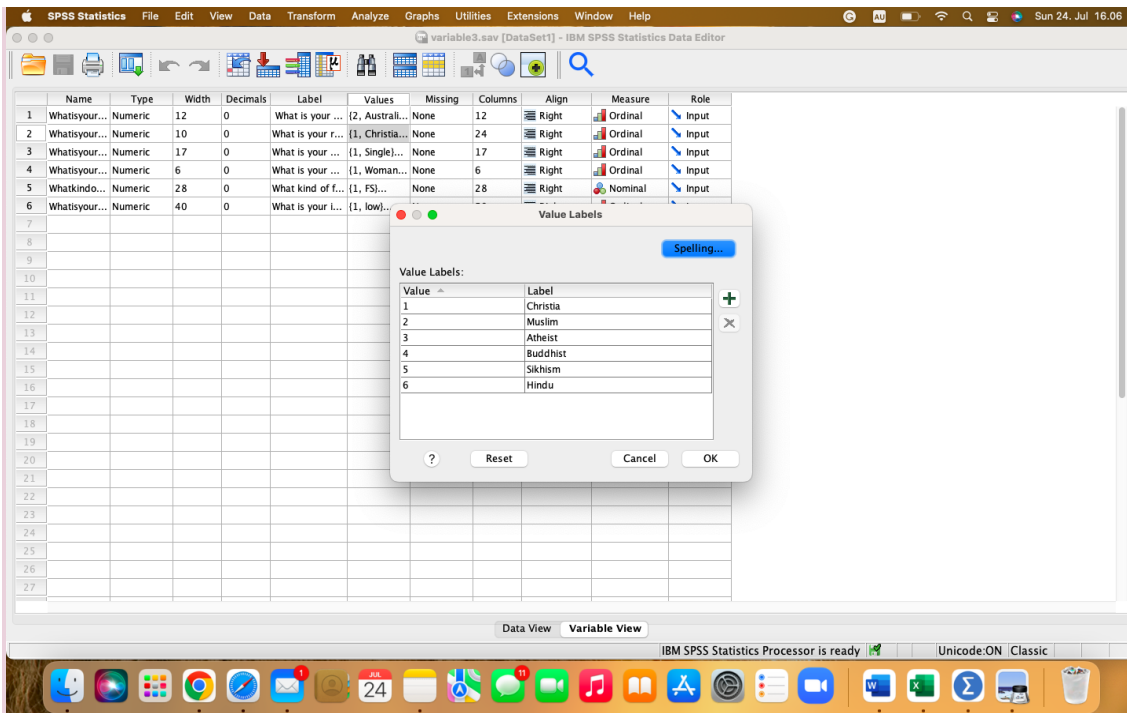
Figure 6: A screenshot showing the coding of religion responses in SPSS

For the marital and family status, 1 represents singles, 2 for married and have kids, and 3 for married but have no kids, as shown below.
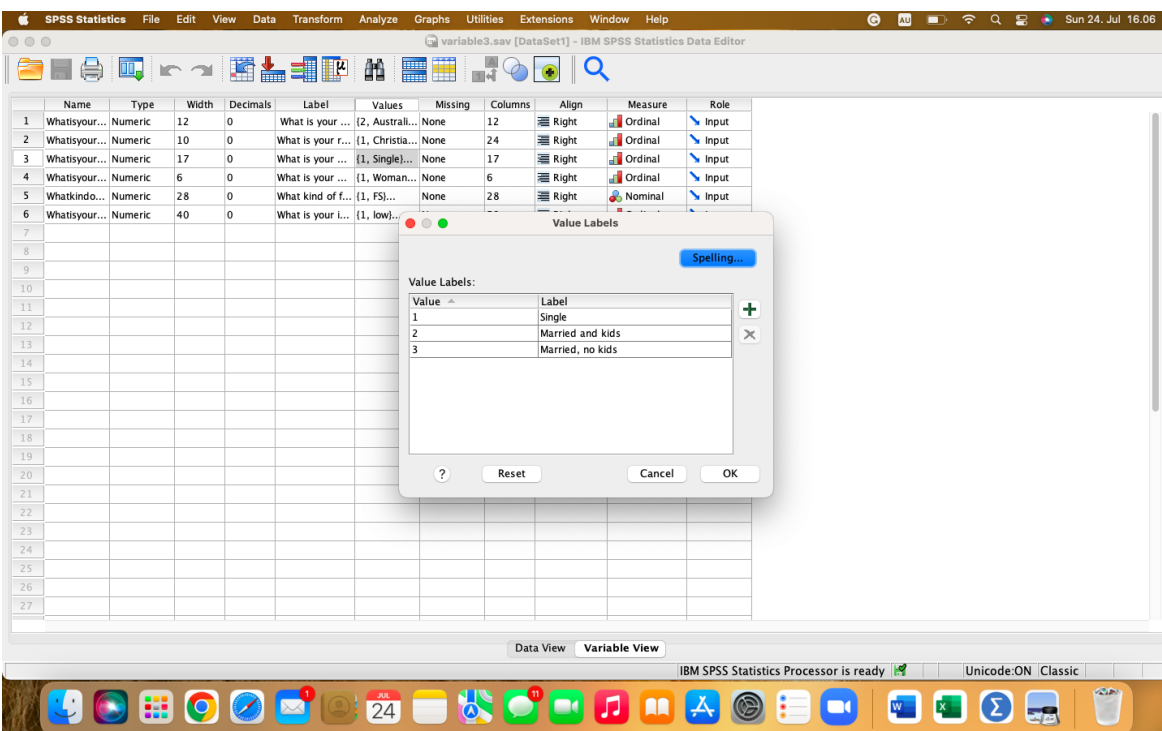
Figure 7: A screenshot showing the coding of marital status responses in SPSS

For gender, 1 represents women and 2 represents men
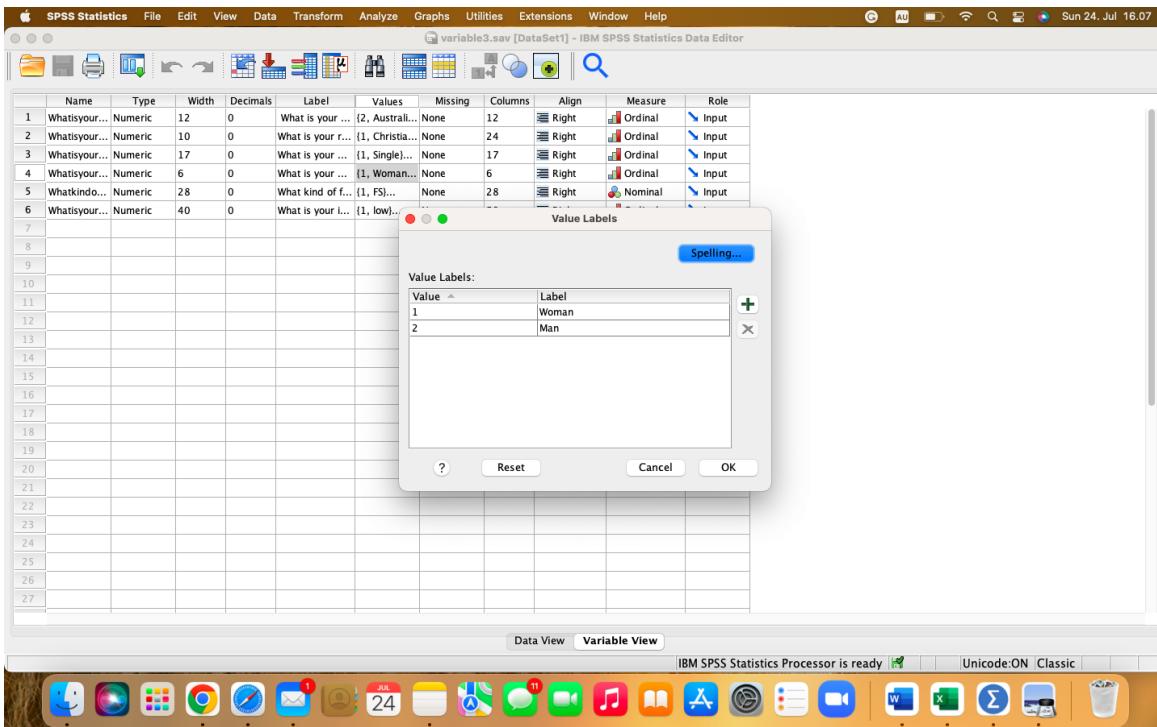
Figure 8: A screenshot showing the coding of gender responses in SPSS

And for variables indicating food choices, coded values are 1 for FS(Fish and seafood), 2 for MP (meat and poultry), 3 for V(vegan), 4 for FF(Fast Food), 5 for DF (Dairy Food) and 6 for NP(No preference).
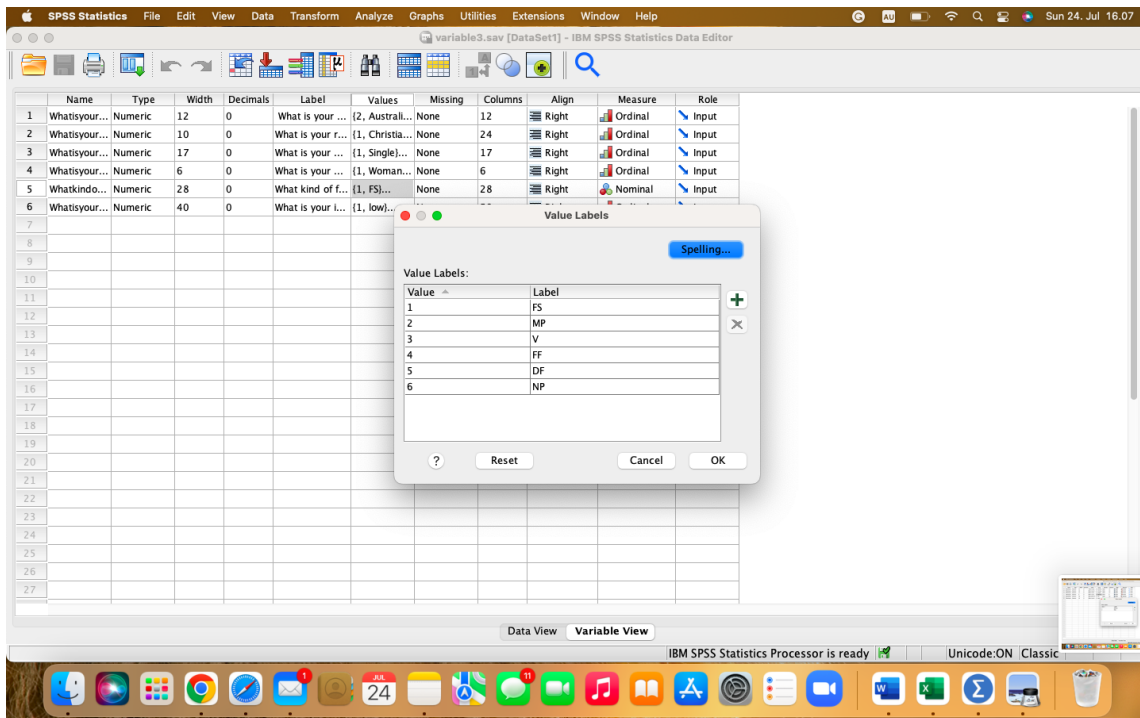
Figure 9: A screenshot showing the coding of food choices responses in SPSS

3.5 Verification of results

Internal validity

Validity that could have possibly influenced this study include maturation (respondents may have been tired, bored, or hungry, and this may have influenced their response to some degree); and maybe history (such as the pandemic situation could have influenced the respondents' frequency of going to eat out in the restaurant, which could be reflected in their responses too) (Babbie, 2020). To handle these internal validity issues and make the findings more effective for the study question, I randomly assigned subjects for the study so that they would be equally influenced by these issues and in their responses as well.

External validity

Some of the threats to external validity that could have interfered with the findings in this study include testing (in which pre-test participation influences the treatment reaction) and sampling bias (where the population of the respondent may consist mainly of a particular category, for in-

stance, young people) (Babbie, 2020). To counter the effect of external validity, first, I ensured that the participants I used for pre-testing were not the same as those I picked for the study. This was to help avoid influencing the responses of the participants in a way because of being aware or thinking consciously regarding the topic due to early exposure to pre-testing. Secondly, to avoid sampling bias, I picked a mix of respondents with different age groups to make the sample evenly and representative of the entire population. All these help to make the results of the study reliable to the general population.

Reliability

Reliability refers to a measure's consistency, which entails the extent to which an instrument of research consistently gives the same results if it is utilized in similar situations repeatedly (Noble & Smith, 2015). To maintain the reliability of the findings, I applied data triangulation, in which I used different methods to collect data for the study. Apart from the questionnaire, I collected data from Facebook and informal interview (face-to-face) contact with some people. These helped to generate a more comprehensive set of findings for the study.

Objectivity

Objectivity implies that the findings of a study should not depend on the researcher. The researcher should not be influenced by certain value judgments, perspectives, personal interests, or community bias, which may make the findings biased (Noble & Smith, 2015). To maintain objectivity, first, I ensured that the language used when formulating the research questions and hypothesis is unbiased as possible to avoid distorting the results of the study. Secondly, during data analysis and reporting of the research findings, I ensured that I recorded data correctly and used an appropriate analysis method.

4. Data Analysis and Findings

This chapter is prepared to analyse the data gathered on how sociocultural factors influence food choices in the restaurant industry. The findings focus on exploring the research objectives as well as the variables, which include religious background, customs and habits, family background, social class etc. The main research question is to assess how social-cultural factors impact on food choices of customers in the restaurant industry. To gather data for his study, the researcher distributed a questionnaire to the public in Australia. This chapter focus on analysing this data in order to come up with conclusive findings. Notably, the findings first present a descriptive analysis of the frequency data followed by an inferential analysis of the correlation and regression of data.

4.1. Descriptive Analysis

4.1.1 Demographic analysis

Table 1 below is a summary of the demographics of the respondents. It is evident from the summary of demographics that amongst all the participants, the percentage of female respondents was higher at 51% compared to that of male respondents, which was 49%. This is evident that females are more inclined towards describing the socio-cultural factors that influence their choice of food. However, this shows that the researcher tried to maintain a small disparity in the number of representatives for each gender. Additionally, in regards to the income levels, the above demographic information indicates that the highest percentage of participants, represented by 57% comprised of the lower-middle income class. This high percentage was followed by participants from upper-middle income, with a presentation of 28%. The lowest number of participants under this category comprised respondents from high-income households, which were 3 out of 100 participants.

Table 1: Respondent demographics

Demographic information	Validity	Frequency	% proportion
Gender	Male	49	49%
	Female	51	51%
Level of income	Low Income	12	12%
	Lower-middle income	57	57%
	Upper-middle income	28	28%
	High Income	3	3%
Marital status	Single	44	44%
	Married and kids	34	34%
	Married, no kids	22	22%
Education level	Primary Education	17	17%
	Secondary Education	43	43%
	Tertiary Education	40	40%

4.1.2. Analysis of Socio-cultural factors that influence food choices

The participants were provided their views on questions regarding some sociocultural aspects, including frequency of visiting restaurants, religious affiliation, personal values, family background and social class. Figure 10 below shows the frequency of respondents' restaurant visitation
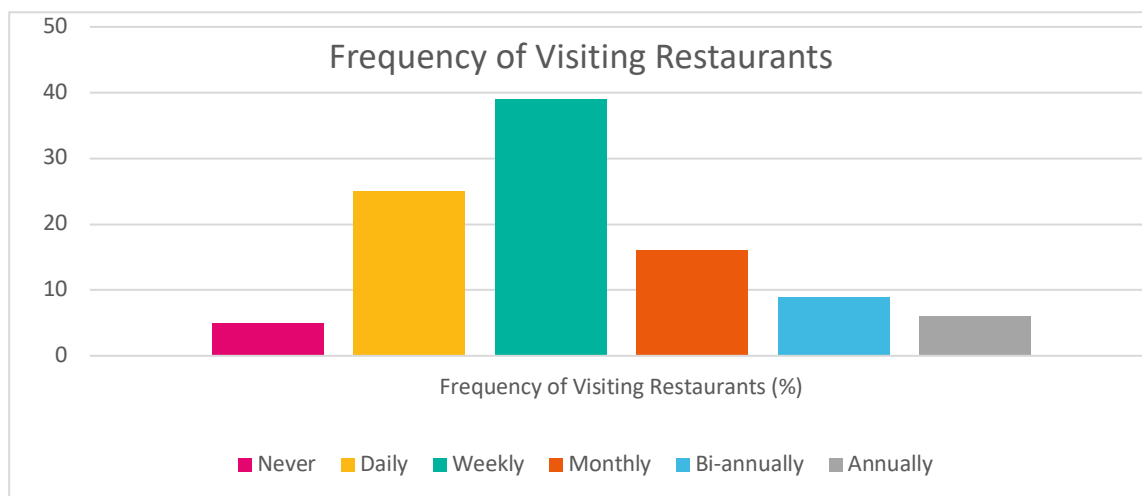

Figure 10: frequency of restaurant visits

The researcher asked the respondents how often they visited the restaurants, and the highest percentage (39%) of the participants indicated weekly, which was followed by those who said that they visited restaurants daily (25%). By comparison, the lowest percentage (5%) stated that they never visited a restaurant at all, whereas nearly a similar fraction (6%) noted that they visited restaurants about once a year.

4.1.3 Religious background and food choices in the restaurant

The figure below shows the number of people based on religious background in the sample pool. From the figure, it is evident that, at 38%, the largest percentage of the participants in the restaurants visited identified as Christians, while the second largest were Muslims at 15%. The lowest number of participants comprised Hindus. These results show that people are likely to visit restaurants that serve foods aligned with their food preferences. While the results from the participants cannot indicate with authority that their religious background influenced their food choices, as there could simply have been more people identifying as Christians in the sample population, the above results support previous research, which states that religion has a crucial role in food choices amongst individuals within particular societies. For instance, research by Theisen, (2020) indicates that Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus and Jews are restricted from the consumption of pork. Additionally, some Christian groups such as Seventh Day Adventists discourage the consumption of alcohol. Thus, this would explain why one would find more Christians in a particular restaurant, and less of Muslims and other religious groups.
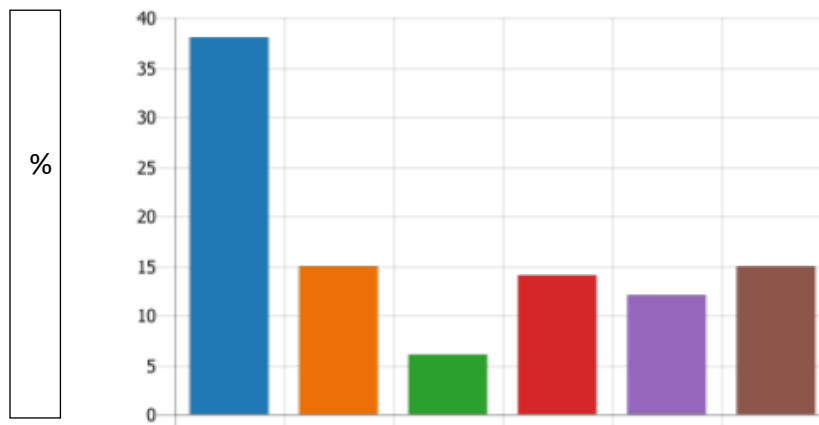
Figure 11: Religious background and food choices in the restaurant

4.1.4 Values and food choices in the restaurant

Values were tested based on seven aspects, which include taste, naturalness, and appearance of the food, affordability, nutrition and health, cooking method, as well as conduct of the staff at the restaurant. Respondents were asked to indicate which value mattered to them the most when making decisions about their food choices. Notably, the researcher was investigating whether the type of individual values had an influence on food choices in restaurants. Particularly, the researcher asked the respondents what values mattered to them when choosing the type of food to eat in a restaurant. Most of the participants stated that they considered the naturalness of food, followed by a relatively high number of respondents who indicated that they focused on the taste or flavour of food. However, values such as cooking method and conduct modes had the lowest scores of 31% and 18%, respectively. Accordingly, research by Monterrosa et al. (2020) supports these findings by indicating that the values of food choice have an influence on the food behaviour

of different consumers. Additionally, Sobal & Bisogni (2009) state that food-related values such as

safety, healthfulness, and conduct mode influence food choice.

Meat and poultry 44 ⬤ Fish and seafood 35 ⬤ Vegan 25 ⬤

Dairy-free 15 ⬤ Fast food 14 ⬤ No preference 4 ⬤
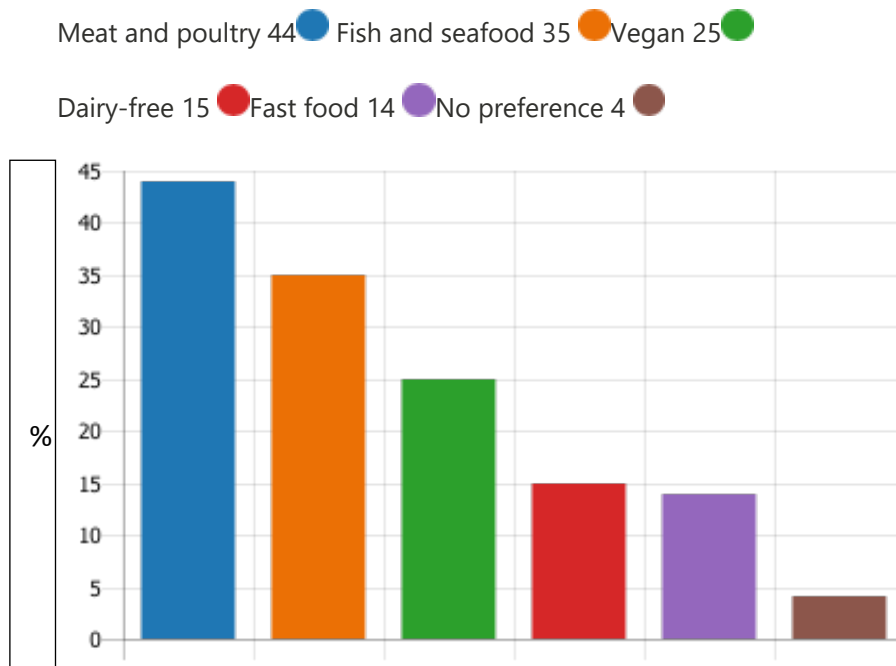
Figure 12 Values and food choices in the restaurant

4.1.5 Family backgrounds and food choices in the restaurant

Another purpose of the study was to detect if family background had an influence on individual

food choices in restaurants. After asking the respondents about their marital status, a large num-

ber of the participants (44%) revealed that they were single, whereas the least percentage (22%)

comprised those who were married but had no kids, with those married but with kids taking the

middle at 34%. The researcher also asked the respondents who they believed influenced their

food choices the most. The majority of the respondents stated that their main influencers were

friends and family members, which totalled 70% with the least percentage of respondents indicat-

ing that they were mainly influenced by social media celebrities. The figure below shows the mean

score of the respondent's responses regarding marital status and their responses regarding food

choices from the study.

The above findings indicate that family background has a crucial impact on food choices in restaurants. These findings are supported by Chen & Antonelli (2020) who assert that family members are highly likely to influence each other to consume certain foods in a restaurant as long as it meets their preference. It would be interesting to explore further how the family background informs food choices among restaurant users, and this is done in the subsequent section using inferential analysis.

	%
● Family members	34
● Friends	36
● Peer groups	17
● Influencer (social media celebr…	13

Figure 12: Food choices

	%
● Single	44
● Married and kids	34
● Married, no kids	22
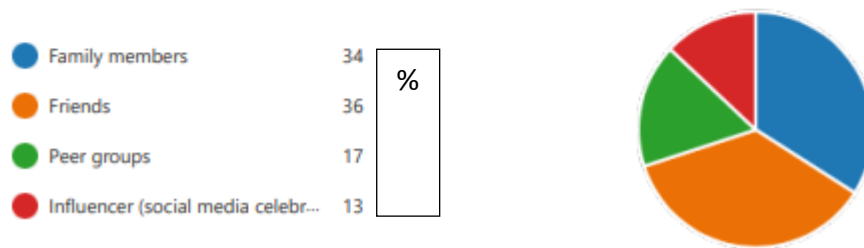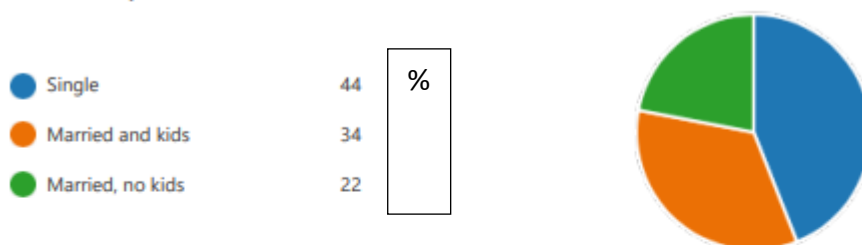
Figure 13: Family background

4.1.6 Social class and food choices in the restaurant

Further, the researcher asked the respondents whether they used food as an expression of any form of identity. The majority of the respondents admitted that they used food to express group affiliation whereas others used it to express status. The result below shows the pie chart of respondents' views on the use of food for show-off in society. The least percentage of respondents (21%) stated that they used food to express social class and wealth. The main conclusion drawn from this finding is that social class also influences the type of food choices in restaurants. Accord-

ingly, Roudsari et al., (2017) argue that people with favourable socioeconomic status prefer to consume foods that satisfy them and eradicate their hunger. On the contrary, those who earn low income are likely to introduce strategies such as the reduction of the quality and quantity of foods.

🔵 Social class and wealth	21
🟠 Group affiliation	44
🟢 Status	35

%
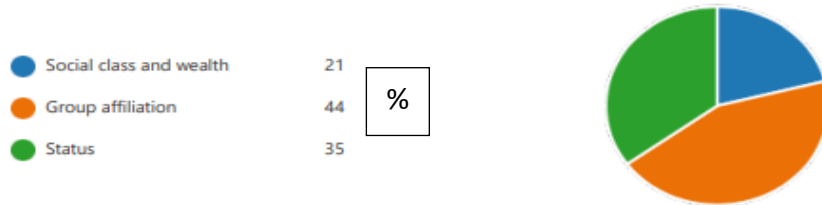
Figure 14: Social class and food choices in the restaurant

4.2 Correlation Analysis

Correlations were conducted to test the connection between the various variables. First, the correlation between nationality and food preference was conducted, as shown in the table below. It was found that there was a negative weak correlation with a coefficient of -.016 between the two variables, with a significance of .878. This implies a weak inverse link between nationality and food preference, with an insignificant finding on the correlation between the two variables.

Table 2: Correlations between nationality and food preference

		What is your nationality?	What kind of food do you prefer when you visit a restaurant?
What is your nationality?	Pearson Correlation	1	-.016
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.878
	N	99	99
What kind of food do you prefer when you visit a restaurant?	Pearson Correlation	-.016	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.878	
	N	99	99

Second, a correlation was conducted between food preferences and the religious backgrounds of the respondents, as shown in the table below. There was a correlation coefficient of .091 with a

significance of .372. This implies a weak positive correlation in the middle of the two variables. However, the correlation is insignificant due to the significance above .005.

Table 3: Correlations between food preference and religious background

		What kind of food do you prefer when you visit a restaurant?	What is your religious background?
What kind of food do you prefer when you visit a restaurant?	Pearson Correlation	1	.091
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.372
	N	99	99
What is your religious background?	Pearson Correlation	.091	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.372	
	N	99	99

Further, a correlation was tested between food preference and marital status. The results are presented in the table below. The findings show that there was a correlation coefficient of -.156, and a significance of .122. This implies that there is a negative medium correlation between food preference and marital status. Once again, the high significance level means the results are insufficient to make any significant conclusions from these results.

Table 4: Correlations between food preference and marital status

		What kind of food do you prefer when you visit a restaurant?	What is your marital status?
What kind of food do you prefer when you visit a restaurant?	Pearson Correlation	1	-.156
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.122
	N	99	99
What is your marital status?	Pearson Correlation	-.156	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.122	
	N	99	99

This analysis was done again between the kind of food preference and the respondent's gender. It was found that there was a correlation coefficient of -.053 which implies a weak association between the gender of participants and their food preference. The significance level of the correla-

tion was .604 which is well above the .05 significance level shows that the finding is insignificant at this time, begging the need for more data to determine the relationship more authoritatively.

Table 5: Correlations between food preference and gender

		What kind of food do you prefer when you visit a restaurant?	What is your Gender?
What kind of food do you prefer when you visit a restaurant?	Pearson Correlation	1	-.053
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.604
	N	99	99
What is your Gender?	Pearson Correlation	-.053	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.604	
	N	99	99

Overall, the findings show that there is a negative and weak to medium correlation between the kind of food restaurant users prefer and nationality, gender, and marital status. On the contrary, there is a positive and weak correlation between food preferences and income level (-.069) and the same was for religious background. However, there is a need for further research to confirm these findings, considering the high significance scores.

4.3 Regression analysis

A regression analysis was conducted to test the strength of the relationship among variables as well as to check the accuracy of the hypotheses. The hypotheses are restated below. From the model summary, the R Square is .038, which implies that the predictors predict up to 38% of the overall change in food preferences. The remaining percentage is predicted by other factors that may affect food preferences which are beyond the scope of this research.

Table 6: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.195[a]	.038	-.003	1.426

a. Predictors: (Constant), What is your income level? , What is your religious background?, What is your nationality? , What is your marital status?, What is your Gender?

Notably, as well, the ANOVA table shows that the F is .927, with a significance coefficient of .452. This implies that the significance is above .05. This finding indicates that results are not statistically significant in the food preferences between people of varying gender, marital status, religious backgrounds, values, or social classes.

Table 7: ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	7.540	4	1.885	.927	.452[b]
	Residual	191.086	94	2.033		
	Total	198.626	98			

a. Dependent Variable: What kind of food do you prefer when you visit a restaurant?

b. Predictors: (Constant), What is your income level?, What is your nationality? , What is your religious background?, What is your marital status?, What is your Gender?

Lastly, looking at the multiple comparisons table, it is possible to test the hypotheses as stated earlier, of which the null hypotheses are restated below.

$H1_0$. The religious background does not have any impact on food choices behaviours of consumers. From the coefficients table below, it is found that the p-value is higher than alpha (0.337 > 0.05), thus the null hypothesis is rejected.

$H2_0$. The customs and habits do not affect food choices of individuals.

Customs and habits are represented by nationality, which received a significance p-value of 0.878. Once again, the p-value is more than the alpha (α) value of 0.05. So, the second null hypothesis should also be rejected.

H3$_0$. Family background and upbringing impact a person's food choices in restaurants

The family background which is represented by the marital status of the respondents a p-value of 0.155, which is more than the significance (α) of .05. This results in evidence that the null hypothesis can't be accepted.

H4$_0$. Values play a direct role in shaping the food choices of consumers in a restaurant.

Values were not tested, and this hypothesis can therefore neither be confirmed nor rejected.

H5$_0$. Social class influences food choice behaviour of people when they visit restaurants.

Lastly, social class, which was represented by income level, recorded a significance score of 0.709. Due to the higher p-value, we can reject the null hypothesis. For all the null hypotheses rejected, the explanation is that there is insufficient evidence to claim that the independent variables predict food preferences.

Table 8: Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.217	.665		4.836	.000
	What is your religious background?	.086	.089	.099	.966	.337
	What is your nationality?	-.016	.103	-.016	-.154	.878
	What is your marital status?	-.266	.185	-.148	-1.434	.155
	What is your Gender?	-.174	.295	-.061	-.591	.556
	What is your income level?	-.080	.213	-.039	-.374	.709

a. Dependent Variable: What kind of food do you prefer when you visit a restaurant?

To support these findings, Moon (2021) points out that the beliefs that surround masculinity or familiarity contribute to the gendered selection of food, such as the masculinity and strength gained from the fact that people can afford meats. As found by Monterrosa et al., (2020), women are probably to eat lighter meals (e.g.fruits and vegetables), whereas men eat heavy meals.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Summary

Understanding the influence of sociocultural factors on food choices in the restaurant industry is the purpose of this study. In the first chapter, the study introduction is given, with a focus on research motivation, a section that justifies the study based on the need to improve food quality to increase the competitive advantage of restaurants. The chapter also explains the objectives of the study, indicating that the central concentration is on social and cultural factors which are critical sources of information for restaurant planning, menu designing, and strategic marketing.

The second chapter is the literature review. It elaborates on previous studies concerning sociocultural factors affecting choices of food. It also investigates previous studies and publications that focus on comparing consumers' opinions. The second chapter has three divisions. The first segment reviews concepts of consumer behaviour, the restaurant industry, and the sociocultural influences on consumer behaviour. The second segment reviews studies about consumer behaviour theory for the correlation between sociocultural factors and consumer food choices. The third section reviews sociocultural influences on consumer food choices in the restaurant industry. Chapter 2 leads to the formation of the following hypotheses: 1) the religious background does not have any impact on food choices behaviours of consumers, 2) the customs and habits influence an individual's restaurant food choice, 3) Family background and upbringing impact a person's food choices in restaurants, 4)Values play a direct role in shaping the food choices of consumers in a restaurant, and 5)Social class influences food choice behaviour of people when they visit restaurants.

The third chapter is the methodology, explaining the reasons for choosing a specific research approach (quantitative), research context, method, data collection (questionnaire) and data analysis

technique to analyse collected data. In addition, the sector of the dissertation deliberates on the verification of results by internal and external validity.

The fourth chapter reports on the findings through data presentation and evaluates the effectiveness of the methodology. Chapter 5 discusses the findings and compares them with previous studies. It establishes whether the results cohere or dissent from those found in prior research. Furthermore, it also summarizes the dissertation and presents recommendations based on the findings and discussion.

5.2 Managerial Implications

The results direct that managers consider religion as an important factor in target marketing. The case is so because religion determines the food choices and restaurants that people prefer. The case is so because it is not simply about the products that people order, but also about exposure to smells and sights of meals that their religions dissent or discourage. For instance, the management team should discourage pork or non-halal beef in restaurants targeting Muslim customers. Moreover, it is not proper to sell alcohol in restaurants targeting Seventh Day Adventists and other religions that discourage the consumption of the beverage. In addition, there is a sense in which managers should engage thoroughly in research about the values of the people that they serve. The inference stems from observing the results indicate a positive association between food choices and values. The values include various factors such as food naturalness, cooking methods, flavours, and conduct modes. Therefore, managers should focus on values most populous among those belonging to the targeted market segment. The results regarding the influence of family backgrounds on food choices in restaurants infer that restaurants should seek progressive traditions among relatives and friends. Findings about social class direct managers to ensure workers are cultural-aware to the extent of understanding how to respond to people of different socioeconomic classes. For instance, the treatment of males should be different from that of females. In

addition, the places and menus designated for the rich should be different from those designed for low-income earners.

5.3 Discussion

The findings tested four of the five hypotheses, to explore sociocultural factors that have significant impacts on consumers' choice of food and restaurant. It was found that although there was some correlation both negative and positive between some sociological factors and food preference among restaurant eaters, there was no sufficient evidence to indicate a meaningful prediction. The outcome of the present study contradicted Contento and Koch's (2020) assertions, who found the representation of food choice is determined by a multi-level sociological framework that can take centric circles. Further, the factors studied at present predicted less than 40% of all food preferences, while other factors predicted much larger consumer behaviour that can contribute to increase the scope of research findings. The position infers that there are numerous factors associated with specific societies and cultures which determine eating behaviours and preferences from one region of the world to another. Accordingly, it is appropriate for restaurant marketing strategies to consider numerous factors while engaging in strategic marketing. Correspondingly, the findings are inconsistent with that of Leng et al., who found that choices of food are also affected by economic factors and the ways foods are labelled and marketed. The general idea from the current research is that sociological and cultural constructs, instead of economic elements, substantially determine food and restaurant choices. Therefore, all the socio-cultural variables (e.g. religious background, customs and habits, family background, values, and social class) considered in the paper can be considered as the key influencers for food choice behaviour.

Religious background and consumers' food choices

The results found that religion had a small and favourable impact on eating patterns and decisions of people. The findings are in line with those of Dindyal&Dindyal (2003) who found that religion is

among other sociocultural variables contributing to eating practices and food selection. Therefore, the mechanism of religion in Australia to influence food choice is eating practice. The practices involve refraining from certain meals and committing to consuming particular foods considered to have spiritual significance. Hence, religion has a conspicuous impact on buying behaviours of religious people. For this reason, it is paramount for restaurants to consider the religions of people while they prepare meals and serve them. In general, the best alternative is to specialize in foods accepted or highly demanded by the most populous religion in the targeted market segment. The observation is parallel to that of Musaiger (2003) who reports that the faith of Seventh Day Adventists leads to different food practices from Catholics such as the former not drinking whereas the latter consuming alcoholic beverages. Resultantly, religion renders people to have varying meanings and rules about food, limiting their choices. The finding also adheres to the conceptualization of Monterrosa et al. (2020) who found that foods have symbolic elements and the emblems determine believers' choices.

Customs, habits and individual restaurant food choice

The present study found that customs and habits had a weak but negative impact on the food options of individuals. According to the findings, people become accustomed to the foods they are exposed to frequently. As a result, they develop an attachment to the foods to the extent of preferring them over others. In addition, factors such as traditions render people have expectations of various foods associated with specific days or festivals. Elements such as media also reinforce various eating habits. The sentiment aligns with that of Leng et al. who found that advertisements and other forms of media result in the development of various food habits and decisions. In addition, how people experience restaurant services render them to return to the premises or not. When they experience satisfactory services, the clients develop a habit of visiting restaurants and ordering specific foods. The observation coheres with that of Monterrosa et al. (2020) who found that strategies serving well become constructed over time into habits of making food choices com-

fortable and expectable while accounting for other demands in life. Henceforth, there is a substantial relationship between exposure frequency and food choices. In this case, exposure develops into customs and habits. The argument also infers that the surrounding environment is a key determinant of food choice behaviour because the surrounding establishes exposure to various foods. Parallel to the finding, Leng et al. supposed that the environment shapes people's preferences, behaviours, knowledge, eating habits, and lifestyle.

Family background and upbringing impact a person's food choices in restaurants

The study found that family background was found to affect a person's food choices negatively and to a medium extent. Family background builds on the concept of customs and habits since family beliefs and rituals result in frequent exposure to various foods. The case mirrors that reported by Bellisle (2005) who found social contexts (such as the family background) is a major social influence on food choices. Additionally, the family leads to the idea of various foods as a reference to identity. Therefore, people tend to associate with foods that affiliate with their family and friends. The case is similar to that of Monterrosa et al (2020) who suppose that food practices communicate what people are in different ways and reference groups, most from relatives and friends.

Values play a role in an individual's food choices in a restaurant

The research did not have a clear finding regarding personal values and their influence on the food choices of individuals. Measuring this aspect was a challenge, and as such, no concrete results were presented. Notably, values are ideational cultural tenets that inform the viewpoint of individuals about the world and its content. Therefore, some people have the idea that various foods are not healthy. Hence, they are likely to evade such meals or ingredients. However, some people place value on low costs and savings, rendering them to prefer junk foods. Henceforth, the values of the targeted market should direct the marketing strategy of restaurants. In the same thread,

Sobal and Bisogni (2009) found that values determine the way people negotiate their food choices.

Social class influences a person's food choices in a restaurant

The investigation led to the conclusion that social class also influenced food choices negatively. The mechanism in which class influences food choice is through economic freedom. As such, there is a sense in which people of a high socioeconomic class have a preference for high-quality meals and do not care significantly about the cost. Therefore, persons of high social class prefer high-end restaurants. In addition, those in high education classes are aware of healthy foods and prefer them. For this reason, Dindyal & Dindyal (2003) found that persons with healthier food choices could be due to their higher levels of education, and they may be more health-conscious with healthier lifestyles.

5.4 Limitations of the Study

The first potential limitation is that the researchers embarked on the survey as the research strategy. The shortcoming of surveys is that they are liable to biases that occur due to either inaccuracy of participants' responses or failure to answer the asked questions. The second limitation is that the research used a small sample size. The case is problematic because quantitative research calls for the use of large sample sizes to minimize errors associated with outliers and extraneous variables that are persons-specific. Another limitation stems from using questionnaires as the data collection method. The issue with questionnaires is that respondents may answer the questions in a casual way or without having a complete understanding, resulting in depreciated validity.

5.5 Recommendations for Further Research

The following suggestions are made based on the research findings. First, future researchers should consider looking at whether restaurants are a link between specific targeted market segments and consumer behaviour. Another important area worth looking at is the link between so-

cial class and the services offered by restaurants. Additionally, it is also important to look at whether restaurants should become culturally aware to ensure that they deliver foods that align with the expectations of the majority in a given market, and the extent to which this can impact the attitudes and behaviours of their target markets.

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