

2019 Professional Development Grant Report

Presentation at the International Academy of Business and Economics 2019 Conference

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B. Restatement of problem researched, creative work, or professional enhancement opportunity

The purpose of our research was to add to the existing body of marketing literature concerning consumer behavior within the fast food industry. More specifically, the research examined whether males and females differ in terms of the healthiness of their food choices. We also looked at how important various criteria are in choice of Fast Food Restaurants (FFR).

C. Brief review of the professional enhancement opportunity, creative work, or research procedure

I presented research work written by myself, Dr. Stephen Jones and Dr. Kevin Mason at the International Academy of Business and Economics Conference in March of 2019. The conference was hosted by Keiser University. The research presented was over gender differences in food choices. We also discuss how this can impact marketing decisions for Fast Food Restaurants (FFR).

The conference gave me the opportunity to present our research and listen to business research from around the world. Presenters were not just from the U.S., and I was privileged with the opportunity to meet with some of these researchers.

D. Summary of findings, outcomes, or experiences

I presented our research in a session on Sunday March, 3, and our paper was published in Volume 19 of *Review of Business Research*. Please see the appendix.

Study Results:

Males and female consumers were similar in their ratings of how important various criteria were in their choice of a FFR. However, some differences were observed. Table 1 presents the subjects' rankings and means for FFR choice criteria. As shown in Table 1, FFR price, portion size and cleanliness were the top three criteria for both genders. However, price seems to be more important to males than females, and portion size (or quantity of food) was ranked higher by females in the study.

TABLE 1: FAST FOOD RESTAURANT CHOICE CRITERIA RANKINGS

Males Choice Criteria	Importance Ranking for Males (mean)	Females Choice Criteria	Importance Ranking for Females
Price	1 (3.06)	Portion Size	1 (2.72)
Portion Size	2 (2.73)	Price	2 (2.66)
Cleanliness	3 (1.59)	Cleanliness	3 (2.60)

Speed of service was also ranked by both males and females in the top five criteria, but while males also chose food quality as important, females ranked it nearer the bottom. It appears that females did not consider that the food that they were about to purchase from a FFR and the concept of food quality were compatible. Support for hypothesis 1 was mixed but the level of difference between these consumer types does not appear to be large enough to warrant significantly different marketing campaigns.

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to test for gender effects on healthy food choices. More specifically, gender, as defined as male and female, served as the independent variable. The dependent variables included consumers' ratings consumption of certain foods designated as healthy foods (such as salads and vegetables) and less healthy foods (such as hamburgers and deep fried foods).

TABLE 2: ANOVA: GENDER EFFECTS ON HEALTHY FOOD CHOICES

Food Choices	Male (mean)	Female (mean)	F-Value	P-Value
Frequency of Eating Deep-fried foods (L)	3.51	3.38	1.576	NS
Frequency of Eating Chicken (H)	4.17	4.11	0.456	NS
Frequency of Eating Beef (L)	4.17	3.87	9.089	**0.003
Frequency of Eating Pork (L)	3.35	2.86	21.407	***0.000
Frequency of Eating Vegetables (H)	4.05	4.47	12.706	***0.000
Frequency of Eating Meat (L)	4.68	4.48	3.255	*0.072
Frequency of Eating Carbohydrates (L)	4.33	4.42	0.694	NS
Frequency of Eating Fats (L)	3.61	3.85	3.279	*0.071
Frequency of Eating Bread (L)	4.41	4.47	0.358	NS
Frequency of Eating Salads (H)	3.36	3.75	9.868	**0.002
Frequency of Eating Dessert (L)	3.58	3.65	0.409	NS
Frequency of Eating Fish (H)	2.94	2.72	3.601	*0.059
Frequency of Eating Pizza (L)	3.65	3.46	6.120	*0.014

Frequency of Eating Hamburgers (L)	3.73	3.34	16.329	***0.000
Frequency of Eating Mexican food	3.40	3.31	0.905	NS
Frequency of Eating Italian food	2.99	3.01	0.026	NS
Frequency of Eating Chinese food	3.10	2.95	2.353	NS
Frequency of Eating Buffets (L)	3.00	2.86	2.716	*0.100
* p<0.10	** p<0.01	*** p<0.001	H: Healthier choice	L: Less-healthy choice

The results on healthier FFR food consumption choices by gender were mixed, although the results did generally conform to expectations. As shown in Table 2, females reported higher frequencies of consumption of salads and vegetables, but they **also** responded with higher levels of fat intake. Males admitted to eating more beef, pork and meat in general along with hamburgers and pizza. They admitted to eating more at buffets as well, but they also responded with higher levels of fish intake than females. While males did report fewer healthy food choice behaviors and more unhealthy food choice behaviors than females, there were several shared “bad” food choices (deep-fried foods, carbs, breads, and desserts) that conventional dietary wisdom would caution against. Mean scores of 3.5 or higher indicate that respondents admitted to weekly or more frequent selections, and scores above 4.0 suggest daily consumption. Support for hypotheses 2 and 3 is generally found, although the differences in frequency on several items is much smaller than expected.

E. Conclusions and recommendations

FFRs have used research for decades to increase sales by improving product and promotion offerings targeting the salient attributes looked at in this research. This research makes meaningful contributions to the understanding of the role of gender on FFR choice and dining satisfaction levels. The data gathered suggests that offering healthier food options can provide strategic advantage to fast food restaurants targeting a higher percent of female consumers. Implications are that FFR management will be able to use this research to offer better products and more effective promotions to consumers and to increase overall FFR sales.

I would like to thank the Professional Development Committee for providing me with the opportunity to attend and present at this conference. I am very grateful for the experience.

Appendix:

Page from conference program showing our presentation:

Sunday, March 3, 2019, 1:15 PM - 3:00 PM ROOM 102

Track: Management Tracks

Session Chairs: Cristina Seaman

PRE-SUIT DISCOVERY IN COMPLEX BUSINESS LITIGATION

Joey Robertson, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, Texas, U.S.A.
Diana Brown, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, Texas, U.S.A.
Laura Sullivan, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, Texas, U.S.A.

FAST FOOD STRATEGIC ADVANTAGE: HEALTHY FOODS

Stephen Jones, Arkansas Tech University, U.S.A.
John Narcum, Arkansas Tech University, U.S.A.
Kevin Mason, Arkansas Tech University, U.S.A.

LEADERSHIP MEMBER EXCHANGE THEORY: A PREDICTOR OF TEAM MEMBER COHESIVENESS

Jeffrey E. Moser, Valley City State University, ND, U.S.A.

THE IMPACT ON LEADERSHIP STYLES ON EFFECTIVELY MANAGING DIFFICULT EMPLOYEES IN A SMALL BUSINESS

Cristina Seaman, New York Institute of Technology, New York, New York, U.S.A.
Joshua E. Bienstock, New York Institute of Technology, New York, New York, U.S.A.
Jennifer Kalla, Independent Scholar, Massillon, Ohio, U.S.A.
John T. LaPerla, New York Institute of Technology, New York, New York, U.S.A.
Eleanor Schwartz, New York Institute of Technology, New York, New York, U.S.A.
Anne L. Brown, New York Institute of Technology, New York, New York, U.S.A.

PROFILES OF INNOVATIVE MIDDLE MANAGERS IN PLURALISTIC ENVIRONMENT

Alicia Buyse, Laval University, Québec, Québec, Canada
Carole Lalonde, Laval University, Québec, Québec, Canada

A WAY-OUT OF FRUIT NEOPHOBIA

Ana M. Arboleda, Universidad Icesi, Colombia
Christian Arroyo, Universidad Icesi, Colombia

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL INEQUALITY IN PUBLIC EDUCATION: THE CASE OF NEW JERSEY HIGH SCHOOLS

George Andreopoulos, City University of New York, U.S.A.
Giuliana Campanelli Andreopoulos, William Paterson University, U.S.A.
Keith Hoyte, William Paterson University, U.S.A.
Alexandros Panayides, William Paterson University, U.S.A.

The published journal article:

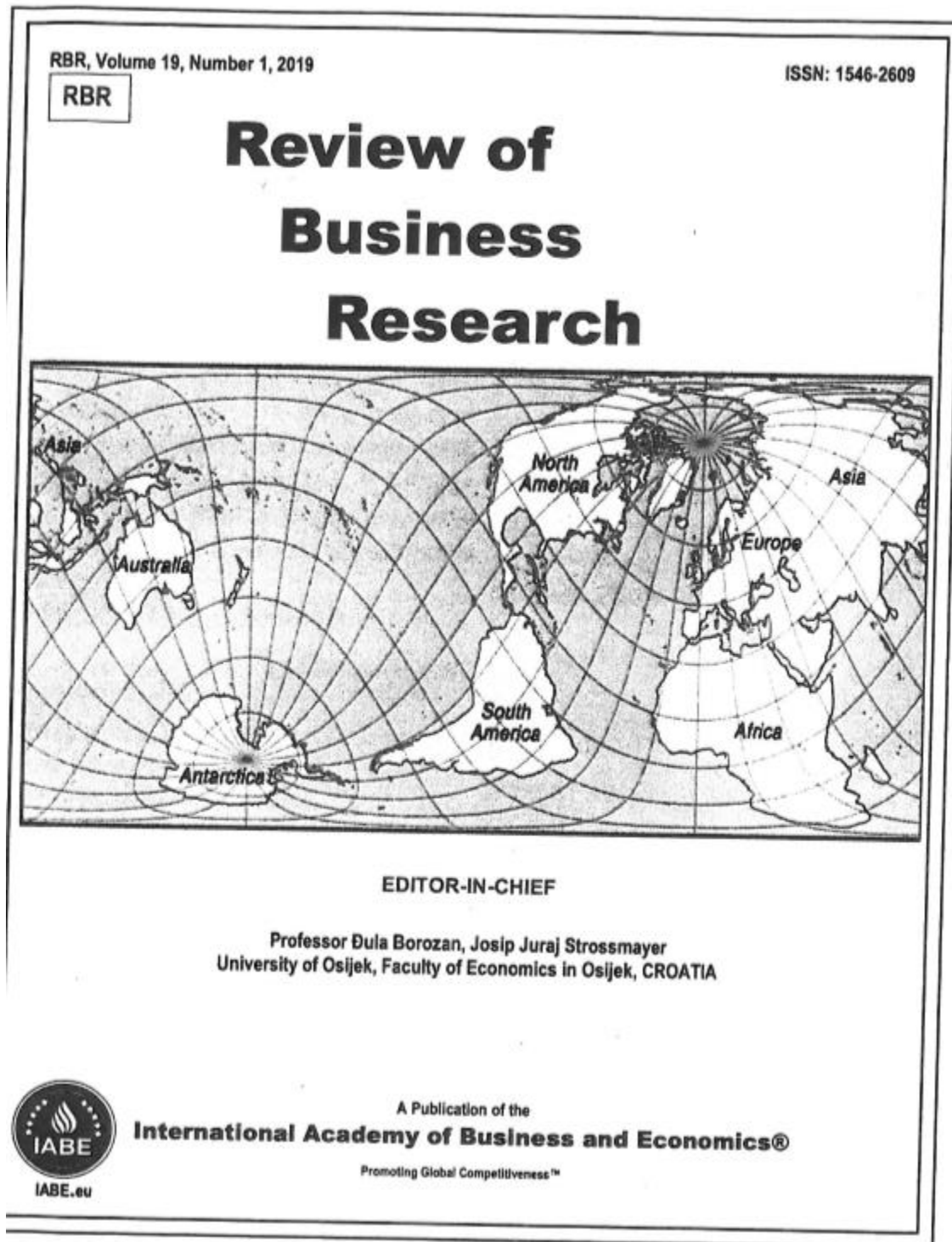


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FAST FOOD STRATEGIC ADVANTAGE: HEALTHY FOODS

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ABSTRACT

Fast food restaurants (FFRs) [NAICS: 722513 (U. S. Census Bureau (2017))], represent a significant and vibrant industry within the global economy. Considerable research has investigated ways for fast food restaurants (FFRs) to achieve strategic advantage. And while FFR consumers are predominately male, there are large numbers of female FFR consumers (Dugan, 2013). Little research has been conducted to examine whether males and females differ as consumers in their food choice selections. This study, while exploratory in nature, examines whether males and females differ in terms of the healthiness of food choices during a FFR dining experience. Findings indicate the genders differ with respect to the healthiness of the food items chosen in while dining at a FFR. The implications of the findings and suggested managerial strategies for FFR success are discussed.

Keywords: *Fast Food Restaurants, Healthy Foods, Gender*

1. INTRODUCTION

Worldwide fast food restaurant (FFR) annual revenues exceed two trillion dollars (Dunn & Bradstreet Industry Profile, 2017). Within the U.S. alone there are more than 250,000 FFRs with approximately \$190 billion in combined annual sales. And sales have grown steadily in recent years. For example, according to Schlosser (2001) in 1970, Americans spent about six billion on fast food. By 2017, US FFR sales were projected to reach more than \$230 billion ("Limited-Service Restaurants," 2018).

While the macro FFR industry is thriving, on a micro level, individual FFRs or chains face tremendous competition from each other. To achieve sustained success a given restaurant or chain must implement strategies that lead to consumer satisfaction and loyalty. Loyalty is vital in the FFR industry as attracting new customers costs several times more than retaining existing consumers (Clark & Wood, 1998; Wallace, 1995). Relationship marketing, key to effective marketing relationships, relies on customer satisfaction which leads to consumers engaging in repeat purchases and positive referrals (Bagozzi, 1995; Shemwell et al., 1998).

Considerable research has shown that there are several factors that impact FFRs consumer dining satisfaction (DS) levels as well as their future loyalty intentions (LI). However, little research has been published that takes into account consumer behavior differences that may exist between males and females. While a greater percent of males (53%) report that they eat at a FFR weekly, a significant percent of females (42%) frequent a FFR weekly (Dugan, 2013). If there are differences in gender based FFR consumer behaviors, then a FFR's success might be enhanced by taking those differences into account with appropriate management and marketing strategies.

There is reason to believe that FFR consumption patterns differ between genders. A plethora of research indicates that females practice healthier behaviors than males in many areas of life. For instance, Courtenay, McCreary, and Merighi (2002) find that college aged males report taking less preventative health actions, and engage in higher levels of risky substance use among other negative behaviors. Females have also been found to make healthier food choices in comparison to males. In studying food choice behaviors across 23 countries, Wardle et al. (2004) find that females often avoid fat and salt more than males, and that females eat more fruit and fiber than men in many of these countries. These findings

appear to be partially explained by stronger healthy eating beliefs in females and greater concern with weight control in females compared to males (Wardle et al., 2004).

FFRs are notoriously known for being unhealthy and offering food high in calories. Documentaries such as Super-Size Me have brought this perception to the forefront in the minds of American consumers. Such perceptions also exist outside the US. For example, a Turkish study, utilizing a student sample, found that the "majority of the participants (61.3%) think that fast-food consumption habit has negative effects on human health" (Ozturk and Onurlubas, 2016, p. 417). Surprisingly, this same study finds that females consume fast-food more than males. Again, Dugan (2013) finds that a significant amount of males and females both frequent FFRs. How are such findings possible when women have been found to be more health and diet conscious? Perhaps women are selecting healthier alternatives at fast food restaurants.

In recent years, FFRs have been more transparent with the nutritional information of their offerings. Furthermore, FFRs now offer healthier options such as grilled chicken, fruit bowls, and salads. Perhaps females are taking advantage of these healthier alternatives on a more consistent basis than males. The current study is exploratory research that investigates whether there are differences in FFR consumer behavior between males and females. More specifically, this study explores whether:

- (1) Gender differences impact criteria that are considered when choosing a FFR.
- (2) Gender differences impact healthy (vs. less healthy) food choices (HFC).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Several constructs have been shown to impact the degree to which consumers like/dislike their dining experience. Dining satisfaction has been found to be a function of consumers' perceptions about the restaurant's food quality (FQ), service quality (SQ), and physical surroundings (PS) (Gronroos, 1982, 1984; Khan et al., 2012; Mason et al., 2016; Mattila, 2001; Ryu & Jang, 2008). After a FFR dining experience, consumers' DS levels have been shown to be directly related to their perceptions of the FQ at the FFR (Mason et al., 2016).

FQ can include such factors as how food tasted and the temperature food was served (Keillor et. al, 2004; Mason et al., 2016). FQ perceptions can also be impacted with portion size and whether the ingredients used were fresh (Keillor et. al, 2004; Richter, 2014; Sabir et al., 2014).

SQ measurements include consumer perceptions of service time, food order accuracy, and service worker friendliness (Lee et al., 2000; Spreng & MacKoy, 1996; Ryu & Han, 2008; Sabir et al., 2014; Ting, 2004). This research has shown that consumer DS is predicted by consumer perceptions of quality service, especially when consumer expectations were met or exceeded.

Previous research substantiates that overall consumer DS is impacted by restaurant atmosphere which is a product of the entire PS (Hui et al., 1997; Millman, 1986; Kotler, 1973; Robson, 1999; Ryu & Jang, 2008; Sabir et al., 2014). Bitner (1990) identified cleanliness and sanitation as controllable physical environmental factors.

Subsequent studies have shown that these factors (FQ, SQ and PS) impact consumers' DS (Chang, 2000; Chebat & Michon, 2003; Mason et al., 2016; Ryu & Jang, 2008). Chang (2000) finds that consumer perceptions of the PS directly enhance their DS levels for a given restaurant transaction.

In addition, FQ, SQ, PS and DS levels have been found to be antecedents to FFR consumers' loyalty behavior intentions (Gronroos, 1982, 1984; Keillor et. al, 2004, Mason et al., 2016). More specifically, studies have shown that these constructs have direct impacts on consumers' loyalty intentions (LI) (Gronroos, 1982, 1984; Keillor et. al, 2004). Mason et al. (2016), in citing Keillor et.al (2004) noted that the study:

"tested consumers in the FFR industry in eight countries (Australia, China, Germany, India, Morocco, Netherlands, Sweden and the United States). They found FQ to be a significant antecedent to consumers' behavior intentions (LI) in six of the countries examined. SQ was found to moderate behavior intentions (LI) in five countries and PS had a significant effect in four countries. While the results varied for different countries, overall SQ, FQ, and PS seem to explain behavior intentions for most consumers. (p. 371)"

Consistent with aforementioned literature, Mason et al., (2016) found that consumers' FFR dining satisfaction levels are directly impacted by their perceptions of FQ, SQ, and PS. In addition, empirical evidence showed that SQ, FQ, and PS are precursors to consumers' loyalty, as measured by future purchase intentions (Mason et al., 2106). However, previous studies have not considered whether gender differences have any moderating effects on FFR consumer behaviors.

Using the ProQuest database, we searched the literature for reported differences in males and females: (1) FFR pre-dining selection process; (2) FFR dining food selections; and (3) post-dining FFR satisfaction and loyalty levels. It was discovered that these topics have received little attention in the literature. However, some relevant research was found. For example, Beardsworth et al. (2002) reports that females tend to have higher dietary health knowledge than males.

In addition, females have been found to prefer healthier meals that consists of more vegetables and less red meat and fats as compared to males (Beardsworth et al., 2002; Fagerli and Wandel, 1999; Rappoport, 1993). These findings imply that females may make choices on which FFR to frequent on different criteria than males. Furthermore, females may prefer different food products in a FFR dining experience as compared to their male counterparts. And, if females make FFR selection and food choices differently from men, they may also have differing dining satisfaction and loyalty intention levels after their dining experience. To test these effects, this study puts forth the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Males and females differ in their criteria considered in the selection of a FFR dining experience.

*Hypothesis 2: Females consume healthier foods (e.g., salads & vegetables) more frequently (**higher HFC**) during FFR dining experiences than males.*

*Hypothesis 3: Males consume less healthy food choices (e.g., fats & pizza) more frequently (**lower HFC**) during FFR dining experiences than females.*

3. METHODS

Students from a mid-size university (enrollment of between ten and fifteen thousand students) served as subjects for our study. A total of 387 dining experiences were examined, with students trained to pay attention to study variables and to report their observations. Among the dining experiences, 208 were of females and 179 were of males. Participants provided demographic information, past fast food dining experiences and ratings of factor importance in FFR selection.

Prior to participating in the dining experiences, students provided the team with demographic and personal data. Demographic information provided by subjects included their gender. Information provided about past FFR dining experiences included how often they consume certain types of food (e.g., beef, vegetables, salads, desserts, and buffets) with responses ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 indicates never to 5 indicating daily. Subjects also rated how important certain criteria are in their choice of a FFR.

The rated factors included; food quality, service speed, restaurant cleanliness, price, location, menu variety and portion size. Each of these factors was measured on a five-point scale where 1 equals the least important factor to 5 equals the most important factor (0 was used when the criteria was not in one of the top five ranked factors).

4. RESULTS

Males and female consumers were similar in their ratings of how important various criteria were in their choice of a FFR. However, some differences were observed. Table 1 presents the subjects' rankings and means for FFR choice criteria. As shown in Table 1, FFR price, portion size and cleanliness were the top three criteria for both genders. However, price seems to be more important to males than females, and portion size (or quantity of food) was ranked higher by females in the study.

TABLE 1: FAST FOOD RESTAURANT CHOICE CRITERIA RANKINGS

Males Choice Criteria	Importance Ranking for Males (mean)	Females Choice Criteria	Importance Ranking for Females
Price	1 (3.06)	Portion Size	1 (2.72)
Portion Size	2 (2.73)	Price	2 (2.66)
Cleanliness	3 (1.59)	Cleanliness	3 (2.60)

Speed of service was also ranked by both males and females in the top five criteria, but while males also chose food quality as important, females ranked it nearer the bottom. It appears that females did not consider that the food that they were about to purchase from a FFR and the concept of food quality were compatible. Support for hypothesis 1 was mixed but the level of difference between these consumer types does not appear to be large enough to warrant significantly different marketing campaigns.

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to test for gender effects on healthy food choices. More specifically, gender, as defined as male and female, served as the independent variable. The dependent variables included consumers' ratings consumption of certain foods designated as healthy foods (such as salads and vegetables) and less healthy foods (such as hamburgers and deep fried foods).

TABLE 2: ANOVA: GENDER EFFECTS ON HEALTHY FOOD CHOICES

Food Choices	Male (mean)	Female (mean)	F-Value	P-Value
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* p<0.10 ** p<0.01 *** p<0.001 H: Healthier choice L: Less-healthy choice				

The results on healthier FFR food consumption choices by gender were mixed, although the results did generally conform to expectations. As shown in Table 2, females reported higher frequencies of consumption of salads and vegetables, but they **also** responded with higher levels of fat intake. Males admitted to eating more beef, pork and meat in general along with hamburgers and pizza.

They admitted to eating more at buffets as well, but they also responded with higher levels of fish intake than females. While males did report fewer healthy food choice behaviors and more unhealthy food choice behaviors than females, there were several shared "bad" food choices (deep-fried foods, carbs, breads, and desserts) that conventional dietary wisdom would caution against. Mean scores of 3.5 or higher indicate that respondents admitted to weekly or more frequent selections, and scores above 4.0 suggest daily consumption. Support for hypotheses 2 and 3 is generally found, although the differences in frequency on several items is much smaller than expected.

5. DISCUSSION

While many FFRs have historically targeted couples and families, U.S. society is changing with the rate of millennials delay marriage more frequently than their single Gen X counterparts (Brown, 2017). FFRs that feel they have more or fewer customers of one gender can use this research to offer new products and promotions targeting one gender over another.

As mentioned earlier, food quality was found to be a more important FFR choice criteria for males than for females. Females rated several other choice criteria more important than food quality. It may be food quality is very important to females in other restaurant venues, yet not as important when faced with a decision on dining at a FFR. It may be that females have a basic understanding that the relative advantage of a FFR does not lie in its food quality. In other words, the choice of dining at a FFR for women may not be based upon their perception of the food quality offered by the FFR.

However, food quality perceptions may play a role in a FFR's competitive advantage for male consumers. To appeal to males, FFRs should consistently offer high-quality meals and promote this characteristic. Pettijohn, et al. (1997) and Mills (2014) stress the need to offer quality, fresh ingredients, consistent tastes and portions, and nutritious menus with more vegetables, fruits, grains and other healthy alternatives. Based upon the current findings, providing healthier food choices is particularly important to female consumers who tend to choose healthier selections more frequently.

Healthier food perceptions may also result from a clean environment. In a study that examined the effect of FFR cleanliness on consumers' perceptions of a dining experience, it was found that cleaner dining environments look more sanitary resulting in a positive impact on consumers' perception of service quality (Min & Min, 2011). As such, a neatly cleaned environment can enhance consumer retention. This finding is consistent with previous research (Barber & Scarcelli 2009, 2010; Mason et al., 2013, 2016; Min & Min, 2011; Steven & Knutson 1995). Cleanliness ranked third-most important to respondents in this study, but for female participants there was no significant statistical difference between the top three criteria.

6. LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

One limitation is that student subjects provided all of the data collected. A more diverse sample group might yield more significant gender variation. In addition, the current study considers self-reported intentions of future loyalty. Also, actual consumer purchases and referrals could be reported rather than relying on intentions. Future research might want to examine how other moderators affect consumer perceptions and impact customer satisfaction and behaviors. Furthermore, future studies should examine whether price sensitivities could be a moderating factor on dining satisfaction levels. That is, FFR consumers' food price perceptions could increase or decrease the likelihood that male and/or females generate satisfying food quality, service quality, or physical surroundings perceptions. Price sensitivities may also impact consumers' (male and/or female) loyalty behaviors.

7. CONCLUSIONS

FFRs have used research for decades to increase sales by improving product and promotion offerings targeting the salient attributes looked at in this research. This research makes meaningful contributions to the understanding of the role of gender on FFR choice and dining satisfaction levels. A total of 387 FFR dining experiences were examined. The data gathered significantly suggests that offering healthier food options can provide strategic advantage to fast food restaurants targeting a higher percent of female consumers. Implications are that FFR management will be able to use this research to offer better products and more effective promotions to consumers and to increase overall FFR sales.

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